Introduction
Research in Modern Psychology and Sociology has revealed that the influence of external society on human ‘self’ or psyche is unavoidable, and human ‘self’ always manifests itself in social behaviour. Eric Fromm, in *The Sane Society* (1955), makes it clear that the understanding of human ‘self’ or psyche must be based on the analysis of human needs streaming from the conditions of one’s existence. According to Fromm, there are five basic needs which connect a man with society: Relatedness – relationships with others, care, respect, knowledge; Transcendence – creativity, develop a loving and interesting life; Rootedness – feeling of belonging; Sense of Identity – see ourselves as a unique person and part of a social group; and A frame of orientation – the need to understand the world and our place in it.

There is according to Fromm, only one possible, productive solution for the relationship of individualized man with the world: his active solidarity with all men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual. However, if the economic, social and political conditions do not offer a basis for the realization of
individuality, the freedom itself turns out to be an unbearable burden. It becomes identical with doubt, with a kind of life which lacks meaning and direction. Powerful tendencies arise to escape from this kind of freedom into submission or some kind of relationship to man and the world which promises relief from uncertainty, even if it deprives the individual of his freedom.

The emergence of post-colonial literatures during the past three decades clearly substantiate Fromm’s thesis because most of these literatures are outcome of the historical encounter between culturally distinct and geographically separated societies; and are of dual nature, one arising from the colonizer and the other from the colonized section of the society. Both these literatures are united by a sort of dialectical tension produced by the history, though they also maintain a striking degree of the thematic or structural congruence, often centring on the issue of identity. Likewise, in an age of increasing self-reflexiveness, literary texts no longer perform the simplistic function of reflecting an all too obvious objective reality. Literary texts have come to be recognized as mine-beds of rich discourses in which lie embedded the fused languages of class, race and gender. It is their
ability to appropriate, contextualize and comment on these heterogeneous strands that has made current critical and cultural practices invest literary texts with new ability to define and, if necessary, re-invent social order. This would render questions about power relations operating in terms of gender, class and ethnicity in society eminently literary by implication, if not by direct reference. This is true of literatures produced by such societies as India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and South Africa and also Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

During the past few decades, however, the post-colonial literatures, which had been valued for the nationalist politics they conveyed or for the anti-colonial nationalist consciousness which they expressed, have come to exist on their own and have been studied within the critical and institutional framework of the study of English literature. Canadian literature, for example, enjoyed the distinctiveness of coming to its own by the 1960’s when it broke free from the shackles of influence and importation and overcame its preoccupation with national identity. Besides writers like Jack Hodgins, Robert Kroetsch, Susan Sivan and Michael Ondaatje, there emerged a number
of accomplished women writers, such as Mavis Gallant, Margaret Renee, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood who not only got down to recording their own history and commenting on Canadian Society but also dealt with such universally vital issues as narrativity, self-reflexivity, historicity, fictionality and representation of feminity. In the novel, Atwood examines the situation of women in Canadian society of time with reference to anti-patriarchal structures of power and domination. She does not offer an alternative nor do her heroines find any change in the social order but at least they come to realize their situation and apprehend it realistically. Atwood’s novel’s are full of such women who are trapped in unfulfilling lives and who cherish the opportunity to be engrossed. Atwood aims to show women’s condition and point of view in the 1960s and 1970s in Canadian society typifies dualistic logic that insists our bodies are entirely separate from our inner selves. Atwood’s representation of the consequences attendant upon a dramatic chafe in body size reveals graphically that for a woman in western society, to be perceived as sexual is to be a potential victim. Atwood pleads for radical change in society.
The wounded psyche or ‘self’ getting crushed under the duress of patriarchal ‘society’ and its dictatorship is probably one of the strongest themes of Atwood’s novels. The wounded psyche according to Eric Fromm, effects human behaviour in different ways. In some people it causes insanity, destructiveness and anarchy, while in some it breeds sanity, balance and constructive behaviour. Whether it breeds negative or positive behaviour in persons depends on the specific temperament of the person on whom it works. It also depends upon on the social surroundings and conditions in which a person is placed as is clear from Margaret Atwood’s fiction which present the social history of Canadian Society as a history of daily inescapable assault on women by men who deny even minimum dignity to women.

Margaret Atwood’s novels have clearly examined the general socio-psychic interaction, as Eric Fromm would call it, with reference to female self in the Canadian society. These novels have insistently challenged traditional male-power-structures while giving readers some of their most trenchant models for a feminist critique. Just as the Anglo-American feminist theory has developed strong historical and cultural dimensions through its investigation of the institutions of
marriage and motherhood, so Atwood has explored similar territory in her representation of female, feminine and feminist position.

Though her writing is grounded in a strong sense of her own cultural identity as white, English speaking Canadian female, she challenges the limits of such categories, questioning stereotypes of nationality and gender, exposing cultural fictions and the artificial limits they impose on our understanding of self and society. Her common colonial experience of moving to a metropolitan culture, where people neither know nor care about their home place, or then going back to Canada enabled her to understand more the limitations imposed by the ‘society’ upon one’s ‘self’. However, critics writing on Atwood have mainly concentrated on her fascination for the endless possibilities of language (in poetry) or due possibilities of narrative (in fiction) without taking into account that her novel’s challenge her readers to see more by seeing differently: to explore these novels as mime-beds of rich social and psychological discourses.

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than thirty books of fiction, poetry and critical essays. In addition to her famous critical works like *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* and
Seconds Words, she has written about twenty novels which include Surfacing, The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle, Bodily Harm, The Handmaid’s Tale, Cat’s Eye, Alias Grace, The Blind Assassin and The Year of the Flood. Hence, it would be very difficult, if not impossible to encompass all her works and relate them to a particular perspective, frame-work or point of view.

The present thesis, therefore, attempts to analyze how Margaret Atwood as a woman writer has always been intensely aware of the significance of woman’s self definition and identity in a society dominated by patriarchal modes of thinking. It is argued that, according to Atwood’s, ‘reflective identity’ male or female is not a matter of simple sexual categorization: rather it entails a wide range of beliefs about what one should do and what one is able to do. This thesis comprises five chapters, besides an Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter I, Concept of ‘Self’ and ‘Society’ establishes the theoretical framework within which Margaret Atwood’s novels have been discussed. Here an attempt has been made to delineate upon the theme of relationship between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Society’ from the traditional as well as modern perspectives. Chapter II, Spiritual
Transformation of ‘Self’ in *Surfacing*\(^1\) focuses mainly on the question of ‘identity’, the essence of which is to be found in simple device to survive. The unnamed protagonist in the novel moves into a world devoid of all values and after various traumatic experiences – abortion, broken marriage and loss of child – she undergoes a ‘spiritual rebirth’ in her native island after which she is able to lead her life in its totality. *Chapter III, Split Self and Identity Crisis in The Edible Woman*\(^2\) discuss how the protagonist Marian has been right from the beginning like a package product of a male dominated society and her rejecting food is synonymous with her rejection of a culture which tends to exploit women and treat them as edible objects. Her act of eating cake is a form of reconciliation between the ‘Consumer’ and the ‘Consumed’ in the existing social setup. *Chapter IV, Multiple-Selves and Search for ‘Self-hood in Lady Oracle*\(^3\) traces the development of the protagonist as a social being to various social circumstances that do not easily allow her to differentiate the ‘self’ from the ‘society’ or

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1 Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*. Virago press, 1979. (All subsequent references, given in parenthesis, are from this edition of the book, unless otherwise stated)
social environment. The protagonist in the novel is in quest of an authentic self-development, both social and psychological, and becomes a representative symbolic reflection of various social circumstances that thwart her individuality. However, the narrative is depicting her ‘self realization’ that the individuality and human significances cannot be separated from the context in which she is created. Chapter V, Search for a Vision of Life in The Hand Maid’s Tale\textsuperscript{4} is devoted to Margaret Atwood’s exploration of individual’s relationship with the world around him. The novel shows how the forces of society have a strong impact on individual’s ‘self’ and how these forces interact with the people living in the society. The protagonist Offred seeks to give shape to her disconnected experience through a unifying idea of love to Nick which not only provides value and coherence in her life but also gives her reason to live her life. In the Conclusion the main arguments of the thesis have been summarised bringing out the fact that Atwood’s fiction upholds the dignity of individual consciousness but affirms that self-fulfilment can only be achieved by establishing a bond between the ‘self’ and the ‘society’.

\textsuperscript{4} Atwood. Margaret, \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale}. 1985 rpt. Seal Books, edition 1998. (All subsequent references, given in parenthesis, are from this edition of the book, unless otherwise stated)