CHAPTER – V

Narrative Strategies

With the world becoming a global village and the literary movements easily migrating into different parts of the world, a commonality of approaches and devices bear some similarities in their writings. There are universal human behavior patterns, concepts and institutions on the basis of which literary comparisons are made between Atwood and Sivasankari and their narrative strategies. Their fiction is written in a mixed style combining realistic and romance elements. And as Grace comments, “It is a style well suited to the exploration of the contingency of life, the nature of language, and the duplicity of human perception” (80). This chapter concentrates on the authors’ approaches which illustrate the transcendency of their artistic and political stances and the narrative strategy becomes instrumental in their hands to present a clear perception of life. Though there are similarities in themes and views, they do differ in certain aspects of narration which are also highlighted.

A striking similarity between Atwood and Sivasankari is their vast majority of principal characters who are women, many of whom seek relief from their object position within the microcosmic political system of family and friends. The narrative methods of Sivasankari both indicate the characters' perceptions of their
positions within relationships and determine the success or failure of their struggles to escape or improve difficult relationships. Atwood being very much aware that “self-definitions can take place only within the very traditions that are being questioned” (Howells 3) deconstructs and displaces the traditional authority structures by demythifying myths and by writing anti-gothic and dystopian novels. In her novels, Atwood tries out resistance against social fixities through their protagonists or by portraying two contrasting women one who is conventional and the other unconventional. One of the ways in which Atwood deconstructs tradition is by means of expression, using the power of language. Atwood believes the The limits of my language are the limits of the world. While women writers of the last century had struggled to find adequate means of naming their authentic experiences, Atwood finds ways to overcome the discrepancy between language and experience. Through most of her protagonists who are involved with verbal or visual communication, Atwood expresses the power of language and also shows a constant questioning of formal categories. Yet she realizes that on the way to authenticity, “literary traditions have to be transformed in a process of perpetual revision” (Howells 20). As a result she rewrites and interweaves genres, uses fragmented or fantastic narrative forms with open or ambiguous endings. It is to be noted that all these features that are found in Atwood’s writings are not gender specific but gender distinctive.
In examining *The Edible Woman*, for example, it can be noticed that the ending has produced a range of critical interpretations, including positive as well as negative analysis by Atwood herself. Atwood's oppositional strategies dismantle and demystify the marriage ideal by laying bare the painful objectification and self-diminishment of women in a male-defined order against the traditional romance scenario. When the protagonist fashions the cake-woman, which scares off her suitors, she destroys the potential happy ending. On the other hand, by eating the cake herself, she takes a positive action, something which was impossible for her, she overcomes her eating disorder, and destroys the image of woman as consumable item.

The novel divides itself into three parts. In the first part Marian speaks in the first person singular; then in the second part, which constitutes the main body of the text (18 chapters), the voice shifts from first to third person singular and in the last part that is the last chapter the voice returns to the first person again. Marian tells us: “Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than his [Duncan's]” (*The Edible Woman* 278). In other words, the whole narrative is presented through Marian's eyes. The change in her language style and texture can be interpreted as a reflection of her changing psychological constitution. Not only does the split voice convey Marian's self-alienation but it also allows her to objectify her experience, to stand back from herself as it were, and it is through this distancing process that
she is able to emancipate herself from her initial role as victim. The metaphors Marian uses to describe herself further exemplify her progression towards reality. In the first part she claims that every time she goes to the supermarket she feels like a cow: “... she remembered an article she had read about cows who gave more milk when sweet music was played to them” (177). This is just one example of Atwood’s powerful analogy through which she depicts a brainless, compliant creature that produces but does not consume. She also describes herself as a sleepwalker: “These days, if she wasn’t careful, she found herself pushing the cart like a somnambulist, eyes fixed, swaying slightly, her hands twitching with the impulse to reach out and grab anything with a bright label” (177). Thus through a wise use of telling images Atwood pictures Marian stumbling, puppet-like, through a timeless dream where the strings of consumer advertising control her actions. In the second part, where Marian begins to make her own decisions, her world becomes more real, and more ordered. In the transition from dream to reality the speaker has managed to rectify her distorted perception of the world. Her individuality is initially so nullified by advertising that she never goes beyond staring at the surface of things.

Thus, what we have witnessed in this novel is the persona’s shift in language and her split voice, in first person and in third person which are skillfully used to express Marion’s sense of alienation and her transformation from acquiescence to autonomy, from victim to artist. When she is overwhelmed by the
onslaught of externals the syntax is often interrupted and embedded. As she begins to think more clearly the syntax is no longer interrupted by diversions and each sentence contains just one topic while numerous temporal adverbials reflect her ability to synchronize and order the external world. The verbs initially used to describe her movements are awkward, roofless and mechanical, her mind not being in touch with her body. With her transformation, that is, when her imaginative faculties interlace with her body, the verbs characterizing her movements are smooth, controlled and powerful.

Atwood’s novels – both those that deal with female artists and those that do not – are not filled, as one might expect, with women who confidently defy societal dictates and resolutely settle the genuine dilemma that the film *The Red Shoes* succeeds in conveying so graphically. Atwood does not let her protagonists off the hook easily when it comes to negotiating the tensions generated by trying to be both artist and wife. One of the ways Atwood chooses to depict – and even, at times, dramatize – this dilemma in her literature is through the interweaving of fairy-tale texts into her own texts. Atwood has openly acknowledged on numerous occasions in interviews the influence that the fairy-tale genre has had on her since early childhood, and it undoubtedly manifests itself as a driving force in her writing. Sharon Rose Wilson, in her comprehensive book on Atwood’s use of fairy-tale motifs, quotes Atwood as saying “it is difficult to create a fictional female character when our literary ancestress include, among mythic, comic-book,
nursery-rhyme, biblical, and mainstream literary stereotypes, mermaids with no tongues, Cinderellas with sackcloth and ashes, and Beauties with Beasts” (92). This is where Atwood the negotiator comes in. As Wilson continues: “Atwood goes beyond stereotype, however, sometimes ‘reversing’ and re-visioning fairy tales” (94). Atwood takes these mainstream literary stereotypes and, by masterfully integrating them into her writing, creates intertexts that (re)negotiate alternative readings of them. The result is a new kind of fairy tale heroine, one for whom marriage is hardly obsolete, but at the same time, one for whom marriage is certainly not an ultimate goal in life.

There are, then, two simultaneous acts of (re)negotiation going on in many of Atwood’s works. On the textual level, through predominantly female protagonists, Atwood portrays the terms and conditions that patriarchal society has imposed on them. In Atwood’s fictional worlds, the community of women (who are compelled to choose between fulfilling their creative potential and being wives-mothers) attempts to (re)negotiate this impasse constructed by the community of patriarchal forces that would insist they relinquish their ambitions and remain the attending muses they have been rather than the self-determining individuals (artists) they want to be. On the meta-textual level, there is a (re)negotiation between “literary” communities: on the one hand, contemporary Canadian women’s literature, and on the other, the canon of popular fairy tales (as recorded mainly by men). Atwood, in novels such as The Edible Woman, Lady
Oracle, and The Blind Assassin, (re)negotiates the message of those timeless
tale by integrating them into her work and subverting their seemingly
innocuous narratives. Thus she creates modern alternatives which prove to be, or
at least should prove to be, more pertinent for today’s post-feminist world. And as
Sherrill Grace observes, “Characteristic of Atwood’s narratives, The Edible
Woman is written in a mixed style; it uses the conventions of realism and
romance. This mixed style is both a delight and a difficulty in the novel as it can
also be in the more problematic vision of Surfacing” (87).

The novel Surfacing is a mixture of the doubleness and irony of The
Edible Woman, the Gothic features of Lady Oracle and the apocalyptic romance
of The Handmaid’s Tale. The influence of a number of fairy tales is also obvious
in Surfacing which help frame the fairy-tale archetype in the novel. But these
tales get transformed, subverted and reversed in the hands of Atwood. “Atwood
uses “The Golden Phoenix,” “The Fountain of Youth,” “The Magic Snake,” and
the closely related Grimm tales “The Golden Bird,” “The Water of Life,” and
“The White Snake” similarly to other intertexts” (Wilson 99-100). The quest
motif of the “The Golden Phoenix” is very obvious in Surfacing. The narrator,
like the golden Phoenix is symbolically caged in the circle games of power politics
but unlike the phoenix she lacks the regenerative power and remains mute for
most part of the novel. Apart from the forces outside, she is also imprisoned by her
own thoughts and beliefs and like Petit Jean of the story who has to face
dangerous beasts and monsters in his quest, the narrator has to deal with her own internal beasts of self-deception, repression and projection. The Persephone myth and its descent-ascent pattern are well employed in this novel. As Sherill Grace notes, “The narrator, a Persephone figure, must not only experience the underworld before returning to her Mother, but her descent also leads to the knowledge that she must henceforth embody both worlds; never again can she inhabit one or the other. This acceptance of duality, basic to the myth, informs each level of the narrative” (105). The themes of temptation, decapitation and cannibalism and the cycle of nature, fertility, death, metamorphosis and resurrection that feature in the “The Juniper Tree” are also evident in *Surfacing*. Atwood parodies these stories, gives symbolic meaning, dramatizes the narrator’s fragmentation and precipitates her transformation, her gender and country through a clever use of these stories.

The unique use of fairy tales as well as the debate over the form of *Surfacing* has gained significance for the novel. *Surfacing* is examined by different critics at different angles and critics like Josie P. Campbell, Sherrill Grace, and Jerome H. Rosenberg see it as a modern novel, “a well wrought urn rationally structured to chronicle the narrator's search for and discovery of her identity”(Kokotailo). But some critics like Robert Lecker, Eli Mandel, and Rosemary Sullivan read it as a post-modern fiction. In denying the validity of this integrated and resolved pattern, these critics suggest that the book is more of a
post-modern novel because it lacks such a definitely coherent and comprehensive structure. Yet they are all united in the belief that by the end of the novel, the narrator attains the ideal that Atwood called ‘some kind of harmony with the world’, Sherill Grace maintains that the narrator achieves a new and more hopeful wholeness in the final section of the book, specifying that by the end of *Surfacing*, the narrator has succeeded in her quest; she has found that she needs to begin a new, complete, and free life. Robert Lecker argues that in *Surfacing* there is a parody of all the conventions associated with 'search for identity' literature, maintaining instead that the narrator of *Surfacing* is reminded at every turn about the futility of believing that self-definition is possible. However, the strength of both modern and post-modern forms in the novel indicates that it ought to be read as both.

Atwood makes the formal characteristics of post-modern literature evident in *Surfacing* from the very start. The narrator begins: “I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire. But this is still near the city limits; we didn't go through, it's swelled enough to have a bypass, that's success.” Many of the qualities of form that distinguish postmodern from modern literature like inconsistency, incoherence, fragmentation, randomness, non-linearity, unpredictability, variety, and most important, the narrator's phenomenological participation in the course of events are obvious here.
The narrator is in direct, active, and creative contact with the details of her surroundings. From the fragmented account she gives, we are made aware that she suffers from a dissociation of head and body and the narrative that issues from such a narrator can only be non-linear and unpredictable in its variety and the strategy employed can only be a collage of narration, observation, speculation, and recollection. The narrator's mind wanders from one to another without a set purpose or an ordered design. Her written narrative moves from one to another in accordance with the patterns of association that are taking place in her mind at the moment that she observes, speculates, or remembers. Also, interspersed throughout the collage are occasional moments of inconsistency and incoherence, most notably when the narrator recounts, between two personal recollections, the episode that took place before she was born. Furthermore, the collage is shot through with fragmentary images seemingly chosen at random. They come not only from different environments but also from different periods of time. Finally, it should be noted that Atwood’s choice of diction and style and the sound of the narrator's own syntax reinforces this sense of fragmentation and randomness. Throughout the novel, she presents her reality in staccato phrases strung together with semi-colons and commas and the choppy rhythms of her narration emphasize the discontinuous and non-linear way in which the narrator tells her story. It should be noted that these qualities of post-modern form are by no means confined to the opening of *Surfacing* but continues even as the novel proceeds. In accordance with her unplanned and unstructured course of action, her narrative
continues its unpredictable, non-linear, fragmentary, and occasionally inconsistent course. When the narrator finally descends into a state resembling madness near the end of the book, these post-modern qualities are even more prevalent and more forceful.

As Philip Kokotailo observes in the article “Form in Atwood’s Surfacing”, the formal characteristics of both modern and postmodern literatures are evident in Surfacing. Despite the narrator's active and creative involvement in the process of the moment, she finally achieves a comprehensive, ordered vision of her life. Despite her non-linear, fragmentary, and inconsistent narration, her account finally coheres into an integrated whole. Yet even though such a patterned structure is the distinctive quality of modern literary form, Surfacing is not a perfect modern novel either because Atwood does not create a narrator who gradually constructs a vision that imposes a comprehensive order on her universe; she creates a narrator who destroys one. The novel begins with an elaborately patterned structure, controlled and integrated order that the narrator has imposed on the reality of her own life but the movement of the novel is not a progressive development toward full realization and integration of the self. Instead it is the progressive exorcism of false selves. Initially, the narrator presents herself as an only child whose older brother drowned just before she was born. She claims to have been married, to have given birth to a baby boy, to have abandoned her husband and child, and finally to have been divorced from her husband who maintains custody of their
son. Most important of all, she has come to believe these lies. She has fully assimilated this false version of her past, which she herself invented, into her present psyche. It is indeed an elaborate structure, a well wrought urn. She wears a wedding ring on occasion, claiming that "it's useful for landladies" (23). She recounts an image-filled description of both her wedding (87-88) and the birth of her child (80). Only by the end of Part I, the narrator has begun the process of deconstruction. She starts to correct herself, forcefully. "That's a lie, my own voice says out loud. I think hard about it, considering it, and it is a lie" (73). She takes the important first step toward the destruction of the protective system she has fabricated; she admits her brother did not drown, that their mother saved him. Finally, after having acknowledged the reality of her true past in all its horror, she openly admits that she has constructed a false reality to protect herself from it “It was all real enough, it was enough reality for ever, I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I'd lived in it until now”(143-44).

As Nathalie Cooke rightly observes, “There are two narratives developed in this novel .... At one level, the first narrative is developed chronologically. We follow the Surfacer’s search for her father as the clues appear and the evidence builds over the first week of her stay on the island.... The second narrative,
involving the Surfacer’s heightening intuition, is not developed chronologically. Rather, memories and visions appear as they are triggered by particular emotions or conversations….If time in the first narrative moves chronologically, then in the second narrative time is (loosely) cyclical” (Critical Companion 68-69). Surfacing is, thus, a kind of well wrought urn, but a uniquely different one. The integrated and resolved pattern which is a distinctive quality of modern literary form runs, here, completely counter to the norm. The book is structured to lead not to an order imposed on reality but instead to an order stripped away from reality. However, just as the post-modern qualities of form do not suffice to consider it as a strictly post-modern novel, its modern qualities of form likewise do not suffice for it to consider it a strictly modern novel. The result is a book that straddles the boundary between the two, refusing to be classified as entirely one or the other. Thus, the post-modern qualities of form evident in Surfacing are not very striking because they are tempered by a more traditional modernism. Its modern qualities of form do not prevail as they do in Atwood's other fiction, because they are compromised by the post-modern qualities. Examining it as entirely one or the other, leads to an incomplete analysis. Atwood had made a beautiful fusion of both modern and postmodern literary forms.

Like Surfacing, Atwood’s Lady Oracle (1976) is also non-linear in narrative. It begins from the ending describing the faked death of the protagonist and it ends at its beginning. Atwood would have realized that linear plot is not
suitable to describe a character like Joan who is highly unpredictable. **Lady Oracle** is also a metafiction, a story within a story. The protagonist herself authors Gothic stories, writes a book of poetry called Lady Oracle. Influence of Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shallot” is also obvious in this novel. Like the Lady of Shallot, Joan is also an artist figure and Joan’s faked suicide could be seen as a comic version of Lady of Shallot’s dramatic gesture of plunging into the river. This novel parodies not only this ballad but other ghost stories and Gothic and Romance novels. A parody of a number of narrative styles is also seen in this novel. It is rich in variations on established literary forms and conventions. For its overall formal structure, Atwood draws on the *Kunstlerroman* (“artist-novel”), a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, which traces the education and growth of a gifted hero from childhood to maturity. However, in portraying the development of a young artist who is not only female but also Canadian, Atwood at once departs from the traditionally male and Euro-centered generic model. The story of Joan Foster further plays with, and against, traditions. It is a work composed of many disparate parts. Among the literary precedents evoked in **Lady Oracle**, two distinct yet interrelated types of narrative serve as an especially fecund source for the predicaments and ironies that shape the protagonist’s *bildung*: first, Bluebeard tales such as Charles Perrault’s “Blue Beard” and the Grimms’ “Fitcher’s Bird”, in which serially monogamous men murder their wives and, generally, get away with it; and second, gothic romances and their parodic counterparts such as Jane Austen’s **Northanger Abbey**, in which heroines overcome an ominous
environment, innumerable obstacles, and menacing strangers in order to find happiness in the embrace of a handsome, strong, nurturing, and oftentimes wealthy men. Ostensibly, tales of the first type do not easily fit into the popular romance tradition. Atwood incorporates elements of Anderson’s literary tale, “The Little Mermaid,” in this comic but highly satirical metafiction. Atwood also parodies the moralistic story of “The Red Shoes”. Like Karen in this story who “dances until her feet are “torn and bleeding” and submits to voluntary amputation, Joan cuts her feet dancing on her balcony and volunteers for symbolic amputation of will and talent” (Wilson 127). Additional elements in this scenario include tonality or atmosphere mainly of horror and terror followed by exultation in more traditional plots, or shame and embarrassment in parodic versions.

There are several basic elements that link the gothic variety of romance fiction with the Bluebeard story and these elements form a pattern—the Bluebeard syndrome—in which four stereotypical characters tend to appear. The two pivotal roles are a persecuted young woman and a mysterious, possibly dangerous man. The two optional roles are a helper or rescuer figure and a mad, bad, or very unlucky wife. The Bluebeard syndrome in Lady Oracle occurs on different narrative levels. First, at several intervals throughout the main story, Joan works on the manuscript of a gothic romance that unfolds together with the romances of her life. Secondly, she also recalls excerpts from her previously published books abounding in lavish period detail and diction; thirdly, Joan evokes the process of
writing a poem of high-flown passion and intensity whose title is **Lady Oracle**. In general, the embedded texts in which Joan recalls or quotes from her works are doubly distinguished—both graphically (by italics) and stylistically—from Joan’s usual speaking voice. Slanted and stylized textual segments thus intermittently interrupt the block-letter assemblage of her past life. At all of these levels, her ways of seeing and representing the relationships between men and women are mediated by components of the Bluebeard syndrome. Generically, like **Surfacing**, it would be more accurate to describe **Lady Oracle** as a collage rather than as portrait of an artist as a young woman. Joan’s multiple identities—self-effacing wife (“Mrs. Arthur Foster”), closet writer of costume Gothics (“Louisa K. Delacourt”), and renowned author of a book of visionary poetry (“Joan Foster”)—are the by-products of many institutionalized literary and social models. Joan exists partly as a central narrative agent and partly as a nexus or repository of language and culture. She constructs worlds and yet is also constructed by them. At stake here is something more than an authorial display of postmodernist temperament and virtuosity. “The intricate weave of the Bluebeard syndrome into the heterogeneous narratives that constitute **Lady Oracle** dramatizes the complex exchanges between “pop culture” and “something real” in women’s lives. More specifically, Atwood explores the unsettling transpositions between literary and literal romance, on the one hand, and between imagined and experienced aggression against women, on the other” (Wilson 251).
Along with the elements of gothic, embedded in this novel are the aspects of comedy. Though Atwood classifies The Edible Woman, Surfacing and Lady Oracle as anti-comedies, the structure of Lady Oracle fits more into the bare outline of the actual structure of Shakespearean comedy - the sequence of social disorder, exile into the green world, reintegration, and return to natural order. While it does not result in the healing of society, it does result in the healing of the individual to survive in that society. The "right couple" may not get married, the social order may not be affirmed, but by the end of the novel the principal character has achieved self-insight. Atwood's denouements leave her narrators - like Shakespeare's Miranda - in a deeply-flawed world about which they still hold some illusions. Lady Oracle's Joan Foster is, in fact, a parody-Miranda - naive, sentimental even as a mature woman, and at the end of the book seemingly on the verge of repeating her characteristic excessive-trust/excessive-mistrust cycle with yet another man. She surpasses Miranda in having fantasies of evil about the world as well as fantasies of the brave and new.

Yet, of the three novels, The Handmaid's Tale, Surfacing and Lady Oracle, Lady Oracle has the most convincing ending because there the narrator's commitment to renewal is tentative rather than total, and exists side-by-side with regressive fantasies. Joan's recognition of the unconscious patterns which have dominated her life occurs as she writes the final chapter of her last Gothic novel, Stalked by Love. Particularly clear to her is the pattern of passively waiting for the
killer/healer to take her away, "rescue" her, "a strong arm about her waist" (Lady Oracle 343). Clear also to her is her tendency to flee from any crisis like a Gothic heroine, "climbing out a window, in my bibbed apron and bun, oblivious to the cries of the children and grandchildren behind me. I might as well face it, I thought, I was an artist, an escape artist" (335). The news for Joan consists of not passively awaiting the next man to walk through her door, but clubbing this rather friendly newspaper reporter with a Cinzano bottle. It consists also of not running from the consequences of this act: "... I could have escaped; he wouldn't have been able to trace me. I'm surprised I didn't do that since I've always been terrified of being found out. But somehow I couldn't just run off and leave him in the hospital with no one to talk to; not after I'd almost killed him by mistake" (334). Yet this is not a thoroughly new Joan. Her speech is as naive and anxious as it is anywhere in the narrative; her act of assertion with the Cinzano bottle is a patently schizoid instance of transference. Her decision to stay with the reporter seems grounded not only in a new sense of self but in a new fantasy not too dissimilar from the organizing fantasy of the nurse novels of her first lover, Paul - "He's a nice man; he doesn't have a very interesting nose, but I have to admit that there is something about a man in a bandage (345). While Joan is making significant changes in her life, she does not seem ready to change it totally.

The ruling metaphor Atwood employs in this novel to concretize Joan’s significant changes and growth is the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a
butterfly. This metaphor is established both in Joan's failure as an overweight child to qualify as a "butterfly" for a ballet recital (47) and in the spiritualist Mr. Smith's parable about the pessimistic and optimistic caterpillars (106). Metamorphosis becomes Joan's main hope; “I was hoping for magical transformations" (43) she tells, as she yearns to dance like a butterfly or "fly up" from Brownies to Girl Guides (52). Her attempts at transformation - from fat girl to thin woman, from high-school dropout to secret author of Costume Gothics and celebrity author of Lady Oracle, from housewife to mistress of the Royal Porcupine - remain partial and unsatisfying. Each new reality seems merely a trick or an illusion. For she says, “When I looked at myself in the mirror, I didn't see what Arthur saw. The outline of my former body still surrounded me, like a ‘mist, like a phantom moon, like the image of Dumbo the Flying Elephant superimposed on my own.” (216)

The summation of Grace’s essay, “More Than a Very Double Life” expresses in concrete terms the unparalleled narrative structure of **Lady Oracle** thus: “Lady Oracle can be read on several different levels. It is an amusing parody of Gothic romance and realist conventions, a satiric commentary upon Atwood’s own experiences as a writer and upon aspects of contemporary society, and a portrayal of the “the perils of Gothic thinking”( 128).

Similar to **Surfacing** and **Lady Oracle**, **The Handmaid’s Tale** is also presented in fragments, like the elements of a puzzle, like a patchwork, like a collage. Offred herself calls this story “sad, and hungry and sordid, this limping
and mutilated story” (The Handmaid’s Tale 344), which is difficult for the narrator to reconstruct and also difficult for the reader to understand. The novel starts in medias res that is, it starts off in the middle of the present although, as the narrative progresses, we realize that the narrator is narrating from some point in the near future even though she is using the present continuous. This complex narrative structure ensures that the reader is forced to work a little harder for comprehension. As a consequence, it is the reader's task to piece different pieces of information together which concern the narrator, the action, the locality, the Puritan background, etc. In reading and understanding this particular novel, the recipient's activity is required right from the beginning and Atwood has purposely employed this fragmented narration to portray the narrator’s reduced circumstances and her limited perspective. Moreover she is allowed neither to read nor to write nor to interact: communication is reduced to a few ritualized formula. Thus, her perception of the world is subject to extreme restrictions. Besides, she has difficulties in remembering the past, and she suspects that her power of reasoning may have become defective, and many of her conclusions and generalizations are just tentative. There is a lot of self-reflection in the story, there are many suppositions, conjectures, and speculations in Offred’s account in order to make sense out of the little information she has got: the narrator is dominated by a basic skepticism, and the textual evidence for that is scattered all over the novel.
Atwood draws from the Triple Goddess Myth, the fairy tales of “Little Red Cap” and “Red Riding Hood” and the biblical story of Jacob, Rachel, Leah and their handmaids to explore, in The Handmaid’s Tale, the sexual politics in a feminist’s hell. These intertexts, the Myth, the fairy tales and the Biblical references share themes, images, motifs, settings and narrative patterns that Atwood uses in The Handmaid’s Tale. The intertexts deal with the theme of sexual politics where the patriarchal power dominates the female. The myth about Persephone is that Persephone is abducted and raped by Hades like Offred who has been abducted to be used by the Commander of the Gilead Regime. The myth also talks about the sterility of the land, the separation of mother and daughter and the mother’s efforts to recover her daughter. The “Little Red Cap” also deals with a similar story of abduction, separation, rape and rebirth. The presence of the main intertext of this novel that is Genesis, chapter 29 and 30 that deals with Jacob, his wives and their handmaidens is felt strongly in this novel.

The novel takes place in the fundamentalist republic of Gilead, which is named after a place in The Old Testament, a mountainous region east of the Jordan. Atwood intentionally chooses the name Gilead because in Hebrew the name means 'heap of stones', though the region also abounded in spices and aromatic herbs and, in an ironic contrast to Atwood's fictitious society, was full of hope and fertility (Genesis 31:21 and 37:25). Yet another reference to this place in the Bible in Hosea 6:8 pictures it as a "city of wicked men, stained with footprints
of blood" (Hosea 6:8). The personal names of the handmaidens are replaced by the new official ones "Offred" and "Ofglen", with Offred meaning "of Fred" and Ofglen meaning "of Glen"; thus the names indicate that handmaids are their master's property. This implies that, apart from being deindividualized, they are also dehumanized. There is some kind of secret police, the so-called Eyes, who according to the biblical origin of their name (II Chronicles 16:9 and Proverbs 15:3) have to control everything and are comparable to the well-known Orwellian Big Brother. Just by use of pun on their names Atwood makes the readers realize the handmaids' fate, which of course, is a deplorable one. However, for the wives of the Commanders the situation is not easy either. Serena Joy is a former gospel singer and TV star; since she is neither serene nor joyful anymore, the double irony of this name quickly becomes obvious.

Prof Pieixoto in his lecture makes it clear that the title "The Handmaid's Tale" for instance was “appended to it by Prof Wade, partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer…” (381). On the one hand, the term tale is an allusion to William Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* but, on the other hand, it is also a pun on the archaic meaning of tail (381), which is a slang term for women, since it reduces them to their sexual function. Another instance of Atwood’s clever use of pun is when Moira explains her escapade to Offred. She refers to the "Underground Femaleroad" (320). Later in the Historical Text the Professor mentions that the name has been dubbed by some of the historical wags as
"Underground Frailroad" (381). This phrase may have two different meanings. In historical terms, it is an allusion to the Underground Railroad set up in order to enable black slaves to escape: thus the reader is again confronted with the implication that women are compared to slaves. In literary categories the term "frailroad" may be an allusion to William Shakespeare's statement "Frailty, thy name is woman" (**Hamlet** I, 2, 146). The pun, then, as Willi Real comments is clearly sexist, which shows that even in the epoch of the Historical Notes, there is only a nominal liberation of women.

The Historical Notes is not an appendix, not an afterword, but an integral element of the novel and a futuristic postscript given by Atwood. The Notes "decry the dangerous blindness of treating horrors of history, including witch burning and other sexism, fascism, homophobia, racism, and religious persecution, "Objectively"." The Historical Notes refer to an academic conference, which is supposed to take place in 2195, i.e. in the remote future. The novel itself has been termed a palimpsest by the narrator that is a written document which had its original writing rubbed out. In the Historical Notes the text is said to have been transcribed from musical tapes, with the reconstruction of a machine capable of playing them (382). "Reconstruction" is a key word in the novel (173, 181): it shows that scholarly work is approximate (383), which is in accordance with Offred's statement that an account of love is always "only approximate", too (340).
She tries to use language in order to construct a self and she speaks about the constructive process of her tale in terms of herself. For example the statement "I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech",(86) not only shows her desire to keep her self-control, but it is also the explicit hint in the complete text of the novel that for Offred telling her story also means an essential effort of defining her own identity. Telling her story may be compared to the psychological function of writing a diary, which may be motivated by a person's desire to learn about his/her own life. Atwood has fashioned her novel in such a way that we may read the novel on a fictional and a meta-fictional level. The text, then, is ambiguous: it has two dimensions at least. For Offred telling her story is an attempt at self-definition which is auto-therapeutic though she is unable to offer a complete account.

In her novel **Cat’s Eye**, Atwood once again evokes the central concerns of the novels discussed earlier. **The Edible Woman**’s critique of consumerism and commodification of women, **Surfacing**’s interrogation of female identity, **Lady Oracle**’s protagonist both victimized as a girl by other little girls and transmuting childhood suffering into art and the therapeutic telling of a painful personal story in **The Handmaid’s Tale** are all evoked in **Cat’s Eye** but with a difference. Like these earlier novels, **Cat’s Eye** also re-visions and transforms the fairy tale intertexts. To focus on Elaine’s fairy-tale journey into her adulthood, Atwood draws from the Triple Goddess myth, the Bible, King Lear, story of Rapunzel and
other popular arts and finally presents her protagonist as one capable of metamorphosis. In the process of demythifying the fairy-tale intertexts and in picturing her transformation Atwood becomes deeply ironic and parodic. The intertexts – the fabulous world of old ghosts, cruel stepsisters, deceitful witches and wizards, disappointing princes – are presented with a touch of magical realism. Magical realism portrays “the imaginary, the improbable, or the fantastic in a realistic or rational manner” (Wilson 296) and in *Cat’s Eye*, the images and scenes beautifully combine elements of dream, fairy story and mythology with the day today happenings of Elaine’s life, testifying to Atwood’s deft handling of fairy tales and myths. The novel deals with the “in-between time” of girlhood friendship, the time when women can be emotionally crippled for life by an incipient soul-sapping relationship or one that evolves into cancerous jealousy. Though Atwood designates the female community “a site of possible oppression” and seems to distrust the label “feminist,” Bouson considers Atwood’s work “decidedly feminist not only in its woman-centered approach and oppositional appeal but also in its continuing critique of patriarchy and its politics of domination and subordination” (871).

*Cat’s Eye* is also a Bildungsroman, a novel that traces a character’s life development, generally from adolescence through maturity. *Cat’s Eye* can be classified as a Bildungsroman not only because it narrates the story of Elaine, her growth and development but also because the novel highlights the loss and
discontent that jar her at an early stage and spurs her on to her journey towards maturity. The process of maturity of Elaine is long, arduous and gradual. She has to face repeated clashes between her needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order. Eventually, as in all Bildungsroman, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in Elaine and the novel ends with Elaine’s assessment of herself and her new place in the society. Her gradual awakening to the subtleties of society gives space for Atwood not merely to draw a convincing, memorable character, but often to observe society’s issues and shortcomings.

**Cat’s Eye** is also considered as one of the most personal of Atwood’s novels, yet not self-evidently autobiographical. **Cat’s Eye** relies more explicitly upon Atwood’s own life than her other fiction, and it is grounded marvelously in minutiae that will awaken an autobiographical reverie in the reader, too. The novel’s premise is simple, its action minimal. Elaine, a successful middle-aged painter, returns to the city of her early life, Toronto, in order to participate somewhat unwillingly in a retrospective of her professional career. One retrospective begets another, and with little conscious volition, Elaine finds herself thinking of her childhood, back to the germination of the personal vision that made her an artist. Of course, the world perspective young Elaine developed is more significant than how it was the precursor to a (fictional) art career. The reader’s reward is in digging into the deeper issues: the formation and unique perceptions
of a child’s mind; the tyrannies of childhood friendships; male and female identity; the politics of gender; the politics of art; the exploration of family and friendship against a specific time in history; the compromises of stepping into adulthood and professional life. **Cat’s Eye** is, most narrowly, a fictionalized autobiography of what it meant to be a woman maturing from the nineteen forties onward, but Atwood does a remarkable job of documenting the forgotten corners of all our childhoods. Many images are vividly authentic, and they strike with the subdued power of awakened memory. The novel is also admirable in its quiet, sophisticated construction. This is a novel of a modern life, set in modern times, and its central character is an artist whose work is perceived to be feminist, postmodern...anything but traditional. All the same, Atwood builds Elaine’s life and the meaning of her experiences largely on a skillful, traditionally constructed series of images, tropes, and motifs. Elaine ebbs and flows between childhood and adulthood with memories built upon shapes and surfaces, degrees of opacity or reflectivity, or of color. Such images are carefully comparable, and they have hidden assertions about what the narrative means, about which episodes echo others. These images do not merely suggest the manner in which experience washes downstream from adolescence to adulthood; they also indicate how Elaine learns. The young artist- to-be gathers her world and its lessons up in textures, colors and shapes. A camera received as a gift in childhood, for instance, is not just a tool for preserving memories, but representative of how young Elaine frames what she sees. The reader grows up with her, and as Elaine vacillates
between childhood memory and present adult experience, every return to the present becomes more meaningful to the reader, more full of sense and experience.

Each section of the book is built around a central image, one that suggests metaphorically how to interpret the life concerns described in the section. The book’s title is drawn from one such image, presented rather early in the narrative. The cat’s eye is an attractive toy marble. It is also the central metaphor for the contrasting tension between the mind of the child and that of the woman. The cat's eye is that fictive element in the childhood imagination. The grown-up longs to recover it, and its loss is a rite of passage, a loss of innocence. The non-metaphorical marble can be risked and lost in a simple game circumscribed by a sand circle on the playground, but even that lends itself to hidden meaning. The cat’s eye is succeeded by other images that connote the passage to adulthood and describe the economies governing adult intercourse in a variety of contexts. The simplicity of owning, winning, and keeping the imaginative eye of childhood, the cat’s eye, is in particularly ready comparison with the convoluted economic system of patronage and commerce. As a child Elaine learns to see the world in a unique, artistic manner; as an adult, the maturity of that vision is robbed from her as she accedes to various pressures for the production, publicizing, and sale of her paintings. This is the only way she can remain an artist, compromised though when compared with the unambiguousness of childhood.
Atwood and Sivasankari express similar concerns and deal with like issues but differ in their narrative strategies. While Atwood’s narratives are intricate and very often non-linear, Sivasankari’s narrative style is simple and straightforward. It has an immediate impact on the casual page-turner as well as those who indulge in "negotiated reading", taking better control of the meaning and the text. Yet, the seemingly narrow focus of her fiction also includes an intricate representation of the dynamics of power. Her subject is the interplay of men, women, and sometimes children within the network of domestic relations. Unlike Atwood’s characters, Sivasankari’s characters, except for a few exceptions, are rarely developed within professional, political, or social settings external to their domestic circles. Yet she is a deeply political writer, repeatedly tracing the contests, victories, and defeats between contenders in a domestic system founded on power imbalance. But such narratives are exceedingly difficult to achieve—indeed, can only be usefully approximated, as we shall see, by means of a unique narrative method consisting of many voices. Traditional narrative, with its discriminatory logics of chronological plot, unitary point of view, major and minor characters, and inflected endings will only perpetuate the disease of Sivasankari's powerless characters. Those of Sivasankari's characters who participate in such narratives not only reach a consensual version of truth, but also escape the object position that first ignited their narrative impulse.
The novels selected for study here, present a series of familiar Sivasankari characters--bright, educated women, somehow outside the system (usually through rejection by men)--struggling to find relief from their object position. The stories represent a progression from a traditional narrative style guaranteeing the perpetuation of objecthood, to a communal, cooperative narrative offering escape from the disease of marginalization, as well as from the risks to which a simple inversion to subjecthood would make their tellers susceptible. 

**Vetkamkettavarkal** has a clear frame of reference — its story, its characters and its narrative tone are like other novels of its kind. When we come to the end of the book, we are neither surprised nor disappointed to find that things have turned out pretty much the way we expected they would. Yet another way in which Sivasankari differs from Atwood is that she makes her voice felt strongly in the novels while Atwood keeps her distance. There are fewer places for speculation, because the author makes everything known to the readers by sharing or even imposing her views on the readers. Her novels like **Vetkamkettavarkal** bring to life a small and closely-webbed world, where it is almost always easier for characters to keep on doing what they do, or, when circumstances demand that they make other choices. The people of this novel do not slip out of character. They are as appropriate as they would be in a world like that — the life of the characters is always viewed against the whole of life in Chennai and not against life in the outside world.
The suspense, the surprises, the shocks, the twists in the story are only as suspenseful, as surprising, as shocking and twisty as they could possibly be in the small world of Chennai. The remarkable thing about Vetkamkettavarkal is that the reader actually sees where and how the strands are brought together. Thus, when Chidambaram’s beautiful wife died, we know immediately that he will fall into the maid’s voluptuous trap and eventually marry her, bringing misery into the life of Bhuvana, the protagonist. Sivasankari has also refrained from the weird narrative pyrotechnics that is considered to be characteristic of the convenient genre of magical. This novel has no need for such pyrotechnics, for it has a lucid pattern of cause and effect. As long as the various parts of their world remain the same, characters remain as they are; when that world changes, then they too must change. Bhuvana would not have thought of doing anything else than what she always has been — which was the most appropriate thing for her to do, in the eyes of the people around her — if things had stayed the same. But since they change, she too changes.

Where an aspiring magical realist would have to create for the novel's central characters an individual ethics of right and wrong to balance their aggrandized actions, Sivasankari’s characters are governed by the mutually reinforcing notions of appropriateness that seem most often to guide moral life in India. In this novel Sivasankari offers a voice to characters who have been silenced, objectified and generally relegated to the verge of discourse. At the
beginning of the story, Bhuvana inhabits not just the position of object, but of reject. Impelled to manage her pain through narrative, she becomes a story teller, a narrator, narrating her story to her friend Citra and her parents. But she does not replicate or even mimic the controlling strategies of her stepmother, Sundari or husband Duraisamy, who have controlled her. What Bhuvana realizes and what Sivasankari insists upon throughout her work, is the fundamental incompatibility of truth and dominance. She believes that truth and understanding can be achieved, but never through the imposition of a stronger will or view on a weaker person and in Vetkamkettavarkal when Duraisamy and Sundari try imposing their stronger will upon Bhuvana she breaks away from them. What is necessary, the author claims, is a cooperation of wills and views. To drive home this point the author narrates a simple story in a narrative method that is unconventional.

Like The Edible Woman which divides itself into three parts Vetkamkettavarkal can be classified into three phases based on the life of Bhuvana. The first part deals with Bhuvana’s life before marriage where her voice is quite audible. In spite of her stepmother’s intimidation, she voices her views. The second part deals with her life after marriage when she becomes completely voiceless. She becomes a puppet in the hands of her husband. The third part is the significant part of the novel. It deals with Bhuvana’s life after she breaks away from her husband, stepmother and her daughter. She voices her daring decisions.
Thus Sivasankari by effective handling of language brings our attention to Bhuvana’s changing psychological constitution.

Like in the novels of Atwood where the dilemma of a woman, who tries to be both artist and wife, is depicted through the interweaving of fairy-tale texts into the main text, in Sivasankari’s novels also the revising and re-visioning of the fairy tales contribute effectively to the narration. Unlike Atwood who has openly acknowledged on numerous occasions in interviews the influence that the fairy-tale genre has had on her since early childhood, Sivasankari makes no such open declaration about the fairy tale influence but she has revolted against such stereotypes like mermaids with no tongues, Cinderellas with sackcloth and ashes, and Beauties with Beasts. For example, in her novel, *Ivarkalum Avarkalum* the mainstream literary stereotype of Cinderella has been masterfully integrated and a new kind of fairy tale heroine, one for whom marriage is hardly obsolete, but at the same time, one for whom marriage is certainly not an ultimate goal in life, is born. Abiramy the protagonist of this novel is pictured as one who respected family values, marriage and rituals. She is happily married but when her husband and her in-laws fail to understand the emotional turmoil caused in her family by the sudden death of her father, she does not hesitate to sever marriage bonds. She dares to violate the expectations of her family and society in order to achieve her ultimate goal. Neither her mother-in-law, nor her father-in-law or her own husband could deter her from her determination to take up a job and supporting
her widowed mother and siblings. She tells them of her decision quite resolutely thus:: “My father’s boss has promised to give his job to any one of us in the family. He might pay at least eight hundred rupees. My mother has decided to take a small house for rent. Until my brother grows to be an adult, I have decided to support my family with the salary I am going to get” (105). Besides she drives home some value. She adds: “Finally I want to tell you something. As long as parents are concerned both sons and daughters are equally entitled to take care of them.” (106) This novel, though narrates a simple story of a family saga, it is an important source that examines the sociological and psychological climate of marriage “propaganda” on which Sivasankari’s generation of women were raised.

This socio-psychological study of women’s general tendency to immerse themselves in marriage as a means of escaping the demanding responsibilities of adult life is a telling and disturbing complement of the aforementioned wife/artist opposition. Unhappy with the impossibility of a woman living up to her full potential as an intelligent and possibly highly talented career woman, while simultaneously fulfilling her obligations as wife and mother, Sivasankari allows her protagonists to struggle with this quandary and seek a way out of it. Thus Abiramy when stopped by her husband and in-laws from taking up a job to support her family, she has to find a way out by going out of her husband’s home. In Atwood’s *Surfacing* the protagonist, who, feels that she cannot express herself and that language has been hijacked by those in control, had to choose between
rejection or subversion. In the same manner, Abiramy whose emotions have been hijacked realizes that subversion is the more effective and practical method. Abiramy decides to subvert the so called family values that existed and in order to render the fight equal she realizes she must be equipped with the same resources. Once she has them she begins to use them to her advantage and appropriate them for her needs. We are left at the end of the novel with the anticipation of her new voice, one that she has chosen, appropriated and understood. Throughout the novel there is a definite condemnation of domestication of women by both men and women but it is most poignantly and symbolically demonstrated with the narrator's final rejection of her husband’s family. She rejects domination in every form and travels to her mother’s place that she must visit in order to fulfill her duty. Her regeneration is made possible by, firstly rejecting all that seeks to domesticate her and then subvering the forces they use such as custom, history and culture to reject her identity as a victim.

There are, then, two simultaneous acts of (re)negotiation going on in many of Sivasankari’s works as in Atwood’s. On the textual level, through predominantly female protagonists, Sivasankari portrays the terms and conditions that patriarchal society has imposed on them. In *Ivarkalam Avarkalam* Sivasankari highlights how Abiramy is dominated by her husband and his parents. They take her goodness for granted and exploit her to the maximum until the time comes when she finally becomes alert and when they refused to learn she had to
teach them only by severing any sort of ties with them. In her fictional worlds, as in the novels of Atwood, women are compelled to choose between fulfilling their creative abilities and ambitions and being just domesticated wives or mothers. But Abirami, instead of relinquishing her ambitions and remaining the attending muse upon her husband and his parents, asserts her rights and becomes the self-determining individual she wanted to be. Thus Sivasankari, like Atwood in most of her novels (re)negotiates the message of those timeless fairy tales with a special emphasis on “Cinderella”, by integrating them into her work and subverting their seemingly innocuous narratives and creates modern alternatives which prove to be, or at least should prove to be, more pertinent for today’s post-feminist world.

Like Atwood’s Lady Oracle which is rich in variations on established literary forms and conventions, Sivasankari’s Palangal is unique in its literary form. It does not narrate a simple story centered around a single domestic issue. Instead it narrates three different stories that picture the socio-economic condition especially of women at three different periods of time. While Atwood draws on the Kunstlerroman (“artist-novel”), a subgenre of the Bildungsroman. Palangal traces the socio-economic changes from the early 1900s to the end of the century. In portraying the development of woman at different ages Sivasankari at once departs from the traditionally male centered generic model. The story of the protagonists of the three stories further plays with, and against, additional traditions. It is a work composed of many disparate parts. Among the literary
precedents evoked in **Lady Oracle**, in **Palangal** also two distinct yet interrelated types of narrative that serve as an especially fertile source for the predicaments and ironies that shape the protagonists can be identified. Like in the Bluebeard stories in which serially monogamous men murder their wives and, generally, get away with it, in the first part of the **Palangal** that narrates the story of the naïve and ignorant Sivakamu, we find men not literally murdering her but murdering her emotions and justifying their act. In the second and the third story which highlights the social changes and the improved status of women, the parodic counterparts of gothic romances could be seen. In the gothic romances heroines overcome an ominous environment, innumerable obstacles, and menacing strangers in order to find happiness in the embrace of a handsome, strong, nurturing, and oftentimes wealthy young men but Sivasankari parodying these stories pictures her heroines defying and rejecting such embrace and learn to be more independent. For example, Mythili, the protagonist of the second story is a bold woman who can speak for herself and resist anything or anybody who tries to put her down and her ambitions. Saru, of the third story is an extremely courageous woman who proves that she can not be intimidated by male power and she actually makes her husband realize that she can very well thrive without him and that she cannot be taken for granted just because she happens to be a woman. When her husband threatens to abduct her daughter and proposes his violent alternatives she initially gives in to fear and wonders how she could protect her. Yet she does not weep, pray, and hope for the best. She demonstrates exemplary
prudence and gets out of his trap. And more fittingly, what Oates comments about Atwood’s heroines can very well be applied to Sivasankari’s women too: “The other interesting thing about these stories is that, unlike the heroines of the more conventional and re-done stories, such as “Cinderella” and “Little Red Riding Hood,” the heroines of these stories show considerable wit and resourcefulness and usually win, not just by being pretty and virtuous, but by using their brains” (Oates 70–71). That Saru is able to look after herself resourcefully becomes evident when she decides to disengage from the increasingly invidious grip of her deceptive husband. Her decision to send her daughter with her father and the fear of protecting herself from Suresh implicates institutions of power in general and the “anatomo-politics” of the female body in particular. Her words function as a barbed social complaint that persists throughout her various narratives. Sivasankari’s carefully calibrated rhetoric in the novel implies, the prevalent images of femininity that construct women as desirable commodities—or, more darkly, as easy prey—evoke a highly conflicted attitude in her protagonist. On the one hand, the protagonists are acutely aware of the prevailing deployments of sexuality, and their insidious effects; on the other hand, their life is also held in thrall and governed by those conventions. In other words, Sivasankari’s women to some extent cannot help but come under the influence of the old fables and codes, and then expose them to constant satirical scrutiny in their everyday life. Thus using humorous fables and satiric imagery, both Atwood and Sivasankari challenge stereotypical representations of feminity.
In order to scrutinize the plight of women and to challenge stereotypical representations of feminity, Sivasankari bases her novel on some lived experiences and she herself states in an interview that: “Very often my story is built around a true incident, snatches of conversation heard in passing or some little idea, which triggers off the creative urge within. Something felt deeply and experienced needs to be shared and this motivates me to write. Keen observation activates my empathy with fellow beings which I attempt to convey in my writing” (Hindu 2002). Palangal is not an exception to that. In the preface to her novel Sivasankari states she had listened to the narrations of her aged grandmother, her great aunt and her own mother about the age old customs and habits and had wondered about their impact on women. She started to ponder over the innocence, growth and maturity of a girl, her dreams and aspirations and later when she grew old how she started to retrospect bridging the past and the present. As a result of her serious pondering was born the novel Palangal. She also mentions that “Not much importance has been given to plot structure but it is a chain of events, a different non-linear narration …” (Palangal vii). Sivasankari presents this novel as an intricate patchwork of events that undermines linearity and the cause-and-effect logic and her purpose of such a narration seems to be that she intended it to be another means of representing historical and social events that rejects the mono-vision of traditional histories. Yet, the result is not chaos but a deliberate and more spatial construction that functions as a dynamic, even evolving whole while retaining the integrity of its separate stories and events.
While society has perpetuated gender discrimination that led to the disappearance of women from histories and “details of women’s lives were perceived as belonging only to the realm of anecdote, not in scientific history” (Pomata 50), Sivasankari like the other feminist scholars began to broach the question of women’s absence from histories of the past two centuries. Although the field of women’s history has developed a variety of trajectories, a common ground shared by most of the scholars involved includes the notions that “women” are a valid “focus of inquiry” and that there exists a need for a reevaluation of established standards of historical significance. (Scott 36)

While Palangal is a chain narration of different events with not much importance given to plot and structure, Amma Pillai is a well structured novel. It has a dramatic beginning with Rengamma’s volley of accusations, introduces us to the problem, the problematic son, and the plot develops further with a good amount of suspense incorporated in the story. Then there is the expected climax and the solution for the problem posed in the beginning. The novel is constructed with contemporary perspectives. Though this cannot be considered as a typical Bildungsroman, that traces a character’s life development, we find aspects of Bildungsroman in the character of Mythili, the dancer. She features as a sensitive, initially naïve protagonist whose gradual awakening to the subtleties of society,
her husband and his mother allows the author to observe society’s issues and shortcoming. And as a proto-feminist study it relates what would happen to a woman who surrenders her identity to a man's creativity. Mythili almost gives in to the whims and fancies of Raja and gives up dancing but encouraged by her mother and uncle she takes a bold decision and when in a position to choose between husband and career, she chooses her career. The structure of hierarchy could not intimidate her but she learns to overturn hierarchy. In the course of the novel it becomes evident that Sivasankari has incorporated the theories of “gender ideology” and “deconstruction” to highlight the fact that society is very much opposed to women’s emancipation.

Amma Pillai though seems to side with the society in subjugating woman, makes it obvious in the course of the novel that the author actually is an ardent supporter of women and their emancipation. Feminist theory of ‘gender ideology’ also forms the base of this novel. Feminist literary theory of ‘gender ideology’ is strongly affiliated with deconstruction. The theory is that ‘female’ is not only linguistically the opposite of ‘male’, but that hierarchical male-dominated society views all that belongs to female and ‘woman’ as its negative opposite. In the story Anandhi and Mythili are expected to dance to Raja’s music because they are after all women and not expected to act like men but be subservient and docile. Gender Ideology is the system of beliefs by which people explain, account for, and justify their behavior, and interpret and assess that of others. Thus we see Rengamma and
Raja justifying their atrocities against Anandhi and Mythili. And as Butler comments Gender ideology is the set of beliefs that govern people’s participation in the gender order, and by which they explain and justify that participation. Gender ideologies differ with respect to such things as the nature of male and female, and the justice, the naturalness, the origins, and the necessity of various aspects of the gender order which Sivasankari highlights in this novel. Thus, gender is a social construct, argue Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, and those who are disadvantaged in the social order are more likely to challenge it (9). Therefore, it is no wonder that women authors like Atwood and Sivasankari by writing about women have brought to light the position of women in the male dominated society. Sivasankari often applies the methods of deconstruction and gender ideology to her literary work to show the reader the position women occupy in society at large. In this novel the protagonist experiences her role as female subject in her fictional society as somehow suffocating and runs away to her parents unable to withstand the cruelties meted out to her in the name of rituals and rites. Moreover, by using deconstruction as a reading strategy, the binary oppositions that implicitly structure the text of this novel come to the surface.

“Victims collaborating victimization” is yet another aspect highlighted in **Amma Pillai.** Like the oppressive rulers who do not consist of a vast majority of the population often have to depend on collaborators of the opposite camp, in **Cat’s Eye** as well as in **Amma Pillai** we can find women collaborating with
victimizers. Most poignant examples of such collaborations are found in war situations. One has to think of the Second World War camps where Jews, gypsies and homosexuals were confined and tortured and killed by their oppressors. Often, members of these groups assisted in the capture and destruction of their own people. These collaborators keep the power with the rulers. Thus, while they are victims, they also collaborate in the victimization of others. ‘Women as women’s enemy’ is pictured in many of Sivasankari’s novels. In collaborating victimization such women gain something; perhaps it is a way of survival, perhaps it will improve the collaborator’s social position, or perhaps it is the only way of gaining some power over others and thereby avoid being at the bottom of the pecking order. In Amma Pillai, Rengamma perpetuates fear in other women, mainly because of the feeling of insecurity. She knew very well that no one loves her and the only way to get their attention is by sending waves of terror and that is her only way of displacing her own suffering of lovelessness. We are at once reminded of Elaine’s friends in Cat’s Eye and as Molly Hite puts it, “Elaine is a surrogate victim, representative of the category ‘girl’ and thus a stand-in for the other girls, who use her as a scapegoat in order to displace their own suffering as members of a patriarchy here literalized in the authority of their own fathers” (137). Rengamma acts in “phallocentrism’s plot against the female self” by acting as a “cultural agent who transmits social mythology-fictional constructs into which the child is expected to fit” (Bouson 65). Thus by applying the theories of gender
ideology and deconstruction both Atwood and Sivasankari are able to focus on the crux of women’s problematic position in the society.

Atwood in her frightening science fiction novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* creates a feminine dystopia where “power is absolute and control of sex is also stringent” (Dodson 99). Sivasankari’s gripping novel *47 Natkal* though not a science fiction or dystopian novel, also describes a place and situation where power is absolute and control of sex is also stringent. By way of narrating a simple family story, Sivasankari is able to sustain an ironic texture, crisply and snappily presenting a few graphic horror scenes, condemning particular social injustices. Vishali, the protagonist of *47 Natkal* is not a powerful user of language like Offred, who is able to present in a strategic way the true horrors perpetrated by the Gileadean state. Vishali’s ignorance of English was a big handicap. Yet the way she makes use of the few words she knows to express the horror perpetrated by Kumar is highly amazing. Making such a novice act so bravely making use of the few English words she learnt brings credit to Sivasankari’s distinctive and unusual rhetorical stance. Offred’s story is composed retrospectively. Her narrative is a complicated mixture of past and present and may not be told chronologically but *47 Natkal* narrates in order the events that took place in the 47 days of Vishali’s married life.
While in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the reader is addressed by a narrator whose authority is sanctioned by the implied author, Vishali is not assigned the authority of an implied author. It is the author’s voice; her intelligence is heard most of the time. Yet, the author does not present Vishali merely as an object of subjugation but as possessing power herself. It is obvious that Sivasankari continually endows Vishali with the strength appropriate to a heroine, and assigns spectacular heroism to her. She attempts a daring escape from Kumar on a snowy morning and though caught and punished was undeterred in making another attempt by meeting in Indian lady and imploring her for help. It is an act of such dizzying audacity that it frightens the readers. As a result of her daring deed, she is able to move both the Indian and the US governments. Kumar is finally caught and in narrating this drama of power and powerlessness, Sivasankari clearly shows that certain types of oppression ensnare the oppressor along with the oppressed and that power is always ambiguous.

The author cannot help but dramatizing horror especially when she had to describe scenes where Kumar showers generous blows on Vishali, hammering and battering the helpless victim. Sivasankari’s height of rhetoricizing violence is seen in the final scene, where Kumar almost mad with rage decides to abort the child growing in Vishali’s womb. His friend Sushil had playfully suggested a crude method of aborting the child and Kumar decides to implement that brutal method. Sivasankari’s description of his implementation of that crude method freezes our
bones. “Kumar’s beastly fury blinded his senses. Even after thrashing and kicking Vishali as much as he wanted his anger didn’t subside. He shook her up, put her on a chair, removed her sari and tied her with the same to the chair. After being beaten up so brutally Vishali did not even have the strength to cry… She shuddered to see the flames of wrath dancing on his face and pleaded ‘leave me … please … I beg you … please leave me’” Her pleadings fell upon deaf ears and Kumar went ahead preparing to implement the horrifying method of abortion. “He went to the basement, brought an iron rod and heated it on the stove until it turned red hot and scorched her on her stomach” (254-55). In spite of the male tyranny that Vishali is subjected to, the author cannot help but make her a figure of compelling fortitude. Sivasankari’s ethical as well as rhetorical imperative to create a convincing and suspenseful story is evident from this novel.

Yet 47 Natkal remains a profoundly puzzling book. The puzzlement that it provokes has sometimes been taken as a source of its power. The thrilling effect of the end of the novel is the result of careful control by Sivasankari, who desires throughout an effect of ambivalence. In presenting and exploring a single point of view, this novel runs the danger of seeming shallow, of allowing no aesthetic distance from which we can respond to the narrator as well as participate in her verbal reactions to the world. On the other hand, the source of the ambiguity, then, is identified as the narrative technique. This novel could be read as a realistic, regional rendering of a particular time and place, and also as a symbolic account
of the universal plight of woman. Sivasankari’s mixing of these two modes makes this novel at once regional and universal.

Until the last century men shaped the experiences of women, defined their roles and set up the social and literary norms and imposed their norms on women. But in a slow on-going process women began to question the stereotype images, narratives and norms of a culture in order to find authentic ways of self-definition and to resist being defined by patriarchal society. The amusement and the seriousness in their novels are evoked through a combination of parody and satire. While the greatness of Atwood’s narrative lies in her use of the perils of gothic thinking in an amusing yet serious manner, Sivasankari’s lies in her pleasing presentation of her thoughts and observations, in bringing alive before the readers the forgotten, faded spaces that constructed our lives, by bridging the past and the present, by intersecting the content and style of the one with the techniques and concerns of the other. In short both these authors have written with reasonable subtlety and masterly craft and can be accessed from a variety of perspectives and concerns. They have manifested their brilliance and wit on a wide variety of topics and instead of relying upon a conventional narrative, they have manipulated the existing patterns of narrations and used schemes and techniques that are fitting narrative strategies for their stories of emotional waifs and strays.
Summation

This comparative study of Atwood and Sivasankari focuses on the canons of the writers’ respective national traditions and the connections between their literature and other realms of human experience. Their writings read across linguistic, national and cultural boundaries and highlight many aspects that a national literature tends to obscure. It is an accepted truth that the European literatures were understood as both aesthetically autonomous and expressive of the “national genius,” while texts from the non-West were read more from an ethnographic, historical, or anthropological perspective than as works of literature in their own right. This comparative study of authors belonging to two different nations endeavours to overcome this division between “the West” and “the Rest” by combining the formal rigour of European literary studies with the interdisciplinary reach of area studies. It traces the transformations and travels of literary genres and texts across time and space and explores the connections of literature with history, philosophy, politics, and literary theory.

Atwood and Sivasankari, though writers of different nationality are not limited by regional or geographical boundaries. Their country seems to be the whole world. Their concerns are not limited to women, their issues and rights alone. They express a wider humanitarian concern and demand equal rights for both men and women. These writers bring awareness in readers about the
damaged and distorted status of women who have been subjugated to man’s will and used as tools to gratify his desire. Yet, their works are not only reactions against the atrocities of patriarchy but against the non-feminist and traditional views and criticisms. The moral theorists define women as deficient moral agents who are not fit for public life. All the western theorists exclude women from taking active participation in political life and confine their contribution to their homes. These theories are anti-women and they explicitly defend gender-biased, misogynist values. The Indian attitude is worse in the sense that, Manu, the law giver of Hindu Dharma Shastra considers woman as an inferior being and denies her any independent status. Moreover as Kalpand Bardhan puts in the essay ‘Women and Feminism in a stratified Society: Recent Developments in India’: “Class, patriarchy and caste or ethnic hierarchy, are interactive elements defining gender relations in South Asia. The interactions among class exploitation, status hierarchy and male domination in family and social contexts have the simultaneous effects of accentuating women’s oppression in the lower socio-economic strata and of muting class struggle, as well as the movement for women’s rights” (Sutherland 185). Thus theories are male-centered which legitimize subjugation of women. As a reaction against these male-favoured values, the works of Atwood and Sivasankari give a new perspective which is concerned not only with women’s issues but with the actual human relationships.
It is astonishing to note that both Atwood and Sivasankari consider their writing as a mission to bring in a “better world of the future.” Atwood herself says in *Second Words*, “I believe that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community” (346) and that “Writing, no matter what its subject, is an act of faith; the primary faith being that someone out there will read the results. I believe it’s also an act of hope, the hope that things can be better than they are” (349). Both these writers consider the novel as a moral instrument that reminisces about the past, renews the present and reflects upon the future of a nation. In an interview Sivasankari was asked, “As a creative writer, do you consider “modernity” as merely a matter of living with constant changes and “tradition” a matter of conformity to accepted norms?” Sivasankari’s answer to this question is amazing. She states: “I do believe in progressive changes and always try to understand that there is another angle of vision. Change should be towards growth….Sometimes traditional practices, if no longer relevant, are rejected. The idea is to generate a sense of permanent values through the medium of fiction” (*Hindu* 2002). These writers have firm belief in change and progress and thereby fashion their women as progressive characters who from passivity and powerlessness grow to be assertive human beings, ready to face the fierce battles and challenges that the society continues to pose. Their writings confirm that the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present and we must rise with the occasion and must think anew and act anew.
Atwood’s apparent belief is that “Everything is connected to everything else and that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact” (Science and Ecocriticism) and this makes her passion and concern for nature natural and genuine and makes her novels read like ecological treatises.

From the protofeminism of *The Edible Woman*, the cultural feminism of *Surfacing*, and the examination of the cultural stereotypes placed on the female artist in *Lady Oracle*… the postfeminist and antifeminist backlash terrors of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the analysis of the potential power politics of female relationships in *Cat’s Eye*, Atwood’s novels reflect on the oppositional culture of the feminist movement. (Bouson 5-6)

Atwood also weaves a “complex web of interrelatedness which develops between character and culture, between the personal and the political” (Howells 16).

An awareness on social issues, a special sensitivity to social problems and a commitment to set people thinking are the unique characteristics of Sivasankari. She has been devoted to touch the hearts of people through in-depth research and writing. Her novels and her research work ‘Knit India Through Literature’ as well illustrate her conviction that writers can influence people’s thinking. Her writings reflect her painstaking effort and her deep commitment to her calling. Her words:
“I feel if I care about society, I should disseminate the view as beautifully as possible. That's what I have been doing. Writing for me is another extension of my policy in life which is caring and sharing” (Rediff Interview) justify her commitment to her career. She also believes that literary people are the torchbearers or opinion-makers because they have followers. What makes Sivasankari’s fiction distinct is that it has outgrown its regional character and has become part of our national storehouse of fiction by reason of its universality. Sivasankari has carved a niche for herself as an exceptional novelist committed to serious writing on issues that matter. She is a novelist who is eminently readable and whose style of writing is unpretentious.

As K.K. Ruthuven says, “Before you can set about changing the world, you need to define it in such a way that changes are possible. You do this by conceiving of it not as a physical essence (a bundle of atoms held together by gravity) but as a social system (a bundle of categories held together by custom)” (36). This is exactly what Atwood and Sivasankari have done. They have viewed the society as a bundle of categories held together by customs and analyzed the possibility of woman’s equality and freedom in a socialist order. The Marxists consider the class system of capitalism as the only cause of women’s oppression and believe that the abolition of class society is the solution for women’s oppression. Atwood and Sivasankari on the other hand view gender discrimination and class discrimination as factors that equally contribute to the problem of
women. Like the radical feminists these writers believe that “women’s oppression is the deepest form of human oppression and therefore it cannot be eradicated by means of the abolition of class society” (Prabhakaran 17-18). Both of them are authors who self-consciously challenge the ideology of romantic love which views romantic affiliation and marriage as a woman’s primary means to self-definition and self-fulfillment. Their women have strong oppositional appeal.

Atwood and Sivasankari are more post modern in their approach (rather than Marxist or Radical) in the sense that they are pluralistic and multi-faceted and study the divergent experiences of women on the lines of class, race and culture. Their writings transcend the boundaries and limitations of other feminist theories and portray their protagonists as forcibly breaking away from any oppressive thought. They redefine the male-defined world; define a pluralistic society which is not gender-constructed. Atwood and are committed to bring about significant changes in the lives and attitudes of women and men as well. They believe that women can overcome oppression and binary opposition by expressing themselves assertively.

The introductory chapter provides a comprehensive study of Atwood and Sivasankari’s biography, their contributions and awards and their major themes and focuses. From the renowned works of Atwood and Sivasankari, Atwood’s The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle, Cat’s Eye, and The Handmaid’s
Tale and Sivasankari’s *Vetkamkettavarkal, Ivarkalum Avarkalum, Palangal, Amma Pillai* and *47Natkal*, which are found to be highly comparable are taken here for study in comparison. The introductory chapter briefly sums up the comparable elements found in these novels. In addition to this there is a reference made to the significant critical texts by the authors and about the authors with a compact review. It also gives a brief sketch of the major chapters.

The first chapter discusses in detail the victim position elaborated by Atwood in her *Survival* and applies that to study Atwood and Sivasankari’s protagonists and their position in the male dominated society. The four basic victim positions as defined by Atwood are: Position one: To deny the fact that you are a victim. Position two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. Position Four: To be a creative non-victim. (*Survival* 36-42) This chapter observes that both these authors believe women have an inherent survival instinct, which manifests itself in the ability to reshape their lives. It does talk about the social constrains that often try to deform women and reduce them to docile doormats but finally, based on the study of the novels chosen, it asserts that women do have the ability to reconstruct their past.

The second chapter makes a study of the cognitive theory and places the women of both the writers against the backdrop of this theory to study how they
are restructured and reshaped to be creative non-victims. It makes a study of the significance of metamorphosis – that in order for women to reach the creative non-victim role, which deems them survivors, they must undergo the metamorphosis from being helpless victims to be people who take responsibility for their plight. In the process of restructuring or metamorphoses the protagonists realize that many of life’s problems are based on perceptions, not reality and identify what will make them happy. This chapter brings to focus many of the hard experiences through which Atwood and Sivasankari take their women to make them learn how to take life from a negative to a positive stand by changing distorted thinking.

The third chapter discusses works by feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Helene Cixous and Toi Moito to illuminate the author’s use of victim/survivor dichotomy. Atwood’s works, *Survival* and *Second Words* where Atwood herself writes on this topic, victimization and survival have been referred to in this chapter. With authentic references from the novels chosen for comparison here, this chapter justifies that both the writers do not like any tags and they find them to be confining and that they are humanist first of all. They are deeply concerned for humanity as a whole and in that process they highlight the indignities suffered by women on the basis of gender discrimination. They do make their point clear that women need to be given their rightful space and respect if they are to be liberated in the true sense of the word.
The fourth chapter views Atwood and Sivasankari as social critics. As social critics there is a vein of irony in their writing. They directly address some of the most vexing issues of their day – not just issues related to women but issues related to various other matters that afflict the society. Both these authors are celebrated for their wry, bitter imaginative commentary on the matters they deal with. While Atwood directly addresses issues on war, apocalypse, technology, its impact on the environment, materialism and fundamentalist religious beliefs and such excruciatingly painful matters, Sivasankari addresses issues that centered on family and family relationships. Her idea is to generate a sense of permanent values through the medium of fiction. She writes on thought-provoking subjects and issues which baffle society. She intends to awaken a sense of response in the reader on such issues. She authenticates these cultural nuances and also delves deep into her cultural consciousness. She is never judgmental and makes no remarks which may have any class bias. This chapter highlights the similarities and dissimilarities in the authors’ attitudes and expression.

The fifth chapter explores Atwood and Sivasankari’s employment of the unique narrative strategies. Atwood in telling the stories of her protagonists combines social observations with her scientific commentary and sets them against the larger global changes. She also uses her narrative as a platform to voice her concern about a trend in contemporary culture that she finds troubling: “the mainstreaming of violence and pornography into the mass culture” (Bousosn 39).
This chapter concentrates on the authors’ approaches which illustrate the transcendency of their artistic and political stances and contribute to a clearer view of the use of a narrative strategy common to them. Atwood deconstructs and displaces the traditional authority structures by demythifying myths and by writing anti-gothic and dystopian novels. While Atwood’s narratives are intricate and very often non-linear, Sivasankari’s narrative style is simple, straightforward and unpretentious. Her subject is the interplay of men, women, and sometimes children within the network of domestic relations. Yet what is common about these authors is that they have used a language and narrative pattern to resist romantic discourse and used a novelistic form to interpret the marriage and love plots and their narratives set out both to expose and redress the wrongs fictively.

Thus this research work has attempted to emphasize the recurring and related themes in the select novels of Atwood and Sivasankari and to examine the impact of the economic, cultural and political colonization of Canada and India. It has investigated the writers’ subversion of romantic love ideology, their unique feminist views, their manipulation of narrative forms and formulas and analyses the emotional demands and interpretive challenges of their novelistic narratives.

Margaret Atwood and Sivasankari offer vast scope for further study. Their novels may be compared with the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, the renowned African-American writers.
Margaret Atwood and Sivasankari: A Comparative Study

Synopsis

Margaret Atwood and Sivasankari are novelists and social critics. Striking similarities between them exist in their literatures thanks to their colonial past and their multi-lingual and multi-ethnic make up. The bizarre and passionate life of the Canadians, with its socio-political problems as revealed in Atwood’s novels are similar to that of the Indians Sivasankari portrays in her novels. Atwoodian women seen against the backdrop of the Canadian patriarchal culture are at first timid and yielding but gradually emancipate. Similarly, Sivasankari’s heroines also grow out of their family ties and cultural confines. Thus these writers with similar attitudes and beliefs call for a comparative study, especially as writers whose novels are regional and universal at once.

The chapter, Introduction provides a comprehensive study of Atwood and Sivasankari’s biographies and their contributions alongside their major themes and focuses. From the works of Atwood and Sivasankari, Atwood’s The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle, Cat’s Eye, and The Handmaid’s Tale; and Sivasankari’s Vetkamkettavarkal, Ivarkalum Avarkalum, Palangal, Amma Pillai and 47Natkal, are chosen for the study in comparison. This chapter sums up the comparable elements found in these novels. In addition to this there is a reference made to the significant critical texts by the authors and about the authors with a compact review. It also gives a brief sketch of the major chapters.

The first chapter, Vibrant Victims discusses in detail the victim position elaborated by Atwood in her Survival and applies that to the study of Atwood’s
and Sivasankari’s protagonists and their position in the male dominated society. The four victim positions as defined by Atwood are: (i): To deny the fact that you are a victim, (ii): to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, (iii): to acknowledge the fact that you are victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable, and (iv): to be a creative non-victim. This chapter observes that both these authors believe that women have an inherent survival instinct, which manifests itself in the ability to reshape their lives. It does talk about the social constrains that often try to deform women and reduce them to docile doormats but finally, based on the study of the novels chosen, it asserts that women do have the ability to reconstruct their past.

The second chapter, Cognitive Restructuring makes a study of the cognitive theory and places the women of both the writers against its backdrop in order to study how they are restructured and reshaped into creative non-victims. It makes a study of the significance of the metamorphosis – that for women to reach the creative non-victim role, which deems them survivors, they must undergo the transformation from being helpless victims to be people who take responsibility for their own plight. In the process of the restructuring or metamorphoses the protagonists realize that many of the life’s problems are based on perceptions; not reality, and they identify what will make them happy. This chapter brings to focus many of the hard experiences through which Atwood and Sivasankari take their women to make them learn how to take life quickly from a negative stand to the positive by changing their distorted thinking.

The third chapter, As Humanists discusses works by feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Helene Cixous and Toi Moito to illuminate the authors’ use of victim/survivor dichotomy. Atwood’s works Survival and Second Words wherein Atwood herself writes on this topic; victimization and survival, have been referred to in this chapter. With references from the novels chosen for
comparison here, this chapter depicts how these writers denounce any tags. As humanists they only find such tags confining. They are deeply concerned for humanity as a whole and in that process they highlight the indignities suffered by women due to gender discrimination. They make it clear that women need to be given their rightful space at once, if they are to be truly liberated.

The fourth chapter, As Social Critics views Atwood and Sivasankari as social critics they exude profound humour with subtle irony. They directly address people on some of the most vexing issues of their day – not just the ones related to women but those related to everyone in the society. Both these authors are celebrated for their wry, bitter imaginative commentary on the matters they deal with. While Atwood directly addresses issues such as war, impact of technology on environment, inevitability of the materialist apocalypse and perils of religious fundamentalism, Sivasankari focuses on family issues. Her idea is to generate a sense of permanent value through the medium of fiction. She writes on thought-provoking subjects and issues which affected her strongly. She intends to evoke a sense of response in the reader on such issues. Alcoholism and drugs have been the themes in some of the novels not to shock people but to convey her attitude towards them. She authenticates these cultural nuances and also delves deep into her cultural consciousness. She is never judgmental and makes no remarks which may have any class bias. This chapter highlights the similarities and dissimilarities in the authors’ attitudes and expression.

The fifth chapter, Narrative Strategies explores Atwood and Sivasankari’s employment of the unique narrative strategies. Atwood in telling the stories of her protagonists combines social observations with her scientific commentary and sets them against the larger global changes. She also uses her narrative as a platform to voice her concern about a trend in contemporary culture that she finds troubling: the mainstreaming of violence and pornography into the
mass culture. This chapter concentrates on the authors’ approaches which illustrate the transcendency of their artistic and political stances and contribute to a clearer view of the use of a narrative strategy common to them. Atwood deconstructs and displaces the traditional authority structures by demythifying myths and by writing anti-gothic and dystopian novels. While Atwood’s narratives are intricate and very often non-linear, Sivasankari’s narrative style is simple, straightforward and unpretentious. Her subject is the interplay of men, women, and sometimes children within the network of domestic relations. Yet what is common about these authors is that they use a language and narrative pattern to resist romantic discourse and use a novelistic form to interpret the marriage and love plots and that their narratives set out both to expose and redress the wrongs fictively.

They redefine the male-defined world; define a pluralistic society which is not gender-constructed. Atwood and Sivasankari writing from Canada and India respectively are committed to bring about significant changes in the lives and attitudes of women and men as well. They believe that women can overcome the age old binarism and its oppression only through self assertion. Both these writers as eye-witnesses and I-witnesses of the experience of women in their respective nations have given aesthetic expression to their personal experience available for their readers across the world. The chapter, Summation sums up the findings of the previous chapter and indicates the possible new research areas on Atwood and Sivasankari.

Thus this doctoral dissertation attempts to emphasize the recurring and related themes in the select novels of Atwood and Sivasankari and examine the impact of the economic, cultural and political colonization of Canada and India. It explores how the native populations were oppressed and later transformed and how the effects of colonialism continue to be felt in both the colonized and colonizing nations. It also investigates the writers’ subversion of romantic
ideology, their feminist views, their manipulation of narrative forms and formulae and analyses the emotional demands and interpretive challenges of their narratives.