Chapter 6

Conclusion
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Regarded as one of Canada’s finest writers, Margaret Atwood’s fiction and non-fiction have received worldwide acclaim and she has also received numerous literary awards. Few themes predominate in her novels, although she doesn’t restrict to limited genres. She is known as a feminist since many of her works reflect feminist consciousness. Suffering in the lives of female characters recurs in her novels that represent their exploitation by the patriarchal society. “The starved, transformed, beaten, diseased, abused, and incarcerated female bodies...” (Davies 62), depict the condition of women in the patriarchal culture. Dystopia and apocalypse also distinguish some of her novels, depicting the darker picture of the world. The strict demarcation between scientific and aesthetic knowledge has been shown as the cause behind abuse of nature and its phenomena.

The juxtaposition of civilization and wilderness in Atwood’s novels sheds light on the destructive impact of modern practices and the civilized world on the natural world. The comparison between violence and innocence emphasizes upon the need to eradicate violence. Atwood insists on a symbiotic relationship between human and non-human nature. She indicates that when the balance between them is disturbed by unnatural ways, an ecological catastrophe is likely to occur. Her vision regarding future has become pessimistic in her later works where moral blindness leads to apocalypse and the civilization comes to an end with only a few survivors left on the planet.

Through the analysis of Atwood’s four novels vis-a-vis ecofeminist peace politics, a conclusion can be drawn that Atwood has endeavoured to bring into picture
various contemporary practices of domination related to women, nature, and other oppressed people. Her novels reflect her yearning for a peaceful world and she strives to highlight various corrupt practices that dominate the world. She also brings into picture various hierarchies and dualisms that divide humans and non-human nature in the present world. Domination of women and nature by men as depicted in some of her works, highlight the need for ecofeminist peace politics. Atwood makes it evident that peace and development are possible only if women are empowered and nature is not abused. She also indicates that patriarchy leads to social inequalities, violence, and ecological imbalance.

*Surfacing* connects the oppression of women to the environmental degradation of our planet. The protagonist of the novel feels disappointed on looking at the unchecked technological developments that pose a threat to nature. She also condemns the patriarchal culture and is repeatedly haunted by the memories of her lover who made her pregnant and persuaded her to abort the child. She expresses deep concern for nature and feels the fear of American cultural and economic domination. She mistrusts Americans due to their aggressive nature, their display of power, and their greed for consuming everything.

In order to gain insight into her real self, the protagonist develops close relationship with her environment. She refuses to accept domination by men and refuses to be a victim any more. During the process of self-realization, she removes all the artificial bondages attached to her and becomes one with nature. The confusion in her mind regarding her past becomes clear after her communion with nature. Freedom from all kinds of domination becomes her ultimate goal. She decides not to
marry as she associates husband-wife relationship with victimizer-victimized relationship. She also rejects American life-style that is responsible for consumerist culture.

The connection between the trauma of exploitation experienced by the protagonist and the destruction visible on the island is clearly marked in the novel. The protagonist realizes that men abuse women and exploit nature to display their power and satisfy their ego. She decides to raise her child alone with nature-loving practices. Atwood conveys the message through this novel that both women and nature can be protected if domination by men is controlled and checked. The discovery of self by a woman, while being close to nature, brings peace to her mind and makes her confident in life. Empowering women and protecting environment are the ways to bring peace in the world also.

The degradation of environment and lowering of the status of women, are the two aspects on which Atwood has called our attention in The Handmaid’s Tale. The environment has become so unclean and inhabitable that people have become sterile in Gilead. Women are totally subservient to men and men have taken over the country as its masters and rulers. They have restricted women from having any kind of freedom and all the women have been divided into classes like whores, wombs, workers, and wives. Any kind of activity related to intellect has been denied to them. They have to remain silent and submit to the rules. They exist like ‘two legged wombs’ and their existence depends upon their fertility. The dystopian situation presents patriarchy in its extreme evil form.
Women are trying to find peace by getting close to nature in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. There are two kinds of sterility that have gripped the country of Gilead – one is physical sterility, and the other is moral sterility. The practices dominated by dualism and patriarchy have abused both women and nature. The functioning of the society has become abnormal due to the partial attitude of men. Women have been denied basic rights on the basis of gender discrimination. Atwood depicts such a dystopian society to highlight the dangerous consequences of patriarchal power. For a peaceful and harmonious world, preservation of nature and the equality of women are essential. The peace agenda of ecofeminism states that all the forms of life are interconnected and should be valued on equality basis. Ecofeminist peace politics has the potential to radically restructure all forms of oppression. The environmental catastrophe and violence against women in the novel reflect upon the need for undertaking a critical analysis of the underlying ‘logic of domination.’

*Oryx and Crake* is a futuristic novel in which environment has deteriorated and global warming has started showing grave consequences. The reader is shocked to find an apocalypse occurring as a result of advanced technological experiments. Before the apocalypse, overpopulation was plaguing the world, putting too much pressure on the ecosystem. The ecological balance was severely disturbed by the human beings. Biotechnology experiments had been converted into bioterrorism by exploiting the natural processes. There was huge wipe out of various species. People could feel that something was seriously wrong in the society. The survival of humans was at stake. Violence against women, pornography, classism, and racism were turning the world towards unnatural and dominating practices.
Apocalypse occurs as a result of the side effects of BlyssPluss Pill. The pill was designed to remove the ageing effect on people and to make them super-energetic. But it brought mass destruction and wiped out the species of humans from the world. Only a few survivors are left who are finding it difficult to survive due to global warming and shortage of food. Atwood envisages the future in a gloomy light due to uncontrolled scientific experiments that are putting pressure on nature and the planet. The domination by men is further pushing women to the corner and women are strategically kept aside from intellectual aspects of life.

The plot of the novel depicts the modern world of alienation. Crake becomes rebellious against society and plans the mass destruction. Jesse Matz comments upon the plot of modern novel, “In the modern reversal of the bildungsroman, characters often grow from conformity to rebellion, and end not in happy oneness with society at large but in intense and often destructive rejections of it” (Matz 48). Madness and alienation are the prominent features of modern novel and also in *Oryx and Crake*. Crake becomes the anti-hero of the novel. The novel depicts the dangerous psychological problems related to the anti-social mind of an estranged individual like him.

The alienation felt by human beings is an outcome of modern trends and culture. Karl Marx’s ‘theory of alienation’ stresses upon the increasing separation between humans and nature, as the prime cause of the feeling of alienation in people. He affirms that when people were in direct contact with nature for fulfilling all their needs, there was no alienation. There was a sense of harmony between nature and the human world. People became alienated when they lost their connection to the means
of production. The modern world has adopted the culture of consumerism, resulting in the focus on accumulation of wealth and alienation from nature. In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake feels alienation in his heart after he becomes involved in high-tech scientific experiments.

*The Year of the Flood* is contemporaneous with *Oryx and Crake* and few characters are similar in both the novels. The strict demarcation of elite people living in the Compound and common people living in pleeblands, reflects upon the dominant corporate culture of the world. Similarly, Watson-Crick Institute for science and technology is far better equipped with facilities than Martha Graham Academy for art. The privileged biotechnology ultimately becomes the cause of mass human destruction on the planet. Few God’s Gardeners, who have survived, had prepared themselves for the catastrophe before it struck. They are nature-loving people having reverence for nature’s phenomena. Crakers have also survived the pandemic who are genetically engineered human beings designed by Crake.

The plot of the novel juxtaposes two opposing ways of life led by dominant people and God’s Gardeners. The people with hegemonic instinct are representative of the growth of corporate culture, capitalism, science and technology, and multinational companies whereas God’s Gardeners represent awareness of nature, nature-loving practices, and pollution reducing techniques. Atwood depicts the unnatural practices of the modern world that are leading the world towards degeneration of moral and ethical values. Sexual abuse of Oryx, Toby, and Ren and abuse of nature co-exist, with the support of patriarchy, technology, and male chauvinism.
Atwood seeks to highlight the dominant and unnatural practices of the world that are posing danger to ecology and human existence. The novels selected for this thesis convey the idea that human beings need to revert back to natural and eco-friendly ways for a peaceful existence. The uprooting of tribal communities, for the sake of endless needs of modern man, must be put to an end. Many such marginalized communities, who live in healthy social order, have to leave their homes when they become the victims of development projects. Ecofeminist peace politics stresses upon the need to value the perspectives of local people for the betterment of environment.

To some people, the initial reaction to ecofeminism can be of mistrust and it may look like a fantasy or romantic imagination. But a complete understanding of the concept and its practical aspects make it a theory of progress, peace, and co-existence in the contemporary world. One essential feature of this theory is the positive value attributed to the connection between women and nature instead of a negative portrayal of both as weaker entities. A great cultural revaluation of the status of women and radical transformation of the environmental policies are the aims of ecofeminism.

The qualities of women that bring them closer to nature may not be necessarily found in all women. The virtues of empathy, nurturance, patience, and maternal instinct associated with women may be replaced by domination and violence in some women. Nevertheless, women’s role in peace-making and in making the environment better can’t be neglected, owing to the commonly found feminine virtues, with inclination towards nature care. Mary Mellor writes in her book *Feminism & Ecology* (1997), “In arguing for the radical potential of a link between feminism and ecology I do not claim that women are somehow essentially closer to
‘nature,’ but rather that it is not possible to understand the ecologically destructive consequences of dominant trends in human development without understanding their gendered nature” (Mellor n.pag.).

Current global environmental crisis has become a matter of concern, creating the need for a new universal politics. There is a need to develop global consciousness that transcends the self interests in relation to nature. In the 1992 United Nations eco-expo at Rio (also known as Earth Summit), thousands of environmental NGO participants and 117 heads of state committed to work with global cooperation to save the planet. Ozone depletion and global warming are global issues and the whole planet needs attention on this front. Another aspect to bring global change is the reorganization of the global socioeconomic system. Catriona Sandilands calls for “a smaller, more stable, and production-for-use economy that can fit within the limits of the biosphere’s capacity to sustain it” (Sandilands 130).

Atwood’s dystopian visions in her novels are a kind of warning against the global tendency towards anti-nature activities. Whereas in The Handmaid’s Tale pollution and environmental destruction threatened one region of North America, Oryx and Crake is situated in a globally affected environment where the abuse of scientific experiments leads to global destruction. Other issues related to the dystopian situation are the restrictions imposed on basic human rights and oppression of women. In the novels like Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood, Atwood has warned that humanity may not survive with the present trends and practices.

Ecofeminists argue that the actions of the military in causing environmental havoc are beyond the reach of law. The researchers confirm that they are the biggest
threat to the environmental welfare of the planet. *The Handmaid’s Tale* focuses on the possible consequences of large quantities of nuclear and other toxic wastes present in the environment due to military activities. The novel sheds light on the fact that a large part of the fatal radioactive wastes come directly from the military actions in the name of their experiments. There is an alarming increase in the number of the deformed foetuses particularly in the regions where such toxic wastes are found at a raised level. Women are at high risk of vaginal infections, cervical cancers, and pregnancy related disorders.

Ecofeminists claim that Central America is one of the most heavily militarized regions in the world and it is on the brink of ecological collapse. Military men are among the largest of landowners and use heavy pesticides for their monoculture crops. Soil erosion, pesticide poisonings, water pollution have made this area ecologically unstable. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood has highlighted the masculine and biased patriarchal regime of military in which the top-most officials take extreme decisions to protect their selfish interests and in the process, disturb the balance of the society.

Ecofeminists shed light on the fact that the industries that deal with fatal chemicals have been shifted to the Third World countries. Exposure to asbestos is a serious threat to human health. Asbestos production has been banned in Europe and North America and the multinationals have shifted its production to the Third World. Rich countries are exploiting the natural resources of poor nations. They are dumping their toxic wastes in poor countries. The industrialists of rich countries find it even more profitable to install industries that produce hazardous wastes, in poor countries.
Atwood has brought into picture the similar exploitation of poor countries in *Oryx and Crake* when Crake chooses human beings for his experimentation of new inventions, from poor countries. Joni Seager writes:

Rich countries continue to enhance their wealth by expanding their resource reach beyond their own borders, while frequently exporting their problems. Having stripped their own forests, they are turning to timber plundering in former colonies; choking on a glut of municipal, household, and industrial garbage, they seek to ship away their waste to small Pacific islands or debt-strapped countries in Africa. (Seager 150)

Ecofeminists claim that the average representation of women in legislative bodies is around two to three percent in the world. A political study confirms that women have different policy-making priorities, and issues like nuclear power are not on their priority agenda. They are more inclined to the formation of environment regulation policies. Military governments least tolerate environmental reform. It is evident in *The Handmaid’s Tale* also that the military government has excluded women from positions of power and simultaneously, the environment is suffering badly. In order to re-establish peace, the conditions of both women and environment need to be improved.

Ecofeminists critique that modern science is based on a paradigm of the domination and exploitation of nature. The mechanistic scientific approach is directed towards technologies of destruction and weaponry. This masculinist and mechanistic scientific approach was also responsible for colonial expansion of Europe. The
traditional and indigenous knowledge systems of Asia and Africa were replaced by scientific and rational knowledge. The natural resources that were used by people for sustenance were controlled by capitalists for their profit. Atwood highlights the destructive impact of modern technology in *Oryx and Crake* when Crake invents a pill that causes a major catastrophe on the planet. The domination of science and the abuse of nature have been depicted in the novel.

Ecofeminists state that women, in majority, started their fight against environmental pollution and exploitation of natural resources. In Europe and North America, women joined environmentalism through peace movement. Their approach towards peace established the link among peace, feminism, and environmentalism. Bringing maternalism also, in connection to the peace movement, women fought for peace in the name of their children. The most visible expression of women’s contribution to environmental issues has been in the form of ecofeminist movement.

Affirming the woman-nature association, ecofeminists embrace the concept that women are closer to earth. Patriarchal culture has manipulated this bond to serve their purpose of dominance. Ecofeminists consider this bond as the strength of women. Lois Gibbs, living at Love Canal, had the courage to speak against the toxic dumping near her house and she established Centre for Health, Environment, and Justice. Dr. Wangari Maathai resisted the powerful opposing forces and continued with her tree planting mission. Dr. Vandana Shiva raised voice against foreign interference in agricultural practices and the use of biotechnology in agriculture. Atwood makes this strength visible in *Surfacing* when the protagonist defies the norms of patriarchy and finds her own way for peace in connection to nature.
Atwood has shown her resentment against the trend of Americanization in her novels. American culture is spreading fast and that creates fear among Canadians regarding the natural beauty and traditional culture of their nation. Some ecofeminists are of the view that America is contributing to a political and economic climate in the world in which no one can be at peace. The theorists of ecofeminism are making efforts to define a peace movement that presents a vision of anti-hierarchical, nature-loving, and ecologically balanced world.

Ynestra King envisions peace in the form of “... national and planetary security – societies free of violence, with nature-friendly technologies, and place and culture-respectful sustainable economies” (King n.pag.). Ecology, feminism, and peace have been always closely linked, especially since the first ecofeminist political gathering in 1980 at Amherst. Over 1000 women had got together to explore these connections. They had begun with ‘Women’s Pentagon Action’ as a protest against military violence.

The ecofeminist ideology proposes the social transformation by moving beyond power politics and viewing nature with its intrinsic value instead of having an anthropocentric view. Ecofeminists around the globe are working to bring changes in attitude of men towards women and ecology. As all life forms are considered to be connected to each other, ecofeminists are stressing upon the need to recognize the importance of diversity for the maintenance of balanced ecosystem. In Oryx and Crake all these issues form a part of ecofeminist debate. The power that is concentrated in few scientific hands brings the civilization to apocalypse. Due to imbalance in the distribution of power, all the people suffer in the end. Nature that
was considered powerless finally turns out victorious. Atwood has used literature as a tool to warn the readers against fatal consequences of the current unnatural practices lacking in ethics. She attempts to make visible the positive role that literature can play in relation to ecology.

Vandana Shiva has focused her research on indigenous people and third world women. She was one of the women who were involved in Chipko Movement. The lives of these women are adversely affected by corporate globalization. Shiva has written many books that highlight the negative impact of globalization on the lives of people in developing countries. War and capitalism have been proved as patriarchal structures that enforce domination and restrict freedom. Shiva calls the present model of economic development as ‘maldevelopment.’ The harsh competitive corporate world separates humans from nature and widens the gap between them. Technology is privileged over aesthetic and indigenous knowledge. Animals are subjected to torture in the name of experiments. Shiva proposes an alternative worldview that promotes partnership and cooperation. For the betterment of women and environment, the concepts of progress and development need to be reconstructed.

The plight of rural women that has been highlighted by Shiva becomes visible in Oryx and Crake also. Atwood paints a picture of women and environment in which both are in debilitating condition. In the novel, Oryx belongs to a poor village in a third world country. Due to worsening condition of environment, people have become very poor due to decrease in the yield of crops. Men idle away their time in smoking and women bear many children to increase work force in the family. Women have to sell their children in order to get the meagre amount of money. Small girls are sold to
people who use them for prostitution and pornography. Atwood indicates that in the present world, all the unethical practices are promoted for the sake of profits. Vandana Shiva makes similar practices visible in order to illuminate her ‘maldevelopment’ concept.

According to Shiva, modernization has promoted domination of women and devalued women’s household work. The work that doesn’t bring financial gains is not considered important. Shiva argues that oppression of women will continue until the devaluation of ‘feminine principle’ continues. This principle promotes nurturing, love, and care in human beings. It is the creative force that maintains life and is based on inclusiveness. It is required in men, for whom activity means ‘destruction’ and power means ‘domination.’ The feminine principle stands for creation and empowerment. The novel *Surfacing* sheds light on the masculine conceptions of power, marriage, and progress and on the need for feminine principle in men. David insults his wife Anna and doesn’t consider her as mentally fit. Anna has to follow his commands against her wish. The natural beauty of the island is also under threat. The effect of modernization has been depicted in the relationship between David and Anna, and the destruction of island’s natural beauty.

Shiva argues that natural resources have been severely affected by man’s greed. It becomes important to use them wisely and to protect the delicate web of life. Climate has changed drastically and further enhancement in global warming can prove extremely dangerous for human beings. The domination of humans over nature has increased the risk of an ecological catastrophe. Atwood has portrayed a picture of
such a disaster in *Oryx and Crake*. In the novel, the global warming has already destroyed many areas of the world. Natural resources are coming to an end and overpopulation has aggravated this situation.

Shiva criticizes the dominant western model of science and development. She proposes other ways to promote sustenance of all life forms on the planet. Her theories about nature can be related to the theory of ‘deep ecology’ proposed by Arne Naess. Naess critiques that gaining maturity involves widening the circles of identification and self-realization is the final stage of maturity, when the widest possible circle of identification is achieved. At that stage, a person identifies not merely with family, community, culture, or humanity, but also identifies with the environment that surrounds him and with earth. Atwood has revealed in *Surfacing* that the protagonist starts identifying herself with her surrounding environment. She undergoes the process of self-realization. In *The Year of the Flood* also, the God’s Gardeners are the people who identify their existence with nature, environment, and earth.

Some ecofeminists believe that human domination of the natural world is an extension of human domination of other humans. All forms of social inequalities need to be eliminated to uproot exploitation of the environment. Everyone should have the right to participate in decision-making procedures. Murray Bookchin, a social ecologist, claims that a non-hierarchical society will be an ecological one also. Atwood makes this concept visible in *The Handmaid’s Tale* where the society that exists with many kinds of social inequalities has been shown to have an environment full of toxins. The novel depicts the idea that a healthy environment depends on healthy human relationships.
The destructive effect on the small scale agriculture has been commented upon in *The Women, Gender & Development Reader* as “Under colonialism, and later under the influence of the development process, a capitalist mode of development and green-revolution technology has penetrated India’s rural economies, a process that destroyed the economic base of small-scale local survival agriculture” (Visvanathan 57). Poor women became more marginalized due to large scale market-oriented agriculture. In the past, people lived in harmony with nature and women were respected for their role in agriculture. Similar exploitation of small scale growers has been depicted in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. The new business of growing coffee beans with new machines throws all the small-scale farmers out of business. They are left jobless and in the grip of poverty.

Ecofeminists argue that environmental imbalance causes acid rain and global warming types of abnormal conditions that have detrimental effect particularly on women. The miserable situation for women has been depicted in *The Handmaid’s Tale* where the environment is so much deteriorated that women are no more able to give birth to viable children. The power of patriarchy is strong and men at the top have lost all sense of decency and humanity. They have reduced women to the level of prisoners, slaves, and children producing machines. Karen Warren suggests that this kind of ‘power-over’ relationship should be replaced by ‘power-with’ relationship in order to overthrow patriarchal power. The liberation of men and women from the clutches of patriarchy is necessary for a peaceful society. Gender divisions are the most significant of all social cleavages that lead to violence.
The argument given by many theorists is that men were separated from nature by the process of development and continuous development activities have widened the gap. Women and nature both were devalued in the development process. In *Surfacing* the protagonist feels disappointed at the destruction of nature due to development projects. She thinks that the preservation of wilderness is as important as the liberty of a woman. She connects the oppression of women with the degrading values of modern times. She decides to go back to the primitive state to gain her true identity. She undergoes the process of recreation in the forest. She creates for herself a utopian world in which there are no traces of domination.

Atwood creates an optimistic situation for the protagonist in *Surfacing* where she can hope to live life on her own terms. But the dystopian situation in *The Handmaid’s Tale* does not let the protagonist to act according to her will. She is strictly bound by the rules. She lives the life of a prisoner in the house of Commander yielding to his lust. She can only dream of freedom and has no way to escape from that place and the country. The hopeless vision created by Atwood emphasizes upon building a society that is ecologically safe and has the freedom to make choices. Ecofeminism also supports only those technologies that are based on ecological principles. Francoise d’Eaubonne has accused governments of over-focusing on economy and reducing women and nature to resources.

Ecofeminism seeks to imbibe the culture in which human beings do not consider themselves separate from nature. Humans are a part of the delicate web of ecology and the anthropocentric view of placing them superior to nature does not hold right argument. The androcentric view of man being above women, nature, and all life
forms also does not carry weight and is based on wrong assumption. Atwood conveys
through her fictional world that her warnings of ecological catastrophes are the
representations of impending disasters. The disappearance of human beings from
earth and the apocalyptic vision is a kind of shock therapy. In *Oryx and Crake* and
*The Year of the Flood*, she has combined utopian and dystopian visions as a metaphor
for the different directions humanity can take.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy’s mother protests against the violence involved in
commercial objectives of technical experiments. She resigns from such an unethical
job but the interests of Jimmy’s father lie in scientific experiments and machines.
Jimmy’s mother leaves the Compound and turns into an environmental protester.
Atwood indicates that environment and human existence both are in grave danger.
Human activities related to uncontrolled scientific experiments might prove fatal in
the long run. Unchecked male domination leads to imbalance in various human
relationships.

By bringing into picture various aspects of ecofeminism, Atwood confirms the
agenda of ecofeminist peace politics that aims to create a peaceful world by
repudiating patriarchy and leading ecologically conscious lives. The proposed
measures by this politics can ensure healthy existence of life on earth. The issues of
feminism, peace, and ecology are intricately linked to each other. The novels that
have been analysed, speculate about darker realities of life related to exploitation of
women and nature, and deep-rooted corruption in the world. Atwood’s feminist,
environmental, and peace related concerns are discernible in her fiction. She reveals
her optimism by creating a utopian vision in the end of the novels like *Surfacing.*
Oryx and Crake, and The Year of the Flood. The analysis of ecofeminist peace politics in her fiction aims at finding ways to end all forms of domination. Ecofeminist agenda of peace relates nature and humans in multiple ways that determine their symbiotic relationship. This perspective of peace in the world would contribute to more vigorous efforts that aim to renew and redefine the concept of peace.
Works Cited


