CONCLUSION

The challenge of this work was to reinterpret Atwood’s novels from a different perspective. In this work I have made an attempt to revisit the novels of Atwood from a new critical direction which offers a critique of the value structures and conflicting ideologies of contemporary society. The critics have often viewed her work in the light of feminism and Canadian signature. There have been fleeting references to her other concerns related to social, political and environmental issues. However the study seeks to establish that right from her first novel Atwood displayed her prime concern with the thought and direction of human life. She followed a universalist approach which combined opposing ideologies of environment and technology to present a holistic view of life. One can notice a preoccupation with human affairs and human condition despite the diverse themes and varying techniques that she applies to her fiction. As Linda Hutcheon gives a precise description of Atwood’s fictional method:

The postmodern novelists use and abuse the conventions of the realist novel. They ask us to rethink those conventions, this time as conventions, but also as ideological strategies. Such novelists destabilize things we used to think we could take for granted when we read novels. (Hutcheon p.21)

The aim of this work is not to break the old approach but rather to develop a new understanding of her world. It is just like the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes the richness of her art to bring out the political, economic, ecological and spiritual dimensions of human life. Her work envisions connections instead of separation. She celebrates the diversity of life. She rejects the ‘isms’ of domination and strives to re-conceive human identity by
seeking harmony in lifes dualities. She attempts to define the human place within the ecosystem by devoting considerable attention to nature and the non-human world. This at once calls for an ecocritical reading of her work.

Reading Atwood as an ecocritical writer broadens the scope and understanding of her philosophy of life. Hope and survival become an important element in her novels. They are explored in the thesis through the concept of wilderness. Her novels like all good works of Literature give a concrete expression to human culture. Through her novels we focus on a more rigorous interpretation and investigation of ecocritical theory and ecological wisdom which offers new hope for survival and existence by integrating diverse fields of knowledge. Just like the ecocritics Atwood challenges the cultural, political and ethical values of postmodern technological societies. From the discussion in the preceding chapters one can arrive at a convincing conclusion that according to Atwood, knowledge can be used to attain wealth and power but it is through self-knowledge that we can preserve the human values of love, hope, faith and wisdom. It is only through synthesis of love and knowledge that human perfection can be achieved. If scientific knowledge and technological advancement govern the rate of material progress of a culture it is the sense of truth, self and conscience that determine the path of survival or extinction of a culture.

The first chapter titled ‘Powerlines: Environment, Technology and Literature’ portrays what is the shape of modern society in the wake of new technology. It talks about the threefold crisis that we face today on account of our stepbrotherly treatment to our nature and the world around us: social, moral and ecological. Never before in history have we encountered so much pain at the mental level. It is because of our irresponsible attitude, because of our failure to
understand our integral connection with environment that we find ourselves lost
and alienated. The emergence of ecological thought has offered some hope to
cope up with the pressures of expansionist culture. The ecological worldview
nurtures the thought that the supreme goal of life is to love and respect
all forms of life. This goal should not be relinquished for progress and material
gain.

Atwood has displayed her consciousness over ecological issues in her novels.
She has always believed in the social function of art and in the writer’s
responsibility to her readers:

If you think of a book as an experience, as almost the equivalent of having the
experience, You’re going to feel some sense of responsibility as to what
Kinds of experience you are going to put people through. (Conversations
p.151)

The second chapter ‘Technology and Human Behaviour: Consumerism and
Identity Crisis in Atwood’s The Edible Woman’ makes a thought-provoking
observation on human behaviour under the impact of technology. As
technology simplifies human life, simultaneously it transforms human attitudes.
This chapter opens up human world in such a way as to evoke a portrait of an
age that deals with technology and consumerism. The central character is
mirrored in context of her concerns of a larger consumerist society which has
sharply transformed humans into machines. The novel unfolds the reality of
capitalism: the vicious combat between money and man. It reveals how
business practice breeds new ground for gender politics, power plays and
cannibalism. In a real sense it is an observation on how human behaviour is
governed by external changes. The human in the maze of speeding technology
mourn over the loss of personal and socio-cultural identity. Anorexia, madness,
identity crisis are the symptoms of a society that is fed on purely material advantage and fake identity. The anxiety of Marian can be linked to Friedan's observation on female neurosis which Atwood's novel explores with such imaginative insight:

If the human organism has an innate urge to grow, to expand and become all it can be, it is not surprising that the bodies and the minds of healthy women begin to rebel as they try to adjust to a role that does not permit this role.(p.292)

Of all the diagnosis of Marian's anorexia, the closest could be what Caskey calls 'a thought disorder' (Caskey, p. 181) where body's refusal to eat forms part of a discourse of hysterical protest.. It is an example of disturbed female vision which signals of collapse of boundaries between personal trauma and social crisis. The personal is fused with the political as Marian's body speaks of the rebellion against the socialized feminine identity. As Freud has shown the body evades the repression of conscious will by speaking out in the language of metaphor so Marian's anxiety is manifested first in her attempt to run away or escape from being shot by Peter's camera or gun and later in refusal to eat or drink. The cannibalism motif which carries through to the end with the cake is a sign of hallucinatory displacement, where metaphor implies Marian's unconscious fear of becoming a consumable commodity.

The third chapter 'Technology Survival and Speculation: The Paradox of being Human' carries forward the theme of blurring boundaries between man and machine. The attitudinal shift and changing pattern of human behaviour is analyzed through the mode of 'Futurist Speculative' fiction. Margaret Atwood commented in an Interview in context to her The Handmaids Tale:
It's about what happens at the intersection of several trends, all of which are with us today: the rise of right-wing fundamentalism as a political force, the decline in the Caucasian birth rate in North America and Northern Europe, and the rise in fertility.

Birth-defect rates, due, some say, to increased chemical pollutant and radiation levels, as well to sexually-transmitted diseases.

*Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx Crake* expose the issues related to the control and power of technology. They question the limits of technological intervention in human life. They caution us of the threat of being overpowered by technology. If we donot review our attitude towards nature and technology the extinction of human race seems inevitable. The regret for environmental and cultural damage is not enough. What really needs to be done is to constantly monitor technological growth, visualize its long term impact and check the misuse of technology. The only human survivor Snowman in *Oryx and Crake* implies the negative manifestation of genetic engineering and biotechnology. In an interview Atwood commented about gene splicing:

If you are going to do it on humans, what you have to ask yourself is, do you want the human race to remain human? (Keenan par. 25).

Stephen Dunning more specifically defines Atwood's purpose: “While Oryx and Crake may not offer much by way of substantial hope it stands as a clear warning of what we must hope to avoid”(Dunning, p. 98)

Hope and presence of a Survival instinct truly define the human spirit which has the power to emerge out of adversity.
It is clear that Atwood is not against science or technology but it is the uncontrolled use of technical power that disturbs her. It is the extraordinary faith in technical strength that becomes the cause of her anxiety. The environmental pollution and destruction of nature are the prime cause of her worry. Her concern is to save humanity from both degradation and degeneration. She makes it quite clear in an interview that we need to set our priorities and check our desire for more: ‘It is not Biotech that’s dangerous,” She claims. “It is people’s fears and desires.”

Both novels emphasize on the role of history in defining our future. The purpose of narrating the two dystopias in past tense is to tell us that it is high time that we learn lessons from our past else very soon the Homo Sapiens would become nothing but part of history.

This situation can be avoided by adhering to the principles of ecological thought and deep ecology. Atwood shows us the path of re-construction of human life through ecocentrism. *Surfacing* reaffirms her faith in the strength of ecological worldview. This follows from the discussion that emerges in the ‘fourth’ and ‘fifth’ chapter. It establishes that the chief cause of all human crises is its separation from nature. In nature is hidden the key to all human problems. The recognition of nature as a potential life-giving force is the essence of this discussion. It tells us about the strong link between man and nature. We must adopt the twin process of recognition of and identification with nature. We must view ourself as part of nature and prevent the process of domination of nature. Reconciliation and not destruction should be the aim of life. It traces a multilayered process of rehabilitation of dislocated and damaged humanity by adopting an ecological attitude where reverence for all forms of life, a commitment to love and trust and fulfillment of moral and social responsibility are asserted as prime values. All this can be achieved through self-realization.
which gives us true knowledge of our real place in the universe as Atwood says, “We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.” (Survival p.19).

Atwood through her art shows her profound faith in Environmental philosophy. She has applied concepts of balance, imbalance, symmetry, growth and harmony in her novels which draw their inspiration from the basics of ecocritical thought. We can appreciate her effort and look for valuable insights in her work to solve many problems ailing the modern society.