

**SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND AESTHETICS  
IN THE PROSE TEXTS OF MARGARET  
ATWOOD AND KAMALADAS**

*Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut*

*for the award of the Degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Social Commitment and Aesthetics in the Prose Texts of Margaret Atwood and Kamala Das", submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bonafide research carried out by the candidate, Ms. Prabhavathy. N.K. under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

Calicut  
21st March, 2002

  
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## DECLARATION

I, **Prabhavathy. N.K.**, hereby declare that this thesis, "**Social Commitment and Aesthetics in the Prose Texts of Margaret Atwood and Kamala Das**" is a bonafide record of research work done by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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## Introduction

Perception of life through literature enables one to have a self-awareness of the cultural values of society. Literature reflects life. The recurrent patterns in the literatures of two or more countries evidently reveal the universal human mind. Hence a comparison of the Canadian and Indian literature by selecting a popular writer from each country facilitates the exposition of the cultural values of these two countries.

Comparative literature has gained wider acclaim in the recent past. As a literary genre it has opened up new vistas for exploration. Comparatists have come forward to examine the multicultural social matrix of Canada and India to look for points of similarities. Variations in geography, language and culture have produced mosaic images in the literatures of both countries. Ironically, the aboriginals of Canada, known as Indians, form an invisible link between these two countries.

Margaret Atwood of Canada and Kamala Das of India are two prolific writers, who have excelled in the genres of poetry and prose. Atwood is equally well known for her critical works. Their unique and unconventional ideas create ripples in the minds of their readers.

The multilingual and post colonial situation in Canada and India has become a fertile backdrop for examining the literary talents of Atwood and Das. Interestingly, these women writers who are deeply entrenched in the cultural values of their nations highlight women's problems.

Margaret Atwood has already established a place among the contemporary writers by becoming the recipient of the prestigious Booker Prize. Her startlingly original voice testifies to her brilliant mind. The complexity of human mind and its unfathomable dimensions have been encompassed within her novels, poems and critical works. The substantial body of her writing gives one wider scope for measuring her literary talents.

The self of an individual is ever-changing and yet constant. Atwood as well as Das, examine the multiple roles of the self in their works. Quest for identity and self is a favourite theme of the mobility of the self in action. She also examines identity crisis in modern and postmoderns writers. In Atwood's novels there is deliberate attempt to locate causes for the lack of proper self-knowledge. Atwood's novels and short stories testify to this attempt. The Edible woman, Surfacing and Lady Oracle are some of the novels in which Atwood explores the development of the emerging self. Besides, Atwood sees the experience of identity crisis and alienation as typical Canadian problems.

The experience of identity crisis and alienation is not confined to a particular place or situation. It is precipitated under the same conditions in a different location. The Canadian experience of identity crisis finds a parallel in the works of Das. But this experience takes a different form in the Indian context.

Das's autobiography, My Story (1988) projects the alienated self of the writer. One can perceive her self on a lonely voyage of self-discovery. The psychological perspective of a writer is an emphatic way for exploring the theme of self-realization. Chapter I of the thesis emphasizes this aspect. The manifestations of the self mainly depends on the social framework of the family. An individual can be considered whole only when he is entrenched within the cultural matrix of the society. The family as an institution is an integral part of the social structure. Hence a study of the self is incomplete unless, it is seen in the background of the family. The intense emotional meaning of a social situation within the family highlights the familial bonds that sustain human relationships.

Chapter II examines those principles that underlie the relationships between individuals. Hence the focus of the analysis of the themes of the novels and short stories is on the family. Atwood and Das project the

deterioration of the moral values that govern the families. Atwood's novel The Life Before Man (1979) exemplifies this aspect. Das's short stories are set in the background of the family which controls the thoughts and action of the members.

The imbalance of power relations between the sexes is central to chapter III. As woman writers Das and Atwood see woman as a victim of patriarchy. Both of them explore the power relations within the family which play a pivotal role in the maintenance of healthy relationships. The interaction of individuals within and outside the domain of a family is responsible for the dramatic situations in their works. Atwood and Das examine the victimization of women in a male-dominated society.

The "Dynamics of writing" examines the strategies employed by these writers. This chapter includes an analysis of symbols, metaphors, style and images. The style of the writer is an integral aspect of his writing. An overview of the techniques of Atwood and Das to voice their protest against social injustice is made in chapter IV.

Atwoods' novel The Blind Assassin has not been included in the main body of the thesis. But some observations have been made in the concluding section.

The attempt of a prose writer is “to disclose the world and offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader” (Sartre 45). With this view, the social commitment of these writers has been analysed by highlighting situations from their novels and short stories. Das’s My Story has been thoroughly probed to examine the writer’s own experience of gender discrimination.

Das has written her poems in English and short stories in Malayalam using the pen name ‘Madhavikutty’. Some of them have already been translated by the writer herself and a few by others. All quotations from Malayalam have been translated in this work.

Above all, during my personal interview with Kamala Das, she clarified the doubts I had met with in certain ambivalent situations in her works. The writer had condescendingly answered all my queries connected with the topic of my research.

For documenting sources, I have followed the stipulated rules in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (fifth edition). Of course, slight variations have been made in few cases. Titles of books have been shortened using key words from the texts themselves. In such cases, the works cited at the end of each chapter gives the full particulars of the texts.

The works of Kamala Das in English have been grouped under 'Das, Kamala' and short stories and novels in Malayalam have been cited under "Madhavikutty".

On the whole this thesis is an attempt to project Atwood and Das as writers who are involved in the contemporary life of their society.

### Work Cited

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## Chapter I

### **The Emerging Self**

Man's insatiable thirst for fiction has persuaded him to seek new methods to explore the entire gamut of human experience. Writers of the twentieth century have focused their attention on human behaviour. Behaviour lies on the surface and the processes which lead to the behavioural patterns lie underneath, in the conscious or unconscious layer of the mind. An attempt to portray individuals in their cultural milieu has widened the psychological dimensions of literature. Margaret Atwood and Kamala Das project the images of the emerging self in their contemporary societies with a psychological perspective and a decolonizing instinct, which establish the cultural identity of their nations.

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the self in the social scenario. Literature of this period reflects the importance of the self and its roles. The combined efforts of Literature and Psychology have widened the scope for studying the image of the emerging self in the cultural matrix. Atwood and Das focus their attention on the portrait of the self within the existential contour of life. The psychoanalytic approach can help us to evaluate these writers and assign them their due places among other writers. Interestingly, despite the differences in their cultural matrices, the images of the selves

projected by these two writers show similarities. A comparative study of these socially committed writers is made easier by the fact that both have excelled in writing poems, short stories and novels.

“He alone is modern who is fully conscious of the present”, says Carl Gustav Jung. (Campbell 457). Modern man suffers the anguish of loneliness and insecurity, in spite of the fact that science and technology have made him more powerful than ever. This paradox is visible in the twentieth century literature. Man’s individuality is found to be at stake. His self is threatened by various extraneous factors. He has lost his faith in himself as well as God. He is totally alienated from the world around him. Man’s predicament is projected in literature by a group of writers known as the existentialists.

The existential philosophy of Kierkegaard, Marcel, Heidegger and Sartre has deeply influenced the twentieth century literature. Existentialism is a revolt against dehumanization. It exhorts us to preserve the dignity of man. It overlooks the mortal nature of man and urges him to live like a human being. Man being the focal point, writers rivet their attention on the self. As an existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre emphasizes the importance of man: “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its ‘subjectivity’...” (Sartre, 1970, 28).

Man's existence and achievements in this universe demand an exploration to seek the mystery behind life. Erich Fromm traces the unique position of man in the animal kingdom. He affirms the need for self-awareness, reason and imagination that are essential for an authentic self to survive in this world:

Without a map of our natural and social world - a picture of the world and of one's place in it that is structured and has inner cohesion - human beings would be confused and unable to act purposefully and consistently, for there would be no way of orienting oneself, of finding a fixed point that permits one to organize all the impressions that impinge upon each individual (Fromm, 1988, 123).

Psychologists and philosophers have attempted to define the mysterious entity known as 'self'. Dr. Paul Brunton believes that the significance of the self becomes clear only when it is perceived in its right place within the external world (20). He considers the individual experience as "partial and finite" (21). He observes: "[T]he right knowledge of self in its fullness must depend on a right knowledge of this time-fronted and space-backed world" (21). The projection of self by Atwood and Das has been accomplished within the

existential parameters. Their pragmatic approach makes it difficult to analyse the characters from a mystical perspective.

Jung's interpretation of the self and its role is based on the three psychic levels distinguished by him. They are consciousness, the unconscious and the collective unconscious (Campbell 38). The self is within the psyche which is neither conscious nor unconscious but partakes of both. Jung comments on the role of consciousness in men: "[T]he existence of individual consciousness makes men aware of the difficulties of his inner as well as his outer life" (45). The psyche acts like a mirror when it reflects the world. Hence the chaotic condition of the world that gets reflected in a work of art can be properly understood only with the help of psychoanalysis. Jung defines the unconscious as "a living system of reactions and aptitudes that determine the individual's life in invisible ways - all the more effective because invisible" (44). A study of the dreams of his patients convinced Jung that underneath the rationally explicable unconscious there is an "absolute unconscious", which is not connected with our personal experience. He circumscribes it as following:

This absolute unconscious would then be a psychic activity which goes on independently of the conscious mind and is not dependent even on the upper layers of the unconscious, untouched - and perhaps untouchable - by personal experience. It would be a kind of supra-individual psychic activity, a *collective*

*unconscious... as distinct from a superficial, relative or personal unconscious (34).*

Jung's investigations on the unconscious helped him to formulate the concept of self or "the total personality". Though its presence is indisputable, it is indeed elusive. He remarks:

[A] total description of the personality is even in theory, absolutely impossible, because the unconscious portion of it cannot be grasped cognitively. This unconscious portion, as experience has abundantly shown, is by no means unimportant. On the contrary, the most decisive qualities in a person are often unconscious and can be perceived only by others, or have to be laboriously discovered with outside help (142).

The self of an individual is considered as extremely flexible and constantly altering. The self is forced to set up goals in order to thrive in this world. It is subjected to pressures from outside and it has to adapt itself to its situation. Luella Cole and Irma Nelson Hall comment on the adaptability of the self:

A definition of 'self' should give recognition to the presence of unconscious elements in the motivations and needs of an

individual; it should also recognize the conscious, goal-seeking effort to make adjustments within the everyday world and to evolve an identity which has continuity, some consistency and some adaptability (2).

In this postmodern world, every individual encounters innumerable hazards. One's conflict with the apparently insurmountable obstacles may lead to "identity crisis". This experience varies according to one's situation-social, ethical, spiritual or biological. Each individual possesses an identity. His autonomy allows him an inner consistency which co-exists with the body. Identity is a decisive factor which controls one's relation to oneself and others. R.D. Laing emphasizes the importance of one's identity in this world: "A firm sense of one's autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity" (44).

When the identity and autonomy of an individual are threatened, he feels insecure, fearing the loss of his self. For a man to experience the world and others in it as real, whole and continuous, a sense of security is essential. Laing calls it the "primary ontological security" (39). The changes undergone by the inner self can take man to the limits of sanity. Laing examines the changes experienced by the inner self:

1. It becomes 'phantasticized' or volatilized and loses any firmly anchored identity.
2. It becomes unreal.
3. It becomes impoverished, empty, dead and split.
4. It becomes more and more charged with hatred, fear and envy (139-140).

Every individual has his relation to the society. His identity is formed in relation to his own self as well as to other individuals in the society. Hence the psychological development of an individual coincides with the formation of his identity. "Identity is a way of expanding the concept of self to include social factors" (Breger 329). Breger also comments on the two contrasting aspects of identity: "Identity as a sum of roles and identifications suggests many selves, while oneness, unity and individuality suggest a single, whole or integrated self" (330).

The relation between 'self' and 'identity' is often ambiguous. John Moss disagrees with the idea of using the two terms in the same sense. He remarks:

Quests for identity and for self are not always the same thing. Robertson Davies sees them as one, taking place retrospectively

within minds searching for order to personal existence amid the dark and rolling shadows of the accumulated past ... But there are two of considerable reputation who do not. Mordecai Richler in St. Urbain's Horseman and Margaret Atwood in Surfacing exploit the tensions between the psychology of self and the sociology of identity which are common to the intensive sort of self-awareness shared by their very different protagonists (123).

Cole and Nelson also project 'self' and 'identity' as separate entities in an individual: It is his sense of self, his evaluation of where he wants to go and what he wants to be, which enables him to integrate the kaleidoscope of experiences into a coherent style of life and into a consistent core of basic resources. Identity is developed slowly and not without difficulty for each individual (2-3).

The geographical layout of Canada, with its vast tracts of wilderness and expanse of snow encodes its distinctive identity. In Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972), Atwood makes use of certain "key patterns" which constitute the "national habit of mind" (13). Atwood tries to highlight the problems inherent in being a Canadian. Canadian identity is problematic to Canadians themselves because of the emotional ambivalence created by the diversity of their culture. Like India, Canada had been a British colony.

France too had colonized it. Even today, Canada continues to be an economic colony of the United States of America. Coomi S. Vevaina comments on the unique nature of Canadian identity:

The problem of a unique Canadian identity was complicated... by the country's preference for a 'mosaic' rather than a 'melting pot' structure. As a result of it, people belonging to various ethnic groups attempt to preserve their respective cultures and fail to respond to the idea of Canada as a whole (9).

Atwood's experience of teaching Canadian literature has convinced her that in high school and university teaching, the personal and universal are emphasized, but there is a tendency "to skip, the national or cultural" (Survival 15). She observes that Canada is a foreign territory to its own inhabitants: "[I]n Canada as Frye suggests, the answer to the question 'who am I?' is at least partly, the same as the answer to another question: 'Where is here?' [. . .]. It is what a man asks when he finds himself in an unknown territory [. . .]" (Survival 17).

Atwood and Das portray men and women in their respective social milieu. They posit the image of the self in their poems and fiction. The idiosyncrasies of their characters are vividly delineated. Man's attempt to

survive in this postmodern world has provided grist to the literary mill of these prolific writers.

Atwood's poems underscore Canadian identity. Many of these poems collected in The Circle Game (1966), Procedures for Underground (1970) and Two-Headed Poems (1978) project the image of the emerging self. The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970) is considered as one of her finest collections of poetry. Susanna Moodie, the persona of the poem is an emigrant English traveller who comes to settle down in Canada. In the beginning, she feels like an alien in the Canadian wilderness. Moodie's exploration of the land is synonymous with the exploration of the self. She feels threatened by the intimidating power of nature and strangers in an alien land. In Survival, Atwood makes this observation on nature:

Nature seen as dead, or alive but indifferent, or alive and actively hostile towards man is a common image in Canadian literature. The result of a dead or indifferent Nature is an isolated or 'alienated' man; the result of an actively hostile Nature is usually a dead man, and certainly a threatened one (54).

In Survival, Atwood comments on the landscape in Canadian literature: "[L]andscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind" (49). The persona in the poem reflects her own self: "I am a word/in a

foreign language" (Journals 11). When she comes to terms with the strange land she realizes that she has developed a new perceptive power. She will need "Wolf's eyes to see/the truth" (13). Atwood's poem "Journey to the Interior" also encompasses the theme of exploration of the split self, symbolized by the journey motif. In the afterword to The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Atwood comments on the split self of Moodie:

If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; She dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself (62).

Schizophrenia, described by Atwood as the "mental illness of Canada", is a major psychological disease in modern times. Don. D. Jackson observes that it is ranked with cancer and heart disease in the U.S. He remarks:

Schizophrenia is a highly complex, unpredictable disease. It is officially defined as a group of psychotic reactions characterized by fundamental disturbances in reality relationships and concept formations, with affective behaviour and intellectual disturbances in various degrees and mixtures. It expresses itself in many

behaviour aberrations, but most of all in a strong tendency to retreat from reality (290).

Psychiatrists of the nineteenth century considered this disease as a senile deterioration of the brain. Earlier the disease was known as 'Dementia Praecox'. Jackson traces the history of this term:

In 1911 Eugen Bleuler renamed the disorder 'schizophrenia' from the Greek for 'split' (schizein) and 'mind' (phren). The term was intended to express the common observation that patients exhibit a splitting of psychic function in which one set of ideas, or 'complexes' dominate the personality for a time while others are suppressed (455).

Das excels in poetry as well as fiction. The poems 'unlock' her heart and the surging emotions tumble out with a tremendous gusto. Being a confessional writer, Das projects her autobiographical veracity in her poems. Her unique feminine sensibility and outspoken style startle her readers. She is a versatile writer whose fame has spread across the literary world in India and abroad. Though she is not formally equipped for the psychological study of human nature, her innate poetic vision and her extraordinary skill to probe the mysterious depth of psyche astound everyone. Unlike Atwood, she is a bilingual writer. She writes poems in English and short stories in Malayalam

Paradoxically, English is the language of the colonizer and Malayalam is the language of the colonized.

In a post-colonial situation writers confront a common problem posed by the interfering image of the colonizer. The shadow of the colonizer acts as a hindrance to depict the image of the emerging self which possesses an 'awesome' autonomy. In Surfacing Atwood introduces the Americans to highlight a situation which denies the Canadians total freedom. Das too is quite conscious of India's colonial past. In the early chapters of My Story the presence of the intimidating British appears to unsettle Kamala during her school days. The colonial past which is like a raw wound in the psyche of Das and Atwood is reflected in their works.

As a committed writer Das's works hold a mirror to the contemporary society. Her protagonists are mostly women. Their stereotypical role models depict the plight of women around her. They are women from all walks of life - woman as mother, sister, wife, prostitute or a professional - all of them struggling to survive their existential problems.

In What is Literature?(1965), Sartre circumscribes the moral mission of a writer. According to him a writer is obliged to illuminate the historical period in which he lives, and bring about changes which the society needs. He also

asserts that "the prose writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure" (17). According to him words are "loaded pistols" "If he speaks he fires" (18).

The image of the self portrayed by Das is conspicuous in her poems and prose. In her poem "An Introduction" Das has virtually 'introduced' her self to the readers. She projects her poetic self articulating her nationality, languages and honesty: "I am Indian, very brown, born in/Malabar, I speak three languages, write in/Two, dream in one [. . .]" (4-6). She boldly utters the sensuality of a woman who seeks love: "In him... the hungry haste/Of rivers, in me... the ocean's tireless/waiting..." (46-48). The poem ends in a note of confession:

[. . .]. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours, I too call myself I (56-59).

An equally poignant image of the self is visible in Das's poem "Composition", published in Collected Poems (1984). The anguish of the poet is enhanced by her existential ennui. Her self is exhausted by her multiple roles. The poet discloses her passionate desire to reveal her self to her readers.

"I must let my mind striptease/I must extrude/autobiography" (113). The image of the fragmented self is a precious thing to be retained:

I will feed only the hunger  
to feed other hungers,  
that basic one,  
To crumble  
to dissolve  
and to retain in other things  
the potent fragments  
Of oneself (244-251).

The desire to "crumble" and to "dissolve" are tendencies of annihilation, but paradoxically they point to re-emergence too. The oppressed self longs for freedom. The poet expresses her desire to reach the core of her self: "I also know that by confessing/by peeling off my layers/I reach closer to the soul" (162-64).

The idea circumscribed within these lines offers an interesting analysis through Jungian interpretation. Jung theorizes the role of the collective unconscious: "Theoretically it should be possible to 'peel' the collective unconscious, layer by layer, until we came to the psychology of the worm and even of the amoeba" (38). Jung also refers to the stripping off the layers of the

persona during the process of individuation. This process highlights the self. Jung observes: "The aim of individuation is nothing less than to divest the self of the false wrappings of the persona on the one hand, and of the suggestive power of primordial images on the other" (123). In individuation, the collective qualities of human being get better and more complete fulfilment.

The desire for freedom is an innate longing of human beings. It is also "a vital biological interest of man" (Fromm, 1990, 268). In Being and Nothingness Sartre expresses his views on freedom: "Man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself [. . .]. Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make *itself* instead of *to be*" (440).

Atwood uses "freedom" with a specific meaning in her works: In an interview conducted by Jo Brans, she remarks: "[S]ome people, by 'freedom' mean freedom to do whatever they want to, without any limitation whatsoever. That isn't the pack of cards we are dealt. We are dealt a limited pack. So I would see freedom more as the power to use what you're given in the best way you can" (Ingersoll 151).

Das shares the existential views on freedom. She articulates her conception of freedom in an interview: "I believe we are born free. Each one of

us is born free. The minute they cut the umbilical cord we are free" (Kaur 148). She explains that she has the freedom to take care of her sick husband or quit him. The previous year she had nursed him back to health when he was in coma (148).

George G. Brenkert analyses Karl Marx's ethics of freedom which is based on self-determination: "In Marx's eyes freedom requires not simply the lack of social coercion, but also a life of self-development within rational and harmonious relations to others. Accordingly, Marx's concept of freedom is social, collective, and positive" (88).

Man is a social being. The social growth of man involves acceptance or rejection by others. Atwood and Das explore the tilted relationships of individuals, especially of men and women. They depict the struggle of women protagonists who aspire to discover their wholeness in the human race. Women struggle against antagonistic, oppressive and predatory forces. Simone de Beauvoir points to the derogatory attitude of men towards women: "For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other" (16).

Beauvoir refers to the duality of the Self and the Other. Earlier this division was not related to the sexes. The feminine element was relegated to the background in the past. Beauvoir describes 'Otherness' as "a fundamental category of human thought" (17).

Atwood's first novel The Edible Woman, published in 1969, is the story of Marian Mc Alpin's journey to self-knowledge. Atwood has made use of the quest motif in three consecutive novels. The subversion of human values in a consumerist society is the theme of this novel. The protagonist is a young career woman, working as a consumer consultant at Seymour Surveys. The nature of her job accentuates the mechanical aspect of modern life. The self is nettled by elements of depersonalization. The forms and questionnaires that a consumer has to deal with, highlight the elements of dehumanization.

Marian's self experiences alienation from her surroundings. The oppressive forces of the patriarchal society almost petrify her. She feels estranged from Peter, her fiancé, "the office virgins" (14) and from her own self. Imprisoned by the oppressive forces, her self yearns for freedom. Her "company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors" (12). This image projects the position of her self. The upper floor is occupied by the executives and psychologists and it signifies the dominant male world. The dehumanized world of I.B.M. machines used for counting, sorting and tabulating

the information were on the lower floor. Her own "gooey layer" (12) was wedged between these two hostile forces in her life. The dominant male world subordinates her, whereas the world of machines dehumanizes her. She ceases to live in these surroundings till she gains self-knowledge.

Peter was a young lawyer who liked her for her "aura of independence and common sense" (52). Marian was attracted to him. "[P]eople noticed him not because he had forceful or peculiar features, but because he was ordinariness raised to perfection [ . . .]" (57). He chose her as his wife because she would never "try to take over his life" (57). Soon she realized that he could easily manipulate her according to his needs. Panic began to seep into her mind. To make matters worse, Mrs. Grot of Accounting suggested to her to opt the Pension Plan. Her consent seems to have sealed her future. She could foresee herself: "Somewhere in front of me a self was waiting, pre-formed, a self who had worked during innumerable years for Seymour Surveys and was now receiving her reward" (14). Marian's self represents the stereotype of the career woman projected by Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique (1963). Inevitably, her self has to make adaptations to her new surroundings. Her survival depends on this attempt.

Her initial response was to escape from her dominating fiancé Peter had already shocked her by his abnormal choice of place for their lovemaking.

He treated her body like a doll which could be used as he desired. The sheepskin on his bedroom floor, the blanket laid in a field and the porcelain bathtub, according to Marian, were not the right places for their lovemaking. She tried to justify his strange behaviour. Perhaps he must have read about them somewhere in an "outdoorsy male magazine" or "this was part of the same pattern, whatever the pattern was" (56).

Peter's decision to marry Marian was one of convenience. He treated her "as a stage-prop: silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline" (67). A bachelor's life would definitely create problems in his profession. He justifies his desire for getting married: "A fellow can't keep running around indefinitely. It will be a lot better in the long run for my practice too, the clients like to know you've got a wife, people get suspicious of a single man after a certain age, they start thinking you're a queer or something" (86).

In The Second Sex, Beauvoir traces the difficulties faced by women in marriage. "Marriage" according to her, "is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445). She considers the union of two independent persons as "a burden and a benefit" (447) for them. "Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them..." (445-446).

The split between Marian's mind and body leads to psychic disorder. She suffers from constant paranoia. Paranoia is a common type of schizophrenia. Marian's unconscious psychic activity creates disorder in her life. Jung's interpretation of the psychic activity in pathological conditions is relevant in this context:

[T]he classic examples of unconscious psychic activity are to be found in pathological states. Almost the whole septematology of hysteria of the compulsion neuroses, of phobias, and very largely of schizophrenia, the commonest mental illness, has its roots in unconscious psychic activity (28).

In The Divided Self, Laing examines a person's experience of his split between the world and himself. By means of existential phenomenology he traces the split in the self of an individual: "The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself" (17).

Marian is convinced of her loss of freedom and is aware of the fact that Peter has been trying to make her an object. Since Marian's world is one of consumerism, she feels that she too has become an object to be consumed by

him. The title of the novel is based on this aspect. The objectification dehumanizes her. The split in her self deepens and her body begins to react against this 'objectifying'. Food repels her. At first she cannot eat steak. When her condition becomes worse, other items of food, including vegetables are rejected by her. George Woodcock observes: "The Edible Woman is a novel about emotional cannibalism" (327). According to him Marian's psychic breakdown closely resembles "Anorexia Nervosa" (153). Susan Bordo traces the factors that lead to this biological disorder: "Anorexia Nervosa is clearly [...] a multidetermined disorder, with familial, psychological and possibly biological factors interacting in varying combinations in different individuals to produce a final common pathway" (91).

Collier's Encyclopaedia gives us a comprehensive idea about the causes of anorexia:

The origin of anorexia is unknown. However underlying fear and immaturity in the psychosexual area have been suggested as being the basic disturbances, with denial of sexual feelings and drives as primary forces. The need on the part of the anorexic to be 'in control' of the body suggests the presence of a basic underlying fear of loss of control.

Marian has lost control over her self. The split in her self has estranged her from the outside world. Psychologically, she is in an insecure position. She suffers from identity crisis. Erich Fromm comments on the loss of identity when one's self is threatened:

Man's awareness of himself as being in a strange and overpowering world, and his consequent sense of importance could easily overwhelm him. If he experienced himself as entirely passive, a mere object, he would lack a sense of his own will, of his identity (Fromm, 1990, 315-16).

Marian has allowed herself to fit into the role model of a housewife as envisioned by Peter. She realizes her mistake before it is too late. She does not want to conform to the traditional image of the stereotype. Her self rebels. Jung's interpretation of neurosis assigns mythic dimension to Marian's self-disintegration:

Since neuroses are in most cases not just private concerns, but *social* phenomena we must assume that archetypes are constellated in these cases... The archetype corresponding to the situation is activated, and as a result those explosive and dangerous forces hidden in the archetype come into action, frequently with unpredictable consequences (Campbell 66).

In the climactic stage of her paranoia, Marian seeks a way out of her dilemma. She bakes a cake in the shape of a woman, "the edible woman", and offers it to Peter. Symbolically, her action is tantamount to her refusal to be "consumed" by him. Then she offers it to Duncan, who has ~~un~~betted the process of self-integration in her. She too eats it. She is no longer anorexic. Her self is ready to adapt itself to the hostile forces which seem to have smothered it. The possession of an authentic self also helps her to discover her 'wholeness'. Sarah Cirese specifies the nature of an individual's wholeness as follows: "Wholeness describes a personality whose several aspects fit together as though they were pieces of jigsaw puzzle. In a whole personality, no parts are isolated, overlapping or in the wrong place. Each is the 'right' size for its slot" (5).

Marian's predicament is quite relevant to any other girl in her situation. In the absence of an authentic self to guide her, she feels that marriage is a 'trap' which imprisons her self. The threatened self shows signs of neurosis.

Other characters in the novel also serve to highlight the self of the protagonist. Marian's contrast with Ainsley and Clara offers two different aspects of femininity. Ainsley is keen on having a baby without getting married. She remarks: "It's even more important than sex. It fulfills your

deepest femininity”(35). Clara is signified by her body. She poses a clear contrast to Marian's conception of woman. Evidently, Marian's dream of married life is shattered by the image of Clara in her pregnancy. Clara had greeted her first pregnancy with “astonishment” her second with “dismay” and the third with “inert fatalism” (30). Her children are “barnacles encrusting a ship and limpets clinging to a rock” (30).

Duncan is a passive character, who serves as a foil to Peter. He helps Marian to discover her own integrated self. Marian is struck by his eccentricities. He broke the mirror in the bathroom and considered it “a perfectly understandable symbolic narcissistic gesture” (141). He did it for fear of not finding his reflection in it one day. He prompted Marian to “break” things and discover the truth: “The human was the last thing to be commercialised” (145). Interestingly, Marian feels more ‘at home’ in the company of Duncan in spite of his eccentricities. Evidently, Atwood has used Duncan as a contrast to Peter, but there is something common between Marian and Duncan. When Marian wore Duncan's dressing-gown he remarked: “you look sort of like me in that” (146). Marian saw her dilemma belittled by Duncan's lack of interest in that particular situation. Perhaps the whole problem of Marian could be explained as “bridal nerves” (214), as Clara had put it. Marian's fear of the responsibility she had to share with Peter after marriage could have precipitated

her nervous condition. Obviously, Atwood has highlighted the incompatibility of a career woman in a consumerist society which is male-dominated.

Atwood's second novel Surfacing (1972) depicts an alienated and embittered woman as the heroine. The unnamed heroine exhibits a split between her inner and outer self and between her head and body. The self of an individual is confined within the existential world. To survive in this world one needs knowledge of the self. Surfacing focuses on these issues and also explores man-woman relationship in a new perspective. The perspicacity and vigour of this exploration have made the process of self-fulfilment more convincing than in The Edible Woman. The protagonist undertakes a journey in search of her missing father. The journey motif is used by the novelist as a device to explore the intricate labyrinth of human psyche. The mythic dimension of the theme provides spiritual significance to it. The quest for personal identity is central to the story. The search for her father leads to the search for her authentic self. Her father is dead, being drowned in the lake. The story begins with the unnamed narrator's journey into the past, to the place where she had spent her childhood. It is a cabin on an isolated island, replete with nostalgic memories of her childhood. The narrator is accompanied by her friend Anna, David, Anna's husband and Joe, her lover. When she reaches the island, she says: "Now we're on my homeground, a foreign territory" (Surfacing

8). The uncharted wilderness of the landscape symbolizes the mysterious dimensions of the psyche.

The unknown territory of the land and the mind has special significance for a Canadian. It symbolizes a feeling of alienation. Alienation experienced by the narrator is not just her personal experience but the response of the Canadian psyche to Canada's geographical wilderness and its colonial past. In the literature of the twentieth century, alienation has assumed pathological dimensions, signifying a particular disorder of the mind.

The narrator's search for her father virtually ends in an internal search. It is a "Journey to the Interior". Incidentally, this is the title of one of her poems. The 'journey' begins by diving into her past. When she 'surfaces', she has undergone a total transformation. The story of her marriage and her child are fabrications to deceive her unsuspecting parents. Her affair with a married man, her pregnancy and the abortion that was forced upon her, were experiences which haunted her. Her self is a divided one. The dichotomy between the two selves, the head and the body, is highlighted in the story.

The narrator goes through the traumatic experience of being haunted by the image of her aborted foetus: "Since then I had carried that death around inside me, layering it over, a cyst, a tumor, a black pearl" (170). Equally

traumatic is her experience of separation from her husband: "A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there's less of you" (44). It was the amputation of her self which had become a "frozen pond". Now she can neither feel nor act. The thawing process can be initiated only when she makes an attempt to regain her wholeness.

The narrator's diving into the lake is a symbolic act. The lake is an "entrance" (172) to the mysterious depth of her psyche. Jung's interpretation of the role of the unconscious reveals that it contains materials which remain submerged in its depth, but not always:

These [materials] are the seeds of future conscious contents. Equally we have reason to suppose that the unconscious is never quiescent in the sense of being inactive, but is ceaselessly engaged in grouping and regrouping its contents. This activity should be thought of as completely autonomous only in pathological cases; normally it is co-ordinated with the conscious mind in a compensatory relationship (71).

The narrator's life is like a "collage", knit together by the wrong pieces. She tries to visualize her own image. Her self was "a woman sawn apart in a wooden crate wearing a bathing suit, smiling, a trick done with mirrors, I read it in a comic book; only with me there had been an accident and I came apart.

The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal" (127)

The narrator finds the dead body of her father under the lake. The weight of the camera had submerged the body. She has come looking for the paintings of Indians. But instead of seeing the paintings she has a 'vision' of what she considers as her father's madness. The "dead thing" reminds her of her aborted foetus, which had looked like an "evil grail" with its "jelly eyes" (167). She also discovers the truth that her father is no god, but only a human being. Now she turns to her dead mother for her legacy. She gets it in a scrap book of her childhood. It is the picture of a baby gazing out of its mother's womb, at a horned man with a barbed tail. She had come looking for a message, which would help her to begin a new life. She gets the message of maternity. She had dived into the dark recesses of her psyche and surfaced with the knowledge of her self.

Margaret Laurence's novel The Stone Angel also underscores the importance of motherhood. Hagar, the protagonist, had only contempt for her 'weak' mother. Hagar was able to overcome the crisis in her life when she knew the potential power of maternity. The instinct to care is an inseparable part of a mother's life. Laurence and Atwood are writers who seem to have implicit faith in the power of maternity. Molly Hite articulates the importance of

maternity: “[W]omen are creatures of their anatomy, ‘one step closer to eternity’ because of their ability to reproduce” (124).

By allowing her foetus to be aborted, the narrator had proved her complicity as a killer. She had been unjust to herself by denying motherhood. With great urgency she leads Joe to impregnate her. After the mating she reflects: “[A]nd then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp” (193).

The duality of head and body had precipitated the narrator’s problem. She had been living in the wrong half, her head, totally ignoring her body which had become the site of power struggle. The abortion is consequent to this neglect. The binary vision of the narrator reflects the divided self. Now, she must return to the present and discover her wholeness by combining the two halves. C.S. Hall and V.J. Nordby affirm the significance of wholeness: “Man does not strive for wholeness, he already has it, he is born with it” (33). This affirmation is similar to that of the existentialists who hold that man is born free. The narrator could anchor her self in the feminine values of life which she had rejected earlier. She has found an antidote to her problems. “This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to

recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone" (229).

The narrator's temporary descent into insanity can be considered as a preliminary step to the process of self-integration. Her father too had a similar experience. She descends to the animal level, becoming one with nature. She ceases to be the distraught woman whose self is threatened. Instead, she envisions herself as an expectant mother, eagerly awaiting the arrival of her baby. "The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten, and I'll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs [. . .]. In the morning I will be able to see it: it will be covered with shining fur, a god, I will never teach it any words" (193).

The narrator discards her false self in the lake and gears up for a new life. The whole process assumes religious importance as in a ritual. She will no longer be haunted by her past. The wedding ring which is symbolic of a "non-husband" (211), is thrown into the fire. Her real self has to start operating in a new world and she has to "clear a space" (212) for it. She severs her connection with the past by throwing the "husks" away and steps into the lake to 'purify' her: "When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy" (212).

More changes follow, which thoroughly transform her life. The narrator's identification with nature is the culmination of her transformation: "I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning" (217). She descends to the level of her ancestors, discovering the primitive instinct in her. She eats roots without washing them. Nature seems to beckon her, no more withholding any secret from her. Everything is "ice-clear, transparent" (216), the rocks as well as her own self. The climactic moment of her transition is when she identifies her self as a place. The dimensions of the self grow wider: "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (217). Sherrill E. Grace comments on this significant moment:

[T]o define self phenomenologically, as Atwood does -- as a place in which things happen where experiences intersect -- is to facilitate a harmoniously integrated system of complementary, interdependent elements, functioning together continually to produce a whole that is more than its parts, a system where everything "fits in". Furthermore, such a view suggests that the self is neither the product nor the solipsistic creator of the world, but a function of the process of relationship. (11)

Anna, the narrator's friend, projects a totally different image. Atwood confines Anna's "other self" within the gilt compact she carried in her handbag:

Rump on a packsack, harem cushion, pink on the cheeks and black discreetly around the eyes, as red as blood as black as ebony, a seamed and folded imitation of a magazine picture that is itself an imitation of a woman who is also an imitation, the original nowhere, hairless lobed angel in the same heaven where God is a circle, captive princess in someone's head (197).

Anna and David had been married for nine years. The narrator thought that they were like the couple in the wooden house of the barometer which she had seen at Paul's house. Somehow they pulled on "half-dead" (198), unable to break from each other. Anna's self offers a sharp contrast to that of the narrator. David had little faith in his wife's loyalty. The narrator reflects upon Anna's dehumanized self:

She takes her clothes off or puts them on, paper doll wardrobe, she copulates under strobe lights with the man's torso while his brain watches from its glassed-in control cubicle at the other end of the room, her face twists into poses of exultation and total abandonment, that is all. She is not bored, she has no other interests (198).

David and Joe are making a film called "Random Samples". Atwood's use of film suggests entrapment. It is a utilitarian device which abets the

dehumanization of the self. Like a hunter, the camera immobilizes the individual. The irony lies in the fact that the narrator cannot abandon the world of entrapments. Her redemption lies in confronting the mundane reality with a persistence that can transcend the barriers in order to quicken the process of self-realization. Her commitment to the society lies in the acceptance of reality, not in its abandonment. Atwood's commitment lies in projecting such human predicaments.

The theme of identity is central to Atwood's third novel, Lady Oracle (1976). The protagonist, Joan Delacourt Foster fills the bulk of the novel with her obesity, which is a constant affront to her mother. The theme focuses on her identity crisis and the consequent self-realization. The opening lines of the novel highlight Joan's tendency to escape from reality and live in a world of fantasy: "I planned my death carefully: unlike my life, which meandered along from one thing to another, despite my feeble attempts to control it" (3). Joan wants her death to be "neat and simple" (3). She wants to "disappear without a trace, leaving behind me the shadow of a corpse, a shadow everyone would mistake for solid reality" (3).

The heroine's protean self undergoes a series of adventures before coming to terms with the hostile forces in the society and those within her. All those adventures are triggered off by her ever-expanding obesity. Joan's

mother expected her daughter to undergo "magic transformations" (47). She betrayed her grotesque daughter by asking her teacher Miss. Flegg to give her the "laughable and unseemly" (48) role of a mothball. Little did the mother know of the injury inflicted on the psyche of her daughter by shattering her dream. Joan's hopes to present the role of a beautiful butterfly were shattered. "The worst thing was that I still didn't understand quite why this was being done to me, this humiliation disguised as a privilege" (51). Joan's pent up emotions found its outlet on the stage by her bumping and spinning in rage. She had the pleasure of taking revenge on her mother. "I threw myself into the part, it was a dance of rage and destruction" (51).

The rift between the mother and the daughter widened as days passed. Joan could say without any regret: "The war between myself and my mother was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body" (73). Joan's self was caught in a battle for its survival and autonomy, defying the restraints imposed by her mother. She found immense satisfaction in hurting her by consuming more food. Food was the formidable weapon that she used against her rival. Joan's obsession with her obesity is remarkable. She proudly admits: "I swelled visibly, relentlessly, before her very eyes, I rose like dough, my body advanced inch by inch towards her across the dining-room table, in this at least I was undefeated" (73).

Aunt Lou's legacy came as a blessing in disguise. To own it she must deflate herself. When her mother's anger erupted into violence Joan left her home. The life that followed was spent in the quest for her authentic self. She underwent transformations by giving up roles and accepting new ones. Her life became involved with those of men. Her shifting relationships with them point to the instability of her self. She could not establish warm, personal relationships with any of the men she lived with. This is caused by the split within her self. Yet, when she noticed her husband relying on her she was rather amused: "Sometimes during the nights I would wake up to find Arthur clinging to me as if the bed was an ocean full of sharks and I was a big rubber raft" (219). If the ocean is considered as a metaphor for life, the rubber raft may imply the instability of her self. Her life with Arthur, the Royal Porcupine and Paul did not bring contentment that she had sought in life. The novel unfolds her life trapped between fantasy and reality.

She wrote *Costume Gothics* as Louisa K. Delacourt. The psychoanalytical perspective of the novel is highlighted by the introduction of fantasy. Joan's creative talent as a writer is evident in her major work "Lady Oracle" poems and "Stalked by Love," her *Costume Gothic*. After her marriage to Arthur, Joan continued to write *Costume Gothics* more vigorously. But she felt "sly" about it, and wrote behind the closed door. She was conscious of her two identities:

It was the fact that I was two people at once, with two sets of identification papers, two bank accounts, two different groups of people who believed I existed. I was Joan Foster, there was no doubt about that; people called me by that name and I had authentic documents to prove it. But I was also Louisa K. Delacourt (238).

This duality is also associated with the men she met. The split self within her projects her double vision. She had failed to penetrate the 'other' self, which made her life more complicated:

Every man I'd ever been involved with, I realized had two selves: my father, healer and killer; the man in the tweed coat, my rescuer and possibly also a pervert; the Royal Porcupine and his double, Chuck Brewer; even Paul, who I'd always believed had a sinister other life I couldn't penetrate (325-26).

Joan's multiple roles and her flight from the harsh realities of life culminate in her role as an "escape artist". The romance of her life was "between Houdini and his ropes and locked truck" (367). Like a magician, she had attempted a series of tricks on others, as well as her own self. The truth was, "I was an artist, an escape artist" (367). Felicia in "Stalked by Love" is her

self-image. Atwood traces the metamorphosis of her protagonist through the labyrinth of her mind. Joan becomes aware of the devious ways of her self rather than her innocence. The pretended innocence of the heroines in The Edible Woman and Surfacing has made the process of their self-realization more complicated.

Joan's mother's role in the novel is significant. Joan had left her home to escape from her mother's dominating presence. One day in the middle of the night her dead mother appeared before her. She was crying soundlessly with her face pressed against the glass. Joan realized the truth then. She loved her mother: "She'd never really let go of me because I had never let her go" (363). Joan is aware of the inevitability of the situation. "She needed her freedom also; she had been my reflection too long" (363). Joan yearned for a child, but feared whether it would turn out to be like her mother. All along she had carried her mother round her neck like a "rotting albatross" (238). But she would never be able to make her mother happy because she was "a vortex, a dark vacuum" (363).

Joan's turning point in life comes with her violence on the reporter. She "hit him with the Cinzano bottle" (378). When she realized her mistake she showed concern for his recovery. The haunting memories of the past recede from her mind. She becomes preoccupied with the man, whom she had

knocked out. She has decided not to write any more Costume Gothics. She can try her luck in science fiction. The novel concludes with Joan's reflection: "It did make a mess; but then, I don't think I'll ever be a very tidy person" (380). She had made a mess of her life. She had made a mess of the reporter's coat, with blood from his gashes. Though she considers herself an "escape artist" she can never escape from the untidiness of her life.

The protagonist in Surfacing had asserted her individuality by refusing to be a victim. Atwood's message as a committed writer is articulated in Lady Oracle, when Joan realizes the truth: "Learn to live in the present, take life as it comes, that's what they told you in the improve-your-head manuals" (341). This can be analysed by Jungian interpretation. Anthony Storr, a psychiatrist and an analyst in the school of Jung, examines Jung's ideas regarding the causes of neurosis:

Patients became neurotic when they got 'stuck' ... that is, when they no longer pursued the natural path of psychological development which takes place with ageing [. . .]. It was only when a person's libidinal energy was not finding its proper expression in the here-and-now that his infantile phantasies became regressively reactivated.(108)

Joan's failure to face her present situation evidently is caused by a psychological disorder. Interestingly, the existentialists focus their attention on "the here-and-now". Joan's folly was that she made an attempt to escape from the so called predatory forces. She also tried to escape from her own self, her past, and the image of the Fat Lady. She meditates over her attempt to fake death: "I thought, may be I really did want to die or I wouldn't have pretended to do it. But that was wrong; I pretended to die so I could live, so I could have another life" (347). She has to peel off the false layers of her self to discover its true nature at the core.

Self-realization is central to the three novels, The Edible Woman, Surfacing and Lady Oracle. Frank Davey observes similarities in these novels:

All three of Atwood's novels are comic novels, that is optimistic of human reconciliation and renewal. While their structure in some sense resembles the traditional comic one of order, retreat to the green world, and re-establishment of order (often symbolized in marriage or birth), it is closer to contemporary models such as the psychoanalytic one of neurosis, catharsis, and self-actualization or literary ones such as deconstruction and invention (220).

An individual's need for self-knowledge is felt as an inner urge. Jung's theory of psychoanalysis emphasizes the role of the "Personal Unconscious" in

acquiring self-knowledge: "The materials contained in this layer are of a personal nature in so far as they have the character partly of acquisitions derived from the individual's life and partly of psychological factors which could just as well be conscious" (80).

These materials are considered as the integral components of one's personality. When they are lost, the person suffers from inferiority complex, as a result of the conflict with one's own self. Man is forced by his moral qualities to redress this deficit. The lost contents of the personal layer have to be retrieved by the consciousness. According to Jung this enlarges the scope of one's personality. The consequent self-knowledge helps one to widen interpersonal relationships (82). This is exemplified by the psychic disorder experienced by the protagonists in The Edible Woman, Surfacing and Lady Oracle. When they acquired self-knowledge, they were brought back to the main stream of life.

Existentialism invigorates man and exhorts him to be aware of his dynamic individuality and subjectivity. Since existentialists consider freedom as an inherent condition of human beings, man is expected to be responsible for his actions. An individual whose self is fragmented, fails to experience freedom. John Macmurray remarks: "Only real people can be free" (167). As a committed writer, Atwood projects her characters grappling with their existential

problems. By widening the psychological dimension of her works she provides insight into the mysterious psyche of man.

Atwood's protagonists succeed in identifying the cause of their psychic disorder. They can survive in a hostile world only when they are willing to adapt to their new way of life. Fromm articulates his fear of man's isolation: "Man aware of his separateness, needs to find new ties with his fellow man; his very sanity depends on it. Without strong affective ties to the world, he would suffer from utter isolation and lostness" (Fromm, 1990, 313).

In an interview, Beatrice Mendez-Egle sought the views of Atwood on the "great sense of responsibility as a writer". Atwood remarked: "No, not as a writer, as a human being. I don't think writers are the only people who should uphold this kind of thing; I think everybody should. I would feel the same way if I weren't a writer" (Ingersoll 163).

Atwood uses mirror as a device to project the image of the self. In The Edible Woman, Marian's image is reflected not only in the mirror but also in objects like the teaspoon, kettle and faucets. She finds her self reflected in the eyes of Peter. But these images are distorted as well as diminished in size. They project her threatened self. Marian and others move through life as in a circle game, feeling trapped. Incidentally, Circle Game is the title of one of the

collections of Atwood's poems. The circular motion as opposed to a linear one hints the trapped self.

In Lady Oracle, Joan dreams of her three-headed mother and her reflection in a triple mirror. The mirror is endowed with the power to project one's split self. The real 'Self' is on one side of the mirror and the 'Other' is on the 'other' side. The 'other' side of the mirror is treacherous and can trap one. Atwood's poem "Tricks with Mirrors" in her collection of poems You are Happy (1981) articulates this idea: "I confess: this is not a mirror/it is a door/I am trapped behind" (54-56). Joan's alter ego, Felicia, enters a similar treacherous maze which symbolizes the intricacy of her psyche. The trapped self of Joan sought to escape from the harsh reality of life into the world of art. She had always dreamt of her "butterfly dance". This beautiful insect represents the beautiful world of art.

Atwood is popular for her wide range of short stories. Considering the Canadian short story as a body of work, Atwood is very much impressed by the relatively large number of women writers who contributed to the genre of short stories. Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence and Marian Engel are some of the popular writers of short fiction. By introducing problematic elements into this literary genre, Atwood has codified the vast amorphous human nature. She invokes a multiple perspective in the mosaic culture of

Canada by introducing characters who exhibit the idiosyncrasy of a unique, mosaic culture.

Short story developed into a distinct literary genre in the nineteenth century. Its relevance to the Canadian culture is too conspicuous to be overlooked. The twentieth century witnessed the publication of a number of collections of short fiction. The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English was published in 1986. It was a time when publication of short stories was easier than that of novels. In its introduction Atwood explains how she “stumbled across” the short stories. She is also conscious of the impact of colonialism on Canada. She observes:

Canada shares with all of the New World excolonies, and with others such as Australia and New Zealand, the historically recent experience of a collision between a landscape and a language and social history not at first indigenous to it, with each side altering the other (xv).

According to Atwood, the colonial situation of Canada should introduce “straight speech, the attempt to describe observed reality as it is, and not through imported conventions that may not apply to it” (xvi). Canadian short stories deal with various themes. There are familial, social and mythical themes which deal with love, war, insanity, defeat and such others. Various factors

have contributed to its making. W.H. New traces the factors that shaped the modern Canadian short stories:

It is marked by the patterns of folk mythology and (dominantly) by the doctrines of Judaeo-Christian belief; it is marked by the consciousness of space and locale and by the impact of an indigenous, European, American, Asian and Caribbean presence in the culture; it is marked by gender and race, and by the writers' individual awareness of their separate literary forebears, Poe, Dickens, and Gogol; de Maupassant, Mansfield and Joyce; Anderson, O'connor, Malamud and Borges; and many more (2).

Atwood's short stories depict the insight of the writer who has successfully probed interpersonal relationships with a realism that is unmatched by many of her contemporary writers. As in her novels, her short stories too have female protagonists, who try to conform to the stereotype roles. These women try to establish themselves in the roles allotted to them. We cannot criticise them as 'gloomy'. Perhaps gloom is precipitated by their existential anguish.

Dancing Girls and Other Stories (1993) testifies to Atwood's skill in foregrounding the interior landscape of a woman's mind. Hence these stories

offer a psychoanalytic perspective. The alienated characters enhance the problem of identity which is a major concern in Canadian literature.

"Polarities" is a short story that projects the isolated lives of Morrison and Louise. The polarity of their selves leaves them estranged from each other despite their intimacy. Each of them has built a cocoon for the self which precludes communication with each other. Louise has rightly summed up the alienated self of the "other pole". Her "sane" sketch of Morrison's self reflects her own split self. According to her, he is "not a complete person. He needs to be completed; he refuses to admit his body is part of his mind. He can be in the circle possibly, but only if he will surrender his role as a fragment and show himself willing to merge with the greater whole" (Dancing Girls 58).

The dichotomy of body and mind is central to Atwood's works. It reflects the split self. Unless his two halves unite and begin to function as a whole, man will never be able to experience his authentic self. Morrison had failed to recognize the fact that he loved Louise. When he did, he was horrified by his own folly: "He saw that it was only the hopeless, mad Louise he wanted, the one devoid of any purpose or defence" (62). But then the only consolation was that his desire for Louise was his "desire to be reunited with his own body, which he felt less and less that he actually occupied" (62). His desire for Louise is an indication of the fact that he has not completely lost his ability to feel.

Morrison was totally alienated from others, as well as himself. He is eager to make friends with others: "He ought to approach someone or something; he was beginning to feel isolated inside his clothes and skin" (43). His frozen self found an equally frozen landscape outside. The "barren tundra", the "blank solid rivers" and the "frozen sea" (65) were 'barometers' of the social climate in which his self existed. The landscape was hostile. The landscape was silent. It was "tight lipped, un giving, good for nothing and nothing" (63).

Louise's insanity reminds us of the psychic disorder of the heroines in The Edible Woman and Surfacing. It can be noticed that Atwood's works project insanity as a prelude to self-realization. Morrison failed to identify traces of her insanity when she spoke with enthusiasm about her 'discovery': "The city is polarized north and south; the river splits it in two; the poles are the gas plant and the power plant [. . .]. We have to keep the poles in our brains lined up with the poles of the city, that's what Blake's poetry is all about" (52).

Morrison had noticed the "pastiche" (58) appearance of Louise's room. She had decorated it like a collage, copying things from various houses. These objects evidently reflect her fragmented self. Her self is the collage, woven together by accepting hints from others. He felt sorry for her: "Poor Louise had been trying to construct herself out of the other people she had met. Only from

himself had she taken nothing; thinking of his chill interior, embryonic and blighted, he realized it had nothing for her to take" (59).

At the mental clinic Louise 'confessed' to Morrison how she had been mistaken about her discovery of the magnetic current. She seemed to have found a remedy for her problem: "I 'am' the circle. I have the poles within myself. What I have to do is keep myself in one piece, it 'depends' on me" (59). The 'circle' represents her wholeness. Morrison too shows signs of transformation. His visit to the zoo points to his self-integration. The "alert, neutral" (64) look of the wolves and the land which "opened" before him to receive him, are positive signs of his recovery. In fact, the two "poles" are Louise and Morrison. The poles can be connected by the magnetic current of love which could unite them and make them live together. One can also draw a comparison between Louise's confined self in the mental clinic and the animals confined in the zoo. Atwood projects the condition of an alienated self by this apt comparison.

"A Travel Piece" is the story of a "travel-writer" who gets an opportunity to peep behind the façade of tourism and confront the shocking realities which thrust man down to the level of a primitive cannibal. Annette had always dreamt of "an unspoiled Eden" (139) where life would be what she wanted it to

be, "where unpleasant things did not happen" (139). She pleased everyone with her work, which she did to everyone's satisfaction.

But lately, things were becoming different. Even the tantalizing tourist spots had become illusory, "like a giant screen, flat and with pictures painted on it to create the illusion of solidity" (140). Her inner world began to crumble. She could diagnose her problem: "It's the unbroken calm, both within and without, that is getting to her" (141). She believed that somehow real events happened to others and they were being withheld from her. Her husband tried to help her to escape from the monotony that made her gloomy.

Her dream came true when she found herself among one of the survivors after a plane crash in the sea. Very soon she had to admit that "exploring the Caribbean" (147) had given her a chance to explore the mysterious working of human psyche. The "enforced vacation" (146) gave her a chance to witness the primitive cannibalistic instinct of man "to witness something mundane and horrible, doubly so because it will be bathed not in sinister blood-red lightning but in the ordinary sunlight she had walked in all her life" (152). This shows the instinct of man to survive in a hostile world. It is a moment of self-knowledge for the protagonist. She witnesses the scene in which one of the delirious survivors was about to be killed for food before he attempted suicide. They would "slit his throat, like that pig on the beach in

Mexico" (152). His body could be utilised for their survival before death claimed it. The struggle for existence is a reality which writers encapsulate in their works. Atwood too focuses on this aspect.

"The Man from Mars" is a short story that portrays the apparently colourless self of Christine, the protagonist. The monotony of her life is broken by the arrival of the mysterious, man from "another culture" (32) like one from "another planet" (35). He followed her with a persistence that vexed her. She admitted that she was not drawn to him. Yet, her unconscious self had started drifting towards him, defying her suppressed sexuality. He was "the one man who had found her irresistible" (34).

Things became different when he was arrested and deported. It brought more trouble for Christine. He wrote to her and sent her a photograph. But she remained passive, not responding to his encouragement. "[S]he was beginning to have nightmares in which he was coming through the French doors of her mother's house in his shabby jacket [. . .]" (37). When at last she responded, it was too late. She could not trace this 'alien' who had created ripples in her monotonous life.

In this story Atwood had projected the self of Christine who had failed to evaluate her own worth. The arrival of the alien in her life had stirred up her

suppressed emotions. She had a unique place among men: "She was spared the manoeuvring and anxiety she witnessed among others of her age, and she even had a kind of special position among men, she was an exception, she fitted none of the categories they commonly used when talking about girls..." (29).

This "nondescript" (37) alien had given her an identity which she lacked till then. She had failed to experience her autonomous self. But this alien had sought her out from the "background" (37), giving her a central position in his life. Not surprisingly, she continued her humdrum life, oblivious of her influence on "the man from Mars", after he had disappeared from her life.

Das's short story "The Woman Who was Loved", published in her collection of short stories Madhavikkuttiyude Premakathakal (Madhavikutti's Love Stories 1988) highlights the transformation of a woman who falls in love. Like Christine, Amminikkutty also was not aware of her own identity till an alien stepped into her life. "Amminikkutty realized the worth of her femininity for the first time in her life. She had neither thought that a man would fall in love with her nor she would appear beautiful to him" (33). Love had transformed her life quite unexpectedly. Even her neighbours had been amazed at the change in her.

Like 'the man from the Mars' her lover too was an "alien" since her family knew little about him. He was an educated man and had a job. It was sufficient for her family to accept him when he proposed to her. He was "the one man who found her irresistible". Interestingly, the disappearance of these men from their lives plunged Christine and Amminikutty into misery. Both of them failed to trace these "nondescript" men who gave them an "aura of mystery" (Dancing Girls 36). But these men had brightened their drab lives though it was only for a short period. They restored the women their identity which they had failed to recognize earlier.

Women writers have been fascinated by the projection of the image of woman's self in a male-dominated world. Besides, the marginalization of women had made it compulsory for a woman writer to articulate their predicament in a world of male prerogatives. The oppressive and predatory forces inherent in the social matrix stifle the self of woman and silence her. Kamala Das voices her protest against the atrocities committed on women. In her attempt to portray the plight of women, she projects the image of her own self in her autobiography. Her poems and prose testify to this attempt. Her short stories portray women in their varied roles. Anthony Storr remarks on the synthesis of the inner and outer world of an artist: "[W]orks of art [ . . . ] represent a new synthesis between the inner, subjective world of the artist and external reality. The artist selects, often unconsciously, material both from external and

internal reality, and the work embodies and portrays a conjunction between the two" (102-3).

Ever since she entered the literary field, Das has remained a controversial figure. Her commitment to the social issues are reflected in her works, particularly in fiction. The vicissitudes that are reflected in the social climate find expression in them. She is adept in highlighting the issues of women. Above all, she projects the multiple roles of the self of an individual.

Unlike Atwood, Das is not restrained by any critical criteria postulated by her. Atwood is a writer of prose and poetry, as well as a critic. On the contrary, Das is not a critic, though she writes prose and poetry. Lack of formal education is her disadvantage. Yet the unique quality of her poems and prose can match that of many other contemporary writers.

Interestingly, the colonial background of Canada and India is a common link between these two countries. The cultural and linguistic diversity of India has in no way hampered the attempt of the writer to project the self. The autonomy claimed by Das in the traditional, patriarchal Indian society is unchallenged. Though her characters are mostly cast in the background of her own state, they are typically Indian and even represent a universal quality.

Das's short stories reflect the profound experiences of a highly sensitive woman writer who has imbibed and transmitted the felt experience of the people around her. They testify to her originality in exploring female experiences, which usually preclude a woman writer from expressing them without any inhibition. No doubt, her works are considered as a critique of the contemporary society.

Padmavati, the Harlot and Other Stories (1994), is a collection of nineteen short stories which dramatically demonstrates the complexity of human relationships. Like Atwood, Das too probes the unexplored landscape of woman's psyche in her short stories. Definitely, the focus is on woman and the infinite variety of her self.

"Iqbal" depicts the theme of homosexuality. It is the story of a woman's triumph over man. It is also the triumph of maternity. The effeminate charm of Iqbal has conquered the protagonist's husband. Iqbal considers the bride of his friend as an intruder who has come to wreck their homosexual relationship. His animosity towards her accounts for his "sullen, sullen, sullen" (58) look when he came to receive them at the railway station. He considers her a rival. Once, she found his poem hidden by her young husband under the mattress: "Dear love, your flesh was the flesh of the moon but I was an orphan nurtured by the moon, I have drunk the white milk of the moon and have suckled her

dry...""(59). She failed to recognize the sexual implication of the poem. She knew the truth later. Iqbal was admitted to a hospital, having made an abortive attempt to commit suicide. The news of her pregnancy had shattered his dreams. On the contrary, she felt triumphant looking at the "convexity of her middle" (60), since the privilege of conceiving had established her superiority over him. At the hospital she taunted him: "You are jealous because it is not possible for you to become pregnant..." (60). Das has projected the self of the protagonist as a woman, as a wife and as a prospective mother. Beauvoir comments on woman's 'elevated status' during her pregnancy:

Thus fulfilled, the woman has also the satisfaction of feeling that she is 'interesting', something that has been her deepest wish since adolescence; as wife she suffered from her dependency with regard to man; now she is no longer in service as a sexual object, but she is the incarnation of the species, she represents the promise of life, of eternity (518).

"The Princess of Avanti" is the pathetic story of an old woman who is treated as a sexual object by three lustful young men. The poor senile woman was almost mentally deranged and considered herself as the 'Princess of Avanti'. The three men took advantage of her loneliness and delusion. Das has portrayed their sexual assault on her vividly enough to arouse one's pity for this victim of man's lust. They were undeterred by her "spindly legs, dry and

blotched by mosquito-bites" and also her "sagging breasts" (18). Her feeble protests made one of them guffaw. The nudity of the old woman did not repel them. But it does make the readers empathize with this hapless woman. By projecting the self of a senile woman, Das has voiced her protest against the injustice on women. Her concern for the welfare of the old is obvious in this story. The oppressive forces in the society have not only marginalized women but also categorized them as the endangered minority. The effort of writers like Das is to speak about them and for them.

As a sensitive writer, Das encapsulates the experiences of women from all walks of life. Such an aspect of her writing can be discerned in stories like "Padmavati, the Harlot" and "A Doll for the Child Prostitute". These two stories deal with the lives of prostitutes. Padmavati is a middle aged prostitute who is equally devoted to her family, clients and God. This is evident in her filial obligations. She is a dutiful daughter who nursed her paralysed mother for seven years. But the mother's contempt for her daughter's profession prevented her from appreciating her filial duties. She educated her brothers. But after getting jobs in the cities they ignored her. Her sister was married off, with the payment of a large amount of dowry. She severed her links with Padmavati after her marriage.

Lost in utter desolation, Padmavati sought refuge at the feet of her Lord. The reader may find it beyond his means to interpret the spiritual aspirations of a prostitute. Her self is totally alienated from the society. She meditates on her plight: "Nobody loves me. Only the Lord, perhaps, has any feeling for me. But he too may have forgotten" (24).

Her visit to the temple was the occasion of her self-fulfilment. The lewd, remarks of the loafers did not hurt her: "Your breasts are still firm. Your haunches set our loins on fire" (24). She felt ashamed of her failure to offer anything to God except her "stale and ageing body" (25). What followed inside the temple is left to the imagination of the readers. Padmavati spent the night alone inside the temple with her Lord. She experienced "the warmth of His body" (25). The transformation that followed her mystic experience is reflected in the loafers' attitude to her. When she returned from the temple they did not humiliate her. They even addressed her as "mother".

Despite the interest and perseverance shown by the social reformers, prostitution continues unabated even in modern times. This situation also highlights the deterioration of the moral values of the society. Invariably, it reflects the victimization of women and their treatment as sexual objects by men. The story of Padmavati also proves that the 'purity', of her self is not at all

affected by the 'defilement' of her body. In the existential situation, the self is embedded in the body and yet it transcends its physical barrier.

"A Little Kitten" is the story of a young couple whose ecstatic love turned stale after weeks of honeymoon. The monotony of their lives made them find shelter in mutual perfidy. She used to ask him for a pet kitten to play with in his absence. During moments of overwhelming love he used to whisper to her: "I am your little kitten" (38). This would silence her. She did get one after a few months.

When the euphoria of honeymoon wore off they began to fight. The husband sought pleasure in the company of his pretty secretary at the office. The wife's bridal freshness disappeared all on a sudden. But when the situation became worse she reacted against her husband's infidelity. She found a new "kitten". The foolish husband failed to notice the significance of the glow on her face and the red weal on her breast.

Das employs subtle irony to portray the hollow relationship between the husband and wife. In marriage, man and woman are bound by the magical power of love. When it weakens, they fall apart. Das has an uncanny way of portraying marital relationship. The polarity of the selves of man and woman causes discord in their lives.

"A Doll for the Child Prostitute" is another example of the miseries of prostitutes. As the title indicates, the protagonist is a twelve-year-old girl who has been forced into this profession of disrepute. Rukmani's 'eligibility' for this profession is that she has been raped by her step father. To save her daughter from his lust, her mother brought her to a brothel run by Lachmi Bai. The reader can visualize the 'safety' of a tender girl in a brothel.

Rukmani's stay at the brothel opens up a new world before her. Das has portrayed the life of prostitutes with such candour and earnestness that Rukmani and other inmates of the brothel leave a deep impression of their idiosyncrasies on us. Sita, Radha, Mira and Saraswati are not Hindu goddesses but inmates of this brothel, destined to wade in the mire of man's carnal desires. Sita is a fourteen-year-old girl and soon becomes a good friend of Rukmani.

Each of these prostitutes is an alienated self striving for freedom. Mira makes an attempt to elope with her lover, but in vain. All are equally doomed and remain "dolls" in the hands of lustful men. Significantly, the title highlights not only the plight of Rukmani but also that of other inmates. The girl is tempted by the inspector's offer of a foreign doll. Men like him are adept in

receiving and offering bribes. He is a middle aged man who shows special interest in Rukmani and is very possessive.

Life in the brothel depicts a microcosm of hope/despair, joy/sorrow and pain/pleasure. The delineation of such a life is not a hard task for a writer who is endowed with a rare poetic sensibility like Das. By projecting the self of a prostitute, Das has expressed her abiding commitment to the society. In an interview, Iqbal Kaur asked Das about her views to mould the society. Das's reply reveals her interest in social issues: "A writer can either be evil and plot the manipulation of young minds or the writer can be not so evil but conscious of his or her power to manipulate and use it. Perhaps I'm doing that now. I am trying to manipulate the minds of people" (149).

The focus of the story is on the relationship between Rukmani and the Inspector. Before long, the girl is able to stir up paternal instincts in him. It is a turning point in her life. The girl's innocence and her helplessness to protest against injustice, evoke pathos and pity for her. She is eager to play hopscotch with her bosom friend, Sita.

Sita draws our attention to her by her philosophic attitude to life. She has nostalgic memories of her sweet home: "Once upon a time I lived in a house with white walls. Every year during Diwali, my father white-washed our

walls with lime and powdered sand [. . .]. He is dead. All are dead. Cholera got them all four years ago" (80). Sita, like other inmates of the brothel, has come to terms with the cruel joke of destiny. She died of excessive bleeding when Sindhuthai attempted a crude abortion on her. Watching her pathetic figure Rukmani reflects: "She resembled a foreign doll. Only her belly seemed alive, protruding from her flat body like a growth. Would she utter 'Mummy' when she was pressed on her tummy, like that expensive doll?" (92).

Ironically, Lachmi Bai, the keeper of the brothel presents an incongruous image by forcing the girls to entertain their clients and by showing her concern in their welfare. She gives them good food and gets them medically checked up regularly. She is visibly upset by the sudden death of Sita. She is an unhappy mother who had been abandoned by her son because of her profession. After many years he is returning to her, having acquired wisdom from his master. He wrote to his mother: "[E]very profession has its own code of honour and that I ought not to have felt ashamed of you" (98).

Das has not left these men and women to be doomed for ever. Like the heroines of Atwood who experienced self-realization, some of these characters find an outlet to escape from the vicious surroundings which stifled their selves. Their freedom depends on how they take their chances. Lachmi Bai is ready to accept Rukmani as her daughter-in-law. When her dream is fulfilled, Rukmani

can escape from the abode of lust and crime. Lachmi Bai is eager to spend her last days in Benares. The transformation of a woman who had spent her life in a brothel is noteworthy. Evidently Lachmi Bai has realized her self-worth beyond the world of sexuality. Having acquired self-knowledge, she can weave rosy dreams of her future.

The Inspector of Police, who is supposed to maintain law and order in the society abets crime by his silence. He is one of the clients who visits the brothel regularly. He has no control over his sexual impulses. It is evident in his eagerness to have sex with a twelve-year-old girl. Rukmani is young enough to be his own grand-daughter. But he does not waste his time on sentiments. She is only an object to appease his sexual hunger. When Sita died, the little girl is heart-broken and seeking consolation in his arms she burst out crying "papa". The word has a magical effect on him and it arouses his paternal instinct. He feels ashamed of his lust and decides to treat her like his own daughter.

The "doll" can be considered as the self that is battered by the existential problems in life. Rukmani is a doll in the hands of vicious, lustful men. Prostitution can be taken as a "circle game" in which the self of the hapless victim is trapped. Rukmani is not an isolated case. She represents such

victims all over the world. By portraying her heart-rending story Das has found her place among committed writers.

Autobiography is an effective device used by writers to project the self. As a literary genre it has a unique place to explore the identity of the writer in the cultural milieu. Meena Sodhi emphasizes its role:

The autobiographical act is a reconstitution of the writer's self, and is viewed from a distance in life: the writer sees himself as a special entity, having a unique identity across the wide space of time. The external events are not responsible only for the restructuring of life; they certainly constitute a limitation but what plays an essential role in this structural design, on the themes of life, is the writer's personality. (19)

Das's My Story (1988) projects the image of her self more conspicuously than in her other works. It is a self swayed by the vicissitudes of her life. She exposes her life before her readers by not trying to withhold any secret from them. This candour is unique in Das as an Indian writer. Her prose style also is very much suitable for this purpose. Very often her poetic sensibility blends harmoniously with her prose.

Gerhard Stilz examines the projection of the self in an autobiography:

The primary aim of autobiography, viz, to define one's personal identity is, paradoxically directed towards coming to terms with the world. Yet the repeated correlation of these two unknown quantities in the elliptic venture of autobiography – writing promises an approximate solution at least. The self emerges through resistance, or in other words the self is the thing which ultimately does not dissolve in the description of the world (15).

My Story was written during her days of illness. She admits that she had written it at the bidding of her husband. She was sick and hospitalised when her husband brought with him the editor of a magazine. She was given a typewriter. Instead of writing she typed her ideas. The inner landscape of her mind begins to unfold before the readers of her autobiography. In the preface to My Story she comments on her cathartic experience: "Between short hours of sleep induced by the drugs given to me by the nurses, I wrote continuously, not merely to honour my commitment, but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscience".

The confessional outpourings of Das have shocked the conventional society which defines its gender roles. A woman is expected to conform to the image of the "Angel in the House". One can say with conviction that My Story is

Das's "Journey to the Interior." The difference between Das and Atwood lies in the difference in their cultural background. Basically, human psyche has a universal quality. In this context it is influenced by factors relevant to the Indian and Canadian cultures. The imagery of the mysterious workings of her mind is obvious when she compares her mind racing through the past to "a motor boat chug-chugging through the inky waters at night" (My Story, preface).

Das has made startling revelations about her self in her autobiography. A reader may wonder about the veracity of her experiences. Das has frankly admitted the role of imagination in her autobiography:

Any book will contain passages which are the creations of the writer's imagination. My Story is no exception. Whether something happened to me or to another woman is immaterial. What really matters is the experience, the incident. It may have happened to another woman who is probably too timid to write about it. I wanted to chronicle the times we lived in and I had to write about the experience (Kaur 144).

Interestingly, Atwood's remark about the "true story" which is "untrue" coincides with Das's view. In her poem "True Stories" Atwood articulates the ambivalence implied in a true story:

The true story is vicious  
And multiple and untrue  
After all. Why do you  
Need it? Don't ever  
Ask for the true story (29-32).

My Story is cast in a reminiscent mood. The writer delves deep into her psyche and emerges with the recollections of her past. The self that is projected in the autobiography is not a cheerful one. It is a self buffeted by the surging waves of sorrow and pain, one which expresses its anguish as Shelley did in his poem "Ode to the West Wind": "I fall upon the thorns of life I bleed" (244).

Nalapat, the ancestral home of Das is central to her childhood memories. It acted as the source from where her growing self derived its nourishment. Among all those who were associated with her childhood, the image of her grandmother occupies the central position. Both Nalapat and the old woman remain like loyal sentinels watching the emerging self of Das.

She was not a happy child. Her sensitive mind acted like a blotting paper, absorbing her experiences. Facts and figures remained vivid in her mind. She describes her parents as "dissimilar and horribly mismatched" (4).

They created "an illusion of domestic harmony" (5). The bitterness of the unhappy child is reflected in her words: "Out of such an arid union were born the first two children, my brother and I, bearing the burden of a swarthy skin and ordinary features" (5).

The colonial experiences of India and Canada provide a common basis to assess the literary growth of writers like Das and Atwood. Americanism expressed in Surfacing points to Canada's colonial experience. In My Story the self of the writer is seen as oppressed by the British occupation of India. She recalls the freedom she experienced at the Elementary School in Punnayurkulam: "I felt that I had died a cultural death and was getting reborn into another kind of world where the hard-eyed British were no longer my co-rivals" (20). These words express the stifled self of a decolonizing artist, which strives to exert its superiority over the colonizer.

Women of Nalapat never experienced their authentic selves. Their "colonized" selves did not dare to challenge male-prerogatives. Throughout their lives they tried to conform to the stereotypes, not daring for self-assertion. But Das was an exception. Her experience at home and outside convinced her of her commitment. She set up goals which guided her through her life.

Adolescence was a painful period for Das. The biological changes of womanhood fascinated and terrified her simultaneously. The mobility of her female self was brought under strict surveillance and restraint. The biological changes of womanhood fascinated and terrified her *stifled self*. Like a dog struggling at the leash, her fettered self struggled for freedom. Not surprisingly, even in the matrilineal Nair society power lay with men. Das was ignorant and innocent of the devious ways of sex. So she suffers a rude shock when she became engaged to a relative of hers, who was much older than her. Her first experience was humiliating. He pushed her into a dark corner and kissed her and his thick fingers crushed her breast (82).

Das was only fifteen when she got married. For her sex and love were different. She expected tenderness from her fiancé: "I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts" (84).

Even after marriage, his callousness hurt her. To him she existed as 'body' and he totally ignored her self which craved for love and recognition. Molly Hite articulates the importance of the female body: "The female body is traditionally a subject about which male authors have written with eloquence, fervor, and a certain proprietary confidence" (121). In Surfacing, the protagonist had witnessed a similar relationship between her friend Anna and her husband

David. David too considered his wife, a sexual object. Beauvoir highlights the relationship between man and woman as the 'Self' and the 'Other':

There is unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or in some cases a 'protector' – is for her the most important of undertakings. In her eyes man incarnates the Other, as she does for the man; but this *Other* seems to her to be on the plane of the essential, and with reference to him she sees herself as the inessential (352).

Das considers herself a victim of her biology. The colonized self of this writer as a woman and as an Indian, struggled to experience its wholeness. Her self is a divided one. The split self seeks its identity in its gender-roles which circumscribe it. Her poetic self strives to transcend its limitations. This inner struggle of her self in her dual roles – as a woman and as a writer – is a persistent one. Out of this tension is born the best of her as a creative artist.

Das could never reconcile herself to the image of the 'Angel in the House' which conforms to the traditional, gender-role of a woman. My Story encodes the revolutionary ideas of Das. In The Edible Woman Marian had visualized the pre-formed self after opting the Pension Plan. In her autobiography Das conjures up the image of her complacent self as a housewife: "I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out

of our union, there would be born a few children. I would be a middle class house-wife, and walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet" (85).

After the birth of her second baby, she suffered a nervous breakdown. It was the eruption of the volcanic forces of her psyche which had stifled her sorrows for long. Unable to cope with the existential problems, her inner self began to show signs of disintegration. All along, her self had sought its identity in different roles. During the period of her temporary nervous disorder, she tried to commit suicide. Finally her suppressed self found an outlet to express its anguish. She took to writing. The existential problems had precipitated her creative talent. A woman requires immense courage to write her self. The traditional society does not expect a woman artist to transcend her sexuality.

As a victim of her adverse circumstances, Das experienced alienation from her self. One of the major reasons for this alienation was her unhappy marriage which oppressed her self. According to Beauvoir, "for girls, marriage is the only means of integration in the community [ . . . ]" (447). Beauvoir traces the anguish of a young wife whose ties with her parental home are severed after marriage and whose days become monotonous with the same rites repeated day after day when she lives with her husband: "In the solitude of her new home, bound to a man who is more or less a stranger to her no longer a

child but a wife and destined to become a mother in her turn, she feels a chill" (477). Das too had experienced this trauma in her life. Her marriage had thrown her into a totally alien world. She had to live with a man who failed to recognize her desires. His only interest was in the gratification of his sexual desires.

Like Joan Foster in Lady Oracle, Das too desperately tries to establish her identity in the gender-defined roles of the society. The multiplicity of her self aggravates her confusion. She finds her inability to conform to the norms of the society disparaging: "I knew then that if love was what I had looked for in marriage I would have to look for it outside its legal orbit. I wanted to be given an identity that was lovable" (95). Das's search for a 'lovable identity' makes her life an adventurous one. One's autonomous identity is indispensable to establish and maintain relationships with others. Socialization has a therapeutic effect on alienation. Das's unhappy marriage forces her to seek love in extramarital relationships: "Like alms looking for a begging bowl was my love which only sought for it a receptacle" (118).

My Story unfolds the world of her self. Das reveals that writing her self did bring her relief: "I felt light because I had been able to share my grief, my agony with the readers. The writing of My Story also kept my thoughts away from death" (Kaur 143).

Das's feminine and poetic sensibility have made a combined effort in projecting the self in her autobiography. She shares her discovery with her readers: "One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one who has decided to travel inwards will realize that his route has no end" (109).

Das considers her self as a "vessel overflowing with emotions" (118). These emotions depict her feminine world. Das highlights her maternal emotions with astounding clarity in her autobiography. One sees her as an affectionate, possessive mother who guards her children from the evils of the world. When her first baby was born she "shrieked with delight" (93). It was the delight of a teenaged girl who found herself lucky to possess a live doll to "bathe, powder and suckle to sleep" (93).

Once she offered all her ornaments to the deity at Guruvayur for the recovery of her son who had fallen ill on eating castor seeds. She narrates another incident which testifies to her overwhelming maternal affection, when the presence of a stream of visitors prevented the shy young mother from feeding her baby. Later, she held her little one to her breast "like a tigress that feared for the safety of its cub" (166).

In pathological conditions of the mind, individuals belonging to different cultural matrices may show similarity in behaviour. In her demented condition, Das discarded her clothes. In Surfacing, the protagonist stripped off her clothes to become one with nature. It is a symbolic gesture expressing the wish of the victim to enter the primal state of man. Clothes signify the social framework which imprison the self of an individual. Jung's interpretation of the role of the unconscious explains the mysterious working of the human mind. An individual, who is subjected to emotions like anxiety, fear, jealousy or any other similar stress, expresses them in his neurotic behaviour.

Das's long bouts of illness which prolonged her stay at the hospital project the desire of the self to escape from this world. The writer's great insight illuminates the reality of life. Das observes: "I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality" (218). Even after returning from the hospital, the thought of death had endeared itself to her. The desire to know her true self became an obsession: "Who am I? Who are these three boys who call themselves my children? We are burdened with perishable bodies which strike up bond which are also unreal and perishable. The only relationship that is permanent is the one which we form with God" (186).

The self of the writer that is swayed by the turbulence of life desperately longs to moor it. Das's identity crises enable her to discover the unexplored

landscape of her psyche. The writer sets out a lonely voyage of self discovery, trying to establish a rapport between herself and her readers. She comments on her unique position as a poet: "Poets, even the most insignificant of them, are different from other people. They cannot close their shops like shopmen and return home. Their shop is their mind and as long as they carry it with them they feel the pressures and torments. A poet's raw material is not stone or clay: it is her personality" (157).

My Story is a solid proof that expresses the personality of its writer. The poetic verbal peelings of Das find their way to this prose text enhancing its beauty, and endearing her to the readers. Her faith in them is so great that she is willing to dismember her organs to form a "collage" for them. She boldly announces: "I have no secrets at all" (206). She has "confessed" all her secrets to her readers.

Towards the end of her autobiography, Das indulges in philosophic speculation which is almost a verbatim reproduction of her ideas in the poem "Composition." Das is aware of the need for one's individuation. She reminds us: "We are trapped in immortality and our only freedom is the freedom to discompose [. . .]" (215).

On the whole, My Story is more than an autobiography, She has voiced her protest as a woman against male dominance. She spoke not only for herself but also for others of her sex. My Story projects Das as a revolutionary who refused to conform to the convictions of the society. It delivers a message to women – “to refuse to be a victim” (Surfacing, 229). Finally, it portrays not an ‘ideal self’ but a self with its existential fringes.

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## Chapter II

# The Family

The social life of man has been the focus of interest of different disciplines, including literature. The ordered arrangement of the social structure is an essential feature of the society, which explains its occupation and relation of individuals. People are ruled by certain norms which control their lives within the framework of what is called an 'institution': "An institution is an established norm of conduct recognized as such by a distinguishable social group or class of which therefore it is an institution" (Radcliffe-Brown 10). The family as an institution, refers to the experience of men and women, related to reproduction and upbringing of children.

Every individual has to learn the culture of his society in order to become a part of it. This process of socialization has been defined as "the complex learning process through which individuals develop selfhood and acquire the knowledge, skills and motivations required for participation in social life" (Mackie 75). Family relations are controlled by the emotional atmosphere that prevails within the family and also among different families in the society. The family serves as a link between the individual and the external world. Hence

the institution of family plays a pivotal role in the process of the socialization of an individual.

The traditional family of the past has undergone tremendous metamorphosis. The values upheld by it are rarely discernible in the modern family. The erosion of moral values has undermined its basis. Despite the deteriorating values of the family, it does have a decisive role in the development of one's personality:

The family has been so central in the framework of human institutions, and so decisive has been its role in the formation of personality and the shaping of people's most intimate feelings, that if it is renounced on principle, our habits of behaviour, our social arrangements, our everyday emotions, and our innermost thoughts will also be changed along a very wide spectrum (Frankel 31).

One can easily make out the social life of Canada and India in the works of Atwood and Das. Images of familial relationships depicted in their prose works in particular, help to analyse the patterns of family existing in these countries. These patterns vary according to the cultural background of the people of a particular region. The colonial background of these countries also offers a chance to explore the families of the pre-colonial and post-colonial

periods. Interestingly, the conclusion drawn from the pictures of these families evidently points to the importance of the family as a social unit that governs the behaviour of its members.

The development of the psychology of an individual is influenced by several factors related to the family. Family as an institution caters to the biological, physical and psychological needs of an individual. A child has to adapt itself to the norms of familial life. This adaptation is a continuous process even after becoming an adult. The family plays a vital role in the process of a child's acculturation:

The family is an essential derivative of man's biological make up for it is the basic social system that mediates between the child's genetic and cultural endowments, provides for his biological needs while instilling societal techniques, stands between the individual and society, and offers a shelter within the society, and against the remainder of society (Anthony, Koupernik 20).

The family as a social unit has a decisive role in the life of an individual. A writer who encapsulates the experiences of an individual within the framework of the family can ascertain those factors that lead to the development of the individual. Often the pathological symptoms of mental disorder are seen to have their origin in the family. Schizophrenia is one such

disorder. It is precipitated by certain events in one's childhood. The split within the psyche of a schizophrenic accounts for the identity crisis experienced by that individual. Heroines of Atwood in The Edible Woman, Surfacing and Lady Oracle are some of the examples.

An analysis of the kinship units of the past reveals the dominance of man in the society. This is exemplified by the presence of patrilineal descent and patriarchy which prevailed over matrilineal descent and matriarchy. Undoubtedly, the kinship network projected by Das and Atwood also confirms this fact. Frederick Engel's seminal work, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State records the presence of patriarchy in a very early period. He traces the history of family from Bachofen to Morgan. The patrilineal family is considered to be the oldest form of family. Bachofen's Mother Right reveals sexual promiscuity in primeval times and disregards the certainty of paternity. It also traces the existence of gynocracy and its transition to monogamy (Engels 9-10).

The dynamics of social development can be affected by the changing family patterns. According to Henry Maine, the patriarchal family was the fundamental and universal unit of human society. His Ancient Law (1861) traces patriarchy in India. He observes that Indians resisted the rigid patriarchy of European imperialism. In Southern India matriliney prevailed (Coward 18).

Das's ancestral house, Nalapat evidently is a matrilineal unit. William J. Goode observes that "the family is the fundamental *instrumental* foundation of the larger social structure, in that all other institutions depend on its contributions" (4). The social structure of patriarchy projects the marginalization of women. Engels traces the emergence of patriarchy and its far-reaching consequences. When man's wealth increased, patriarchy emerged. The emergence of patriarchy witnessed the overthrow of mother right, which according to Engels was the "world-historic defeat of the female sex" (57). The development of private property in the epoch of civilization quickened the birth of patriarchy. Women became "the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children" (57). Offred in The Handmaid's Tale comments on the duties of handmaids: "We are for breeding purposes" (176).

Patriarchy implies a hegemonic definition of the polarity between the two sexes. "The term 'patriarchal' refers to the power relations in which woman's interests are subordinated to the interests of men" (Weedon 1-2). Weedon remarks that power relations are present in the sexual division of labour, the social organization of procreation and the internalized norms of femininity. The term patriarch means 'father'. It originally referred to a system of male-dominated family. Hence the term is also used for theorizing the subordination of women. Patriarchy conceptualizes the male as the norm and the female as the deviant. Patriarchal relationships fulfilled functions within the social matrix,

which became central to the discussions of the feminists. Studies on the operational nature of kinship in maintaining the inequalities between the sexes have led to the formulation of social theories. Invariably, these theories explore the distinctive experiences of woman's sexed body which differentiate her from man.

Family is the battleground of emotions where clashes occur among individuals. Prominent among these are the power battles between men and women which culminate in the victory of one of these groups or end in an impasse. As women writers, Das and Atwood project these battles, highlighting the distortions within the family, which deny equality to women. Their female protagonists are keen about their affirmation as women and they try to assert their individuality in the sphere of the family. Human relationships, man-woman relationship in particular, is the locus of the conflicts that create dramatic situations in the works of Atwood and Das.

The biological differences between men and women give rise to gender differences which explain the subordination of women. Sexuality and biological experiences like menarche, menstruation and pregnancy are factors that restrict women's mobility. The selfhood of woman is often confined within the boundary restricted by domestic chores. The hegemonic discourses that appeal to the feminists reflect different aspects of gender and sexuality. The

cultural codes in women's narratives provide insight into the sexed bodies of women as sites of male domination. The narratives of Atwood and Das explore female experiences from a unique perspective. They do explore gender discrimination in Canada and India as conclusive evidences of patriarchy that prevails in these countries.

Patriarchy encourages gender indoctrination and marginalizes women. Women as a social group, differentiated from their male counterparts form a minority group. Louis Wirth defines minority group as "any group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment" (347). The unequal treatment of women has become central to the works of woman writers of the twentieth century in particular.

In Sexual Politics, Kate Millet examines power within sexual relationships. 'Politics' refer to "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (23). Sexual politics within the family valorizes the existence of patriarchy. "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (33). Millet considers the family, society and the state as "patriarchal institutions" (33).

The ramification of patriarchy is reflected in the system of family. The nuclear families in Canada and India basically exhibit a similar pattern. The International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences describes the nuclear family as "the group consisting of a man, a woman and the socially recognized children" (303). The matrilineal joint family projected by Das during the latter half of the twentieth century is split into smaller households as in nuclear families today. Nalapat, the ancestral home of Das is a joint family. Das's Balyakalasmaranakal, (Memories of Childhood 1989), is cast in the background of Nalapat, which is the locus of the nostalgic memories of her childhood. Its glorious days are over. The members of this joint family have established nuclear families elsewhere and the house had been sold off (personal interview).

Relatively, joint families offer security and warmth to its members. This is obvious when Das goes down memory lane in Balyakalasmaranakal. She recounts her experiences as a girl of about seven years. Her self had a distinctive, colourful identity in the magic world of Nalapat. Nalapat was a silent witness to the metamorphosis of this little girl during her tumultuous adolescence. She became eager to terminate her childhood and enjoy her womanhood. She observes: "When I was living at Nalapat, Calcutta was gradually vanishing as a dream. In those days, I used to believe that Nalapat, and not Calcutta was the reality" (143). Interestingly, sociological studies do

reveal that modern families have certain advantages over the joint families because of their smaller size.

In fact, the modern family is our most successful institution. Geographical migration and the social services have given it a new importance and have promoted its unity; social mobility (children rising above the social level of their parents) has not weakened the cohesion of the family or seriously impaired the bonds between parents and their prospering children (Musgrove 31).

The tradition of joint family system is a unique feature of the Indian society. Often three or four generations live under the same roof, forming a compact unit. In a world where kinship relations are receding fast, such compact units epitomize a strong familial bond which unites individuals of varied groups. The joint family of India is called 'extended' family. The twentieth century witnessed the gradual decline of this system. Arranged marriages are the usual patterns. Power to manage the household lies with the eldest male member (Goode 46-49).

The joint family includes a man and his wife, their sons and the wives and children of the sons. Married daughters stay in their husband's homes whereas unmarried daughters live with their parents. In My Story, Das portrays

the joint family at Nalapat: "When we went there as children, the Nalapat House had seven occupants, not counting the servants. My grandmother, my aunt Ammini, my granduncle, the poet, my great grandmother, her two sisters and Mahatmaji" (13). Mahatmaji's presence was very conspicuous at Nalapat, as though he were the head of the family. The members of the joint family are jointly responsible for the payment of revenue and other government assessments. The eldest male member is the head of the joint family. Some joint families have all their members living together (Tyler 129-30). Rosalind Coward considers the expansion of primary families into larger groups as a transition that took place with more changes within the family. She observes:

In its simplest form the earlier patriarchal theory had represented society simply as an enlargement of the primary family. The primary family, the father, mother and children under the authority and protection of the father gradually expanded as children married, extending the family group to include more distant relatives (21-22).

The principle of descent in a family decides whether it is matrilineal or patrilineal. Das belongs to a family with matrilineal tradition. The matrilineal family consists of a mother and her children, the children of her daughter, her brothers and sisters, and the sister's children. Obviously, such a family pattern offers more security to a child during the days of its acculturation. Though

nuclear families of the modern times have their own advantages, matriliney does offer a value system to the growing child.

Kerala Through the Ages, published by the Department of Public Relations offers an interesting analysis of the matrilineal system in Kerala. Literary sources have proved that in Kerala this system came into existence during a period not later than ninth century (36-37). People belonging to the Nair caste were known as 'Savarnas' or the upper class and were superior to the 'Ezhavas' or the lower class. Das's father belonged to a Nair family, whereas her mother was a descendant of the royal family. Views differ regarding the origin of matriliney or *marumakkattayam*. P.T. Sreenivasa Iyengar opines that matriliney did not prevail in Kerala till the tenth century. But according to K.P. Padmanabha Menon, matriliney was non-existent in Kerala till the thirteenth century (Menon 84). David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough examine J.J. Bachofen's propositions in Das Mutterrecht. According to Bachofen before matriliney evolved, promiscuity had prevailed in the society. Matriliney and matriarchy were two aspects of the same institution (preface viii). They also trace the principles of descent in the family:

Unilineal rules or principles for the affiliation of descent unit members are those in which sex is symmetrically used as the distinguishing criterion, so that those kinsmen related through one sex are included and those related through the opposite sex are

excluded. When male sex is the distinguishing criterion the descent principle or rule is called patrilineal [ . . .]. When the female sex is the distinguishing criterion the principle is called matrilineal (Introduction 3).

In Kerala, Nairs, Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis follow matriliney (Menon 88). Kerala also encourages patriliney in other communities. Besides, Western education has alerted the youth of today about the disadvantages of matriliney. Their clamour for reforms introduced legal measures which improved the condition of the Nair commoner. The Travancore Nair Act of 1912 and the Nair Act of 1925 paved the way for such reforms. The Cochin Nair Act empowered the wives and children of husband or father to be the loyal heirs to his property (Menon 91).

The caste system is a unique feature of Indian society. The social stratification which results in hierarchy among different castes has been quite conspicuous in the pre-independent India. Such stratification is not seen in the Canadian society. In India, evidences of the caste system are seen in the Vedic period. The society to which Das belongs is acutely conscious of its caste discriminations. In Balyakalasmaranaka Das refers to instances of caste discrimination, when she was at school. In the class she was flanked by two Muslim boys. She was reprimanded for sitting next to one who belonged to a

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different caste. She was advised to be conscious of her place in the society. She was even asked to complete her education at home to avoid mingling with children of lower caste. Arrangements could be made for that (178). In My Story Das reveals her great grandmother's royal descent: "My great grandmother was the only daughter of a wealthy chieftain, the Raja of Punnathore Kotta" (140). Evidently, Das is proud of her royal lineage.

Canada Year Book 1999, published by Statistics Canada gives us a sweeping survey of the modern Canadian family. The Canadian family is known for its diversity. The increasing divorces and the consequent increase of lone parents is an index of the disintegrating values of the Canadian family. Paradoxically, family continues to be an integral part of Canadian life.

In Survival, Atwood compares the English, the American, and the Canadian families. The English extended family comprises distant ancestors and relatives and the hero rarely breaks away from the family. On the other hand, in American literature the hero defines his freedom by breaking away from the family. She sums up her observations thus: "If in England the family is a mansion you live in, and if in America it's a skin you shed, then in Canada it's a trap in which you're caught"(131). Atwood highlights the influence of Canadian geography on Canadian family: "Families in Canadian fiction huddle together like sheep in a storm or chickens in a coop: miserable and crowded,

but unwilling to leave because the alternative is seen as cold empty space" (132) On the other hand, Das's autobiography and fiction highlight the family as a frontier where men and women fight their battle of life. She also reveals the discrepancy between the old and the new family patterns.

Canada Year Book 1999 examines what is known as the 'Common-Law-Union as a recent phenomenon in Canadian life. Couples live together without being formally married. This system is taken as a trial of marriage, though very few couples get married in the long run (189). In Atwood's short story "The Resplendent Quetzal" Edward and Sarah lived together as husband and wife. "He hadn't thought of marrying Sarah at all, he'd never mentioned it because it had never occurred to him she would agree, until she told him she was pregnant" (Dancing Girls 166). In India marriage is considered to be a sacred bond which ratifies the relationship between the husband and wife. Nevertheless, the decay of moral values has affected the Indian family too.

Nuclear families are considered to be the source of material prosperity. Ironically enough, these families also exhibit signs of discord as they turn into battlefields of power. This is evident in the interpersonal relationships explored by Atwood and Das. In Surfacing, the female protagonist realizes her predicament when she discovers her lover's true self. She had foolishly let herself get entangled with a married man. When she became pregnant he

wanted to abandon her. “[H]e showed me snapshots of his wife and children, his reasons, his stuffed and mounted family, they had names, he said I should be mature” (175). He was ready to forsake his love to save his family. Though men and women feel attracted to each other, the family is given priority when the choice is made between the family and one’s lover.

Woman’s roles in the family are varied. The self-effacing quality of an Indian woman in the role of a mother is central to many of Das’s short stories. Her short story “The Tattered Blanket” highlights the warmth of maternal love. The mother, an eighty-five year-old lady, pined for her son, who worked in Delhi. But when he came after five years she failed to recognize him. She asked him whether he knew her son, Gopi. When he replied that he knew him she pleaded: “Please tell him that I want a new blanket [ . . . ], tell him that I cannot stand the cold in the mornings” (Padmavati 63). The mother did not know that her son had come to sell his share of their property, as his income was not sufficient to support his own family. This story projects the deteriorating values of the modern nuclear family with its emphasis on materialism. The son fails to fulfil his obligation to his old mother.

“The Lies” is yet another story which accentuates the bond between a mother and her son. It focuses upon the extramarital relationship of the husband. Appu’s mother who is ignorant of her husband’s extramarital affair,

advises her son: "Appu, you should not tell lies. When you grow up, don't you want to be like your father"? (Madhavikuttiyude Kathakal 28). The subtle irony of the situation is too obvious to be ignored.

The Annual Report of the Minister of Health and Welfare, 1927-40 shows that premarital sex and illegitimate births are on a steady rise in Quebec. Every year more than 2000 illegitimate births are recorded. In 1939, 2668 births were recorded as illegitimate (Levesque 166). The traumatic experience of the narrator in Surfacing portrays woman's vulnerability and the consequent victimization.

Premarital sex in Canada and India has to be viewed from different perspectives. In Surfacing the narrator's love affair with a married man does not create any ripple in the social matrix, though the victim herself fails to overcome the emotional disturbance. On the other hand, the conventional Indian society does not approve of such illegitimate relationship. In My Story, Das narrates the furore over the pregnancy of her unmarried kitchen maid. Her grandmother shouted at her and asked her to leave the house. Das was too young to realize the gravity of the situation: "It was obvious to me that the kitchen maid had fallen from favour. I did not know what her crime was"(27).

Family relationships are highlighted in Atwood's novels. In Surfacing, the heroine feels "total safety" even during the war time: "I had a good childhood, it was in the middle of the war, flecked gray newsreels I never saw, bombs and concentration camps, the leaders roaring at the crowds from inside their uniforms, pain and useless death, flags rippling in time to the anthems" (15). This image of safety in the midst of tumult is central to Surfacing. The narrator's affair with her artist teacher had estranged her from her parents. Her fabricated marriage and abortion had been hidden from them. She had severed her links with her past and the safety of her childhood. Her parents had never forgiven her when they came to know of her "divorce". She recalls: "What upset them was the way I did it, so suddenly, and then running off and leaving my husband and child [. . .]" (29). The "chicken-wire enclosure" and the "fence" (32) are images of safety associated with her childhood. These man-made structures protected herself and her brother from dangers. The protective instinct of her father is projected through the "camouflage" (32) of trees in the bush which hid her house from any threat. Later, during the period of her alienation from her parents, she thought of them with regret since she had abandoned them instead of seeking their advice in her hour of crisis.

In Survival, Atwood outlines three generations in the Canadian family – the grandparents, parents and children. Often the grandfather becomes a "threatening icon, self-proclaimed embodiment of morality and the Calvinist Will

of God" (134). The narrator's father in Surfacing fits into this image. The unique nature of this character becomes evident when one looks at the odd house he had built for himself. It was a bottle house "built of pop bottles cemented together with the bottoms facing out, green ones and brown ones in zigzag patterns [. . .]" (7). The narrator considers it a "preposterous monument" (7) of her father. Her father did not approve of her going to a Sunday School. "Christianity was something he'd escaped from, he wished to protect us from its distortions". (59-60). Needless to say, the patriarchal image of her father haunted her like a "threatening icon."

Das's My Story also projects the image of the narrator as an alienated child during her early days. She used to feel totally estranged from her mother, who spent her time writing poems, neglecting her children. The illusion of "domestic harmony" (5) created by her parents sustained the harmony of the family. As for Das, she could easily make out the absence of warmth between the couple. She says, "My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched" (4).

Every child comes to know the external world through his parents. Hence the influence exerted by the parents on the child is undeniable. During the process of socialization, the child is bound to internalize the patriarchal values nurtured by the society. Needless to say, eventhough the parents

influence the child during his early days of development, they do not have access to the child's world of fantasy. One can easily discern that a child's observations are modelled upon the keen observations of his parents. Atwood's Surfacing and Lady Oracle are examples of the influence of parents on their children during the early part of their childhood. Ensnared within the parameters of the family and protected by her father, the narrator in Surfacing feels vulnerable and totally exposed to the predatory forces around her. Driven from pillar to post, ultimately, she seeks refuge within the family that she plans to build up with Joe.

In Lady Oracle, Joan Foster, who appeared like a beluga whale to her mother at fifteen, shocked her with her weight of two hundred and forty-five pounds. She observes: "It was only in relation to my mother that I derived a morose pleasure from my weight; in relation to everyone else, including my father, it made me miserable" (78). In her childhood, Joan never enjoyed the warmth of maternal affection. She has only bitter memories of those early days: "Our relationship was to be the manager, the creator, the agent; I was to be the product" (70). This bitterness later precipitates a series of adventures in the life of Joan. The facts that Joan discovered about her mother fits into the jigsaw puzzle she had created. The parents of Joan's mother were very strict and very religious: Joan's mother had run away from home, and tried various jobs outside. One finds obvious similarities between the lives of the mother

and the daughter. Joan too has an unhappy childhood because of the dominating nature of her mother. She too runs away from home, in search of autonomy. When she lived with Arthur, her husband, she had the desire to settle down permanently and have children. But then Arthur had not been ready to start a family. Joan herself had mixed feelings: "I wanted children, but what if I had a child who would turn out like me? Even worse, what if I turned out to be like my mother?" (238). For a mother, the child is her precious possession and hence she hopes to have the best, if a choice can be made.

The failure of building up a meaningful man-woman relationship often rattles the very foundation of the institution of marriage. In marriage one looks for compatibility, mutual interest and understanding between the partners. When they fail to secure emotional satisfaction, the institution of marriage crumbles. Das's autobiography explores man-woman relationship and its distortion. Das's marriage does not appear to have given any satisfaction to her. She sought love and gentleness from her husband. The incompatibility of the spouses even precipitated mental disorder in the young wife. She had the knowledge of his extramarital relationships. She had no other choice, except to live with him and submit to his demands.

In Das's short story "Marine Drive" the tilted relationship between a pair of lovers is examined. Bison, the lover, exploited the ignorance of Anasuya,

his beloved, and tried to force her to please his friend just as she had pleased him. He had arranged a hidden movie camera to take their photographs of lovemaking. He expected her to serve his bosom friend for his own personal interests. "He's someone very important for me. Why can't you please him as well"? (The Sandal Trees 95). Though she possessed strict moral ethics she returned to him even after his interest in her had waned. The story ends with his attempt to kill her when he came to know that she was pregnant. For one like him, who entertained many women in his life, being bound to a single woman could never bring him happiness. Pre-marital sex and pregnancy are dealt with in a different way by men like the Bison. Neither parenthood nor a child is his goal, though "the child is not viewed as an end in himself, but rather as a means to an end" (Lantz, Snyder 302).

Woman's role in the family varies. Earlier she had been confined to the domestic circle, the husband and the children demanding her whole attention. In the recent past, a noticeable trend in the family is to expect women to contribute to the family income. Unable to meet the demands of the family, women too have come forward to supplement its income. Marian Mc Alpin in The Edible Woman, Joan Foster in Lady Oracle, the unnamed narrator in Surfacing, Annette in "A Travel Piece" belong to the class of working women.

Das's "The Smell of the Bird" is a short story that deals with yet another aspect of woman's life, trapped as a housewife. It is the story of a young woman who is eager to get a job and earn her living. But the simple theme of the story is veiled in an undercurrent of mystery and the reader is the one who is left in shock at the end. The protagonist is in search of a job at a 'dyeing' company. But she dies in an accident caused by the crashing of a lift. (The Sandal Trees 57). Her death has highlighted the irony between the world of 'dyeing' and 'dying'. Life and death are but two of the major challenges that every woman has to face. Dyeing can add colour to clothes as well as life. Ironically enough, one forgets the fact that death is the ultimate end. The subtle projection of the harsh realities of life is a favourite device of any committed writer.

Stable love relationships are essential for the survival of the institution of marriage. Disillusionment in marital life is caused by lack of mutual understanding and emotional commitment. My Story reveals a couple who are diametrically opposed to each other. When the young wife yearned for love and gentleness, the middle-aged husband shocked her with his lust and sexual haste. Das's dreams of the romantic image of marital life were shattered when she felt alienated from her husband, owing to his indifference to her.

Atwood's works point to the disintegration of the conventional norms of the family. Lack of stability of the family leads to divorce and estrangement. The narrator in Surfacing moves from one relationship to another quite easily, though she is haunted by her traumatic past. Needless to say, that in her hour of crisis, she could have derived much comfort from her faith. She does regret the lack of religious training in her early childhood. When Joe expresses his desire to marry her she is reluctant to accept his offer. She has not yet recovered from her unhappy experience. Having failed in her first attempt to build up a family owing to her abortion and separation from her lover she should tread cautiously to avert dangers. She does not want any more emotional scars to ruin her life.

In India marriages are generally traditional. It is celebrated with pomp and splendour. Not only the upper class, but also the middle class spend money lavishly on weddings in the family. The traditional Hindu marriage is a sacrament. Das refers to her wedding as "the most expensive wedding of the year" (My Story 86). Hindu wedding is considered to be patriarchal in nature. The golden chain tied round the bride's neck symbolises the mastery of the husband. This *thali* of the bride symbolically empowers the bridegroom to protect her. Ironically, it becomes a patriarchal icon, authorising man to suppress woman.

Das experienced the presence of patriarchy in her life. Marriage did not obliterate the hegemonic codes that stifled her self. In her autobiography she reveals that at the age of fifteen she was ignorant of the adult world: "Until my wedding night I did not have the slightest knowledge of what went on between men and women in the process of procreation. Sex was not a fashionable word then as it is now [. . .]" (My Story 24). She failed to please her husband. His "rowdy ways of sex" (90) baffled her. Sadly she watched her own metamorphosis to womanhood. The problems in her life stemmed from the fact that this physical transition was not followed simultaneously by psychological development. Her immature mind failed to realize the importance of meaningful man-woman relationship in marriage. Ernest J. Green articulates the importance of the institution of marriage in the cultural matrix of the society: "It is an institution through which society controls its members. For individuals, marriage provides a framework for societal expectations and obligations. Marriage is also an opportunity for personal expression and interpersonal growth" (5).

Sex was "violence and bloodshed" (25) for women of the best Nair families. Her own experience forces Das to comment: "It was customary for the Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual

haste on the wedding night" (25-26). Her husband's sexual brutality dismantled her romantic notion of marriage.

The sexed body of a woman is a fertile ground where patriarchal values flourish. Chris Weedon remarks that we need a social theory to explain patriarchal oppression (3). According to Weedon, family as social institution, "is a site of discursive battle over 'natural' gender which has direct implications for the nature of the marriage contract and the socialization of children" (96).

Gender inequality and gender division of labour are internalized by gender socialization. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood circumscribes the life of Offred in the phallogratic culture of Gilead. Trapped in a sexist regime, she witnesses the dehumanized lives of women in Gilead. Her survival depends on her 'breeding' capacity. The phallogratic culture has inevitably prized away her control over her own body. Offred laments her fate: "We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (176). Patriarchy has vested the control of woman's reproductive power in man. Offred has to subject herself to the humiliating experience of insemination by the Commander. She must try "to fulfill the expectation of others," (95) which have become her own. Patriarchy can go to the extent of dehumanization. Offred ponders over her fate, when she lost control of her body:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits, but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me (95).

Intimidating forces of patriarchy encroach into Offred's body, which she describes as a "treacherous ground, my own territory" (95). This violation is not only physical, but also psychological. She would be relegated to the category of an "Unwoman", if she fails to conceive. Every month she has to be examined by the doctor, who is generous enough to 'help' her to conceive so that she can escape from the fate of being "shipped off to the colonies, with the Unwomen" (80). Gilead does not attribute womanhood to sterile women. Women are dehumanized objects, transported like commodities.

The biological aspect of pregnancy entangles women in complicated relationships with men. The narrator in Surfacing feels that her body has been used like a "chemical slot machine" (92). Probably, she can escape from the ordeal of pregnancy by means of an artificial womb. The marital life of Anna and David has convinced her of man's selfishness: "Love without fear, sex without risk, that's what they wanted to be true" (92). The role obligation of a

woman in being instrumental to the continuance of the society imposes upon her biological restraints.

Das's short story "Marine Drive" highlights man's selfishness. Patriarchy deprives woman of her right to plan pregnancy. Anasuya, the protagonist seeks fulfilment of her love. But her lover's double standards snatched away her dream. When he comes to know of her pregnancy he accuses her: "You were trying to trap me?... You too have the characteristic feminine cunning?" (The Sandal Trees 99). He insists that she should abort the foetus. He does not want to tarnish the image he had built up in the society. In Surfacing too a similar situation had arisen when the narrator conceived. Her lover had persuaded her to abort and succeeded in his attempt. The obligation to his own family forced him to terminate their relationship.

Infidelity in marital life endangers the harmony of conjugal life. Das's autobiography does not project a smooth man-woman relationship. The young wife helplessly watched the homosexual relationship of her husband and his friend. "He wrote mostly about a friend of his who stayed at the Y.M.C.A with him and was his constant companion. "You will like him very much when you meet him, he wrote" (96). He shocked her when he confided "the sexual exploits he had shared with some of the maid servants in his house in Malabar" (84). When their first son was born, the first letter he sent from Bombay was

not to his wife but to a girl cousin whom he had hugged while they walked towards home in the evening. The bitter wife confesses: "I made up my mind to be unfaithful to him at least physically" (95).

Das's short stories "The Flight" and "The Kitten" also deal with the theme of infidelity. "The Flight" is the story of a young wife who became a breadwinner to help her paralysed husband. She could aptly judge their relationship: "I was just a plaything in the hands of my oversexed husband. It was only through a sacrificial offering of my body that I could satisfy him" (The Sandal Trees 132). The wife worked as a sculptor and began to earn for the family. Sridevi, the young model who posed for her, became a prey to her husband's lust. One day, the wife caught him making love to Sridevi: "I felt that I had accidentally witnessed some primitive ritual" (136). She had no other options, except to flee from her life. Under modern egalitarian norms, the wife has the freedom to choose divorce as a means to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of the family. The infidelity of the husband forces the wife in "The Flight" to escape.

The ramification of patriarchal structure highlights man-woman relationship as a battle of sexes. Atwood's novel, Life Before Man examines the disintegration of family from a different perspective. The characters move about, as in a vicious circle, unable to extricate themselves from each other.

Fidelity, or the lack of it, is central to the story. The couple, Elizabeth and Nate occupy the nucleus of the story. Their nuclear family is on the verge of collapse. Lesje, Chris, William and Martha move around them like satellites, trying to encroach into their lives. Elizabeth and Nate drift apart from each other, seeking substitutes to continue their broken lives. Elizabeth's extramarital affair with Chris ends in his suicide. Nate and Lesje live together. Lesje ends her affair with William. Interpersonal relationships appear as in a circle game, one chasing the other. The focus of the writer is on the stability of the family. Lack of communication and emotional support from each other, forces the couple to separate.

Lesje has been living with William. Later she is drawn to Nate. In her life family and marriage do not hold the promise of security. After her separation from William, Lesje opts to live with Nate. Lesje considers marriage and divorce equally meaningful: "Marriage is an event, a fact, it can be discussed at the dinner table. So is divorce. They create a framework, a beginning, an ending. Without them everything is amorphous, an endless middle ground, stretching like a prairie on either side of each day" (220).

Generally, divorce leads to psychic disturbances and the victim seldom overcomes her traumatic experience. Snyder claims that "divorce is generally an emotionally, psychologically, and socially traumatic experience which leaves

its marks and scars on the personalities involved" (326). Rejected by her lover, the narrator in Surfacing desperately plunges into her second love affair with Joe. But her emotional disturbance acts as an impediment to seek fulfilment of her love. In My Story Das narrates her anguish when she experienced indifference from her husband. She laments: "I could not opt for a life of prostitution, for I knew that I was frigid and that love for my husband had sealed me off physically and emotionally like a pregnancy that made it impossible for others to impregnate afterwards." (102-3).

Even when Nate and Elizabeth lived together, they were aware of the cleavage that separated them, Divorce lingered over them like the sword of Democles: "[I]t hangs between them in every conversation; it is the secret weapon, the final solution, the unspeakable thing. He suspects that both of them "think about it almost all the time considering, rejecting" (90). Nate expected Lesje to get along well with his children. Lesje knew that Nate always gave priority to his family: his love came next to it: "He'd placed himself and the children, and Elizabeth too, in a tight verdant little oasis where such things as understanding were possible" (259). It was as if she was watching a pantomime, "isolated, single, childless and culpably young" (259). Lesje would have happily welcomed pregnancy, if that could strengthen their relationship. But at times, she is conscious of her constraints as a paleontologist: "Her business is the naming of bones, not the creation of flesh" (358). Evidently,

Lesje's situation discloses the constraints of a career woman. Such women have to choose between the family and the career. Unable to transcend their biological urge, women choose the former.

Interestingly enough, Life Before Man is a novel in which men and women abandon their lovers in search of better substitutes. Lesje, Elizabeth, Nate and William are in a relentless pursuit of happiness. Paradoxically, this pursuit debilitates the institution of family. At the end of the novel, Elizabeth wants to go to the supermarket "since there's nothing in the house for dinner" (168). Awareness of one's home or family can boost up one's declining interest in life. Rootlessness experienced by an individual can definitely enhance the process of his endearment to the family. Family disorganization is a traumatic experience for its members. Goode defines it as "the breakup of a family unit, the dissolution or fracture of a structure of social roles when one or more members fail to perform adequately their role obligations" (91).

Significance of marriage in Canada and India varies. In India the society ratifies man-woman relationship only when it is strengthened by marriage. Lesje and William had been living together for some time though they were not married. She expected William to propose to her. Ed and Sally in The Bluebeard's Egg also lived together without being bound by marriage. "You lived with someone first, to try it out. Then you got married" (25). William

admired Lesje's mind. "He's proud of her as a trophy and as a testimony to his own wide-mindedness. But what would his family in London, Ontario, think?" (26). Lesje hated playing the role of the "Other Woman in some conventional, boring triangle" (141). She did not consider herself "a web-spinner expert at the entrapment of husbands" (142). The dramatic situations enacted on the terrain of middle-class families are symptomatic of the decay of moral values that govern the institution of family. Interestingly, the reluctance of these lovers to have deeper and meaningful relationships and their affinity for their own legally approved relationships point to their selfishness. They draw sustenance from their own families.

Das's short story "Letter from Radha" is the mythological story of Krishna who deserts his beloved Radha. The title of the story and its contents have been cast in a modern vein, as is characteristic of any other love story. After departing from her lover, Radha returns home to her husband who has been anxiously waiting for her. She says: "In my husband's embrace I turned a whore again" (Sandal Trees 80). She pined for her lover, but in vain. He had left for Mathura and never returned to her. She wandered like a lost soul. People whispered about her: "The one who walks there is Radha, the king's old lover. Don't even look into her eyes. In them her soul lies dead. Sorrow has enveloped those eyes like cobwebs over unused gates" (83). In "Royal Avenues" Das projects complicated man-woman relationships in which

Manorama, plays the central role. She worked for Nicholas as a model. But their relationship was beyond that of an employer and an employee. He sent her on a special mission to attend the international fashion parade at Colombo. There she was drawn to the irresistible charm of Jerry, the young secretary of Fletcher. She knew that Jerry was Fletcher's "sweetheart" (124). Manorama's arrival created a triangle of love relationship and soon Jerry was wiped out from the scene by his cunning master.

Das has skilfully portrayed women who try to ensconce themselves in suitable roles within the family in her short stories in Chekkerunna Pakshikal (The Roosting Birds 1999). The protagonist in "Ammalukutty's Husband" is a young wife who has been deserted by her husband. She becomes desolate and pines for love. "What I want is love. I was not destined to get it. If I had a baby I could have bathed and suckled it" (54). Her loneliness is aggravated by the absence of a baby in her life. The child would have not only filled the vacuum in her life but also strengthened the bond of love between her husband and herself.

The ideology of family can be traced in Surfacing which projects nuclear families of two different periods. The narrator and her companions represent the permissive nuclear family of the 1960s. Sexual freedom enjoyed by the narrator and her companions bear testimony to this fact. In patriarchy, the

hegemonic narratives on gender and sexuality are evidences of the male strategy which controls the female body. David's attempt to force his wife to pose for a nude photograph can be viewed from this perspective. He even tries to seduce the protagonist, taking advantage of her vulnerability.

The narrator's parents and their friends, Paul and his wife belong to nuclear families. They represent the tradition of the English and French-speaking Canadians of Quebec. Language had never been a barrier to the friendship between the two families. The narrator recalls vividly the scene of conversation between her mother and Paul's wife: "Neither knew more than five words of the other's language and after the opening *Bonjours* both would unconsciously raise their voices as though talking to a deaf person" (18). As for the friendship of the men, it survived on mutual trust. The narrator observes: "My father trusted Paul, he said Paul could build anything and fix anything [. . .]. Paul justified for him his own ideal of the simple life" (21). The family protected the narrator as in a cocoon. Her alienation was total, ever since she became estranged from it. The contrast between the conventional and the modern norms of the families are projected through the two generations.

The narrator was acutely conscious of her inability to build up a family of her own since she left her parents. Her father's cabin and the chicken-wire

fence on the island reminded her of this failure. She was aware that her father “would have wanted a dynasty” (34). He is projected as a patriarch with “his descendants proliferating around him” (34). A similar image of a patriarch is depicted by Margaret Laurence, a Canadian novelist, in The Stone Angel (1964). Jason Currie, the protagonist’s father installed a huge marble stone angel in the cemetery in memory of his dead wife. Hagar ponders: “I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother’s angel, that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied forever and a day” (3).

The Handmaid’s Tale also depicts a similar dichotomous pattern of family. Offred’s misery is accentuated by the patriarchal set up in Gilead. On the other hand, her mother represents the extreme views of a radicalist, and therefore has chosen single parenthood. She has nothing but contempt for men. “I don’t want a man around, what use are they except for ten second’s worth of half babies. A man is just a woman’s strategy for making other women” (155). Ainsley in The Edible Woman shares similar ideas. It prompted her to conceive without being ‘trapped’ in marriage. Offred’s mother used to abuse men as “Chauvinist Pig” (156). She comments on them: “They aren’t a patch on a woman except they’re better at fixing cars and playing football, just what we need for the improvement of the human race [. . .]” (155-56).

Offred had chances to witness "Unwoman documentary" (152), with the help of a projection equipment. Once she saw the camera focus on her mother with certain signs in the background. They were the slogans of a radical feminist, resisting the patriarchal attempt to colonize the female: "FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE ? (154). In a phallographic culture woman is oppressed by the yoke of man's power: "Woman is still denied sexual freedom and the biological control over her body through the cult of virginity, the double standard, the prescription against abortion, and in many places because contraception is physically or psychically unavailable to her (Millet 54).

Patriarchy entails an asymmetric division of labour. The hierarchical and exploitative relationship between men and women are conclusive evidences of women being victims of their own biology. A woman who is saddled with endless domestic chores, finds it an uphill task to trudge along the existential path of life. Das's short story "Running Away from Home" foregrounds the experiences of a woman who makes a vain attempt to escape from the oppressive forces of domesticity. She wants to escape from the "nightly rituals" (34) of her lustful husband. Her twin babies who are not yet one year old make leisure a distant dream for her.

Unable to resist the forces that stifle her self, she seeks freedom outside her home. But soon she realizes that it is only a mirage. Escape from domesticity alone does not guarantee freedom to women. Tormented by the ordeals that she has to face, she seeks the help of her husband's friend to get a job. He finds her fit "only to sleep with a man" (219). Domesticity and nurturing instinct have restricted her mobility and made her life miserable. Though she considers herself unfit to perform the role obligations to her family, she longs to return home in order to escape from the predatory forces around her.

The protagonists in The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle had left their homes in search of autonomy and self-realization. Marian had been threatened by Peter, her fiance and Joan Foster by her mother. Their quest for autonomy led to the discovery of their own weakness. The hunter image of Peter and the monster image of the mother add credulity to the flight of Marian and Joan. Atwood's attempt to portray women like Marian and Joan shatters the illusion that Canadian women enjoy more freedom than Indian women.

Child-bearing and child-rearing have elevated woman's position in the society. The instinct to nurture endows her with a rare gift which helps her to fulfill her gender-based roles in the society. Hence sterility is viewed with

scorn. Often the absence of a child is seen to wreck marital bliss. Atwood's "The Resplendant Quetzal" and Das's "Rohini" are short stories which highlight the misery of women who fail to experience the joy of motherhood. Many Canadian couples follow the practice of living together without being married. When Sarah became pregnant Edward married her. Her pregnancy changed his attitude towards her.. He was filled with radiance at the thought of the baby: "He treated her body as something holy, a white and gold chalice, to be touched with care and tenderness" (Dancing girls 160). When the baby died, their life was plunged in gloom.

"Rohini" is the story of a barren woman who pined for a child. Rohini failed to conceive though many years had passed after her marriage. Her mother-in-law blamed her for her ill-luck. Conceptualization of motherhood acquires more significance in a male-dominated society, since it elevates the position of women. Das has highlighted the misery of a 'barren' woman in "Rohini". Interestingly, the accusation of women being barren is often an unjust allegation as in The Handmaid's Tale. The handmaids were considered barren even when the Commanders were sterile.

The Handmaid's Tale deals with the problem of sterility in a unique way. Sterility dooms the life of a woman. The doctor who examined the handmaids once told Offred that most of the men in Gilead were sterile old guys.

Ironically, sterility is never attributed to men. The doctor had “helped” (79) the handmaids to be blessed with motherhood. He was willing to help her too. In Gilead sterility has become synonymous with gender discrimination. “There is no such thing as sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (79). Needless to say, gender discrimination prevails in a phallocratic society.

In India, the life of a widow is fraught with misery. Death of the husband leaves the wife desolate. Das examines her own life as a widow in her prose work Ente Pathakal, (My Paths 1999). She feels that the society and its rigid code of conduct never show any sympathy towards a widow. Old age and ugliness act as a curse on many women writers (109). She considers old age as “a tree which has shed its leaves, flowers and fruits” (124). Das’s short story “Nagnashareerangal” (“The Naked Bodies”) is the pathetic story of a widow artist. The society did not expect her to draw the portrait of a nude woman. The artist in her craved for excellence in art. Her home, without her husband became a vacant place. In Survival Atwood has portrayed the image of isolated artists, who feel mutilated when they are deprived of audience and cultural tradition. They are “artists who have suffered emotional and artistic death at the hands of an indifferent or hostile audience” (184-85). The creative talents of a woman artist wither away in a male-dominated society.

The family is a functional unit which connects man to the external world. It is the locus of woman's power. Overtones of disintegration, power struggle and alienation have adversely affected the structure of the family. Das and Atwood examine their characters against the backdrop of family. The social expectations of the wife or her incompatibility are sources of conflict in husband-wife relationship. The patriarchal set up of the family accentuates these conflicts. The motives of the actions of the members of a family affect the interactions between them. Man-woman relationships highlighted by Das and Atwood point to the fact that the family has lost its moorings. Yet men and women make a futile attempt to entrench themselves within it, since the external world offers no solace to them. Hence, Das and Atwood posit their characters within the terrain of the family.

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### Chapter III

## Victimization

“Feminism is politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society” (Weedon 1). Gender power relations have been the focus of women writers in the twentieth century. Atwood and Das explore the experiences of women which bring the personal and political together. Gender relations in a patriarchal society reflect the experiences of women as the oppressed group in the society. Weedon defines patriarchy as the “power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men” (1-2). In a patriarchal society power is synonymous with man and powerlessness is synonymous with woman. Hence the focal point of the thematic issue of victimization is the polarization of power/powerlessness.

Women writers often face the difficult task of recording gender discrimination experienced by women. The marginalization of these artists in a male-dominated society narrows their chances of rendering the ideology of patriarchy truthfully. Nevertheless, some women writers have taken up the task of attempting a truthful representation of experiences exclusive to women.

Atwood's works open up the Canadian scenario which depicts the victimization of women. Interestingly, the social fabric that she unfolds to her readers also exposes woman's complicity in her own victimization. Das's outspoken frankness in portraying female experiences often shocks her readers. Das too highlights the oppressed female as her protagonist.

Das and Atwood, like other women writers are acutely conscious of woman's marginality in a male-dominated world. Significantly, the twentieth century witnessed a spurt in the feminist activities. Feminist writing focuses upon gender differences, and gender oppression. ~~Worell~~ defines the "politics of gender" as the "unequal balance of power between women and men" and power as "access to desired resources and influence over others" (205). According to her, "power both engenders and requires comparative judgements of human worth, that these judgements take a binary form and that there is a basic human need for recognition as human" (25).

The ideology of self depicted by Atwood and Das invariably manifests signs of alienation experienced by the writer. Ania Loomba considers ideology as a social thought with wider dimensions: "It includes all our 'mental frameworks,' our beliefs, concepts, and ways of expressing our relationship to the world" (25). As women writers, Das and Atwood exhibit similarities in the depiction of self and its problems. The conflict between the two selves of the

same individual - of the artist and the woman - precipitates emotions which become an integral aspect of the process of writing the female. The conflict itself is the result of marginalization experienced by women in a patriarchal society. The felt need of these two writers to transcend these barriers are exemplified by their poems and prose works.

Feminism deals with the victimization of women. Hence feminist ideology can be used to evaluate writers like Das and Atwood. Surprisingly, these writers, though they refuse to call themselves feminists, express feminist ideas. The ideology persuades one to reflect upon its relevance in today's world. The women protagonists of these writers defy the parameters prescribed by their biological roles. These women are encompassed within the turbulent existential problems. They grapple with the harsh realities of life and often emerge as "New Women". Undoubtedly, the image of Das in her autobiography is that of a "New Woman", who refuses to act the role of a stereotype.

The American Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s was the result of gender discrimination against women. Woman's body has become the site of power struggle. Feminist movement created a new feminine sensibility which helped women to recognize their victimization. Paradoxically, "women constitute the only group which is treated unequally as a whole, but whose

members live in greater intimacy with their 'oppressors' than with each other" (Chafe 3).

Woman-centred novels have become the hallmark of feminist writing. Atwood and Das are no exception to this trend. Such novels attribute centrality to women's experiences. Das has written fewer novels than Atwood, but she has established herself as a writer of short stories. Needless to say, that she has made use of the conventions of this genre to express her feminist concerns. Both these writers examine the oppression of women and the vagaries of their emotions caused by the problematic man-woman relationship.

In the 1960s, Canada witnessed a sudden upsurge in the feminist movement. Godard traces the early development of the Canadian Feminist Criticism. There were feminists who were bra-burners attacking the "symbols of enclosure and constraints in the name of liberty and equality" (6). In the second phase, the feminist critics shifted their target of attack from men's works to those of women. The exploration of women's writing was an attempt "to define a female tradition in writing" (6).

HOW TO WRITE as a woman? This is a question which Canadian women writers have been exploring for at least a decade in its multifarious facets, rephrasing it variously as how to write at all if one is a woman confronted with institutional forces which would

silence her, and how to write that difference implicit in her sexuality into the literary text, how to give voice to her subjective realities which differ from men's. (Godard 2).

Women's oppression had a tremendous response from feminist writers. They reacted sharply to the marginality of women. They sought to project the political ramification which prompted the male to resort to double standard in dealing with women. Godard considers the written word as a powerful weapon for waging war against gender discrimination experienced by women (7). She also puts forward suggestions to accentuate equality between the two sexes:

Denouncing stereotypes in men's writing is the first step to equalizing the position of women: a second phase must follow for any real advances to be made. Somewhere, somehow, the realities of the feminine condition must be identified and signs of women's emergence from her limitations must be noted. (9).

Atwood's major works were written in the latter half of the twentieth century when Women's Liberation Movement was in full swing. As an empowered woman writer, she expresses her outrage against the oppression of women. Her woman-centred novels reject the stereotyped role models and succeed in their attempt at consciousness raising. Marian in The Edible Woman acts like a mouthpiece of the novelist, who voices her concern over the

victimization of women. Most of the novels that followed like Surfacing, and Lady Oracle highlight the predicament of the suppressed women.

Atwood's Survival, which she calls a "guide to Canadian literature" and "a book of patterns" (11), comments on the pessimistic trend of the twentieth century reflected in Canadian literature. She proceeds on the presumption that "Canada is a collective victim" (36) and sets forth to examine the Basic Victim Positions. She considers four Basic Victim Positions in Survival as follows: "Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim" (36). The victims do not consider themselves as victims since they do not want to lose their privileges. In the second position, the victim does not deny his/her victim position: "To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea" (37). The victim is neither blamed nor is expected to do anything about his victim position. If there is anger or scorn, it is directed against the fellow victims or oneself. "Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable" (37). The real source of oppression is identified and anger is directed towards it. "Position Four: To be a creative non-victim" (38). Atwood attributes this position to those who have never been victims at all. In this position all kinds of creative activity is possible and one is

able to accept one's experience for what it is without distorting it. Atwood considers this model of victims useful for those who study Canadian literature. She claims that there is "a superabundance of victims in Canadian literature" (39).

In her address at the York University in the Gerstein Lecture Series "The Curse of Eve-Or what I learned in School," Atwood examines her own experiences of victimization (Second Words). She admits that she dislikes the term "role model". She has chosen her career with determination to succeed. "I did not want to be a role model, I wanted to be a writer" (217). Like many other women writers, Atwood also is aware of the perils of creativity when a woman takes to writing. She emphasizes the restraints on a woman writer: "Writers, both male and female, have to be selfish just to get the time to write, but women are not trained to be selfish" (276). Feeling reluctant to express her affinity for literary stereotypes, she concludes her address by rephrasing Agnes Macphail's plea for absolute equality for women: "Then men and women can take their turns at being human, with all the individuality and variety that term implies" (228).

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929) also highlights problems confronted by women writers. By writing her self, a woman writer discovers her immense power hidden in the untapped resources of her psyche. In a male-

dominated world “women had no existence save in the fiction written by men” (44-45). Women were not allowed to enter the library in “Oxbridge”, unless accompanied by a Fellow of the college or a letter of introduction (9). Sexual bias against women had persuaded her to remark that “a woman must have money and a room of one’s own if she is to write fiction” (6). Woolf had overcome problems that women writers had to face in her days and had established herself in the literary field. Woolf had strong convictions regarding her role as a writer of fiction: “[F]iction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground as science may be; fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” (43). This involvement with life and its problems enable a writer to become socially committed.

In Women and Writing Virginia Woolf articulates the problems faced by women writers. Millet’s “feminine mystique” and Woolf’s “Angel in the House” are images of women who play the role of stereotypes. Woolf portrays the traditional woman, as sympathetic, charming and unselfish: “[I]n short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the mind and wishes of others” (59). The ‘Angel’ is not expected to disclose her mind to anyone.

Atwood also is conscious of her commitment to the society. Like Virginia Woolf, she has examined the social matrix of the society by means of fiction. Atwood's remark on the genre of fiction can be recalled in this context:

[F]iction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular but in its typical aspects; through which we can see ourselves and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves (Dalhousie Review 424).

Atwood's novel The Edible Woman projects the pervasive influence of mass consumption in a consumerist society. The novel portrays conditions prevailing in post-war Canada which leave little choice for a career woman to achieve her personal fulfilment. Marian, the protagonist worked for Seymour Surveys, a market research firm. Everything seemed to be in the right place till she became engaged to Peter Wollander. As days passed she became aware of her vulnerability as a career woman who was engaged to be married. Firms preferred unmarried women, since their personal autonomy relieves them from mothering and homemaking. In The Edible Woman, Mrs. Bogue thinks of terminating the service of Mrs. Dodge since she is pregnant. The company prefers the loyalty of unmarried women. Mrs. Bogue "regards pregnancy as an act of disloyalty to the company" (17).

The infiltration of American consumerism in Marian's life is intended as a device to highlight victimization of women. The products of the market research firm reach the housewives. Incidentally, women become the target of exploitation. No wonder, Marian feels that she too is a packed commodity to be consumed by Peter. Evidently, Atwood fears the threat posed by American technology and Americanism to Canadian life.

Marian reviews her inconsistent and sudden decision to get married. She considers it "a very good step" (100). Besides, as a sensible girl she too has her dreams of future: "[. . .] I'd always assumed through high school and college that I was going to marry someone eventually and have children, everyone does" (100). The image of femininity embedded in this dream coincides with the "feminine mystique" of Betty Friedan. Friedan comments on the young woman who finds feminine fulfilment in being a housewife and mother: "In the fifteen years after the Second World War, this mystique of feminine fulfilment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture" (16). Ironically, even before she got married to Peter, Marian could foresee her future as Peter's wife in a subservient role. She succeeded in extricating herself from this relationship.

During her visit to Peter's apartment, Marian enters his bedroom. Marian notices Peter's collection of weapons which includes two rifles, a pistol

and "wicked-looking knives" on a pegboard (54). Besides these, there is a camera and a full-length mirror. The weapons project Peter as a hunter, who apparently seems to chase Marian. Marian develops the fear of being photographed since she thinks that it will "fix" her for ever, thus making her immobile. The mirror traps her. Patriarchy boosts up the image of man. It also belittles that of woman. This truth dawns upon Marian when she sees her reflection in Peter's eyes as "small and oval" (80). Marian feels all along, that Peter has been trying to impose himself on her. Ironically, taken in the reverse order, women act as "looking glasses" magnifying the image of man. Keith M. May articulates her opinion about this false image of man which boosts up his ego:

Literary portraiture of women has merely extended the main cultural function of their sex, namely to promote the confidence of men. For women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size (128).

The monotony of domesticity and nurturing make the lives of women bleak. The discontentment experienced by wives, daughters and mothers is expressed aptly by Betty Friedan in what she describes as "the problem that has no name" (17). In The Feminine Mystique Friedan explores the insidious transformation that shook the feminine world in the 1950s. Women no longer

enjoyed the self- complacency they had experienced before the Second World War. American women failed to fit into the framework of the stereotyped role models: "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image that I came to call the feminine mystique. I wondered if other women forced this schizophrenic split, and what it meant" (9). Friedan's phrase "feminine mystique" has been continuously used by theoretical experts to interpret feminism and related topics.

The protagonists of Atwood and Das belong to the affluent or middle class, complacent in their materialistic possessions. Few of them appear to strive for materialistic possessions. Caught in the web of existential problems many of them move through life like somnambulists. Nevertheless, some of them boldly confront the situation they find themselves in. When they are subjected to any kind of oppression, they even resist it.

Atwood and Das have invariably proved that woman's autonomy is at stake in a patriarchal structure. Her freedom to articulate her femininity is restricted and it affects her activities in the society. The plight of the protagonists in The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle, Surfacing and The Handmaid's Tale are examples of this loss of freedom suffered by women. Not surprisingly, Atwood has chosen artists or career women as her protagonists in these novels.

When Marian recognizes her victimization by her fiance, she resists it. This resistance finally precipitates in her anorexic behaviour. She even tries to flee from him. She realizes that she has been treated like a consumer item. It is indeed a bold step on her part to assimilate the truth by self-discovery and achieve self-integration. She can be easily categorized under victim position three, as prescribed by Atwood.

Needless to say, a similar stance is adopted by the narrator in Surfacing. She is in victim position two, as a victim of the dictates of Biology. But when she refuses to be a victim any longer, she moves to victim position three. Paradoxically, the narrator's friend Anna remains in the basic victim position two, since she is resigned to her fate and endures suffering. The narrator remarks about her friend: "Anna was more than sad, she was desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight" (181). Caught between the binary opposites of love/hate, Anna clings to David, her husband who is the victor. Anna and Marian express their passive femininity through their silence. Perhaps, it is this silence that accentuates their victimization. Marian's silence is broken by her protest, which leads to her self-realization.

Marian and the narrator in Surfacing discover that their lives are to be manipulated by men. Marian's fiance is a self-centred man who considers his wife as a "prop", who can give him the support he requires. In Surfacing the fabricated marriage of the narrator leaves her little choice: "[H]e married me, we committed that paper act. I still don't see why signing a name should make any difference but he began to expect things, he wanted to be pleased" (42). In the male-dominated world power lies with man. His likes and dislikes alone are counted. When the novel ends she has achieved self-realization and ceases to be a victim.

Friedan finds that in books and articles experts tell women that "their role was to seek fulfilment as wives and mothers" (13) She observes that "American women who are single, widowed or divorced do not cease even after fifty their frenzied, desperate search for a man" (22). Even after her separation from her "husband", the narrator in Surfacing wears her wedding ring to convince her parents that she is no longer single. Beauvoir comments on the significance of the wedding ring:

Even at the present time many young middle-class women of strict behaviour marry 'so as to be free'... A single woman in America, still more than in France, is a socially incomplete being even if she makes her own living; if she is to attain the whole dignity of a

person and gain her full rights, she must wear a wedding ring (450-51).

The narrator's wedding ring symbolizes her safety. It serves other purposes as well. She says, "it's useful for landladies" (21). Interestingly, in the Indian culture, 'thali', the golden chain worn by a married woman is of great importance. It is tied on her neck at the time of marriage by the bridegroom. The ring and the chain are considered as symbols of patriarchy.

Maternity elevates the position of woman in the society. Marian's friend Clara is excited about her pregnancy: "I get so excited waiting to see, it's like when you were little and you wanted and waited and finally got to open your Christmas presents" (129). As for Marian's other friend Ainsley, "having a baby" is more important than sex. "It fulfills your deepest femininity" (35). But the narrator's traumatic experience of abortion shows the psychological scar that lies deeply embedded in her psyche. The later developments which appear to stifle her self are nothing but the offshoots of this experience.

Patricia Waugh sees the female body as "the site of a complex focus of social meanings" (174). Marian's passivity is an active way of resisting Peter's attempt to victimize her. The narrator's abortion and the fear of conception in

Surfacing point to her victimization by her lover. She had fallen unwittingly into a trap and when she realized the danger it was too late. The harm was done. Her body and mind suffered damage. Her experience at the hospital remained green in her mind. "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 practising on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar" (92).

David's attempt to seduce the narrator was in vain. He found her a "groovy chick" (178) and persuaded her to accept him. He spoke about having sex "as though it was an exercising program, athletic demonstration, ornamental swimming in a chlorine swimming pool no place in California" (178). But the narrator rebuffed him when she saw through him "an impostor, a pastiche" (171). David imposed his power on his wife. He saw her as a sexual object and advised her to go on a pill. "Love is taking precautions" (92). Woman is no longer "natural" or "cyclical" but only a "chemical slot machine" (92). This situation draws a parallel in the poem "The Waste Land". By citing the example of Lil and her husband Albert, Eliot tries to highlight the deterioration of sexual values in modern life (159-164).

As a woman writer, Das occupies a prominent position among those who deal with the theme of victimization. She expresses her concern for women. Obviously, her poems, short stories and novels depict the polarity between victor/victim. She has highlighted the oppression of women in a world dominated by men. In an interview, Iqbal Kaur sought her views to help women realize their self-worth and refuse to be subjected to victimization and exploitation by men. Das observes:

I don't even have to speak about the exploitation that all of us suffer at the hands of men [. . .]. I symbolise courage. I don't think women in Kerala are any longer victims. It wasn't so . . . about twenty years ago. Almost every woman was a victim and had to submit to tortures, mental and physical. But the position has changed now and perhaps in some way my writings and speeches also have made some difference (149).

Though feminism expresses concern for women's welfare, Das and Atwood appear to differ in their views on the same ideology. Atwood considers herself as a "pre-feminist" (Ingersoll 162). When she started writing in 1956, there was no feminist movement. Yet she is quite emphatic in her views on the status of women: "Women are human beings; they are equal human beings"

(Ingersoll 183). Interestingly, Atwood's perception of feminism in India is one without any ambivalence:

Feminism for women in India [. . .], starts with getting them job and money. It starts with setting up little weaving projects in the villages so that they can demonstrate to their husbands that they're worth something. I'm involved in something called the Canada-India Village Aid Association. It takes a total view of the culture, rather than just put in medical clinics or whatever. (184)

Das categorically affirms the differences between her concept of feminism and that of the West: "Feminism as the westerns see it is different from the feminism I sense within myself. Western feminism is an anti-male stance. I can never hate the male because I have loved my husband and I still love my children, who are sons. And I think from masculine company I have derived a lot of happiness. So I will never be able to hate them" (Raveendran 159).

The tragic degeneration of sex precipitates a situation which reflects the abnormal behaviour of men and women. Homosexuality is a curse which has to be dealt with in all its importance. Das's My Story portrays the homosexual relationship of her husband and his friend. Homosexuality is the theme of her short story "Iqbal". This theme recurs in her novel Amavasi (The New Moon

1999), written in collaboration with Mohanavarma. The superintendent of the jail, Monica Biswas and her assistant Neepa Ganguli, had developed a bond between each other which crossed the barrier of their sex. The middle-aged Monica was drawn to the sturdy Neepa who was around thirty. Evidently, Monica's secluded life in the jail forced her to seek love and comfort from Neepa, who was one of her own sex.

Monica revealed to Nityan, the protagonist of the novel, that the women prisoners were often victims of sexual violation. Even if chances of women's complicity are over-ruled, their confinement did not give them security or power to resist oppression by the male. The novel portrays the deplorable plight of women prisoners. In spite of the inhuman treatment meted to them, they remained silent. Their silence aggravated the situation. During their visit to the jail, the officials were pleased with the reception they had at the jail. Arrangements were made to offer women prisoners to 'entertain the V.I.P' guests who visited the jail. The theme of victimization in the works of Atwood and Das explicitly deal with the similarity of these victims and their universal nature. The super-abundance of victims in the Indian and Canadian society has spurred these writers to explore the theme victimization with zest

The colonial past of India and Canada has evoked similar responses from the writers of both countries. Post-colonial literature is characterized by

the tendency of resistance. The protest of the oppressed against the oppressor, of the colonized against the colonizer and the victim against the victor is the hallmark of this literature. Das's novel Amavasi deals with the deplorable condition of the prisoners of the Tharapur Women's Central Jail. The woman prisoner Hemalatha and Offred in The Handmaid's Tale are characters who show similarity in their lack of freedom. Both are victims of patriarchy. Hemalatha is treated as a dangerous prisoner because of her radical views. She is an alleged murderer too. She is under the vigilant eyes of the superintendent of the jail. The brutal treatment at the jail has wrecked her body, but not her indomitable spirit. She suffers all kinds of inhuman treatment and yet hopefully waited for the day of her freedom. Freedom and love were what she wanted. But the prison-life deprived her of both. Nityan's father had warned him to preserve his identity once he started his profession at the jail: "Everybody in the jail has an iron mind. You should see that your mind too doesn't become iron. Intimacy and constant companionship can transform vice into virtue. But equally easy is the transformation of the good into bad" (24).

Offred in The Handmaid's Tale is a vertiable prey of the totalitarian state in the United states. The theocracy of the Republic of Gilead has virtually bereft women of their freedom. Offred's victimization begins with the loss of her name. She is 'Of Fred', Fred being the master of the handmaid. Woman

is almost a non-entity in a world of male dominion. The narrator in Surfacing is also nameless. When she returns to the island, she remembers the old woman who used to run the store. She was only "madame" to others. "None of the women had names then" (Surfacing 26). Perhaps the significance of one's name lies in its practical purposes, not in oneself. Offred reflects: "Your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others" (108).

Offred defines the handmaids as "two-legged wombs", "sacred vessels" and "ambulatory chalices" (176). Her value lies in her viable ovaries. The fecundity of her body alone can save her from being completely obliterated. Her mere existence in Gilead depends on it. The ideology of sexual politics implied in the novel demands our attention since Atwood has applied metaphorical connotations of a colonizer to the word "American.". Gilead is far from the claustrophobic urban life which usually is seen as the site of victimization. The vicious tentacles of the pervasive evil of patriarchy have suffocated Offred and other women in Gilead.

In Gilead, freedom has been made conspicuous by its absence. Virtually, the handmaid is a prisoner of the male strategy. She is even denied the freedom to read. In Gilead, the handmaids are assigned different duties. They have to act the roles of 'Wives' and 'Aunts'. The "ceremony" of insemination highlights the extent of the humiliation suffered by the handmaids.

Serena, the Commander's wife has to hold Offred between her knees at the time of insemination. Serena's complicity in no way alleviates her plight. Offred wonders, "which of us is it worse for, her or me" (106).

Life of the handmaid is a mockery of her womanhood. Gilead exploits her reproductive capacity as though she were a machine. But once the reproduction is over she would be deported to the "colonies" to clean toxic wastes. She is given three chances with three masters to be served. But her success depends on her ability to get herself impregnated by the Commander, or she should be prepared for the worst consequence.

The multicultural social matrix of India precludes the possibility of arriving at a definite conclusion regarding the status of an Indian woman. The divergent cultural milieu, variety in the family patterns, the caste system and the moral values nurtured by the society are unique features of the Indian society. The rigid code that Manu lays down for women in Manusmriti gives us an insight into the marginalization of women in the past. It restricts the mobility of women: "In childhood she should remain under the control of her father, in youth under that of her husband, and on the husband's death under that of her sons; the woman should never have recourse to independence" (172).

Women characters of Das depict the oppression of women by men. The sexual discrimination against women invariably points to the hierarchy which considers men as the dominant group. The twentieth century heard the voices of writers like Anita Desai and Kamala Markandeya who expressed their concern over women's plight. Like Das, these women writers have depicted characters who struggle to realize their wholeness. Woman's roles at home or in the society at large, accentuate her importance. By analysing her problems, women writers try to fulfil their social commitment. Betty Friedan articulates the influence of women's lives on the society: "[W]omen can affect society, as well as be affected by it; that in the end, a woman, as a man has power to choose, and to make her own heaven or hell" (12). Catherine R. Stimpson posits women against a wider backdrop, thereby increasing her spectrum of action: She says that "every woman is more than a woman. She belongs as well, to a class, a race, a nation, a family, a tribe, a time, a place" (119). Godard offers a suggestion for the liberation of women: "The way to liberation is through the elaboration of alternate theories valorizing woman, not through the listing of examples of discrimination experienced by women writers practising their craft" (7).

A woman caught in a patriarchal web finds it difficult to extricate herself from it. The more she struggles, the deeper becomes the trap. The intricate power-structures make her escape impossible. Yet some of the heroines

manage to carve a female space in a patriarchal narrative. The first step in this process is to recognize one's victimization. The protagonists in Surfacing and The Edible Woman have done it. Offred in The Handmaid's Tale too had realized her victim position.

By articulating woman's silence, Atwood has made Offred appear as a rebel against male hegemony. The repressive society of Gilead does not encourage women's speech. Offred's tale recorded on a cassette evidently defies the marginalization of woman. In the "Historical Notes" at the end of the novel, evidences of the use of "surrogate mothers" for the hired purpose of "birth services" (386), are undoubtedly established. Ironically enough, woman's nurturing instinct has been exploited by the male hegemony in Gilead. The cultural norms of woman's submissiveness and domesticity do not in anyway belittle the importance assigned to her skill for nurturing and caring. Shogan considers them as "survival skills":

Within dominance relations, those who are assigned the subordinate positions, that is, those with less power, have special reason to be sensitive to the emotional pulse of others, to see things in relational terms, and to be pleasing and compliant. Thus the nurturing and caring at which women excel are among other things, the survival skills of an oppressed group that lives in close contact with its oppressors (Shogan 16).

The spirit of nationalism urges a writer to explore themes related to the freedom of one's country. The colonial experiences of Canada and India have prompted women writers to explore the oppression of the nation and women. Das's My Story reveals her unpleasant experiences at the European school she had studied. The children used to sing, the National Anthem "Rule Britannia" in a loud voice. "King George the Sixth (God save his soul) used to wink at us from the guilt frame, as though he knew that the British were singing in India their swan song..." (3). Srinivasa Iyengar observes the spirit of nationalism in Indo-Anglian literature promoting "an all-India consciousness and projecting a total vision of Mother India" (699). Das's aversion to the foreigners on the Indian soil is quite obvious in her autobiography.

Atwood and Das deal with the colonial experiences of their country's past. The evil of the colonial past is vividly etched in the first chapter of My Story, "The humiliation of a brown child in a European school". The term "brown child" is used as a derogatory term to denote the dark-skinned Indian student. In a European school, the superiority of the fair British is conspicuous. Das sadly remembers the day, when a distinguished visitor came to the school, all of them were "swept under the carpet" (38) as though they were only dust.

Signs of sexual colonialism become evident even at a very early stage in one's life. Instances of ill treatment of girls by boys are signs of sexual discrimination. In Surfacing the protagonist recalls her experience at school: "[w]hen the boys chased and captured the girls after school and tied them up with their own skipping ropes, I was the one they would forget on purpose to untie" (81).

The polarity of the sexes among the human beings as male and female and the dominance of the male over the female explicitly state the victimization of the so-called inferior sex. Germaine Greer observes that dichotomy of sexes is not uniformly distributed in nature: "It is an essential part of our conceptual apparatus that the sexes are a polarity, and a dichotomy in nature. Actually, that is quite false. The animal and vegetable worlds are not universally divided into two sexes" (29).

Women writers have to face immense problems in a patriarchal society. But a writer who is aware of her social commitment continues her creative task undaunted. Experiences of women writers like Virginia Woolf, Atwood and Das invariably point to the discrimination that women face in recording their experiences. In a lecture delivered at the Dalhousie University, Atwood narrates her experiences as a woman writer. In Canada, she says, writing is "expressing yourself" (Dalhousie Review 421). "Writer and audience are

Siamese twins. Kill one and you run the risk of killing the other. Try to separate them, and you may simply have two dead half-people" (427). Das too expresses her intimacy with the readers. In My Story Das confesses that during her days of illness she had preserved her energy for writing. Being an invalid then, she becomes aware of the role of her readers in her life. "I had realized by then that the writer has none to love her but the readers. She would have proved herself to be a mere embarrassment to the members of her family, for she is like a goldfish in a well-lit bowl whose movements are never kept concealed" (206).

Das narrates the experience of her own metamorphosis and its effect on her husband. Her illness and the pain she had suffered made her deeply religious. Das compares her body after delivery to a "cloth doll" (191) which had lost a few stitches. Her sagging breast and her scarred abdomen continued to beguile her husband. But she had turned deeply religious when she knew her limitations: "I was no longer bed-worthy, no longer a charmer of lecherous men [. . .]. My articles on free love had titillated many. So I continued to get phone calls from men who wanted to proposition me" (191-92).

Both Atwood and Das have created protagonists who dethrone the myth of femininity. They do not conform to the image of the 'Angel in the House'. These writers have probed female experiences without any inhibition. For Das,

the depiction of the female body and its unique experiences was not at all an easy task in a conventional society. Nevertheless, the rapport between herself and her readers has to a certain extent made this task easier for her. The autobiographical sketch of Das in My Story is that of a rebel who flouts the tradition of the matrilineal society. Her resentment against the oppression of women is reflected in the sexual relationship between her husband and herself. She strives hard to sustain her spirit of individuality against odds. Atwood's heroines struggle for self-realization. Problematization of self-perception is a device used by these writers to explore the marginalized condition of women.

Atwood's treatment of nature requires special mention in this context. In Survival she projects women and nature as victims: "[L]inking of women and nature is a frequent feature of radical feminist alternatives to patriarchy" (129). Atwood mourns nature's loss of power. She observes that nature is bereft of power; power lies with man (Survival 61). In the specific Canadian situation, woman and nature are victims. "Nature as woman keeps surfacing as a metaphor all over Canadian literature and in unlikely as well as likely places... Nature is a woman, but an old, cold forbidding and possibly vicious one" (Survival 200). Coral Ann Howells, the Canadian critic articulates the significance of the Canadian wilderness: "Wilderness has multiple functions - as geographical location marker, as spatial metaphor and as Canada's not popular

cultural myth' (21). Atwood has accentuated the importance of the Canadian wilderness without any ambivalence.

Canadian wilderness is a unique feature of its geography. It is also one of the causes of the Canadian experience of alienation. Atwood delineates nature as an integral part of human life: "You aren't and can't be apart from nature. We're all part of the biological universe: men as well as women" (Ingersoll 120). Nature in Atwood's poems also reflect the image of the psyche. She observes: "[L]andscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind" (Survival 49).

In the introduction to The Canadian Postmodern, Linda Hutcheon examines the critical view of the national search for a cultural identity and the feminist search for a gender identity which involves the combatting of colonial positions (6). Atwood envisages Canada as a marginalized female. Hutcheon comments on the critics' view of considering the Canadians and women as "open, tolerant and accepting" (65), owing to the shared themes of their powerlessness, victimization and alienation. According to her, they are "ex-centrics" in terms of nationality and gender, since both are victims of colonialism. In her attempt to hold a mirror to the society, Atwood examines the power structures in post-colonial Canada.

Atwood's short fictions and prose poems in Murder in the Dark expose the oppression of women and the pretensions of the male world. In "The Victory Burlesk", Atwood comments on the strip-tease act of an old woman, watched by the young narrator. It was an 'enchanted' scene for everyone, as long as the spotlight was focused on her back. When at last she turned round, the narrator was horrified: "I didn't want this woman to take off her clothes, I didn't want to look. I felt that I, not the woman on the stage, was being exposed and humiliated" (24). The female body is treated as a sexual object in a patriarchal society. Evidently, Atwood shows her own protest in such a situation by voicing the thoughts of the indignant narrator.

Das's autobiography can be considered as her "Sexual Politics" which defies patriarchal norms. My Story is the story of her colonized self, which is suppressed in a world of male dominance. It is also the story of her attempt for self-assertion. Millet quotes Max Weber who considers the sexual relationship of dominance and subordination as one of "interior colonization" (25). As a young bride of fifteen, Das was ignorant of the ways of sex. Her fiancé had already shocked her by narrating stories of his sexual exploits. He considered her cold and frigid for not responding to his insatiable lust. Her psyche and body registered her protest against his physical violence. "His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin" (My Story 84).

Das recalls instances of women's victimization she had witnessed. She introduces Lazar, the oil-seller who "drove his white cow and the three women of his house round and round his old mill" (28). Woman's status is worse than that of an animal. Both are passive. Iyengar's comments on the suppression of individuals can be applied to the victimization of women: "Captivity, slavery, subordination are ugly, degrading, demoralizing things and this applies to individuals as well as to whole peoples and nations" (693).

As a wife, Das suffered humiliation when her husband became involved in a homosexual relationship with his friend. She was denied access to their room when he locked himself inside with his friend. It was a moment when she felt distanced from her own femininity: "I felt then a revulsion for my womanliness. The weight of my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound, the soul's wound, showing through" (104). Her poem "An Introduction" unmistakably deals with the traumatic experience of a teenaged girl who is ignorant of the devious ways of the world:

I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me  
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten (26-29).

Das's collection of short stories Chekkerunna Pakshikal portrays miserable women in different situations. Paradoxically, some of them appear to be independent and well settled in life. "Fear" is the story of a middle-aged teacher who finds herself threatened by the presence of a young man following her. She had taught him when he was a little boy. Das portrays Venu as a lustful character, looking for his chances. Venu did not fail to notice the attractive figure of his teacher, Soudamini. At fifty, her sexual appeal had not faded. It prompted the young man to follow her and even began conversation, much to her shock. It was already getting dark. Her loneliness and vulnerability frightened her. The old woman in Atwood's story "The Victory Burlesk" and the teacher in Das's story invariably project the vulnerability of women in a male-dominated world.

Das's short stories "Subhadramma" and "Ammayum Makanum" portray woman in the role of a mother. The mother sacrificed her pleasures for the sake of her children. But when the children grow up, her sacrifice is overlooked. Portrayal of women characters in their maternal role is done by Das with much felicity and dexterity. Perhaps her own maternal role has equipped her with all the paraphernalia and nuances of an artist for this difficult task of delving deep into one's psyche as a writer. The short story "The Mother and Son" highlights the contempt of a son for his rustic mother. The middle-aged woman lived almost a lonely life with her son who no longer cared for her.

She was happy to be with her son and did not wish to join her husband who was in Qatar. She did dare not to leave her son alone. But all her attempts to please him were in vain. He did not expect her to toil at home. He would rather see her reading books which he was ready to borrow from the library. But the woman resented such an idea. She said "why do I need books? I don't have time to read books. After I finish washing, cooking and cleaning the vessels, I only feel like relaxing. I don't feel like reading books." (30).

The short story "Subhadramma" also projects the image of an old selfless mother. Her son, a millionaire worked in the U.S. and her daughter was happily settled at kunnamkulam with her husband, a doctor. The old woman lived alone. She did the domestic chores by herself, without the help of servants. She used to write letters twice a month to her son. But the son never wrote to her. She consoled herself that, perhaps he was too busy to write to her. When she had to undergo surgery for brain tumour, her children anticipated her peaceful death. But she survived this ordeal too. Though her friends persuaded her to go to her son, she refused. She would rather spend her days surrounded by her few loving friends who were ready to help her in her hour of need.

The stories of such hapless women throw light on the miseries of selfless mothers. Examining the inner dynamics of the extended household,

William J. Goode observes that "it has been to the interest of people at intermediate ages or statuses to support the old, to maintain the system, for they know that in time they too will grow old. If these intermediate people challenge the authority of the old too soon, or supplant them without finesse and respect, then they undermine the structure which they could otherwise enjoy in their old age." (55).

"Few tasks are more like the tortures of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition..." (Beauvoir 470). Tied down to the endless domestic chores, women find themselves trapped and are unable to escape from the maze they are caught in. Minnie, the protagonist in Das's short story "Running away from Home" projects the dilemma faced by a housewife. For her "the poetry of hearth and home" (133) is not at all an enchanting one. She is yet another victim of the oppression caused by the male. She finds her autonomy at stake. Her husband considers her a sexual object to satisfy his lust. As a mother of twin babies, motherhood has not endowed her with its characteristic charm. The more she tries to escape from the "universe of permanence" the deeper she gets, bogged down by domesticity. Her "cramped apartment", and her "thin young man" who works her up with his "cruel fidgety hands" for the "nightly ritual" (213) make her gloomy. Minnie appears in sharp contrast to Clara, the heroine's friend in The Edible Woman. Clara is burdened with domesticity and yet she clings on. Perhaps, her

motherhood is an acid test for her endurance and tenacity. Marian finds herself rather perplexed by the image of her friend surrounded by her unmanageable children.

Minnie's escape from her home is a turning point in her life. The bitter experiences outside her domestic circle shock her. Interestingly, one does not fail to notice her chances of victimization when she is rescued by her husband's friend who appeared to be her benefactor. Like her husband, he too finds her a sexual object to appease his lust. He tells her:

You are qualified only to sleep with a man yes you are a handsome wench any man would pay well to have you warm his bed you can enter a brothel there is good money in it and fun you will be able to lead a comfortable life till you are forty and then if you play your cards well you will start a brothel of your own and collect a few young girls  
(219).

Minnie's plight in a phallogocentric society accentuates her victimization. All the three men in the story - her husband and his friend and her father do not help her to experience self-realization. To experience it, she has to break away from the shackles of domesticity. Beauvoir observes that self-realization is achieved through different processes by the husband and the wife.

According to her "the husband finds concrete self-realization in work and action, whereas for the wife, as such, liberty has only a negative aspect" (498-99). Very often, her freedom is exploited by those around her. Abuse of freedom either by oneself or by others upsets the equilibrium of life.

Atwood as Das have explored man-woman relationships from different perspectives. Women, when seen through their multiple roles, do not appear to be placed in a secure position. In her collection of short stories The Sandal Trees, Das articulates her anguish at the plight of women who become a prey to man's lust. In "Marine Drive" Anasuya and her lover "the Bison" are projected as combatants in power politics. Das portrays the power exerted by the male over the female. The lovers name itself symbolizes the power of the male. She examines the relationship between the lovers as one between a hunter and his prey: "For a deep and spiritual relationship usually develops between the murderer and the one about to be murdered" (Sandal Trees 93). One may recall a similar image projected by Atwood in her novel The Edible Woman.

Victimization is enhanced by the use of power. Power politics endanger sexual relationship, when power is used by one of the sexes over the other. In Surfacing, the narrator realized her own inability to make use of power: "I had no idea what I would do with the power once I got it; if I'd turned

out like the others with power I would have been evil" (38). Anasuya was horrified at her lover's feats: "They told her that he had certified his eldest daughter as mad and put her up in a mental home when she fell in love with a communist leader; that he had taken out his typist to Poona when she got pregnant and had killed her, pushing her out of the car down a deep ravine" (98).

When Anasuya became pregnant, the Bison accused her of trapping him with the "characteristic feminine cunning" (99). Ironically, pregnancy, which is considered as a woman's way of fulfilling her femininity, is also considered as a bane when the child is unwanted. Anasuya's baby would tarnish the image of the Bison in public life. Hence he ordered her to abort the foetus. The interruption of pregnancy, according to Beauvoir, would affect the psychology of women. According to her "some women will be haunted by the memory of this child which has not come into being" (508). This is what exactly happened to the protagonist in Surfacing. Beauvoir's remark justifies her erratic behaviour: "[W]omen may gain from abortion the sense of having destroyed a part of themselves and feel resentment against the man who has agreed to or requested this mutilation" (508). The narrator had even considered her "divorce" as an "amputation" (944). Anasuya pleased her lover by acceding to his demand. The narrator and Anasuya, through their passivity, have expressed their complicity in their own victimization. The plight of an unwed

mother is precarious in India when compared to a similar situation in Canada. Such women have no way out. Either they have to undergo abortion or face the consequences.

Das's candour in dealing with the physicality of the female body and female desire indeed is shocking to many. The ease with which she portrays images of female sexuality has distanced her from many of her readers, who tread along the conventional path. It is a distorted image of love that Das sees in sexual politics. The binary opposition of masculinity and femininity is compared to a weapon that destroys rather than act as a guiding spirit.

Patriarchal oppression is multifaceted. Woman's multiple roles in the society enhances her chances of victimization. Das portrays the images of a lover who is cruel to his beloved, a husband who is unfaithful to his wife or a son who is indifferent to his aged mother. The short story "Letter from Radha" depicts the modern version of the archetypal figure of Lord Krishna as the lover. Radha, his beloved waits for his magic touch. Her implicit faith in him confines herself within the limits of his body. Love is blind and the beloved hopes to be contained within the six-foot frame of her lover. Das exclaims: "How limited is the vision of a woman in love!" (Sandal Trees 81).

Das's collection of short stories Madhavikkuttiyude Premakathakal (Love Stories 1998), encompasses a wide range of situations, their focus being women. Most of them are women who suffer because of their male counterparts. "Deceit" is the story of the infidelity of the husband of a gynaecologist. The childless couple adored each other. The wife's dedication to her profession made the husband jealous. But one day the wife caught him red-handed in his act of infidelity. It was a moment of her self-knowledge. Fully exhausted, she had rushed home to enjoy the comfort of the haven of her home. She was shocked to find her husband and a woman sleeping on her bed. Then the truth of her husband's infidelity dawned upon her. Though he pretended to be a loyal husband, he preferred a young woman to his middle-aged wife. The foolish wife had doted on her husband. Infidelity of the husband or wife can disorganize the institution of the family, since it is built upon their mutual trust and love.

The protagonist in "Marine Drive" is also depicted as a victim. Anasuya loved the Bison, but had to sacrifice her life to please him. The story ends with the decision of the Bison to kill her. Yet true to her love, she was even willing to accept death from her lover as a gift. She believed that life was transient but love never ended. She would gladly wait for the murderers to snatch away her life. Her body would be dissolved in acid and allowed to flow through pipes. Love had made her blind and she failed to see the truth.

Atwood's anti-Americanism in Surfacing projects her nationalist concern. The U.S.A is a metaphor for the male who victimizes the female. Canada is also depicted as a woman. The woman's body and psyche are victimized by sexual colonialism. According to Loomba the female body has been metaphorically used to convey the ideology of colonialism in colonial and post-colonial discourse. "[F]rom the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land" (152). Americanism implies the colonized condition of Canada. The American influence on Canada is seen by Atwood as detrimental to the interests of her nation. She observes: "They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the difference" (151). The dead heron hanging upside down at the second portage (135) indicates the presence of the Americans on the island. Their wanton killing had proved "they could do it, they had the power to kill" (137). One can easily substitute the Americans by the male and the dead heron by the aborted foetus of the narrator which signify the victimization of woman.

The novel contrasts the city life with the 'unspoilt Eden' of the island. But the Americans have spoiled it by their encroachment. Their presence on the island was too obvious to be ignored. The narrator saw two men, evidently of the "power company" (133), who had left trails of their work - "trees felled at

intervals into the bay, trunks cut cleanly as though by a knife" (133). Later, the narrator discovered that the men whom she had thought of as Americans were her own countrymen. But then, the word 'American' and its menacing connotation could very well be applied to the Canadians too.

The Handmaid's Tale, taken as a parody of the American society, advocates cultural autonomy for Canada. Professor Pieixoto's speech throws light on the rivalry that is present between Canada and its neighbour. He wonders whether Canada had offered refuge to Offred who crossed the border between the U.S and Canada. He says:

Was she smuggled over the border of Gilead, into what was then Canada, and did she make her way thence to England? This would have been wise, as the Canada of that time did not wish to antagonize its powerful neighbour, and there were roundups and extraditions of such refugees (393).

Treichler interprets the childbirth in Surfacing as a symbol of the technological progress in the U.S: "Indeed in Surfacing, Margaret Atwood uses childbirth American style as a symbol for U.S. imperialism" (119). The technician and students had treated her body, as though it was just an object.

In Second Words, Atwood probes her own attitude to the Americans. She considers them as "enthusiastic, generous and optimistic." But this opinion in no way reduces the gravity with which she accuses them for interfering with the Canadian life. This attitude of hers has been engendered by memories of her "childhood in Northern Quebec, surrounded by many trees and few people" (375). She considered the Americans as "wimps who had a lot of money but did not know what they were doing" (376). The superiority of the U.S. economy over that of Canada bears its imprint on the cultural matrix of the country. Atwood describes this trend of the U.S as "megalomania" in her afterword to The Journals of Susanna Moodie (62). Atwood's perceptive mind has depicted the subvertive attempts of the U.S. in her reference to the CIA in her novels.

Oppression causes resistance. Hence colonialism invariably precipitates resistance among the oppressed. Sexual colonialism projected by Das and Atwood highlight woman as a victim. Some of these victims realize their victim position and make an earnest attempt to escape from their oppression. Their struggle for survival and escape from victimization gives vitality to these characters.

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## Chapter IV

### **Dynamics of Writing**

Domesticity of women writers has ever been more a hindrance than a boon to their profession. Their seclusion in a male-dominated world – both as women and as writers – has forced them to resort to inhibitions peculiar to their art. In a refreshing way, Atwood and Das could transcend these limitations to articulate their disquieting views, frankly and often provokingly in their works. As members of a marginalized social group, they have discovered in their own unwonted ways to record their social commitments.

Interestingly enough, female biology, language and psyche have widened the scope of critics to interpret the works of women writers in relation to their social contexts. The emotional dynamics of women writers encode female experiences in a way totally different from that of male writers. Exploring the dynamics of their writings would definitely throw light on the mindset of these writers.

"One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way" (Sartre 16). The aesthetic pleasure which a reader derives from prose is definitely different that of poetry. Atwood and Das have excelled in prose as well as poetry. Hence it is easier to make a contrastive study of these writers in order to examine their literary devices.

Women's writing is marked by their attempt to assert their autonomy at the physical and psychological level. Their narratives are usually highly innovative as in the case of Atwood. The vitality of their narratives springs from their attempt to resist, as the colonized. Atwood and Das resort to literary devices in order to express their anguish at the oppression of women in their patriarchal cultures.

Atwood's Survival offers Canadian patterns to deconstruct Canadian literature. Sherrill E. Grace attempts to evaluate this Canadian writer by a particular system: "Through an analysis of these four elements, duality, nature, self and language it is possible to describe Atwood's system" (4-5).

Atwood's fiction abounds in dual images. The polarity of the binary opposites reflects the schism between the self/other, victor/victim mind/body and culture/nature. One may even consider the polarity of prose/poetry, taking into consideration. Atwood's ideas spread between these two genres. As a

creative writer, the polarity between the woman and the artist also can be considered to assess her works. Linda Hutcheon has made a thorough analysis of the postmodernism in Atwood:

In her poetry, art-as-product is associated as is love, significantly – with closed circle games (which include, but also exclude), with photographs, maps, roads, and fences, or with the acts of naming, labelling, and knowing. A negative view of culture is confronted by a positive one of nature; the sterile black and white of print stand judged by the fecund green of the natural world. Superficial and cold, mirrors and ice are opposed to images of flowing water or places deep underground (139).

What Hutcheon attributes to the poetry of Atwood is equally applicable to her prose.

Atwood seems to be obsessed with the images of binary opposites. The polarity between the process of artistic creation and the finished product of creativity is significant in this context. The image of the split self of the narrator in Surfacing, projects the polarity between the head and the body. Being locked up in the upper half of the body, since the neck has “frozen” over in the middle, the narrator is unable to communicate with herself or others. The binary opposites almost stagnate her life. Only when the freezing stops, the narrator

will be able to correspond with others. The binary analysis of the male and the female takes the form of a contrast between the 'Self' and the 'Other'.

Nature in the works of Atwood and Das is treated differently. In Canadian literature nature is a potential source of power both in the geographical and psychological sense. Atwood's remark on Nature as a metaphor for woman may be recalled in this context: "Poets incline towards Nature-as-woman metaphors; prose writers turn the metaphor around and use Woman-as-Nature" (Survival 202). This facilitates her to consider Nature and Woman as victims.

On the other hand, this metaphorical significance of nature is not seen in the works of Das. Like a child she absorbs the beauty and charm of nature. The portrait of her ancestral home, Nalapat, invariably is accompanied by images of nature. Her autobiography reveals glimpses of the beauty of nature she has revelled. She recalls a memorable scene: "We moved to a cottage near the sea facing the Cuffe Parade in the gaudy month of June when the trees were all in bloom and the yellow butterflies were all over the tiny lawn" (113). During phases of loneliness and sorrow Das used to derive comfort from nature.

The portrayal of the self in the postmodern literature is highly significant because of its psychoanalytical interpretations. By writing her self, a woman writer defies the role of a stereotype, which has been imposed upon her by the society. Woman is defined in terms of man. She does not possess a distinctive entity as "she is called the sex, by which is meant, that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being" (Beauvoir 16). She is only the 'other', as she lacks the position of the 'subject'.

The phenomenon of the split self necessitates self-integration by means of self-realization. The journey motif in Surfacing evidently leads to the discovery of her 'whole' selfhood when the head and body unite. In a way, this journey can be taken as a journey to the interior. The narrator's journey to the scene of her childhood is more than a journey in the metaphoric sense. Annis Pratt examines the significance of this journey: "As in Woolf [. . .], the quest penetrates a world of unconscious material that is at one and the same time a wholly new space and, in terms of motifs from ancient mytho-religious materials, a wholly old one" (158). According to her "[W]omen's fiction originates from and guides us toward a world of archetypes, a repository of symbolic and narrative patterns, that reflects women's desire for a fully feminine and yet fully human authenticity" (166). Pratt examines the story of the narrator's rebirth through the "assimilation" of green-world potency" (160-61) and archetypal materials of "Tammuz/Adonis" (159). The archetypal figures of

the parents also enhance the self-integration of the protagonist. In an interview with David Cayley, Frye comments on archetypes: "Archetypes are myths and units within myths. They are repeating elements of literature. They can be anything from conventional images to story patterns" (76).

Atwood's novel Lady Oracle and the autobiography of Das project images of the multiple selves of the personae. The narrators in both works are forced to play multiple roles which project their multiple selves. My Story examines the multiple roles of the narrator as a child, daughter, wife and mother. It is a self battered by patriarchal forces.

The images of the "New Woman" in literature marks the self of a woman which has survived the ordeals of life. They are women characters who are empowered to assert their individuality. Atwood and Das convey the message of their social commitment by projecting the image of the "New Woman". Amartya Sen, the winner of 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Science comments on the freedom of women to improve their lives:

[T]he empowerment of women, through employment opportunities, educational assignments, property rights and so on, can give women more freedom to influence a variety of matters such as intrafamily division of health care, food and other commodities and work arrangements as well as fertility rates, but

the exercise of that enhanced freedom is ultimately a matter for the person herself (289).

The narrator in Surfacing, Joan Foster in Lady Oracle and Marian in The Edible Women are protagonists who are able to tide over their crisis by means of self-realization. The psychological depth attributed to them in the process of self-realization is not to be found in the works of Das. The methods adopted by the two writers vary in each novel.

One of the major literary devices used by Atwood as a post-modern writer is metafiction. Metafiction is a literary device used by writers for self-exploration. Atwood projects the problems faced by her as an artist. Her novel Lady Oracle is a metafiction which contrasts reality with fantasy.

Patricia Waugh comments on the metafictional novels as those which are "constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (43). Atwood's portrayal of Joan as an artist enables the writer to explore the struggle of an artist to survive in a world of male values. It is also an attempt of the two artists Atwood and Joan to explore the possibilities of different genres. Atwood portrays the hurdles faced by a professional writer. The intertextuality of Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott", Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, "The Little Mermaid" and the film "The Red Shoes" are

elements introduced by the writer to focus upon the protagonist's journey to self-integration. Interestingly, as in Surfacing, it is a lonely journey of the protagonist.

The narrative patterns in the works of Das and Atwood show some similarities. The first person narratives in the works of Atwood and Das evidently point to the presence of the speaker. Das's use of 'I' in her autobiography and her memoirs are indicative of the writer's invisible presence. 'I' is autobiographical in Neermathalam Pootha Kalam (When the Pomegranates Bloomed 1993). The line of demarcation between the narrator and the writer disappears and the two merge into one. The work includes anecdotes and experiences of the writer's past in which the central figure is 'I'. 'I' in Atwood's novels indicate the persona or the speaker who appears to be authentic, till the narrative switches over to third person.

While examining the poetic and narrative structures of Atwood. Linda Hutcheon observes the unique quality of her art:

Her early use of the short lyric poem has led many to suggest that for Atwood, to write is to fix, to order into a static form. But her increasing concentration on narrator, by nature a more temporal kinetic art form, should prompt a critical review of this "circle

game” interpretation of the ‘Creative process according to Atwood’  
– both in its formal and in its thematic dimensions (17).

Atwood’s novel The Blind Assassin (2001), shows an improvement as a modification of the narrative patterns of her earlier novels. The novel is divided into fifteen sections. In The Handmaid’s Tale also a similar division can be observed. Each section is further sub-divided by introducing titles. In The Blind Assassin the numbers of sub-divisions vary from three to twelve. The narrator’s points of view scan the multiplicity of the themes. Atwood has condensed the story of the Chase family, the publication of The Blind Assassin, considered to be a novel written by Laura and life in the city of Sakiel – Norn, its magnificence and power within her latest novel.

Kavatam (2000), a novel written by Das in collaboration with Sulochana, her sister, shows some similarities with The Blind Assassin. The novel is divided into twenty seven chapters. Each chapter bears the name of the characters in the novel and a date, as in a diary-entry. The novel focuses on life in a hospital. It is the story of a few doctors, who are invariably drawn into a vicious circle of competition and jealousy. Life is depicted as a “circle game” and the characters fail to escape from its unending rotation. In the narrative structure of novel the events span a period of less than two months.

Das's autobiography, My Story, is examined within the framework of fifty chapters, each of them bearing a title. The title offers a clue to the theme. The first person narratives of her autobiography and short fiction enhance the subjective presence of the speaker. But the novels written in the third person narratives conceal the autobiographic elements as in Kavadam and Amavasi.

In her short story "Running away from Home" Das experiments with a new style of writing. The story is an incessant flow, exploring the situations that lead to the oppression of Minnie the protagonist. The whole story is a long sentence, terminated by a single full stop. The sentences stretch endlessly. The story begins abruptly: "When Minnie decided to run away from home to run away from her husband and the twins who were not yet one year old and the cramped apartment that always seemed to smell of wet laundry and curdled milk [. . .]" (213). Das had tried this method of narration in writing her diary (personal interview). Invariably, this narrative pattern expresses the desire of the writer to introduce an innovative style in her art, which is refreshingly original. The two writers have resorted to the use of narrative patterns which enable them to project the struggle of the artists within them. The flexibility of these patterns are visible in their prose texts which give them scope for the projection of their ideas.

Atwood introduces elements of narcissism in The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle. Joan's mother in Lady Oracle and Duncan in The Edible Woman exhibit signs of narcissism. The concept of narcissism was formulated by Freud, based on his libido theory. He interprets the psychoses of schizophrenics by means of narcissism "in which an adult individual lavishes upon his own body all the caresses usually expended upon a sexual object other than himself" (422-23). Atwood projects the character of Duncan as one who is obsessed with himself. He is more at home, in the laundromat, than elsewhere. In the novel The Edible Woman, Marian recalls her encounter with Duncan at the laundromat:

[T]here was something most unchildlike about him, something that suggested rather an unnaturally old man, old far beyond consolation [. . .]. It may have been real enough; but then again, it may have been calculated to evoke just such a mothering reaction, so that he could smile cleverly at the gesture and retreat further into the sanctuary of his sweater, refusing to be reached or touched (98).

Apparently, Duncan seems to be a lifeless character. But his presence in the novel is essential not for himself, but for others. He can help women to "bring out the Florence Nightingale in them" (98). In Lady Oracle, Joan's mother appears to her "three-headed" (238). She used to watch her mother sitting

before her dressing-mirror, putting on her make up. The elaborate performance at the mirror used to fascinate the little girl, who sat there, as though charmed (68-69). The mirror reflects the narcissistic tendency of the character.

In Lady Oracle Joan's mother is a dominant factor in her life. "She was to be the manager, the creator, the agent; I was to be the producer" (70). Joan used to carry the image of her mother hanging from her neck like an iron locket. The one image that lingered in her mind was the picture of her mother sitting in front of her dressing-mirror. "Her lips were thin but she made a larger mouth with lipstick over and around them, like Bette Davis, which gave her a curious durable mouth, the real one showing through the false one like a shadow" (71).

Joan's mother is instrumental in her self-integration. It is her dominating power that forces Joan to escape in search of her personal autonomy. Her mother and Duncan quicken the process of her self-integration.

Parody is a strategy used by writers to undermine dominant discourses. In Lady Oracle Atwood parodies the intricate world of art by examining the 'escape' adventures of Joan Foster. Joan's Gothic romances were means of her self-realization. The artist Louisa K. Delacourt, is one of the multiple selves of Joan, who is a prisoner of the internalized values of the society. Joan's

artistic talents find expression in her Gothic romances. "Lady Oracle" is the embodiment of her poetic talents. Thus the novel becomes a self-parody of Atwood herself. Atwood's Lady Oracle and Joan Foster's "Stalked by Love" are attempts of the two artists who have to be assessed against each other, in order to examine elements of parody that they embody. Metafictional elements introduce the self-exploratory technique into creative art, projecting the writer's concern with fiction-making.

Atwood's novel Surfacing also is a parody of the traditional ghost tale. The narrator's self-integration is made possible by her encounter with the ghost of her father. Atwood emphasizes the importance of the linking of the present with the past by her return to her childhood scene. The green world of her childhood is the scene of her self-integration.

The depiction of woman's experiences – biological or psychological – requires a language that can project the tensions and conflicts that the artist experiences during the process of creative activity. Images of the body are central to women's writing. These images are associated with the biological functions of the female body.

The body images of the two sexes vary. The male body symbolizes power, whereas the female body is associated with the biological function of

reproduction and nurturing. Hence the images of the female body denote her sex roles. The gender dichotomy between the male and the female makes them binary opposites.

Helene Cixous emphasizes the need for 'writing the female self':

Women must write her self, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement (245).

'Writing the body' has gained significance in the post-colonial discourse. Colonization of the female body in a situation of male dominance forces the women writers to seek an alternative 'space', which is physical in relation to the body and psychological in relation to the mind. Women writers are obsessed with the theme of the binary opposites of sexism. They struggle to express themselves which are marginalized in the phallographic culture.

The prose texts of Atwood and Das project images related to the body. The protagonist in Surfacing is highly conscious of the split between her head and body. Her neck has sealed off the head from the body (124). She thinks of

her "former faces" which are frozen (125). She fails to forget the traumatic experience of abortion when a "section" of her life had been "sliced off" like a "Siamese twin" (51). When she became pregnant the growing foetus within her body made her feel like an "incubator" (34). She thinks of her unborn baby looking through the walls of her stomach like "a frog in a jar" (32).

In The Edible Woman, Marian looks at the distorted image of the female form in the poster. The picture was that of a young woman with "three pairs of legs" (90), skipping merrily in her girdle. Marian watches the sprawling figure of her friend Ainsley, "a mermaid in a grubby green terrycloth robe" (80). Relaxing in the bathtub, Marian objectively watches her submerged body:

From their elevated position her eyes had a long vista of white concave enclosing walls and semi-transparent water, her body islanded, extending in a series of curves and hollows down towards the terminal peninsula of legs and the reefs of toes[. . .]  
(227).

As a Canadian writer, Atwood projects images associated with the unique Canadian geography, specially in her short stories. Her short story "Polarities" depicts the encroachment of Canadian geography into the psyche of the characters. The cold, damp external world has pervaded and substituted the warm human elements. Morrison "imagined his long body locked in that

athletic, chilly grip, his eyes darkened by fur" (Dancing Girls 44). The biting snow envelops the character quite aggressively, freezing his body as well as mind. Nature is hostile and ruthless in its attitude: "It was colder, the weak red sun almost down, the snow purpling and creaky" (39). Atwood considers nature in Canadian literature as an integral part of human lives.

The autobiography of Das is replete with images of the parts of the body. The "physical rapture" of her husband in the company of his "old friend" fills her with disgust. She feels crushed by the weight of her breasts. Her "private part" becomes a "wound, the soul's wound showing through" (104). She recalls the brutality of her fiancé who "bruised" her body with "blue and red marks on the skin" (84). The adolescence fills her with excitement. She recalls the image of her "boyish body" (71) draped in a white sari: "I was in such a hurry to grow up that it began to show in the way. I brushed my hair whipping it as one would whip a snake to kill it [. . .]" (71).

Das's short story "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" highlights the female body as a sexual object. The prostitutes used to decorate their bodies to please their "clients". There were signs of premature ageing, which were well concealed by applying pink powder on their skin. Their bodies were "rinds" (Padmavati 85) without their spirits. Rukmini finds her friend Sita lying insensate after an attempted abortion. She was bleeding profusely. "How pale

she looked with the rash of the midday sun mottling her narrow face. She resembled a foreign doll. Only her belly seemed alive, protruding from her flat body like a growth (92).

These images project the entrapment of the female body in a colonial situation. Sexual colonization deprives women of their freedom for the mastery of their own bodies.

Atwood's use of words and phrases signal her knowledge of science. In her novel The Robber Bride, she refers to the "cosmic insight" (62) of Charis. She becomes conscious of the "sharing" of air by "countless thousands" (62) of people in the city. She knows that "every single molecule in her body has once been part of someone else's body, of the bodies of many others, going back and back, and then past human beings, all the way to the dinosaurs, all the way to the first planktons" (62). Charles Darwin's remark in the introduction to The Origin of Species is very similar:

In considering the origin of species, it is quite conceivable that a naturalist reflecting on the mutual affinities of organic beings, on their embryological relations, their geographical distribution, geological succession, and other such facts, might come to the conclusion that species had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species (26).

The emphasis on the potential nature of the human body confirms Atwood's knowledge of its mysterious power. Charis conducts 'yoga' classes. The infinite power of human energy is highlighted by Atwood's remark:

The room fills with the sound of breathing, like wavelets on a shore, and with the scent of tensed muscles. Charis feels energy flowing out of her, through her fingers, into the other bodies (245).

Atwood had depicted the immense power and vibration of the Reiki energy, also known as the "Universal Life Force Energy" in the human body. Recently, there is an awareness among the people of the importance of 'yoga' and the immense power of Reiki energy which help them to maintain mental equilibrium in times of crisis.

Paula Horan, a psychologist, highlights the importance of Reiki energy:

According to Hermetic Science, man will not realize spirit until his body is made clean by water, and his mind pure by fire. In other words, no man will be liberated from the bonds of fear and ignorance, and raise his level of conscious awareness who has not regenerated his body through Life Energy, and purified his mind by Truth and Love. (17-14).

Das does not convey such information through her works. Nevertheless, she appears to be aware of the threat posed by the dehumanization of individuals. Her short story "Ennenum Thara" "(Always Thara)" reveals the unhappy life of a couple. The husband, a scientist, treats his wife like an object to conduct his experiments. He installed a small machine within her chest which could be revealed by pulling a metal zip. A 'beep' sound emanated from her body as in a machine (210). This story reveals Das's concern for women who are oppressed and dehumanized in their marital lives.

Atwood's sensational book The Blind Assassin (2000), a science fiction, is a Booker Prize winner. Obviously, she explores reality with elements of fantasy. She looks into the "dimension of space" (11) and the "Planet Zycron" (12). The dramatic events of this novel portray the widening of the potential skills of the writer.

The issue of survival is related to man's existence in this world. But it assumes greater significance for a Canadian. Atwood articulates this significance in her critical work: "The central symbol for Canada – and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature – is undoubtedly survival *la Survivance*" (Survival 32). Atwood claims that Canadian literary works of the twentieth century "show a marked preference for the negative" (35). The works of Das too highlights this

particular aspect of her society. Atwood and Das do not project a complacent society which enjoys materialistic prosperity. Ironically enough, these two writers deal with the life of the latter half of the twentieth century. The concept of social pathology is relevant in this context since a sane society is an essential factor in the development of an individual. Erich Fromm circumscribes the sane society as "that which corresponds to the needs of man – not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs, because even the most pathological aims can be felt subjectively as that which the person wants most; but to what his needs are *objectively*, as they can be ascertained by the study of man" (20).

Insanity denotes a schism between the world and oneself. It can be considered as a social or biological failure of adjustment which results from a lack of insight. R.D. Laing claims that an "*ontologically* secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity" (The Divided Self 39). Such a secure individual experiences his presence in the world as "real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person" (39). The behavioural pattern of the narrator and her father in Surfacing is symptomatic of the lack of their "wholeness" as well as a sense of alienation from the rest of the society. In My Story Das speaks of her alienated self: "As I wrote more and more, in the circles I was compelled to move in, I became

lonelier and lonelier. I felt that my loneliness was like a red band on my face” (174).

Man’s inseparable connection with nature always helps him to return to it in his hour of crisis. The narrator’s metamorphosis during her days of insanity brings her closer to nature. The bond that develops between them stabilizes her. The narrator steps into the lake and looks around: “Inshore a loon; it lowers its head, then lifts it again and calls. It sees me but it ignores me, accepts me as part of the land” (212). This acceptance of her is part of the process of self-integration.

A similar affinity between Das and nature can be noticed in My Story. Unable to bear the oppressive forces of the urban life, Das left the city and returned to Malabar. Her spirits revive soon and she exclaims: “I had taken a sentimental journey to my childhood – home. I did not want to return to the impersonal city and its tension; once again in disillusionment” (198). Sheer happiness fills her days and she refers to those days as “idyllic existence” (198). Apparently Das and Atwood see a fundamental antagonism between “nature” and “culture”. Das’s short stories “Subhadramma” and “Januamma” project women who are entrenched in rural life and its values. Even during her days of illness and desolation Subadramma, an old woman does not feel tempted to go to her son, a millionaire in the U.S. She decides to continue her life in the village, surrounded by her well-wishers. Her faith in God has grown

stronger after she survives a surgery for brain tumour. The simplicity of such characters transcends man's paranoid attitude to nature.

The mirror images in Atwood are highly symbolic. In Lady Oracle the mirror is a prominent image. Joan decides to resort to the occult, since it was the "latest thing" for a writer. She sat before the mirror with lighted candles and stared into the mirror. The writing displayed on the paper at first puzzles her. Joan's life is intricately connected with the world of mirrors. Joan's search for her self takes different dimensions in the mirror images projected in the novels. Invariably, these images are the distorted images of her multiple selves. Unless Joan realizes the potential nature of her true self she would not be able to survive in this world. Her journey to reality and self realization is through the shadowy world of the mirror. Once she felt trapped in the mirror: "I went into the mirror one evening and I couldn't get out again. I was going along the corridor, with the candle in my hand as usual, and the candle went out" (249). The other side of the mirror, she discovers, is indeed tricky. Atwood's "Tricks with Mirrors" : : articulates the potential power of mirrors which can even trap lovers:

I confess: this is not a mirror  
It is a door  
I am trapped behind  
I wanted you to see me here  
Say the releasing word, whatever

That may be, open the wall  
Instead you stand in front of me  
Combing your hair (34)

All her life, Joan had been dominated by her mother. Little did she know the true relationship between them. One night, after her mother's death she saw her spirit standing outside her window. The window pane separated them. She recalls the scene: "It had been she standing behind me in the mirror, she was the one who was waiting around each turn, her voice whispered the words. She had been the lady in the boat, the death barge, the tragic lady with flowing hair and stricken eyes, the lady in the tower" (363).

Joan's attempt to write the gothic reveals not only her predicament but also that of Atwood. The maze depicted by Atwood in Lady Oracle can also denote the labyrinthine ways of a writer's psyche. An exploration of the self of Joan Foster is also an exploration of the writer's self. The conflict between the woman and the artist is projected by Atwood using the metafictional device.

The mirror images in The Edible Woman also project the fractured identity of Marian. She saw herself reflected in the mirror between the two dolls, a dark and a blonde. She felt herself located inside them, looking out. She feared that very soon the central part which held her image would be a void. "By the strength of their separate visions they were trying to pull her

apart" (229). The two dolls signify her duality which resulted from her schizophrenic split. Atwood emphasizes the concept of duality by projecting images of mirrors. The mirror separates the world of reality and fiction. The splintered self of the persona confronts the chasm between the real and unreal worlds.

In Surfacing the lake also serves the purpose of a mirror. It reflects life and acts as an "entrance" to new life or rebirth. By diving into the lake the narrator regains her wholeness. Like mirror, water too becomes an agent of self-integration.

Mirror motifs are used by Atwood for the affirmation of life. One has to confront life and its problems. Mirrors as looking-glasses help us to achieve self-integration. This metaphoric significance is conveyed through her novels and short stories. The writer uses mirror to magnify the image of the male. It diminishes the female image.

The fictional world of Atwood and Das testifies to their skill as creative writers in the genre of prose. As women writers they have created a female space for themselves in the world of art dominated by men. The dynamics of their writing prove beyond doubt that women artists can survive in a patriarchal framework of the society by asserting their skill as writers.

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## CONCLUSION

As women writers, Margaret Atwood and Kamala Das have impressed the literary world, by voicing their protest against the suppression of women. These two writers of Canada and India respectively, have left an indelible impression on their cultures. In spite of their cultural diversity, they show striking similarities, in their works, which defy their national boundaries.

Both of them began their potent literary career in the second half of the twentieth century. Each of them has a distinctive identity. Their literary contribution is of immense value. Both have written poems, prose and novels. Atwood has also contributed critical works. The preceding chapters devoted to an examination of their prose texts reveal worthwhile similarities in their approach. Their thematic concerns also highlight their social commitment.

The present analysis of the themes of Atwood and Das reveals the importance they attach to the self. The emerging self of a woman in a male dominated society confronts problems which impose restraints on her. The

projection of the self in a strife-torn world of hierarchy forces a woman writer to examine her own female subjectivity. Atwood's novels follow a consistent pattern in the projection of the self. The heroine of her work shows a marked advantage over the previous one, in the chronological order. As a career woman, Marian in The Edible Woman, the first novel of Atwood, faces problems that any working woman confronts in the present day. The self of this career woman is wedged between I.B.M. machines on the lower floor of her office and the male executives on the upper floor. The I.B.M. machines denote the lifeless computers which are conducive to our modern life style. These machines, apparently harmless, are seen as dehumanizing factors. The mad rush for jobs in a busy industrial town reflects the image of the present urban life style. Marian's situation projects the problems confronted by a career woman.

The foregoing chapters focused on the novels of Atwood affirm the psychological dense world that the author could generate with the struggling, emerging woman at the centre. Her works vouch for the impact of diverse behavioural patterns on the deeper layers of human psyche, particularly the feminine psyche. A good response to Atwood's works demands a psychological knowhow on the part of the readers.

On the other hand, a reader does not require a deep knowledge of the human mind to analyse the characters of Das. They are individuals whom one can see in every day life, jostling with each other, making an attempt to survive. Das locates the self, deeply enmeshed in the cultural matrix of the society. The disturbances experienced by the self precipitate neurotic behaviour.

The symptomatic signs of neurosis are more elaborately dealt with in the works of Atwood than in those of Das. The endangered self shows signs of a split. The individual lives with a real and unreal self. Owing to this schism, the person fails to confront the harsh realities of life.

Besides, Atwood's projection of the self also entails the Canadian experience of alienation and identity crisis. Though alienation is a universal experience, the method adopted by Das and Atwood to delineate this experience are different. According to Atwood, Canada is an unknown territory and a state of mind. The failure to fix one's self in a geographical territory and the failure to discover one's own self, precipitate problems in an individual. Atwood explores such problems in her fiction.

The problems related to the self, point to the survival instinct of an individual. Atwood's critical work Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian

Literature, (1972) examines the Canadian patterns of survival. The attempt of the Canadian characters to survive, appears more complicated, owing to the Canadian experience of identity crisis.

Literature mirrors life. Hence the social background of the literary works is indispensable for analyzing factors that control human behaviour. Man is connected to the external world by means of the institution of the family. The images of the Canadian families and Indian families loom large in the works of Atwood and Das.

The modern nuclear families and the joint family patterns of the past occupy a prominent place in these works. Joint family system is seen in the works of Das. The projection of the two types of families evidently show the disintegration of moral values which sustain them.

Social acculturation takes place through the family. An analysis of the works of Atwood and Das reveals the emphasis on the process of socialization of the protagonist during her childhood. They serve as clues in interpreting their behaviour in the later stages of life. One observes the painful experience of the rupture between childhood and adolescence of the women protagonists. In spite of the divergent cultural backgrounds of these characters they are influenced by the same principles of psychology.

The basic principle of the institution of family is related to reproduction and caring. Hence Atwood and Das probe the complexity of man-woman relationship which decides the existence of the family.

The oppressive effects of patriarchy are projected by Atwood and Das. The women of Canada and India are entrenched in phallocratic societies which marginalize women. There is an emphatic display of the power structures that control patriarchy. Atwood projects images of 'power politics' which examine men as the dominant group. In a male-dominated society, the status attributed to women is that of a 'minority' group. The hierarchy of the sexes is projected by Das too. Besides, she also projects the caste system which stratifies the Indian society.

Experiences which are exclusive to women are central to the works of Atwood and Das. Prominent among these are childbirth, menstruation and nurturing. In her novel Surfacing, Atwood finds fault with the interference of the American technology, in childbirth. In such a situation, the childbirth ceases to be a natural process. But at the end of the novel, the protagonist is ready to experience childbirth by returning to nature, in her primal state.

Paradoxically, the Indian writer expresses the ecstatic experience of motherhood in her autobiography, My Story. She narrates her experience of childbirth as a teenaged girl. She was too young to be a mother. She treated the baby as her best toy.

Treatment of motherhood assumes greater significance in the works of Das, than in those of Atwood. Das portrays the maternal instinct with great vivacity in her short stories and autobiography. Her own maternal experiences add vigour to these portraits.

Portraits of women in the works of Atwood and Das can be analysed from a different perspective. One can contrast the images of the single woman in the Canadian context with the image of the widow portrayed by Das. Virtually, the life of these 'single' women project their survival instincts. Relatively, the life of a single woman is less miserable than a widow in the Indian background. Marriage and widowhood are social factors that influence an Indian woman more than a Canadian woman. The portrait of widow in Das's autobiography and her short stories is a bleak one. She is projected as one who has lost her moorings in the society.

The Canadian and Indian scenario that unfolds in the works of Das and Atwood highlight women as victims in a male dominated society. Atwood's

critical work Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature helps the reader to analyse the victims projected in her works. The political dimensions of patriarchy enhance the process of victimization. Both these writers posit women in their cultural milieu to examine their victim-position. Some of the protagonists are seen to resist oppression as in The Edible Woman of Atwood. The resistance or passivity of the victims acquire equal significance in the works of these writers.

The colonial past of Canada and India serves as a backdrop for examining the theme of victimization. The American influence on Canada is pervasive in Atwood's novel Surfacing. 'Americanism' is examined as a colonial instinct that acts as a predatory force on the nature and economy of Canada.

Atwood treats woman and nature as victims. Man is the victor and woman and nature are the victims. The infiltration of nature is a common occurrence in the modern times. This is depicted as the cause of industrialization and urbanization. The contrast between the narrator's past and present in Surfacing, is a contrast between the rural and urban life. Das also laments the loss of the glory of her childhood-days. She had imbibed the splendour of nature during her childhood. The images surrounding Nalapat, her ancestral home is replete with the beauty of nature. But when

she grew up, she became estranged from the colourful images of her childhood.

Atwood and Das cannot be categorized under any school of feminists. No doubt, they witnessed the turbulence of feminist movement. They do not consider themselves as feminists. Nevertheless, they project their feminist concerns in their works. They articulate the gender-specific concerns of women. They protest against the patriarchal forces that stifle the self and restrict woman's autonomy.

The intrinsic worth of an artist is decided by the quality of the creative work than the quantity. Women writers have to struggle to establish their place in literature for two major reasons. The literary field has remained a male-bastion for long. Writers like Virginia Woolf have succeeded in stamping their influence, in this field. Atwood and Das have found their spaces in the Canadian and Indian literary fields. Besides, the conflicts between the two selves of a writer-as woman and as artist – act as impediments in their creative works. Atwood and Das have transcended these barriers by their contribution to literature.

The literary growth of these artists shows similarities in their progress. Both are recipients of literary awards, which enhance the worth of their

contribution. Das's religious conversion to Islam and her consequent change of name as Kamala Suraiyya do not seem to have affected the literary quality of her work. Her creative energy appears to be invigorated by her present religion, as seen in her collection of short stories Hamsadwani published in 2000, after she became Kamala Suraiyya.

The works of Das and Atwood is replete with ideas, which denote their social commitment as writers. They do not claim themselves as social reformers. But there is an undercurrent of significance related to those topics, which require immediate attention of the public. Their works point to the threat lingering on the family and the society at large. They explore the predatory forces in the society that are potential enough to destroy human life. But they do not offer any remedy for these problems.

Atwood and Das resort to their own techniques to encapsulate human experience. The narrative patterns mostly vary, though there are similarities in their thematic issues. Atwood, equipped with her excellence in academic record, makes use of devices to project her ideas. Besides, the writer employs these devices with a conscious effort. Metafiction, science-fiction, parody and binary opposites are some of the devices she has tried. She has also made use of the journey motifs for the exploration of the self.

Das, on the other hand, does not resort to such techniques. Her first person narratives mostly indicate the presence of the writer herself. The persona of the speaker increases the variety of the narrative shift between the first person and third person, indicating the identity crisis of the protagonist. Interestingly, some of the short stories of Das are re-creations of situations described in her autobiography. Hence, they appear as repetitions. But her narrative tone and the images built up within her works, conceal her technical imperfections. Both these writers have made use of the language to convey the relevance of female experiences. As women writers they have made use of language to dismantle andro-centric notions.

The contribution of Atwood and Das to literature proves that they have found a 'space' as women writers in a male dominated society. Their message for the women writers of today is to assert their individuality.

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