PREFACE

The passage from agriculture to industry, from the village to the town and from town to city has elevated science, debased art...... taken from us many of our most cherished beliefs and given us in exchange a mechanical and fatalistic philosophy of life.

Will Durant (The Mansion of Philosophy)

Industrialization, urbanization, globalization and advances in technology in the last few decades have drastically changed the face of human society. With the emergence of enlightenment and development of a rationalist - scientific thought the world was divided into two groups the rationalists and the spiritualists. The publication of Darwin's 'Origin of Species' in 1869 set forward the never-ending debate on the question of origin of man. It challenged the religious beliefs of man. Moreover it added a new dimension to the study of man as not just a humble creation of God but as a Homo-Sapiens, the embodiment of the most refined specie in the process of evolution. In the wake of new theories and upcoming branches of science and technology the idea of being human was redefined. With unprecedented growth in science and technology in the last few decades human life has undergone a remarkable transformation. The flight from simple rustic to high-tech urban is the result of economic and technical excellence. The conquest of moon, the strength of nuclear power, the luxury of mobiles, internet and robots along with developments in biotechnology and man technology have brought dramatic changes not only in overall lifestyle but also in our behaviour.

The dilemma of modern man is the attempt to remain human in a mechanical age. In an attempt to adapt to the new technology one is so involved that the world outside this cocoon of virtual reality appears to be meaningless. What is more disturbing is that as man keeps attaining ever
new heights, each time he moves away from his roots. Filled with pride for his new achievements he develops an utter disregard for not only his surroundings but also his fellow-humans. The root cause of such an attitude is the feeling of superiority, the myth of becoming supreme of being omniscient and omnipotent, almost God-like. The desire to play God gives a sense of empowerment, the authority to create, to preserve, to destroy. As pride and passion are driven alike man finds himself on a pleasure run with little knowledge of the dangers that await him.

With increasing demand on nature and excessive plundering of natural resources, the earth is depleted of its richness and diversity. Emission of harmful gases, industrial waste, nuclear radiation, poaching and deforestation for material gain have posed severe threat to the existence of planet earth. It is almost like being at the mouth of an active volcano which can erupt anytime.

As environmentalists and ecologists raise concerns for destruction of land at the same time they also identify the causes of destruction. It is the dichotomy in our vision that fails us to perceive the truth. We are unable to realize that the destruction of nature is essentially linked with the destruction of human life. Technology can empower but it can also overpower. Man, made technology, but today technology shapes up human identity. The race for material gain has taken away the inherent human qualities of love, care and understanding. The corruption, discrimination, manipulation and domination mark the identity of modern man. As the chasm between abundance and scarcity, environment and technology, materialism and spirituality, reason and faith deepens further there is a heightened mood of despondency, chaos, anxiety and frustration. We feel alienated and rootless. This mental pressure impairs our vision, our power of reason and judgement.
To overcome this dichotomy we need to understand that just as reason, intellect, sensation and consciousness are part of human brain, similarly conscience and spirituality are intimately related to human make-up. It is this attribute of human personality that truly distinguishes humanity from all other animals. Scientists have studied humanity for years. They have identified so many aspects of what it is to be human from our genetic to our social interactions, our behaviour to our psychology, our intellect to our spirituality.

There are three fundamental questions of human existence:

1. Who am I?
2. Where did I come from?
3. Where am I going?

These questions may be answered from a spiritual or a scientific perspective. However, we must realize that they are not separate enquiries; they are indissolubly linked by the humanity from which they arise. The dichotomy occurs because people think that there is only one aspect scientific or spiritual. The rationalist neglects the spiritual whereas the spiritualist overlooks the rational existence of fact. But in nature there is no separation. It possesses both the rational and the spiritual. The reconciliation between the contradictory forces should be the goal of human life.

It is here where the development of Ecocritical thought has helped immensely to bridge the gap. 'Ecocriticism' or 'Green Writing' is that branch of knowledge which helps unite the dualities of life. It integrates diverse streams of learning to give a holistic view of life. Ecological viewpoint dismantles the myth of human superiority over all other forms of life. It tells man that he is an integral part of the universe, just like the plants, animals, flowers, rain, trees, sky and the sunshine. It is not domination but harmony that makes life beautiful.
Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Cheryll Glotfelty). It is also known as 'Green Writing'. The terms are used to denote a critical approach which began in the USA in late 1980's and in the UK in early 1990's. In the USA the acknowledged founder is Cheryll Glotfelty Co-editor with Harold Fromm of a key collection of helpful and definitive essays entitled the Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (University of Georgia Press, 1996). She is also the co-founder of the Association for Literature and Environment.


Ecocriticism takes the literary bearing from the major nineteenth century American writers whose works celebrate nature, the life force and the wilderness. They are Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). The U.K. version of Ecocriticism or 'Green Studies' takes its bearing from the British Romanticism of the 1790. The founding figure was Jonathan Bate, author of Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (Routledge, 1991).

While the American writing is celebratory in tone, the British variant tends to be more 'minatory' warning us of environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial and neo-colonial forces.

The Canadian author Margaret Atwood (b. 1939) has contributed significantly to the development of ecocritical thought. The chief concern of
this work is to explore the human dimensions of Environment and Technology in Margaret Atwood's novels under the light of Ecocriticism, with special reference to:

2. *Surfacing* (1972)

The thesis begins with a discussion on how issues on environment and technology have been vividly portrayed in literature. Literature has served as a platform to enter into meaningful debates and discussions over scientific growth and environmental philosophy. This discussion allows scope for the textual analysis of Margaret Atwood's novels and to discover in her art a fascinating interplay of environment, technology and human life. The prime purpose of this worked is to locate the ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective of Atwood's environmental philosophy. This work also attempts to show how Atwood's environmental ethics have added a new dimension to ecological thought. The work addresses some of the concerns like:

1. How does Atwood portray the parallel connection between nature and man?
2. How local and cultural factors interact with human nature to cause ecological problems?
3. What is the impact of technology on human behaviour?
4. How can the ecological consciousness help in the reconstruction of life and human values?

The work focuses on a plethora of questions that Atwood raises in her novels, specially those related to the ethical values of the world we inhabit.
today. The aim is to see how Atwood's vision and philosophy help us develop a new understanding of ourselves and the world around.

The thesis is divided into five chapters:

1. Powerlines: Environment, technology and literature.

   It focuses on the conflict of environment and technology as it figures in the literary discourse. It shows how writers and novelists have responded to technology and environment and how this interaction has produced both positive and negative effects in human life. The glorious achievements in science and technology motivated the writers to write utopias featuring the ideal world. However with the destruction of land, environmental pollution, threat to nature and the loss of human values there is a marked development of ecological writing. The development of ecocritical thought in literature has largely contributed to the spread of ecological consciousness.

   As a consequence of modern life and new technology both humans and nature suffer alike. Never ever in history has man faced such crisis which is three fold:

   (i) ecological (destruction of nature)

   (ii) cultural (consumerism, greed, domination, manipulation, alienations)

   (iii) spiritual (loss of values, lack of conscience)

   It calls for a re-evaluation of the values, ethos and life-style of the modern man.


   It focuses on the human interaction with technology and the impact of technology on human behaviour. It talks about the plenitude of choices available and the confusion that arises out of too many choices. Immersed in
a world of gadgets and technical devices the world seems nothing but a space for free trade, marketing and consumption. Even the relationships and human identity is commoditized in such a world. The Chapter particularly focuses on the issues of:

1. Gender - equations
2. Power-plays
3. Consumerist culture and cannibalism.

The chapter is analysed from the three perspectives of consumption, urbanization and industrialization and how all these govern human behaviour.

Chapter 3: Technology, survival and speculation: The Paradox of Being Human

It questions the limits of human expansion? This chapter is based on the use and abuse of technology. It raises concerns related to power and control of new technology. It is a meditation on how far can man rely on technology and what is the limit and extent to which technology should be put to use. As we move from humanism to post-humanism, we find the 'organic' being replaced by the 'mechanical'. The reigns of power are being shifted from man to machine. The transformation from man to machine is charting a new course of life. However the rate of progress has led us to a point where the catastrophic impact of technology seems almost inevitable. The paradox of being human is to own or to disown the responsibility. It is high time we develop an ecological sensibility or else be prepared to face the risk of extinction.
Chapter 4: Reconstruction of Human Values through Nature in Atwood's Surfaces

This chapter is about reconstruction of human values through nature. It explores the different stages of integrating oneself with nature. It involves:

1. Return to nature
2. Respect for nature.
3. Identification with nature.

This seeks to establish an integral connection between man and nature. It views how issues of domination of man are linked to domination of nature. It is harmony with nature that will help regain the balance and rhythm of life.

Chapter 5: Environmental Philosophy and Atwoodian Vision.

It seeks to establish the presence of an ecocritical thought in Atwood's writings, particularly her novels. It focuses on Atwood's ecological philosophy and environmental ethics. It defines her faith in nature. It explores how Atwood has applied a range of ecocritical concepts in her novels. Her vision calls for the creation of an ecological society. Her voice is clear and distinct - we can perceive her message to move from egocentrism to ecocentrism. She views a sacred dimension in nature the presence of a life affirming force which helps as to connect to our surroundings and ourselves. Nature to her has the power of regeneration and re-creation, hence it is the source of life and energy.

With this knowledge and background the thesis attempts to explore the 'Human' dimensions of environment and technology in the novels of Margaret Atwood.

The conclusion is based on the facts, ideas and insights gained from the thorough study of her novels in the preceding chapters. The study
convincingly establishes the presence of an ecocritical understanding of life in Atwood's novels. It also observes that there is an underlying message in all the novels which reflects a deep understanding of modern life and offers solutions that might be useful in combating with the evils of life.

The end-references have been provided at the end of each chapter. At the end is a list of selected bibliography that has been used for their research work. I have used the 2006 edition of 'MLA' in my thesis for providing reference and citation.