Margaret Atwood, a Canadian novelist, poet, and critic, has been a complete phenomenon in the span of more than forty years. She is one of the prolific and eminent writers of Canada and has carved a niche for herself in the international literary circle also. Being a humanist, her works reflect humanitarian concerns and yearning for a peaceful world. The dystopia or apocalypse that marks her recent fiction is a kind of a shock therapy that influences the readers and makes them ponder over the contemporary problems of the world. Her novels are generally inquisitive, thought provoking, and probe into the dilemmas and complexities of human life. The two most commonly found themes of her novels are women empowerment and environmental crisis. The novels that have been selected for this doctoral thesis, namely Surfacing (1972), The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), Oryx and Crake (2003), and The Year of the Flood (2009), primarily focus on gender inequality and the effect of current global practices and technological advancements on nature. These novels are the central focus of the thesis and various situations in them connect the theory of ecofeminist peace politics to the underlying themes.

“Ecofeminism” is an umbrella term that captures various social systems of domination, especially those related to women and nature. The term was introduced by Francoise d’Eaubonne, a French feminist, in 1974 to emphasize upon women’s potential in bringing about an ecological revolution. Instead of viewing the women-nature connection as a weak link for women, she argued that the affinity between the two is a source of strength needed to make the world peaceful and harmonious.
Ecofeminist movement gained international recognition as a grassroots movement for peace and it encompassed the pragmatic issues like women’s status, role of technology, pollution, animal rights, and peace. Ecofeminists hold the patriarchal system and power-over relationship responsible for both environmental degradation and woman’s oppression. Karen J. Warren, a leading ecofeminist of the present generation, has argued that exploitations of women and nature are the outcome of historically sanctioned ‘patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework.’ Her article “Toward an Ecofeminist Peace Politics” repudiates patriarchy and demands a commitment to the development of anti-patriarchal philosophies and practices.

Ecofeminist philosophy combines naturism to multiple social oppressions, including sexism, and that makes it a philosophy having great insight. The ecofeminist movement strives to find theories and political strategies that eradicate various tangled oppressions. The ecofeminist framework includes development of liberation theory that is capable of addressing the interconnection of all forms of domination, focusing especially on race, class, gender, and environment issues. Val Plumwood critiques that the hope for peace in the present situation of crisis in the world lies in having a complete and connected understanding of the web of domination in order to follow a remedial course.

The introductory chapter highlights the theory of ecofeminism, ecofeminism as a political movement, and ecofeminism as peace politics. The references from the works of prominent ecofeminists namely, Val Plumwood, Karen J. Warren, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Maria Mies, and Ariel Salleh, have been given. The connection between feminism and ecofeminism has also been analysed. The eight
types of connections between feminism and the environment as identified by Karen J. Warren have been discussed in relation to their contribution towards formation of this theory. The analysis of ecofeminism about social dysfunction has been probed with respect to oppression and domination prevalent in the world. The patriarchal conceptual framework has been summed up as the causative factor behind the domination and the aim of ecofeminism to replace it with egalitarianism has been analysed.

The second chapter of my thesis entitled “Discovering Self in Ecofeminist Mode: Surfacing,” relates ecofeminist peace politics to Atwood’s novel Surfacing (1972). The central theme of the novel deals with the female protagonist’s search for her identity in a mechanical and patriarchal society and the positive role that nature plays in her life. Domination of the technical modernization is an ecofeminist issue that has been highlighted in this chapter. The contrast is clearly visible between the mother’s life on the island and her daughter’s life in the city. The mother, absorbed in age old values and traditions, lived her life as a part of nature. She had an understanding with nature and that made her a confident and self-reliant woman. She was capable of protecting herself and her family in every way. The daughter migrated to city and she had to take up a profession which she didn’t like. She got pregnant and her lover commanded her to abort. She hated the whole mechanized process in the hospital. Everything and everybody worked like a machine in the city. Clearly, modernization dominated the souls of people and dragged them away from nature.

The journey of the protagonist towards peace begins after she experiences truth in the lap of nature. The picture of her past suddenly becomes clear to her. She no
longer needs to frame stories in her mind to hide the bad incidents from herself. She has gained the courage to face truth in its bare form. She realizes that her lover’s relationship with her was only a ritual for him; a tag to remind him that he was still young. He wanted to keep the relationship separate from his married and routine life. She refuses to be a victim any more. She has gained the power a woman needs, to rise against domination and exploitation. “I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless ...” (197). After gaining the knowledge of her new identity, she can now bring changes in order to preserve nature, tradition, and culture. Her inner being is at peace now. She has found solace among trees. She would no longer let men bind her in chains again.

The novel highlights multiple experiences that the protagonist undergoes, especially in relation to nature and patriarchy. The protagonist’s discovery of her connection with nature acquires a democratic impulse in the end when she refuses to accept any sort of inequality or domination. After her experience of being in a purely natural state, she is now free to go anywhere. Her inner strength would guide her and not let her fall apart. She decides to go back to the city but only to remain as a true citizen of Canada, not to get affected by Americanism.

The third chapter of the thesis entitled “The ‘Logic of Domination’ in The Handmaid’s Tale,” probes the novel The Handmaid’s Tale (1985) in which the ecofeminist strains run deep into the whole situation. In this chapter the concept of ‘logic of domination’ has been related to the domination that exists throughout the novel. Karen J. Warren has defined it as a structure of argumentation that leads to a justification of subordination. One such logic given to subordinate non-human natural
environment is that since plants and rocks cannot change the community radically in which they exist, humans are justified in having control over them.

Ecofeminists claim that the logics which are given to justify oppression of women and nature should not become part of any activity or policy. The novel is a dystopian masterpiece in which fascist rule by men has given rise to biased policies, reducing the status of women to prisoners. Many restrictions imposed upon them, directly or indirectly, have left them completely paralyzed. The oppression of women is linked to deteriorated environment also. The failure of the administration is proven by the fact that the health of people has severely gone down and they are no more capable of giving birth to healthy children. Most of the new born babies suffer from congenital abnormalities. Men and women have become infertile and the whole blame has to be accepted by women. The novel is a masterpiece of the dystopian genre in which people live in constant fear and control of their governing body, live meaningless lives, and have very little hope for any change to take place.

The fourth chapter entitled “Apocalyptic Future and the End of Technology vis-à-vis Atwood’s Oryx and Crake,” analyses the novel Oryx and Crake (2003) as it has enormous scope for critiquing the role of technology in the present world and of determining its connection to the agenda of peace on this planet. The devastated condition of human being points towards the fact that down the road he is heading towards a major destruction. Along with many new inventions, mankind has also witnessed many disasters leading to mass destruction. The disasters have been the outcome of the abuse and unethical use of the latest inventions. Atwood gives a prophetic warning that man needs to mend his ways if the future is to be saved. Atwood focuses on the themes of exploitation
of women, destruction of nature due to excessive use of advanced technology and
domination of the weaker by the powerful. Various complex situations in the novel
indicate towards a dire need to reform the society.

Due to the fast pace of advancement in technology, the basic human values
are getting deteriorated, making the world a dead end. The large depletion of natural
resources and their misuse, environmental pollution and destruction of the rhythm of
nature are the factors responsible for the present crisis. The theory of ecofeminism
finds its grassroots ideologies becoming an essential part of the critical thought
process of the events in the novel. The events depict the erosion of women and nature
running parallel and their mutually reinforcing causes of exploitation as having
common ground.

The fifth chapter entitled “Aspects of Violence in The Year of the Flood,”
analyses the novel The Year of the Flood (2009) that presents two different worlds –
one in which human beings think themselves as superior to nature and exploit it and
the other in which they can live in harmony with nature. On one side there are people
in the Compound who have become the slaves of technology and have become
corrupt in the process of making profit and on the other side Gardeners have
constructed a world for themselves in which life in the simplest form is led. The study
of various herbs, their properties, their medicinal uses, extracting honey with a special
procedure, caring for bees, preserving maggots to cure wounds, learning self-defence
activities, meditation, celebrating nature’s phenomena are part of their daily routine
activities. They are living without any burden on the planet rather they were
contributing their best to it. From the violence and mismanagement in the world, the
Gardeners could realize that man had adopted the wrong way and instead of following the nature’s way and inner instinct, he is more into greed, lust, and selfishness, ultimately becoming totally dependent on artificial means. Women are the victims of exploitation by men and their suffering is linked to the degraded environment. The imbalance results in a pandemic in which almost the whole of civilization comes to an end.

The thesis reaches to the conclusion that the issues related to ecofeminism have been close to Atwood’s heart. In Surfacing, she was successful in portraying complete atonement between the female protagonist and nature in all peaceful manifestation. The protagonist in this novel is a metaphor for the universal identity of a woman. In her later works like The Handmaid’s Tale, Oryx and Crake, and The Year of the Flood, she was less hopeful and she created darker pictures of the world. Her presentation of dystopian civilization makes the reader ponder over the current problems of the world. The apocalypse in her two contemporaneous novels, Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood brings forward the need to contemplate on the devastating effects of technology. These works are a kind of forewarnings and emphasize upon the need to take corrective measures for the rejuvenation of peace, which is the main agenda of ecofeminist peace politics.