It has been a stark fact of nature as well as of history that man has failed to achieve unlimited freedom. This failure leads to frustration so that man begins to think that he is pitted against a hostile environment in which he is an alienated soul. This feeling has been aggravated in modern times because of social, political and economic organisations that have become so unwieldy that the sense of choice and pride of any achievement has been reduced to nullity. As such, the conflict between the requirements of the self and the demands of society has become a central issue of our time. 'Self' is the meaningful interaction of man in a given social set-up and the resultant image of his personality in that set-up. In relation to the American social set-up, the image that comes before is one that smacks of the nasty situation where disharmony, disorder, violence and several such things hold the reins of routine life and hamper the development of human personality and obstruct the path of advancement for the better future of humanity. Under such conditions, how is man to know who he is today? By what does he identify himself? This is the problem to which various American writers have put forward their arguments, seeking solution in their own way. In the context of the proposed subject Norman Mailer (1923- ) has been selected for detailed study. He has rendered this theme of 'Quest for self' with more energy of style, more ideational power and more vivid drama than any other American writer to emerge since World War II.

The concept of 'self' in Mailer's novels opens out with confronting a stage of bewilderment with all the accepted values of life and suffocating institutions, leading an individual to defy all the social norms by taking risks.
and pushing himself to the limit of experience. This eventually leads him to self-evaluation and self-realization, resulting in the evolvement of a new, authentic style of living by confronting the very society that produces inauthenticity and crisis of identity. As such, the process of quest for self involves five well-defined stages: a) The Bewildered Self, b) The Cultured Savage, c) The Confrontation, d) The Existential Self, e) The Crystalized Self: Perception.

The whole study comprises seven Chapters. Chapter-I is in the nature of exposition and lays foundation for the entire project. It is divided into five sections — 'Setting the Limits' — deals with the term 'Self' in its various connotations as used by different cultural historians, anthropologists, philosophers and psychologists and as used in the context of this thesis. Second Section — 'A Close Look at the Concept' — affords a brief report of the representative ideologies in the field of quest for self noting convergence and difference with a purpose to derive lead for a concept of self that is scientifically based. Third Section — 'Life of Norman Mailer and the Philosophy of Quest for Self' — is a commentary on how Mailer came to develop his philosophy of quest for self influenced by his immediate environment — family, education, relationships and literary influences. Fourth section — 'Age of Norman Mailer and the Philosophy of Quest for Self' — closely examines the general phenomena and the climate of creativity prevalent during Mailer's time because for any understanding of the literature of America after the Second World War, it seems essential to view its whole culture, important events and creative achievements. Fifth and final section — 'Characteristic Features of the Philosophy of Quest for Self' — explicitly makes clear Mailer's philosophy. These five feature — 'The Bewildered Self,' 'The Cultured Savage,' 'The Confrontation,' 'The Existential Self,' and
'The Crystalized Self' — form the backbone of the thesis. The subsequent chapters illustrate and exemplify this pentagonal pattern.

Mailer in the very first stage of (The Bewildered Self) depicting the process of search for identity debunks the modern American society and her technological advancement for creating a sense of uprootedness and lostness in man. He sees society as an epitome of evil which has invaded every aspect of human life. The individual is not even free to take the most private decisions of his life such as child-birth. All the natural chords are gradually being sapped. The net result of this modern malady, which is often connected with plague by Mailer is the dissociation between self and the physical environment, which leads to the bewilderment of the individual who is at a loss to understand his true leaning and bearings.

The second stage (The Cultured Savage) in the development of self implies a hard blow on hypocritical surface of society and its rotten morality. Mailer believes that the triumph over the modern maladies of bewilderment, fragmentation and chaos can be affected only by meeting them head-on, by taking risks and pushing ourselves to the limits of experience. As such, he advocates the need for an intellectual attuned to his non-rational being, a "cultured savage" who lives on the plane of the barbarian, giving free reins to his instincts. As such, he concentrates on psychical rather than social reality and replaces the imperatives of the society with the vitalistic imperatives of the self. The purpose or intention behind this demonic rebellion is to bring out the real potentialities of self that lays hidden in the layers of obsolete social customs and orthodox norms, and to enable him to evolve a style of living based on his own moral choices with which to reunite the two rivers— self and society.
The third stage (Confrontation) in the direction of finding out one's real identity represents a confrontation of socio-political and personal styles of identity, of dullness with vitality, of the existentially naked with the imaginatively dead. It underlines the fact that concept of identity is a product of the dialectical interrelationship between man's psyche and society, between his inner drives and external compulsions. Man's quest for identity becomes meaningful only when he realizes the integrity and inviolability of the community and is able to have a grip on the forces of life. Allied to this is his awareness of his guilt or sinfulness. The human being becomes himself in the act of becoming aware of his sinfulness. He is what he is ashamed of. It is in this sense that crisis for identity becomes man's quest for identity.

The fourth stage (The Existential Self) of Mailer's solution to the tangled issue of quest for self relates to the result and effect of individual's confrontation with his own personal void through the agency of destructive socio-political institutions or mysterious forces of Nature. The net result is that the individual perceives himself as he is, not as he imagines himself to be under the facade of optimistic illusions and euphemisms. It is at this juncture that the quest for identity takes an existential turn. The individual at this stage realizes that he is not a free chooser, monarch of all he surveys, but benighted creature sunk in a reality whose nature he is constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by his own choice of fantasy. And this realization breeds in him a feeling of dread, despair or despondency.

The fifth and final stage (The Crystallised Self) relevant to quest for identity encompasses the surmounting and conquest of barriers of despair, dread and alienation by struggling most heroically against these forces and asserting one's will-power, achieving in return a new recognition of one's potentialities,
a new psyche, a new vision, away from sanctions and morals of society, dictates of spiritualism and charms of macrocosmic existence. Those who wage such a war are designated as 'Transformed Seers' in Mailer's final analysis. Others who succumb to the forces of nature or to another's will, are the unheroic majority who yield to the merely animal desire to survive at all cost. For the attainment of this stage, Mailer contends that the only value which matters is the value which answers one's own psychological needs. For the fuller development of potentialities, Mailer shows the path of Neo-primitivism, a belief that modern man should return to more simplified and more natural existence. As such, the hipster is the ideal, crystallized self — self that has perceived the fact that only by the satisfaction of one's inner being can a style for meaningful life be evolved. Though to many, it seems a very restricted and narrow approach. But to a logical analyst of Mailer's writings, it becomes amply clear that the reforms at the grass root level can be much more effective and fruitful than those applied at a higher level, meaning thereby that a revolution in the consciousness of the individual has to be achieved before even thinking of any social revolution. Definitely it looks foolish to expect from a dissatisfied self to propagate satisfaction to society.