

## Chapter Five

### Summation

You delight in laying down laws,  
Yet you delight more in breaking them.  
Like children playing by the ocean who build  
sand-towers with constancy and then  
destroy them with laughter.

- Khalil Gibran

Canada's quest to discover a distinctive national identity has made tremendous impact in Canadian literature. The adverse climatic conditions, with ferocious summer and fierce winter have played a significant role in Canadian life and literature. Canada's diversified geographic features, which is filled with wild wilderness, vast landscapes, oceans, mountains, rivers and ravines have influenced many Canadian writers, and it has played a crucial part in shaping the cultural and psychological development of the Canadians. Many Canadian authors have self-consciously attempted to revive their nation's literature and have inscribed the Canadian experience which is completely new to the world. And Margaret Atwood is one of the forerunners of the nationalist literary movement who carved a distinctive space for Canada in the world literature.

Atwood's novels are set in Canadian backdrops which display the splendid aura of nature-human encounter. Atwood's *Surfacing*, *Cat's Eye*, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin* have depicted Canadian wild wilderness with its essential vitality. Nature plays a decisive role in the emotional and psychological development of protagonists of the above mentioned novels. The unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* in the end of the novel decides to live alone in the Quebec Island, surrounded by dense

forest. Her decision to live a solitary life in the Quebec Island seems to be an inherent Canadian aspiration. The childhood reminisces, of Elaine Risley, the protagonist of *Cat's Eye* reveals her deeper yearning for the days she has spent with her parents and brother, Stephen in the forest. Elaine's father is an entomologist and the family often spends months in forest and Elaine has acquired the skill to survive the lurking danger, which is an inherent part of forest life. The unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* and the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin*, Irish Chase are also akin to the forest life, in the early part of their childhood, and have acquired the skills to survive in the wilderness. Atwood's novels not only reflect the Canadian life, it also deals with the serious global issues the humanity confronts in the contemporary times.

Atwood's writing career spans for more than 50 years, and at present she is actively involved in discourses and activities to resolve global issues which affect the peaceful progress of the humanity. Coral Ann Howells a noted Canadian critic and professor in the University of Reading, United Kingdom, in her book *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* classifies Atwood's works into three stages. The early stage of Atwood's career is called 'mapping her Canada'. Second stage of Atwood's work which covers the period between 1970 and 1985 is classified as 'interpreting Canada abroad'. The final stage is called 'Canada in the world'. In all the three stages Atwood has voiced for weaker and oppressed sections.

The researcher has extensively examined how Atwood works on core issues which modern man confronts. Though Atwood's novels work on numerous contemporary political, social, gender and environmental issues, she is much concerned with issues related to children, women and women writers. To be specific, she makes a loud call to the international community to introspect the issues related to

child rights and marital system. She, as a women writer presents the problems and challenges of writers, especially women.

In the **Introduction**, the researcher has traced how Canada's geography and adverse climatic conditions have influenced Canadian literary writings. The chapter has presented the outline literary history as well as the social history of Canada. The introductory chapter has also sketched the place of Margaret Atwood in Canadian literary tradition.

The second chapter, **Children with Broken Wings and Shattered Dreams** has analysed the childhood of the protagonists of the select novels. The chapter has extensively explored the socio-psychological problems faced by the protagonists during their childhood. The protagonists confront challenges right from their early infancy and are victimised by their parents, close family members, school friends and employers at work places. Homes, schools and work places have not provided secure environment. And children who are brought up in the unhealthy and repressive environment suffer terribly in the later years.

The third chapter **Deception and Marital Discord** studies the adulthood period. The abused protagonists face innumerable socio-psychological problems. These children suffer enormously in their adulthood. The negative impact of the endangered childhood days, affected their decision making skills. Protagonists who are abused during the childhood, made wrong decisions and landed themselves in trouble waters. Their search for a secure life often ends in failure. The poor decision making skills has driven them to make wrong marital choices. The chapter has closely examined the maltreated protagonists' marital lives.

The fourth chapter **Crossing Boundaries of Creativity** has explored the professional lives of the protagonists. The chapter has discussed the protagonists who are creative writers and artists. The unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing* is a freelance journalist and writer. Joan Foster, the protagonist of *Lady Oracle* is a pulp romance writer. Reenie Wilford of *Bodily Harm* is a travel and political journalist. Eliane Risley of *Cat's Eye* is a painter and Irish Chase the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* is a science fiction novelist. Apart from these five novels, the project has also analysed *Hag-Seed* which is the latest novel of Atwood. Felix, The protagonist of *Hag-Seed*, is a theatre director and he is the only male protagonist of the novels selected for research. *Hag-Seed* is considered for analysis because Atwood has extensively analysed the process of creativity.

Atwood considers the power structure which controls and denies the rights and privilege of children, women and creative writers and artists as uncivilized. Atwood's novels analyse wide range of children's issues. She discusses various forms of child abuses which include, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, and emotional abuse in her novels. According to Atwood, the present world is not a better place for children. Atwood through her novels wants the world to change its perception about children. The world needs to reverse the way it views and treats children. The modern thinking, throws new insight about child development and the traditional concepts of child development is no more relevant in the modern times.

Atwood's perception about child development reflects recent studies and researches sponsored by The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF sponsored child development researches and it has worked out many plans and programmes to improve international understanding of issues related to children. The

analogous correlation of child abuse studies between UNICEF sponsored researches and Atwood's novels is closely analysed in the thesis.

Medical science has unravelled many mysterious brain development in human species and the UNICEF funded research in early childhood has thrown astonishing insights and completely revived the 'old thinking' about early childhood. UNICEF's recent researches has stated the first eight years of a child's life, as early childhood. UNICEF's recent researches have termed 'the first eight years of a child's life span, as early childhood'. UNICEF has released many brochures and guides both in print and online to protect the rights of 'every children'. UNICEF's *Early Childhood Development: The Key to a full and productive life* is an important guide, published by the organisation to promote and protect the rights of children, states about the brain development in the first eight years of child development:

Early childhood is the most and rapid period of development in a human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children . . . Therefore, early childhood is a period in progress where environment actually has an important shock on determining how the brain and central nervous system nurtures and expands. Environment affects not only the number of brain cells and the number of correlations among them but also the way these connections are "wired." . . . Scientific evidence proposes that if the brain does not receive the suitable stimulation during this significant window, it is very hard for the brain to rewrite itself at a later time. (1)

The research findings cited above, demonstrates that the early childhood has profound influence and has ‘lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality and social behaviour’ and it serves as ‘foundation for children’s future well-being and learning’. Home, school and social environment not only influence children’s formative years, the recent scientific researches and evidences has pointed out that the environment in home, school and society fundamentally determine the entire brain development of children. UNICEF’s *Early Childhood Development: They Key to a full and productive life* further observes thus:

Early stress can affect brain function, learning, and memory adversely and permanently. New research provides a scientific basis for the obvious fact that children who experience extreme stress in their earliest years are at greater risk for developing a variety of cognitive, behavioural, and emotional difficulties later in life. (1)

Lives and future of millions of children all around the world are in jeopardy and to these children loving homes, safe society and secure school environment are deprived. The twenty-first millennium has begun to acknowledge and document the prevalence of violence against children. Atwood can certainly be claimed as one of the early writers who attempted to draw the world’s attention towards children’s issues. Atwood’s novels can be called as a psycho-socio fictional documentary of children. *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Bodily Harm*, *Cat’s Eye*, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin* are fictitious case studies of issues cited in UNICEF’s brochures, guidelines, documents, publications found in UNICEF’s online databases.

UNICEF’s researches and Atwood’s novels are almost identical and complement correspondingly on child abuses reported in home, school and in work

place. Atwood has candidly documented the violence against children at home, school and workplace right from her early years of writing career.

Atwood voices with astonishing intensity for children's rights for nearly three decades. Protagonists of *Lady Oracle* and *The Blind Assassin* are fictional case studies of 'home violence' against children. *The Blind Assassin* has unearthed the familial sexual abuse and vividly portrayed the tragic life of two sisters, who are physically, emotionally and sexually abused by a close family member. Joan Foster of *Lady Oracle* is a victim of parental violence. Joan's mother's deliberate neglect and the abuse results in 'behavioural and emotional difficulties in her later years'. Laura Chase, the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* is sexually abused by a close family member, the husband of her elder sister, in her school years and it causes tremendous psychological tumult and she commits suicide at the age of twenty four. Reenie Wilford, the protagonist of the *Bodily Harm* is brought up by a single parent. Her father visits only on Christmas Eve, and her sick mother struggles hard to provide a happy childhood.

Joan Foster, the protagonist of *Lady Oracle*, is a victim of parental aggression. Parenting is an art but in the modern era parenting has become more challenging. To some parents it turns out to be a burden and they begin to abuse their own children whom they consider is the cause of their dreadful life. The expectation of the parents and the ability of the child play a crucial part in shaping the formative years of a child. Children, who fail to fulfil the expectation of the parents, are reported to experience pressure and stress at home. Failure of a child, leads to parental aggression. There are many causes for parental aggression. Low intelligence, less academic proficiency, physical disability and unpleasant physical appearance of the children are some of the primary causes of parental aggression. Atwood's *Lady*

*Oracle* with astonishing precision, illustrates the ill effects of parental aggression in a person's life.

Joan Foster suffers parental abuse and aggression because of her unpleasant physical appearance. Joan Foster's obesity is a thing of mockery and it has terribly affected the social stature of her mother. Joan's parents do not live a happy and peaceful marital life. Her father, a doctor, loves his profession more than his family. Her mother's anger for her husband instigates her to abuse her child. She derives sadistic pleasure in hurting her daughter. Joan is caught between the parental conflicts, suffers both physically and psychologically. The obesity of Joan foster further intensifies her mother's anger for the child.

Atwood demonstrates various levels of child abuse in *Lady Oracle*. Initially she is neglected by her mother. Later it turns into verbal abuse and finally her mother assaults Joan physically. The frustration of Joan's mother intensified day after day and she becomes an alcoholic. At an inebriated mood Joan's mother stabs her with a knife. Joan comments thus about the worst form of violence she received from her mother:

She looked at me with an expression of rage, which changed quickly to fear, and said, "God will not forgive you! God will never forgive you!" Then she took a paring knife from the kitchen counter – I had been using it to spread cottage cheese on my RyKrisp – and struck it into my arm, above the elbow. It went through my sweater, pricked the flesh, then bounced out and fell to the floor. Neither of us could believe she had done this. We both stared, then I picked up the paring knife, put it down on the kitchen table, and placed my left hand casually over the wound in my sweater. (136)



The dreadful event has remained in Joan's memory. Joan, gripped with terrible fear for life, instantly leaves her home permanently. Fearing for her life, she flees from Canada to England. The life of Joan is a symbolic representation of parental violence at home which millions of children face in their everyday life.

*Cat's Eye* and *Surfacing* depict school bullying and peer group violence among children. Violence among children is increasing at alarming rate in the recent years. Numerous cases of school murders and shootings have taken place in the recent days all over the world. And Atwood has vividly documented the adverse effect of violence among children in *Cat's Eye* and *Surfacing*. Elaine Risley the protagonist of *Cat's Eye* and the unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing* are brought up in similar environment. Elaine's father is an entomologist and the unnamed protagonist lives in an island in Quebec. The protagonists of the two aforesaid novels live with their families in the wild wilderness of Canada, surrounded by dense forest. These two protagonists who are less exposed to community life lack behavioural ethics and etiquettes of the urban world. Hence the two protagonists find it difficult to adopt with other students who hail from urban background and their poor socialising skills pave way for peer group bullying and violence.

The traumatic school day experience of Elaine Risley has turned her into an aggressive woman. She became a successful painter and avenges her school intimidators Cordelia and Grace after so many years. The reprisal on her friends soothed her soul and it slightly reduced her hatred for her school intimidators. Elaine's perception about children remains the same even after she mothers two daughters. She comments that the "Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized" (140). The above quoted line from *Cat's Eye* clearly suggests the serious tone of Atwood on the issues of violence

among children at school. The unnamed protagonist symbolises the plight of the aborigines and tribal students in school. UNICEF researches have reported numerous cases of abuses against aboriginal students at schools.

UNESCO's global status report on *School Violence and Bullying* was released in International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying in Seoul, Republic of South Korea in 17-18 January 2017. UNESCO's *School Violence and Bullying* reports thus:

A 2012 account by the Special agent of the Secretary-General on Violence beside Children notes that more than one billion children around the world concentrate school. . . . Many are also exposed to schoolyard fighting, gang violence, physical attack with weapons, and sexual and gender-based aggression by their own peers. (8)

The UNESCO's conference on violence among children at school urges all the countries to pay more attention to eradicate school violence among students. It requests all the members to take necessary steps to provide violent free school environment. UNESCO considers 'school violence among children' as a grave global issue and calls for immediate redressal. According to United Nations report 246 million children and young people experience school violence every year.

Atwood's *Alias Grace* depicts how work place harassment can lead a child to the path of violence. Atwood has set her story based on a real life incident which is permanently embedded in the memory of Canadian social history. She has weaved *Alias Grace*, around the murder of Thomas Kinner, a land lord. He was murdered by his servant maid, who is a sixteen year old girl. Poverty forces Grace Marks to take the job of a servant-maid. She shoulders the burden of her large family at the age of twelve. But the timid and fragile child, unable to comprehend the cunning ways of the

adult world commits a gruesome twin murder and ends up a life convict. Atwood's *Alias Grace* is a social satire which portrays the sordid condition of children who hail from a poverty stricken family. She poignantly portrays the ill effects of children who are deprived of school education.

Atwood is one among the many humanists who constantly and continuously voice to protect the rights of children. Atwood's writings demand equal rights for children. According to Atwood, children like elders are privileged to enjoy all rights. Children's dependency on their parents, teachers, elders and the community in which they live are the main cause of child abuse. It is the duty of every grown up citizen of the world, to collectively work for child rights protection. Legal protections and lethal punishment for child right violators can certainly help to improve the present situation. Atwood's protagonists who were abused in their early childhood, suffered in their later lives. The protagonists, who are abused in their childhood, face marital discord and their marital life ends up in failure.

Atwood is considered a feminist and some critics even call her pro-feminist. Atwood in many of her interviews has repeatedly refuted being called a feminist. But her fight against the gender injustice certainly remains a salient feature of her writings. Atwood has examined the system of marriage in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Cat's Eye* and *The Blind Assassin*. Atwood, in the above listed five novels, has attempted to identify the causes of marital failures. Marian MacAlphin in *The Edible Woman*, the unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing*, Joan Foster in *Lady Oracle*, Elaine Risley in *Cat's Eye*, and Irish Chase in *The Blind Assassin* experience marital conflict and failure.

Canadian collective consciousness no longer accepts the marital bondage between man and woman. Atwood reflects the Canadian nihilistic attitude towards the

system of marriage. Canadians consider the traditional concept of marriage as too impractical and ideal. Atwood strongly believes that the traditional marital system paves way for women subordination and hence searches to evolve an alternative system of matrimonial ties between men and women. She does not regard husband-wife relationship as sacred. She does not approve Christian marital system. Matthew's verses pronounce about the sacredness of marriage:

“Haven't you read,” he answered, “that at the commencement the Creator made them male and female,” and believed, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will grow to be one flesh’? So they are no longer two, although one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Matthew 19:4-6)

Canada though a Catholic nation has legalised divorce and abortion. Atwood has satirised the sacredness of marriage. Religion, according to Atwood, is an agent of patriarchal system which aims at female subordination. She firmly attacks religious fundamentalism and conservatism which uses marital institution to oppress women. Apart from the novels discussed in third chapter titled ‘Deceptions and Marital Discords’, Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* has vehemently attacked religious laws on marriage, divorce and abortion.

*The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985. But in the year 2017, after thirty years of its publication, the novel received worldwide attention and there was sudden demand for the novel in the United States of America and thousands of copies were sold in few months. The dystopian novel satirised the abortion policy of an imaginary theocratic regime called The Republic of Gilead. Readers of the United States of America related the abortion law of the Republic of Gilead with the newly framed

abortion laws of the newly elected Republican Government in the United States of America in the year 2017. Atwood in her interview to Elisabeth Moss for the online edition of *Time Magazine*, New York on 07.09.2017 remarks thus about the history of gender oppression:

Margaret Atwood: The control of women and babies has been a part of every repressive regime in history. This has been happening all along. I don't take it lightly when a politician says something like a pregnancy can't result from a rape because a woman's body knows it rejects it. There is an undercurrent of this (type of thinking). And then it rises to the surface sometimes. But *The Handmaid's Tale* is always relevant, just in different ways in different political contexts. Not that much has changed. (Elisabeth Moss: On the Urgency of the Handmaid's Tale)

Atwood further in the interview to Elisabeth Moss describes 'theocracy' as the greatest threat to women liberation. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in futuristic America. The theocratic military commanders successfully enact a coup and capture the United States of America. The Commanders of The Republic of Gilead employ women as handmaids. Handmaids are women whose work is to bear babies of the Commanders in their womb. Handmaids are 'living incubators'. These Handmaids are ordered to have sexual intercourse with the Commanders of the Republic of Gilead. The sexual intercourse between the Handmaid's and the Commanders of Gilead takes place in front of the Commanders' wives. Offred, the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale* remarks about her awkward sexual experience with the Commander which takes place in front of the Commander's wife, Serena Joy:

My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product . . . I do not say making feel affection for, because this is not what he's undertaking Copulating too would be inaccurate, it would imply two people and only one is engaged. Nor does rape cover it . . . Serena Joy grips my hands as if it is she, not I, who's being fucked as if she finds it either enjoyable or agonizing. (104-105)

The Handmaid's cannot sleep with the commander for sexual pleasures and their sole work is reproduction. Handmaids are used as 'incubators' and they are ordained to carry the babies of the commanders. The above quoted passage clearly demonstrated Atwood's perception about loveless marriages between two human bodies. Atwood's attack on marital system reaches its highest point in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Like Atwood, many modern writers, especially women writers, have recorded the failure of marriages in their works. Divorce, illicit and extra marital affairs are very common in the works of the modern writers which clearly reflect the fall of the institution of marriage.

Atwood's novel certainly depicts marital discords, but unlike other writers, the protagonists of Atwood certainly do not revolt openly against marital system. Instead they use deception, as a survival tool, at least temporary relief to break the monotony of marital life. Deception and treachery are very common in the lives of Atwood's women. They deceive either their husbands or lovers and maintain a secret affair with other men, to ease themselves and to survive the pains of the day to day life. In other words, deception is a means of survival for the Atwoodian women. These female protagonists experience painful marriages and they develop extramarital affairs. Many

protagonists in the novels have extramarital affairs yet they do not opt for divorce or separation. In fact they are more comfortable with two men. Deception is the master game played by women protagonists in their marital life. These protagonists fulfil all the expectations of their husband or partners but turn to other men and live rather a more romantic life with them. To their husbands, they are prosaic, plain and simple but they are passionate and vibrant with other men.

Atwood's protagonists not only cross the boundaries laid by the marital system, they attempt to replace it with a more acceptable marital contract. In *The Blind Assassin* Irish Chase comments that she needs a man just for the comfort of her body. Many Atwood's protagonists express similar opinion. Almost all Atwoodian women have extra-marital or pre-marital sexual relationship. Religious ideals and social doctrines do not stop them in breaking the marital boundaries. These protagonists are psychologically stronger than their partners and are happy to be in the arms of two men; one openly and another secretly. These, Atwood's women do not depend psychologically, emotionally or spiritually on their men. They need men but are comfortable with surface level relationship. They never reveal the secrets of their inner 'selves' even in the weakest moment of their life to their male partners. In other words, they do not trust their male partners and they never ever have taken pain to be loyal and trustworthy. Ironically the feeling of guilt has never aroused in the mind and heart of these protagonists who crosses the boundaries to escape gender stereotypes.

The system of marriage has solved many problems of the ancient people and the bondage of marriage is considered very holy, loyal and trustworthy and it bounds together the lives of men and women. But over the ages, the institution of marriage has slowly loosened its grip. Simon De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* traces

the history of the institution of marriage and the patriarchal power the institution of marriage has over a woman:

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage . . . Marriage is the reference, by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution . . . The economic evolution of woman's condition is in the process of upsetting the institution of marriage: it is becoming a union freely entered into by two autonomous individuals; the commitments of the two parties are personal and reciprocal; adultery is a breach of contract for both parties; either of them can obtain a divorce on the same grounds . . . Yet, from the feminist point of view, the period we are living through is still a period of transition . . . Modern marriage can be understood only in light of the past it perpetuates. (502)

Atwood's novels echo the perception of Simon De Beauvoir on marital system. Atwood has certainly exposed the vulnerability of the system of marriage. She has raised her concern and demand for a serious introspection. The liberal feminist movement has made a tremendous impact on the feminist perspective. A huge population of women across the world has successfully liberated themselves from the cruel clutches of the patriarchal supremacy. Lesbian and homosexual relationship is hardly found in the novels of Atwood. Certainly Atwood's woman prefers man but ironically Atwood's woman protagonist prefer more than one male partner. Close reading of the novels certainly can make a reader to identify the subtle celebration of sexual freedom of woman protagonist which is prevalent in many of Atwood's novels.



According to Atwood a new marital system should evolve, which should cater to the biological, emotional and psychological needs of both the gender. Marital institution should liberate itself from religious fundamentalism and should provide equal space for both the genders. Atwood certainly accepts and acknowledges the human beings' longing for intimate relationship. She, at the same time, also realises the inherent thirst for liberation which is embedded in every human beings. Atwood's protagonists are in constant search to strike a balance between these two basic human instincts. And in the process of their search, they cross all the boundaries laid by the marital system and attempt to evolve a more comprehensive marital system.

Atwood is rebellious who subverts all the established norms of literature and society. She clearly made valiant attempt to redraw the boundaries laid by their paternal ancestors. Atwood in her interview with Geoff Hancock which is published in the *Canadian Writers at Work: Interviews with Geoff Hancock* admits that she always writes about women because she is familiar with the women's life. She remarks:

Well, they all have women in them . . . But by and large, my novels centre on women. None of them are about all-male groups. None of them are about miners in the mines, seaman on the sea, convicts in the jail, the boys in the backroom, the locker room at the football game. Never a story have I set in those locations! How come? Well, gee, I don't know! (laughs.) Maybe it's because I am a woman and therefore find it easier to write as one. (262)

Atwood writes what she experiences, and believes that freedom of expression can transform society and empower women. Atwood utilises her writing to express her opinions on contemporary global issue. For nearly five decades, she has worked to

form public opinion and awareness on social evils which generally is experienced by the entire humanity. She relentlessly strives to refine and transform the world.

Creativity is a complex and mysterious process. For ages humanity has relentlessly tried to unravel the mysteries that shadow art and artists. The curiosity about artists and art has not died down yet. The intense desire of the mankind to understand the artistic consciousness has lead to the evolution of various theories about art and artists. Philosophers, psychoanalysts, social thinkers, sages, scientists, and critics have propounded various theories and definitions about art and artists from time immemorial. Ironically various studies and researchers have failed to unravel the uncertainties and ambiguities which surround art and artists. Artists are emphatically termed as creators and prophets and at the same time, they are also antithetically called as lunatics and persons with serious mental illness. The above mentioned contradictory beliefs and theories about art and artists prevail for ages. Ray Brandbury in his book *Zen In The Art Of Writing* comments thus about great artists:

You have list of favourite writers; I have mine. Dickens, Twain,  
Wolfe, Peacock, Shaw, Moliere, Jonson, Wycherly, Sam Johnson.  
Poets: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Pope, Painters: El  
Greco, Tintoretto. Musician: Mozart, Hayden, Ravel, Johann Strass(!).  
Think of Shakespeare and Melville and you think of thunder, lightning,  
wind. They all knew the joy of creating in large or small forms, on  
unlimited or restricted canvasses. These are the children of gods. . . .  
The important things are those passed down to us from their hands and  
minds and these are full of bursting with animal vigor and intellectual  
vitality. Their hatreds and despairs were reported with a kind of love.

(3-4)

Ray Brandbury calls great writers as ‘children of gods’. They are considered as persons who acquire extraterrestrial power. Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohamed, Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha, Mahavira , Zen monks and Sufi saints have narrated so many anecdotes and small stories to reveal the secrets of human life and universe.

On the other hand some of the modern critics and psychologists declare artistic talent as kind of mental illness. Modern critics and psychologists claim that great artists like Michelangelo, Ludwig Van Beethoven and Sylvia Plath suffered from mental illness. Sigmund Freud in his essay on *Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of His Childhood* which is included in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* writes about the abnormality of Leonardo da Vinci:

When psychiatric research, normally content to draw on frailer men for its material, approach one who is among the greatest of the human race, it is not doing so for the reasons so frequently ascribed to it by laymen. ‘To blacken the radiant and drag the sublime into the dust’ is no part of its purpose . . . Leonardo da Vinci(1452-1519) was admired even by his contemporaries as one of the greatest men of the Italian renaissance; yet in their time he had already begun to seem an enigma, just as he does to us today. He was a universal genius ‘whose outlines can only be surmised, - never defined’. . . . In the last hour of his life, according to the words that Vasari gives him, he reproached himself with having offended God and man by his failure to do his duty in his art. (2242)

According to Sigmund Freud, the great Leonardo da Vinci believed that he was chosen by God to serve the mankind through art. But painting was a very laborious art and he took at least three years to complete a work. And almost all of his

works are incomplete. World admires his paintings and celebrate it as a master piece but to the great artist, Leonardo da Vinci, his works are imperfect and erroneous. Hence he feels himself a failure. The very perspective of Leonardo da Vinci about his own paintings shows how complicated is the creative experience of an artist.

Many writers and artists lived with enormous traces of abnormality. Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci are extremely eccentric. Sigmund Freud terms that art springs out of neurotic disorder of the subconscious mind but Ray Brandbury declares artists as children of gods. But ironically both Sigmund Freud and Ray Brandbury, labels creative artists as eccentrics who are either abnormal or paranormal. Atwood cleverly makes assumptions of the readers, on artists and writers, as the central theme of the novel. Atwood cunningly plays with the readers' prejudices about writers and writings and deceptively weaves an innovative plot which is absolutely new to the world of fiction writing. Atwood's novel exploits the contradictory view which exists about writers and artists from time immemorial.

The classical literary and artistic world is totally dominated by men. In ancient times, woman writers and artists are almost invisible. Denial of education to women is one of the main causes for the less production of women writings. Deprivation of education is primarily the reason behind the dearth in women's writing in the literary history of the world. In the nineteenth century Europe, reading and writing were considered a dangerous act for women and the early society believed that education would spoil women, and hence women were denied the freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Hence very few women writers and artists were able to achieve eminence in the world of art and literature. Women were intentionally kept away from educational institutions.

Virginia Woolf sarcastically questions the obstacles which, for centuries, have curbed women the 'right to write' and 'right to read'. Virginia Woolf stresses the importance of education and points out how the men's world denies women the right to education. Virginia Woolf has pointed out the prohibitory laws for women in Oxford and Cambridge universities in her *A Room of One's Own* thus:

I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have unlocked it, for instantly there mattered, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flap of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly fellow, who be apologetic in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only confessed to the library if attended by a fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction. That a famous library has been blighted by a woman is a matter of total indifference to a famous library. Respected and calm, with all its treasures safe locked within its breast, it sleeps complacently and will, so far as I am distressed, so sleep for ever. Never will I wake those echoes, for no reason will I ask for that hospitality over, I vowed as I descended the steps in anger. (7-8)

Virginia Woolf has strongly perched a vibrant attack and passionately criticises the male dominated social set up which prohibits woman, entry into the university libraries, which eventually forbids women from choosing writing as their career. In the early years, educational opportunities for women were less and only in the middle of the nineteenth century, separate colleges for women were opened in the United Kingdom. Over the ages, education has served as an instrument of socio-political change.

Canada produced many successful women writers and the women writers faced innumerable problems from all corners of the writing world. Maria Tippet in her research article titled *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* which is published in the book titled *Canadian Culture an Introductory Reader* writes thus:

The continued bias against women artists owed a great deal to the lingering belief that they were dabblers, that they simply could not tackle important subjects . . . The idea that women artists belonged solely in the home was challenged suddenly during the Great war. (78)

For ages literary field is dominated by men's writings and in the history of world literature, very few women have accomplished their creative talent. Only in the post war period, women writers started participating in creative activity.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Canadian literature is dominated by woman writers. Canada produced many women writers who raised many serious issues which were neglected and silenced by the patriarchal system. Canada is one among the few countries which has given equal space for women in the world of writings. Canada a North American country is very much influenced by social, political and literary moments of their mother country England. But the middle of twentieth century has witnessed tremendous social change and numerous women have succeeded in the literary and artistic field. These women writers attempt to unravel the mystery of creativity in their respective works. And Atwood is one such writer who has repeatedly set her novels around writers and writings.

Margaret Atwood in her novels and non-fictional writings has explored the process of creative writing and writers. Atwood in the introduction to her famous non-fictional work *Negotiating with the Dead* writes thus:

And has the concept of the writer *qua* writer, as expounded by (of course) writers, changed at all over the years? And what exactly do we mean when we say *a writer*? What sort of creature do we have in mind? Is the writer the unacknowledged legislator of the world, as Shelley so grandiosely proclaimed, or is he the snivelling neurotic wreck and ineffectual weenie so beloved of his contemporary biographers? . . . Possibly I have written about the subjects in this book not only since they were things about which I was apprehensive at the outset of my own writing life, except because many people – judging from the question they ask – continue to be anxious about them today.(xvii-xviii)

In *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood thoroughly analyses the multidimensional aspect of writers and writings, and eventually been one of the recurrent themes in her novels. Atwood's novels recurrently trace the life of artists protagonists from childhood. Her novels minutely picture the evolution of an artist. To her the world of women authors is the favourite fort and she sets several of her novels around the life of an artist.

The traditional view about literature and art has changed drastically in the mid decades of the twentieth century. The modern critics and theoreticians like Stanley Fish and Roland Barthes have emphasised the active role played by the readers in creating the meaning of the text. And Derrida's deconstruction demonstrates the infinite possibilities and free play of multiple meanings in a single text. Atwood is aware of the reader centric theories and she acknowledges the paradigm shift in the world of linguistics and literature. Atwood who is herself a theoretician is fully aware of the twentieth century readers who are exposed to theories like deconstruction, post

structuralism and postmodernism. Hence she provides difficult and interesting task to the readers and plays a competitive game with her readers. Her narrative style is multi-layered and she uses multiple genres to narrate a single story. Atwood also discloses the commercial aspects of a work of art. She divulges how the publishers and distributors make a work of art a marketable product in the market. Atwood's protagonists cross the boundaries of art and artists. The chapter has examined how Atwood has invented an alternative narrative technique to challenge theoreticians, critics, academicians and her readers. Multiplicity is the tool with which Atwood weaves her fictional plots. Atwood's novels subvert generic classification and cross generic boundaries to invent multiple-generic amalgamation. Atwood exploits pulp fiction, nurse romance, automatic writing, pornographic novels, dystopian novels, science fiction, historiography and speculative fictional forms recurrently in her writing career. Atwood's novels are melting pot of numerous genres which synthesis multiple generic mode in a single text and celebrates multiplicity and hybridisation.

Atwood exploits multi-generic mode of writing to portray the complexities of Canadian multicultural and multiethnic life. Atwood's multi-generic mode has helped her to achieve a unique space in the world of writing. Multi-generic mode of writing has assisted her to examine the strength and weakness of multiculturalism in Canada. She studies in detail the opportunities and obstacles of multiethnic society. Atwood's novels depict the lives of protagonists who hail from different racial, ethical and linguistic background. The unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* is from Quebec, a province in Lower Canada, which is occupied by French population. Elaine Risley, the protagonist of *Cat's Eye* represents the native aboriginal population. Grace Marks the protagonist of *Alias Grace* is an immigrant from Ireland. Alex Thomas, the lover of both the Chase sisters in *The Blind Assassin*, is an international communist



extremist, whose nationality is not clearly portrayed in the novel. *Bodily Harm* speaks about the native Caribbean's life.

Atwood's multicultural and multiethnic fictional world symbolises Canada. Atwood in her novels clearly attempts to dissect the multicultural and multiethnic Canadian society. On dissection, she identifies the vulnerabilities and the vitalities of pluralism in Canada. The research has analysed how multiculturalism has broken barriers and boundaries to open up new vistas in the field of socio-politics, psychology and literature.

Multiculturalism has enormous influence in the domestic as well as the social life and Atwood's novels proclaim the dawn of the new era and loudly announce the arrival of evolving socio-cultural change in Canada. Atwood, in her novels, creates alternative value systems which includes and fuses the best practices and ethics of different ethnic, religious and non-religious groups. Canada is one of the earliest countries which voices for gender equality. Canadians openly revolted against any prohibitory laws, which deny and control women's professional as well as personal life. Multiculturalism, is the essence of Canadian social life and Atwood extended it further and attempts multi-layered and multi-generic fusion in her novels. She as a woman writer also explores the status of art and artists in the multicultural age.

The holistic study Atwood's select novels certainly lead to comprehend the deeper intricacies of her writings. The protagonists of the select novels, after a long prolonged struggle, succeed as artists and writers and carve a free space in both the domestic and professional lives. Atwood's writings celebrate plurality and attempts to destabilise racial and cultural hegemony. Atwood's protagonists cross nationalistic, cultural, ethnic and artistic boundaries to achieve a distinctive identity in the multicultural and multiethnic society. The analyses of Atwood's novels echo the

conviction of Canadian historian J.L.Granatstein, who claims Canada as the ‘moral super power of the world’.

Margaret Atwood’s novels provide wide range of scope for future researches. In the present research, Atwood’s science fiction, speculative fiction, dystopian fiction gothic fiction and popular romances are not considered for research. Her *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *The MaddAddam* are dystopian trilogy. Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a dystopian fiction as well. Science fiction, dystopian fiction, speculative fiction, gothic fiction and pulp fictional forms can be analysed and future researches certainly will reveal new perceptions about Margaret Atwood’s socio-fantasy fiction.

To conclude, for centuries, humanity has equated reality with oneness and wholeness but the twentieth century has unanimously and comprehensively replaced oneness and wholeness with multiplicity. Atwood attempts to lay a multicultural road map for the futuristic mankind. She persistently deals with contemporary social issues in her novels and strongly believes that multicultural and multiethnic acceptance can provide peace and prosperity to the entire humanity. Accepting and acknowledging cultural and ethnic diversities can serve as a remedy to the contemporary conflicts and problems. Margaret Atwood’s novels celebrate heterogeneity and hybridisation. She strongly opposes cultural, racial and linguistic hegemony. According to Atwood, the greatness of a nation should be judged on its treatment of children, women and women writers. Atwood in the select novels has clearly attempted to create an alternative value system for the futuristic world. Atwood’s protagonists inherit the values of a global citizen. Atwood, a great ambassador of world peace, relentlessly strives hard to create a secular world for the next generation.