Chapter V

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been proposed to present the findings. It also states comparison of the novels of Margaret Atwood with those of the contemporary writers. Finally it tries to prove the supremacy of Atwood as a novelist and an estimate of her art. It also explores the need and justification of the research work with its pedagogical importance. It states further topics on Atwood’s novel for further research work.

The Canadian novel takes a new turn in the 1960s with the appearance of women novelists who tend to write more as women than as patriots. The women’s movement has provided many novelists with the courage and motivation to break out of traditional patriarchal forms to depict how women have been abused, exploited and oppressed. Their novels move towards the discovery of the self and women’s encounter with the world. They are concerned with exploration and survival and tend to project the image of a woman who is confident, intelligent and assertive. The aim of women writing in Canada is to bring about remarkable changes in the lives of Canadian women and society. They want gender equality in Canadian society. They are, improving women’s life-chances and have the sense that women can contribute to the building of a major peaceful caring world.

Margaret Atwood challenges the Canadian English novel along with contemporary women writers like Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Marian Engel who raised their voice against the gender-based injustices and proposed feminist alternatives through
their writing. The main objective of Mavis Gallant’s writing is development of specific situation and reconstruction of the state of mind or of heart. Her stories focus on expatriate men and women who have come to feel lost or isolated.

Margaret Laurence’s fiction is concerned with themes of disinheritance, dispossession, roots and orphanage. The protagonists in her fiction typify the common people particularly Canadian in the contemporary world. She advocates a more balanced view of man-woman relationship. She cares a lot about her male characters. She believes in individual freedom to both men and women.

In a fellow woman writer, Alice Munro’s writing a recurring theme is the woman’s search for self-understanding and personal fulfilment. She depicts man-woman relationship from the woman’s point of view. She is concerned with human experience and the record of cultural dimensions of female sexuality. The chief characteristics of her art are simplicity and realism. She has presented the battle of the sexes in vivid, complex images of women and men as powerful and powerless through her stories. She believes that there is a change coming in the lives of girls and women. Thus like Margaret Atwood, she begins with the traditional female concerns with personal relationships and the details of daily life and expands these concerns to include a wider and wider path of human experience.

Marian Engel is concerned with women’s experiences and perception of the world, female identity and the social constraints on its development, female subjectivity and self, the mother-daughter relationship and forces opposing women’s artistic self-expression.
And Margaret Atwood is the first major novelist of Canada who attempts to focus on the new-woman as self-aware, independent, seeking to evolve an identity of her own. In her writing, she systematically thematizes the personal quest for fulfilment as involved in a communal quest for cultural identity. With expressing revolutionary, realistic, humanistic and majority optimistic view of life, she challenges the contemporary women writer like Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant who raised their voices against the gender-based injustices and proposed feminist alternatives through their writing.

Next, on the basis of the consideration of the novels of Margaret Atwood from the critical point of view, the consideration is drawn that the novelist under scrutiny establishes distinctive identity as a novelist. She is one of the serious novelists of the age who has successfully created space for herself as Canada’s much loved, respected and most popular novelist of the present era. To view Margaret Atwood as a novelist of the contemporary period with distinctive art of writing, it will be in fitness to consider her place among the contemporary writers. Atwood is usually compared to the important Canadian and non-Canadian novelists like Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Marian Engel and Beryl Bainbridge for the use of the main aspects of the novel.

Atwood is supreme among the English novelists in use of titles of all her novels which are meaningful, suggestive and metaphorical. The title of her first novel, *The Edible Woman* suggests that the woman is not as food and as an object. The second novel, *Surfacing* is also a well developed metaphor in its title. Title, *Bodily Harm* concerns with the bodily harm of powerless women by powerful men. The words in the title of the novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* suggest the tale means an
experience of a whole particular handmaid’s class in Gilead. Metaphorically the *Cat’s Eye* is the eyes of the protagonist which can see in darkness like cat for own retrospection. The title the novel, *The Robber Bride* indicates the Demonic woman, the protagonist — Zenia.

Atwood’s novels have always highlighted the art and indeed the artifice of storytelling, where the real world is transformed and reinvented within the imaginative spaces of fiction. There is Snowman, Atwood’s only one male storyteller in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood’s fiction draws attention to the ways in which stories may be told. She has explained that one must learn what is not said is often more important than what is said. Story within story is the main feature of Atwood’s novels.

The setting of Atwood’s novel is global or multinational. She very successfully and conveniently provides the setting as a background to precede personal, social, national and universal themes. She gives vivid description and colorful real life exposure to the setting, along with the well-known places like Toronto, Rom, London, Caribbean Island, Gilead, Cambridge, Britain, New York, Vancouver, Port Ticonderoga and Avilion. Above all she is highly successful in presenting the canvass of Toronto, which is her home town. Her novels integrate variety of setting.

Atwood is an extremely versatile writer and her greatness as a novelist lies in every novel she takes up the conventions of a different narrative form — autobiographical novel, gothic romance, fairy tale, spy thriller, science fiction and historical novel. Her writing insistently challenges the limits of traditional genres. Regarding the plot-structure of her novels it can be said that each plot is woven in such a manner that it brings the different genres of novels together.
Like Beryl Bainbridge’s early autobiographical novels *Harriet Said*, *The Dressmaker*, *The Bottle Factory Outing*, *A Quite Life* Margaret Atwood has written *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man* and *Cat’s Eye*. The realistic and quest novel, *The Edible Woman* is structured like a journey. *Lady Oracle* and *The Robber Bride* are the Gothic novels. *The Edible Woman*, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* are the feminist novels. Atwood has applied plot-structure of science fiction in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*.

Through her twelve novels to date, Atwood has shown extraordinary talent for surprising her readers with her ongoing narrative experiments. In fact, her novel writing career shows all the qualities of a good narrative. As far as the narrative aspects in Atwood’s novels are concerned, it can be said that Atwood is a master technician who has used different techniques of narration to present the complexity of modern world. She has used the first person narration, third person narration, two way narration, oral narration, prison narration, multiple narration and diary form to narrate the actions of her novels.

For example, *The Edible Woman* is narrated by the protagonist in the first and third person singular, past tense. The novel, *Surfacing* contains first person singular and third person plural narration in present-past-present tense. In *Lady Oracle* multi-named protagonist narrates the story in second person address. Narration is shifted from first person to third person and from one crisis to another like *The Edible Woman* in *Bodily Harm*. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, this novel is narrated orally by a young Handmaid named, Offred.

The present study also shows that the protagonists and other characters in the novels of Margaret Atwood provide a map of the
spiritual condition of modern Canadian fiction. The most interesting aspect of her novels is that her characters and their ability consciously or unconsciously to wound others that makes them not as fictional characters but as live human beings. Atwood is a true painter who has painted a vast gallery of major and minor characters with same ability. She presents alienated and isolated characters. Through her characters Atwood projects the real social condition of Canada.

Margaret Atwood’s novels deal with women’s experience in a male dominated culture. They present women caught in oppressive stereotypes from which some women struggle to create a female space for themselves. She creates women characters that are forced to reconstruct themselves in courageous form as they seek to establish their relationship to the world and to the individuals around them. This may be done through autonomy of thought, through self-definition and self-reconstruction of one’s own history, through creative composition, oral or written, through bonding among women and through a refusal to the role of subjugation.

Through her protagonists, Atwood has revealed not only the stereotyped perception of women and the traditional society’s expectations from them but she has also shown the changing man-woman relationships. She has tried to show how women are trying to redefine themselves. She also tries to establish the fact that the two sexes are complementary and neither is complete without the other. She does not desire a matriarchal society to replace the patriarchal with her characters.

Atwood’s female protagonists — Marian McAlpin in The Edible Woman; Joan Foster, the writer in Lady Oracle; Elizabeth, a house wife in Life Before Man; a young journalist, Rennie Wilford in Bodily Harm,
Offred, a handmaid in *The Handmaid’s Tale*; the painter, Elaine Risley in *Cat’s Eye*; the Demonic woman Zenia in *The Robber Bride* and the murderer, Grace Marks in *Alias Grace* are unforgettable images of times who appears to be universal. All they are representatives of their own class. And many male characters are like Heathcliff in Jane Austen’s *Wuthering Heights*.

From *The Edible Woman* onwards, her novels have focused on contemporary social and political issues. They accommodates Atwood’s major thematic concerns: her scrutiny of relations between men and women, which she has always constructed as a form of power politics; the representation of women’s lives, their bodies, their fantasies and their search for identity; her engagement with questions of national identity and Canada’s international relations, especially with the United States; her wider humanitarian concerns with basic human rights, and her environmental interests and increasingly urgent warnings about global warming, pollution and the risks of biotechnology. Each of her novel deals with serious themes.

Like Bainbridge’s *Watson Apology* and *According to Queeney*, a plea for a balanced man-woman relationship is the theme of Atwood’s *The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The same theme of *Sweet Williams*, Atwood focuses on the social problem of unmarried mothers in *The Edible Woman, Surfacing* and *Life Before Man*. The effect of digital technologies runs through the *Oryx and Crake*. The theme of *The Year of the Flood* is environmental degradation from manmade causes.

The use of imagery and symbolism is Margaret Atwood’s strong point, which is an internal aspect of the novels to give depth. They
forecast the forthcoming disaster waiting in the womb of future. By using mirror images, she reveals that art is not a mirror or representation of nature but a reflection of process of writing, reading and interpretation. The simple activities of Marian like drinking and sitting are expressed through local and particular animal imagery in *The Edible Woman*. The images of human get mixed with the images of animals in *Surfacing*.

The images of mirror in *Cat’s Eye* are a dominant motif in Elaine’s paintings as well as in her inner life. *The Robber Bride* is full of mirror images with Zenia on one side of the mirror and the three friends on the other. In *Alias Grace*, the protagonist, Grace Marks extends the war imagery to the bed that is not a peaceful place at least for women. Atwood uses the imagery of nature to explain the terms of survival and growth as well as oppression and death. The summer garden provides a sublimated image of Offred’s own repressed desires in *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Atwood’s novels express the various thematic issues through familiar and powerful symbols. Food and clothing are major symbols used to explore theme of *The Edible Woman*. Cake is a symbol of Peter’s destructive propensities and a substitute for Marian. In *Surfacing*, the fish is the symbol of wholeness, the unity between the mind and the body, emotion and reason for the protagonist. Then heron is the symbol of her psychological death. The scrabble game is the symbol of the freedom and restrictions for the protagonist, Offred in the novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Atwood’s concern has centered on the operations of power politics at every level, from national and international relations to the sexual politics of personal relationships. Indeed, over the period of forty-one
years since her first novel was published, Atwood’s own perspectives have changed in response to her widening international audience and changes in cultural politics on the international globalised scene as well as to shifts in Canadian social and political agendas. Her view of life expressed in novels is not only optimistic but also revolutionary, realistic, humanistic and political. She is a minute observer who never leaves any aspect of life untouched.

For example, in *The Edible Woman* Atwood discusses a young woman’s revolutionary rebellion against a modern, male-dominated world through food and eating. In *Surfacing* protagonist’s view of life is not only revolutionary but also optimistic. She has a new hope that a woman can emerge as a brave New Woman with a new courage to lead happy life. The novel, *Lady Oracle* leaves an optimistic note to the female writers whose voices are marginalized.

The novel, *Bodily Harm* shows Rennie’s feminist consciousness and her optimistic struggling into a new awareness of herself as a morally responsible human being. With revolutionary view of life Offred tells that one need’s to survive and to know about the human capacity in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Atwood gives the realistic view of life through the character of Grace Marks in the novel, *Alias Grace*. She also gives political message that don’t trust the scientist and big corporations to run the world for cultures and societies are always changing in *Oryx and Crake*. And in the latest novel, *The Year of the Flood* with optimistic view Atwood suggests to survive in an era of environmental destruction.

To sum up Atwood’s art as a potential writer, her innovative writing style proves her as one of the genuine novelists of the contemporary period. The study appraises her unique place among the
contemporary writers. During the novels of early phase Atwood is seen as a budding artist with some limitations of beginner, during the middle phase she has shown her potentiality as a mature novelist and it is during the later phase that she has shown great skill as an established reputed novelist who has handled every subject with vitality. The development through the budding artist to the mature serious novelist shows her identity as one of the most significant novelist of Canada.

The present research work considers the difficulties and requirements of the students, research scholars and teachers of Indian universities and to meet the need for teaching commonwealth literature. It is also a modest aid for teachers of English engaged in teaching literature. It will be found useful by students and teachers alike. It may also prove as a tentative rough track to new investigators to walk on to search and find out the great and noteworthy contribution in further research. Feminism in the novels of Margaret Atwood is the dominant recurring element. That is the topic for further research work.

To facilitate further the task of the research scholars, often hard pressed for time, the relevant critical material has been presented in a lucid and simple manner. A list of books consulted and drawn upon is appended at the end in the form of bibliography consisting of primary and secondary sources.