CHAPTER I
Introduction

I Outline

Most societies the world over have been through waves of change, in terms of social dynamics, which include changes in the familial matrix and institutional structures; economic changes which include changes in the means of production and economic opportunities, and environmental changes which include changes in the quality of life and awareness of environmental pressures. Thus the functions that a society was meant to perform have also undergone a change, in several cases resulting in a dysfunction. According to Richard T Schaefer, author of Sociology: A Brief Introduction, “dysfunction is described as an element or a process of society that may disrupt a social system or lead to a decrease in stability (Schaefer 132). According to the Oxford Reference Dictionary, something dysfunctional can be described as that “which does not operate properly” or an abnormality or impairment of function” (Tulloch 459). According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, “Something is dysfunctional if it inhibits or disrupts the working of the system as a whole or another part of the system” (Gordon 117). It would be simpler to understand the meaning of a dysfunction if we try to understand its positive counterpart- a function. A function according to the Oxford Reference Dictionary is defined as “an activity proper to a person or institution” or “a mode of action or activity by which a thing fulfils its purpose” (Tulloch 606).

The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology defines dysfunction as “consequences that interfere with the system and its values, while those that contribute are called functional” (Johnson 128-29). As with divorce, aspects of systems often have both functional and dysfunctional consequences. Divorce often has the dysfunctional consequence of interfering with family members’ material needs, but it can also have the functional consequence of providing a solution to destructive conditions such as family violence. In sociology, the functionalist approach was pioneered by Emile Durkheim. The functionalist perspective focuses on social systems as a whole, how they operate, how they change, and the social consequences they produce. In evaluating or trying to explain any aspect of a social system or its consequences, functionalism asks various questions like how this aspect is related to other aspects of the system, what is its place in the overall operation of the social system and what
kinds of consequences result from this. In a study of the family life for example, a functionalist will think of the family as a social system organized around particular cultural values like the socializing of the young, giving love and protection to family members, regulating sexual behavior and perpetuating the family as a social system. Like any social system, the family can have a variety of characteristics, which, individually and together produce consequences both for individual members and, most importantly to the functionalist, for the system as a whole (Ibid 128).

The enduring contribution of functionalism and of Durkheim is a focus on social systems and how they operate, which helps us to see how even the most undesirable aspects of social life such as war, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression are bound to be related with otherwise “normal” functioning of societies and their institutions. Such insights are crucial especially for studying social change. In analyzing how social systems maintain and restore equilibrium, functionalists tend to use shared values or generally accepted standards of desirability as a central concept. The emphasis on value is the second most important feature of functionalism, alongside the stress on a system’s interdependence and the tendency to restore equilibrium. As such it is in direct contrast with the conflict theory. Whereas functionalism emphasizes the unity of society and what its members share, conflict theorists stress the division within the society and the struggles that arise out of people’s pursuits of their different material interests (Wallace 12-13). Durkheim’s task of functional analysis is to clarify how institutions and other social phenomena contribute to the maintenance of the social whole. Functionalism’s usefulness in analysis of complex organizations led Durkheim to a classification of societies according to their degrees of organization (Ibid 113).

A dysfunction can also be explained in terms of a ‘deviance’ in behavior. Behaviour is deviant if it departs from the norms of a group. The functions of culture and a society are to nurture, provide for and to give mores and norms for its members to follow in order to preserve the identity of the group (Coser 58). Culture helps human beings to adapt more easily to different conditions. For generations, society has been fulfilling these traditional roles, besides integrating into itself newer ones which change with the changing times. However if changed circumstances lead to a change in values, it will naturally result in a dysfunction which will prove detrimental to society. Evidence shows that a family can have a great impact on various aspects of an individual’s development, including the likelihood of delinquency (Felson, 1986)
and extra marital affairs (Edwards & Booth, 1976) (Michalski 86). Similarly the society that one lives in, the religion that one follows, the educational institutions that one attends, the environment in which one grows and the work place where one spends large amounts of time determine to a great extent the personality of the individual and the interpersonal skills that he or she develops as a result of these interactions. The correct working of anything be it an instrument, an organization or an institution is a function and this functioning is imperative to the health of that body.

In order to understand the concept of a function and dysfunction, we must understand the sociological theory of functionalism. Emile Durkheim is the front runner in the formulation of the concept of functionalism. The Modern Dictionary of Sociology defines functionalism as: The analysis of social and cultural phenomena in terms of functions they perform in a sociocultural system. In functionalism, society is conceived of as a system of interrelated parts in which no part can be understood in isolation from the whole. A change in any part is seen as leading to a certain degree of imbalance, which in turn results in changes in other parts of the system and to some extent to a reorganization of the system as a whole. The development of functionalism was based on the model of the organic system found in the biological sciences (Wallace 11).

In analyzing social systems along these lines, functionalists emphasise three elements:

1. the general interrelatedness of the system’s parts;
2. the existence of a “normal” state of affairs, or state of equilibrium, comparable to the normal or healthy state of an organism; and
3. the way that all the parts of the system reorganize to bring things back to normal.

Whenever a writer sets upon the task of creating a work, he/she is constructing a social milieu which acts as a habitation to the characters. This milieu is endowed with a social system apparent in the working of institutions, a political system represented by the government and a cultural system characterized my mores, norms and folklore. All the interactions that take place within the framework of the ‘artistic creation’ are a result of the interfaces between the characters and the systems within which they operate. Similarly when Atwood writes, she place her characters in varied social set-ups, sometimes ‘regular’, while at other times even utopian and dystopian. She is thus
able to control the variables of societal framework. The manner in which her characters behave and interact are the product of the systems within whose realms they are expected to function.

Talcott Parsons enunciates the concept of a system as the core of his Parsonian theory. His general theory of action, in which he gives his overall picture of how societies are structured and fit together, includes four systems:

1. the cultural system
2. the social system
3. the personality system
4. the behavioral organism as a system.

Parson’s cultural system includes symbolic systems such as religious beliefs, languages and national values. The social system includes role interaction which means “a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a ‘tendency to the ‘optimization of gratification’ and whose relation to the situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.” According to Parsons, the basic unit of the personality system is ‘the individual actor, the human person’. His focus at this level is on individual needs, motives and attitudes such as the “motivation towards gratification” emphasized in the above lines. In the fourth system which is the behavioural organism, the basic unit is the human being in its biological sense which is the physical environment in which a human being lives (Kingsley 23).

Margaret Atwood is a modern writer who is concerned with changing human relationships, economic structures and environmental catastrophes that may ail the coming generations. She began her writing career very early and she was always fascinated by the Canadian wild and the attempts by Canadians to find an identity of their own. She views Canada as a nation with multiple identities; however the search for a distinct identity still remains the dream of most Canadian citizens and of course of almost all Canadian writers. Atwood grapples with many problems that her characters face and the cultural-social ethos is embedded in all these experiences. The interplay of these influences in the life of a Canadian goes to make up the structure of the Canadian family and the Canadian society. A new generation of career touting, fiercely independent, feminist and upwardly socially mobile youngsters clearly question and defy the rules that their predecessors had set for them. Marriage,
children, financial independence, religion and the preservation of culture are no more matters of mere course; they are now more concerns of deep far sight and careful planning. However, despite the planning and pondering over matters of utmost concern, the functions of society continue to be attacked by a barrage of new circumstances which periodically alter its contours.

Margaret Atwood was bom in 1939 in Ottawa and grew up in northern Ontario, Quebec and Toronto. She was a student of Victoria College at the University of Toronto where she received her undergraduate degree. Thereafter she received her master’s degree from Radcliffe College. She had her early education in the wild as her father was an entomologist and she lived in the wilderness for a large part if her childhood. Her mother was a fearless woman who did what was never considered ‘traditionally female’. She could encounter wild animals, horsehide, and ski. For a large part she lived alone with her children in the Canadian wild when her husband was away. Atwood’s’ mother did not question patriarchal structures like a feminist did; she broke them effortlessly and unknowingly as she never thought of any other alternative. Atwood imbibed a lot of the characteristics of her mother in her personality, reflected in some of her female characters who refuse suppression under patriarchal structures and canon. She was also highly influenced by Northrope Fry, J Macpherson and EJ Pratt. She is a writer who has a deep love, almost veneration towards nature. She writes of the movements in Canadian Literature and the influences which have gone into Canadian Literature. Atwood’s works are the subject of a large body of research and her works have also been adapted to stage and film productions.

Atwood found that she was attracted to writing at the age of sixteen when she found that it was “suddenly the only thing” that she wanted to do. (Atwood, Life Before Man 391). Throughout her career Atwood received many awards and honorary degrees, including the Governor General’s Award, Le Chevalier dans L’Orde des Arts et des Lettres in France, the National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature in United States, and the Giller Prize. She is also the recipient of the Booker Prize for The Blind Assasin in the year 2000. She is the author of more than thirty volumes of poetry, nonfiction, and fiction including children’s books and short stories. Her most recent works include Moral Disorder, The Cat’s Eye, The Robber Bride, Alias Grace, the story collection Good Bones and a volume of poetry, Morning in the Burned House. She is also credited with Survival- A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.
published in 1972 which is looked upon as the most astounding book ever written about Canadian literature. Since then, it has continued to be read and taught, and it continues to shape the way Canadians view themselves in the context of their country and culture. In *Survival*, Atwood says that the predominating characteristic of Canadian Literature has been the considerations of survival and victims.

Atwood’s works have been published in more than twenty-five countries. She has travelled extensively and has lived in Boston, Vancouver, Montreal, London, Provence, Berlin, Edinburgh and Ireland. She lives in Toronto with novelist Graeme Gibson and their daughter.

Margaret Atwood’s work provides a useful starting point for thinking about the general direction of Canadian writing in the late sixties and early seventies, which is according to Neil Besner “the most recent, if not the last manifestation of our recurring surges of national self-declaration” (Besner 6). In 1968 Atwood published *The Animals in that Country*, a volume of poetry; in 1970 *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, one of her finest book of poems, *Roughing it in the Bush* and in 1972 she published both *Survival* and *Surfacing*. *Survival* is a story of Canadian ‘colonial victims’, Canadian terror and victimization in the face of Nature the monster, in the face of American imperialism, is a powerful novel with a compelling plot. Similarly *The Animals in the Country* talks of the colonial masters and their cruelty and like *Surfacing* it “maps the position of a colony and of colonized consciousness defining themselves over against somewhere or someone else- in *Surfacing* against a threatening North American culture (and nature) much closer at hand and in the present” (Ibid 7).

Canadian society is undergoing waves of change and this is clearly reflected in the literature of various writers, and notable among them is Margaret Atwood. Atwood grew up in the Canadian wild as her father was an entomologist and her mother was an ‘an extremely free spirited woman’. She had to deal with the trappings of going to a urban school where she felt a total misfit because of her ‘wild’ Canadian life. Her childhood memories and fears are clearly seen in the novel *Cat’s Eye* though she does claim that the work in no way totally autobiographical. Similarly her fear of religious hegemony and cultural abuse is portrayed in *The Handmaids Tale* while the drunken stupor of consumerism is seen underlined in *The Edible Woman*. Atwood also shows the female psyche in the character of Xenia in *The Robber Bride* as she is shown as a woman who can do anything to become the prima donna of society.
As a sensitive observer of life, Margaret Atwood aesthetically records dysfunction of self, culture and society in her novels. The reflection of dysfunction of Canadian society in Margaret Atwood's select novels in particular forms the essence of the study. Both the glaring and the undersurface instances portraying the slow crumbling of Canadian society stands for are visible is clearly the works of Margaret Atwood.

The history of Canada begins with the arrival of human beings thousands of years ago. Inhabited for millennia by aboriginal peoples, Canada has evolved from a group of French and British colonies into a bilingual, multicultural federation. France sent the first large group of settlers in the 17th century, but ceded its territories in present-day Canada to Great Britain in 1763. The present constitution of Canada took effect in 1867, with three British colonies uniting as a single nation of four provinces. Canada gradually attained full independence from Britain during the 20th century, and it presently consists of ten provinces and three territories (History of Canada Wikipedia). Canada is characterized as a country that is multi-lingual and multi-cultural in its composition. There are many people living in Canada who are different from one another; however there is harmonious existence among these different people.

The concerns that Atwood has for the Canadian landscape and the Canadian ethos are seen not only in her fiction but also in her poetry. The deep concern for things Canadian and of the place of the individual in the firmament of the universe comes through in her poems as well. The language used is sometimes nostalgic and at other times even angry and sarcastic.

Her “A Place: Fragments” leaves a feeling of desolation:

Here on the rim, cringing
under the cracked whip of winter
we live
in houses of ice
but not because we want to:
in order to survive
we make what we can and have to
with what we have.

Similarly, in “Backdrop Addresses Cowboy” the feeling is one of destruction

… and you leave behind you a heroic
trail of desolation: Beer bottles
slaughtered by the side
of the road, bird-
skulls bleaching in the sunset

In “Disembarking at Quebec” Atwood feels cut off from her environs:
Is it my clothes, my way of walking,
The things I carry in my hand
-a book, a bag with knitting-
The incongruous pink of my shawl
this space cannot hear
or is my own lack
of conviction which makes
these vistas of desolation,
long hills, the swamps, the barren sand, the glare
of sun on the bone-white
driftlogs, omens of winter,
the moon alien in day-
time a thin refusal
the other leap, shout
Freedom!

(Daymond and Monkan 627-32)

Margaret Atwood looks at both the visible and the veiled threats that weaken Canadian society and culture and their repercussions are there for us to see in her characters and the fate that they suffer. Margaret Atwood presents a society that is dysfunctional in many ways. Elaine Risley in Cat’s Eye, Marian McAlpin in The Edible Woman, Iris Chase Griffen in The Blind Assassin, Zenia in The Robber Bride and the unnamed protagonist in Surfacing, all grapple with an identity crisis that they could never anticipate and a hostile social structure that pins them down. Like the opening lines of Anna Karenina “Happy families are all alike but unhappy families are unhappy in their own way”, in Atwood’s works too, the characters are ‘dysfunctional’ in their own way (Tolstoy 7). In the Blind Assassin, Iris’ parents are trapped in a loveless marriage, “It was as if they’d drunk some fatal potion that would keep them forever apart, even though they lived in the same house, ate at the same table, slept in the same bed…” (Atwood, The Blind 82) In The Robber Bride, Zenia
believes that the best way to be the prima donna of social life is to claim other women's men. The institutions of marriage, the church, education, the workplace all become mammoth structures of deviant behaviour and attitudes. Atwood depicts life as a process, a journey into one's self which results in "self-realization, self-assertion and reconciliation". The broken relationships portray the universal problem of survival of the human race which reflects the "radical influence of colonization" (Ramamurti and Cheellapan 148).

Several forms of dysfunction mark the Canadian horizon in Margaret Atwood's novels: social, cultural, and individual. In Survival- A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood says that the Canadian family was characterized by 'group preservation'. The members of a Canadian family kept together but there was always a desire to break away from the trap, which was impossible for being out in the cold. So being in a family was "more a need than a desire" (Atwood 131). Evidence shows that the rate of divorce in Canada is steadily increasing. While earlier generations held marriage sacred, the same has lesser sanctity to the younger Canadians. There are drastic changes that are taking place, which can be seen in lesser births, premarital pregnancies, more abortions and unmarried mothers. There are also problems of child prostitution, suicide, drugs and juvenile delinquency, which have a direct relationship to the changes that are taking place in the family and the society. Shades of these are seen in almost all Atwood's novels.

Unusual behavioural patterns mark many of Atwood's characters. In The Edible Woman, Maria Mc Alpin stops eating as a protest against the society that she lives in and she is loathe to think that she is an object of consumption. Similarly in The Blind Assassin, Laura just 'drove a car off the bridge' as she wanted to teach her brother-in-law a lesson for corrupting her innocence and misleading her in every possible way.

Gandhi's idea of function is rooted in the concept of self. For Gandhi a human being is the product of his own beliefs and his inner self. He advocated the concept of Swaraj as the overriding aim of every human being. The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word which means self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which the word independence means. Real Swaraj according to Gandhi "will come not by the acquisition of the capacity of a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority" (Gandhi, Village Swaraj 3). Gandhi describes the India of his dreams as a
Ramaraj which is a sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Under Swaraj, a society is based on the principle of non-violence. It is a non-violent society in which no one is anyone’s enemy, everybody contributes his or her quota to the common goal, all can read and write and their knowledge grows from day to day. In such a Swaraj there is no place for vices like drinking, gambling, immorality and class hatred. In such a well organized state usurpation would be an impossibility and it should be unnecessary to resort to force for dispossessing an usurper.

Gandhi said of Swaraj “What we want through Poorna Swaraj is an awakening among the masses, a knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest against the whole world… harmony, freedom from aggression from within or without, and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses” (Prabhu 318).

Iris Murdoch’s view of the freedom of an individual is similar in some ways to the views that Gandhi has of freedom. “She says that every individual is free, separate and irreducible and is related to a rich, complicated background from which as a moral being he has a lot to learn” (Datta 8-9). Her concept of freedom is located against a thick, uplifting and inflexible backdrop of reality. She said “We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy” (Ibid 9).

It is worthwhile to mention here that Gandhi in his Hind Swaraj (1908) criticizes the growing materialism of western civilization, (read modernity) and calls it “cursed modern civilization” for its lack of spiritual values, adding that it propagates “immorality” (Gandhi, Hind 54). Significantly, Gandhi could sense the moral as well as institutional “dysfunction” prevailing in the modern society years before it took definite shape. Using the Gandhian perspective entails me to use the philosophy of Gandhi while critiquing the said novels of Margaret Atwood. Gandhi was not against modernization per se, but he was against the sacrifice that humanity has to make at the altar of culture and modernity. He felt that the exercise was unethical and therefore unacceptable as it was violative of the principles of ahimsa and sarvodaya. Gandhi advocated that non-violence was the cornerstone of a civil society and erosion of morality, destruction of economic opportunities and large scale use of machinery had a streak of violence in them. He advocated non violence and the concept of trusteeship that could contribute to an egalitarian society. Gandhi had envisaged
cultural impasses and environmental catastrophes many years ago, long before these dimensions had taken definite shape. So looking at the dysfunctions that exist in the said novels of Atwood with a Gandhian perspective makes it interesting as it rises above national borders.

The questions of morality and culture are universal questions that affect every society. Gandhi advocated the importance of the family as a basic unit of society and the role of parents as being paramount in the growth and grooming of a child’s personality. He cites the example of his own mother Putli Bai who was a formidable influence in his life. She inculcated in him values of the heart and thus developed his morality and his mental strength, which is known to have seldom faltered even in the most trying of times. Gandhi said of his mother: “The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her daily meals without her daily prayers” (Gandhi, My Experiments 4). At another instance he said that the quality which he admired in his mother the most was the quality of common sense. She was highly admired by the women of the court and she could discuss all matters related to the state. She was spiritual, intelligent and calm.

Gandhi advocated a life that was based on simplicity and self-sufficiency. He advocated a village economy based on egalitarian principles and the policy of trusteeship. Gandhi said that in order that a society be functional, it should preserve its culture, follow the path of non-violence, have spiritual and religious leanings, be self-sufficient and follow the path of truth which was paramount in finding the answers to all questions related to existence. Gandhi said that “Truth and non-violence are perhaps the activest forces in the world” (Gandhi, My Non-Violence 49). A man who wields ‘sanguinary’ weapons with the effort to kill people has to put his weapons to rest for some time. However a person who has the weapon of truth and non-violence never has to put his weapons down ever as they are not ‘external weapons’. Gandhi also talked of passive resistance when he defended it by saying that it is “a misnomer for non-violent resistance”. He said that passive resistance is “direct, ceaseless, but three-fourths invisible and only one-fourth visible” (Ibid 59). Gandhi said that the outer expression of such resistance looked ineffective, but it is intensely active and most effective in its ultimate result. Gandhi’s non-violence was not merely limited to the non-harming of human beings but also the non-harming of animals, and thus he contributed to the cause of environmental protection. He championed the cause of
anti-cow slaughter and also talked of the protection of forests, rivers and other natural resources.

Gandhi’s vision of life undoubtedly displays a “remarkable blend between the scientific (avidya) and the spiritual (vidya) aspects of knowledge - the interdependence and mutual inclusiveness of which is characterized by the centrality of truth and nonviolence in Gandhi’s theory and praxis for ethical existence” (Kumar 91). To Gandhi the marriage of science and spirituality was essential in order to bring out the best in a human being. His vision of life was therefore based on morality.

Gandhi compared truth with God and he said that whatever was the truth was equivalent to the highest achievable principle. He said of God, “To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in his boundless love he even allows the atheist to live. He is the searcher of all hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves” (Prabhu 49). For Gandhi, Hinduism was the Supreme religion but not to the exclusion of other religions of the world. He realized that the scriptures of all religions had universal truths that could stand the test of time. Mahatma Gandhi spent time reading scriptures and blended the spirit of these into the body of his philosophy. He also said that the rich culture of India beckoned the world and in it lay the elixir to all ills. He said that the most distinctive and the largest contribution of Hinduism to India’s culture is the doctrine of Ahimsa. It has given a definite bias to the history of the country for the last three decades and over and it has not ceased to be a living force in the lives of millions even today.

Gandhi raised his concerns about the environment early in his life when the mammoth movement of ‘Save the Planet’ had not really caught ground. Gandhi was one of the first to raise the thesis of Sustainable Development which has literally become the catch word of modern growth economists (Sharma 37). Gandhi pronounced that “Nature produces enough for our wants and if everybody took enough for himself and nothing more; there would be no pauperism and starvation in this world. The Gandhian model of “Sarvodaya Economic Order” has a built-in-mechanism of ‘growth for justice’ not only to the human race but also to nature. It is a natural order, more eco friendly. Louis Fischer has rightly stated in praise of Gandhi that if a person has to survive and blossom in freedom, truth and decency, “the
remainder of the twentieth century and what lies beyond it must belong not to Lenin or Trotsky, not to Marx or Mao, or Ho or Che, but to Mahatma Gandhi” (Ibid).

Gandhi is seen as one of the most resolute critics of modernity in the twentieth century. He sees modernity sweeping everything that comes its way if it is not reined in. Taking charge of the world means that we know how to organize the world and how to implement our plans. “At the heart of modernity is a questioning of and dissatisfaction with the present and a faith that reason and the change it fosters will lead to a progressively better future” (Tercher 77). In mounting his attack, Gandhi challenges the foundations of the modern world and instead of those principles he offers an ‘idealized conception’ of traditional rural life which he saw as the ideal alternative to the complexity, materialism and poverty he detects in modern society. Gandhi’s own views of traditional culture departs from most conservative critiques like Burke and Thomas and Carlyle who want to “reclaim the past without changing it much” (Ibid). To rely on a tradition to guide practice means to Gandhi that “tradition must eliminate those corrupting practices that have intruded over time and debased its core moral vision concerning the dignity and worth of all persons” (Ibid).

Gandhi was staunchly against Imperialism and he felt that the evil of colonialism was a blot on the identity of any nation. The non-violent freedom struggle of the Indian nation led by Mahatma Gandhi was an example of his great faith in the power of a nation over the despotic colonial rulers. In Margaret Atwood’s works too the scourge of the colonial masters can vividly be seen in the way in which the Americans are hated for the exploitation of the Canadian landscape. The manner in which they exploit the natural resources of Canada, dirty the pristine environment and spread the tentacles of their noisy ‘culture’ all over Canada are seen with suspicion by Atwood, with a special reference to Surfacing. The colonial hangover is seen in the manner in which Anna and Peter behave with each other, one being the slave and the other being the master, the former in total submission and the other in total control. Gandhi abhorred this slavish submission and said that even the mightiest is not stronger than the simple one who knows what his rights are and fights to achieve them.

Gandhi had profound views on marriage and sex. For Gandhi marriage was a duty that had to be performed with the utmost care and affection. The man and wife were duty bound to each other. The function of procreation and the subsequent upbringing of children were the sacred duty of both parents, with a special emphasis
on the mother as the guardian of the child’s health, morality and conscience. Gandhi
said that marriage was for keeps but he did not rule out the extreme when he said that
if a marital relationship was not conducive to the well-being of the cohabitants, then it
has every ground to be dissolved. Gandhi was strongly in favour of the institution of
marriage as it regulated the sexual function and helped in the stabilization of the
family bonds. He was vehemently against contraception as he felt that it would lead to
immorality, with a loss of sanctity of sex as a natural consequence. In an interview
with Mrs Sanger, the American pioneer in the field of contraception, he argued with
her on the merits of this ‘population stopper’. He argued that when two people want to
satisfy animal passion, without having to suffer the consequences of their act, it is not
love, it is lust and hence contraceptives will only add to lust (Paul 82). He said that
continence and not contraception was the way to put a cap on the growing population.
He argued that the free availability and reckless use of contraceptives would give rise
to immorality in the form of pre-marital sex, adultery and prostitution. He also argued
that sex was not to be considered a vehicle for pleasure but a medium for the
proliferation of the species. Gandhi once commented about unrestricted freedom in
sex and the free availability of contraceptives. He said, “The perfection of the anti-
conceptual practices and the methods of bringing about abortion has led to the
emancipation of either sex from all moral restraint. No wonder marriage itself is
laughed at” (Gandhi, Self-Restraint 15).

Gandhi’s conception of politics is as unorthodox as his views on religion. He uses
this word not in the usual sense of the art of capturing, holding and managing
governmental power, but as meaning “the art of transforming social relations in
terms of Justice” (Bandhopadya 23). In his words Gandhi expressed that a non-
violent revolution is not a programme of ‘seizure of power’, but it is a programme of
transformation of relationships. Gandhi views with suspicion the concept of power as
it is generally applied to human society. In his ideal society, neither the state nor any
part of its organizational apparatus- government, armed forces, pressure groups etc
would exist at all. Nor would there be any complicated machinery or concentration of
wealth in the hands of a few. He said it is only spiritual power which can be consistent
with the ideal of Justice.

Indian scriptures lay great emphasis on the control of the senses or indriya. The
Sikh scriptures regards five evils as the basis of corrupting a human being: kam, krodh, lobh, moh and ahankar. Kam, the first of the evils is the evil of lust, krodh is
anger, lobh is greed, moh is attachment while ahankar is pride. The evil of kam is uppermost as under its influence, an individual loses his senses and can commit a heinous crime. According to Gobind Singh Mansukhani in Sikh Ethics chastity or continence, is emphasized in Sikhism, because in the human body lies the divine presence and as such, the body has to be kept clean and perfect. Those things which harm the body or cause sickness and disease have to be conscientiously avoided. Sex is to be limited to one’s wife. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex is forbidden to a Sikh. “Marriage is a sacrament and the purpose thereof is companionship and help on the spiritual path, rather than sexual enjoyment”. The guru said “0 Lust! You consign people to hell and to the cycle of transmigration, You cheat all minds, influence the three worlds and destroy all contemplation and culture; Your pleasure is momentary, you make one fickle and poor and punish the high and the low; I have overcome your fear by associating with saintly persons and taking shelter with God!” (Adi Granth, 1358). Even in married life, sex is to be mutually regulated. Those who are spiritually inclined, consider the sublimation of sex into divine love as a great virtue (Mansukhani).

Gandhi suggested that along with moral strength and spiritual values, economic independence hold the key to the dignity of a human being. He talked of the significance of a self-sufficient economy in which village economy was free from the scruples of urban exploitation. He also advocated the principle of trusteeship under which resources could be shared by all and thus that would contribute to the development of a Socialist State where all had the right to enjoy wealth without its concentration in the hands of an exploitative few. The concept of the charkha or the spinning wheel was also a part of Gandhi’s philosophy of self-sufficiency under which self-reliance could be attained in the field of cloth production. The charkha in fact became the symbol of economic freedom and self-reliance. Gandhi fought a non-violent battle against English imperialism in India which had resulted in the destruction of the local economy. This further gave rise to poverty and exploitation, making the traditional Indian economy dysfunctional while England kept becoming richer. Similarly in Atwood’s works we see that Canada as a nation is exploited for its natural resources by America and Canadians watch as things go by. The angst in Atwood’s Surfacing is an ample example of how the protagonist feels against this unchecked exploitation.
The proposed project is an attempt to study various aspects of dysfunction in Margaret Atwood's novels with special reference to *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride*, *The Blind Assassin* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, using the Gandhian approach. In other words, the proposed project focuses on "Gandhian readings" of some of Atwood's novels which foreground dysfunction at different levels. By a Gandhian approach, we mean how Gandhi in his integrated vision of life addresses various aspects and issues related to socio-cultural dysfunction at different levels: the individual, the familial, the social, the natural and the global. Gandhi's views on culture and civilization are grounded in his critique of modern, consumerist, value-neutral modernity and his emphasis on the spiritual and ethical aspects of human life. Using Gandhian approach presupposes the application of Gandhian insights on self, culture, society and modernity to the analysis of dysfunction as reflected in Atwood's novels.

Margaret Atwood shows various aspects of Canadian society in a state of disarray. The attitudes that the protagonists have towards religion and the spiritual are markedly adverse. In Sociological terms, “Religion is an institution of shared beliefs and practices created by human beings as a response to forces that they cannot understand rationally, and they give ultimate meaning to their lives” (Coser 308). Religion helps to strengthen the bonds between its members, besides giving spiritual backing to social norms and exerting social control by lending legitimacy to other social institutions. The gradual degeneration that comes about in the institution of the church in particular is exposed in the attitude of the protagonists. The church and all that it apparently stands for is severely debunked in Margaret Atwood's novels. The female protagonist's brother says, “Catholics are crazy” (Atwood, *Surfacing* 53). The church defeats the very purpose for which it stands. It has been reduced to 'Sunday Mass' and moralistic preaching which is not what the function of religion is. In 2004 over half of Canadians aged 15 to 29 and almost 60% of British Columbians either had no religious affiliation or did not attend any religious services (Clark and Schellenberg 2). It is not only the lack of religious sentiment but also the lack of spirituality and a common binding with members of the community, which are more worrying.

Canada has a history, which is an admixture of various influences. The Canadian looks for an identity and this identity lies beneath the many layers of cultural influences. Canadian literature is a concoction of history, culture and environment, all
interfaced with distinct aspects from each other. In Canadian Literature, “Nature in its primordial form is always projected as something a pre-man form of existence with its own laws according to which to proceed with an utter indifference to man” (Meitei 99-100). But this relationship between the human and environment is always an important part of Canadian literature. The slow moving away from nature and its healing effects and a ruthless exploitation of environment and natural resources has a baneful effect on human life.

The regional consciousness in Canada began to give rise to a national consciousness which further broadened into an international or universal consciousness. This awakened conscience led to the writers showing a preoccupation with quest themes, search for identity and self-definition which ultimately turned out to be a search for inner space. The women as portrayed by Atwood suffer from personal victimization which has its roots in the colonial pattern of destruction. The women feel inferior to men and suffer psychological tensions, which support the view that “women’s lives constitute an experience in colonialism” (Ramamurti, Chellapan and Shankar 143).

Women are socialized as ‘breeders’ and ‘caretakers’. This is what constitutes the definition of a ‘normal’ woman, a woman who will protect the patriarchal social order. Any other role would be deviant. In a patriarchal order, gender becomes a normative system through which female behavior is controlled. (Heredia and Mathias 42). The patriarchal setup defines all interactions and relations that women have as members of a society. Patriarchy maybe defined in the following way: “It is the tracing of descent through the father and any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms” (Ibid). Women in the novels of Margaret Atwood are pinned down by patriarchal structures which cause them to revolt in ways peculiar to each. The dysfunction of female society is represented in the course of actions taken up by various female characters like Mari Mc Alpin, Ofred, Laura and Iris.

As any society changes its social structure or its economic base, artefacts are recreated within it (Lodge 407). Literary forms arise as one of the ways in which “changing subjects create themselves as subjects within a social context”. The novel is a major example of the way in which women create themselves as ‘social subjects
under a bourgeoise form’. Therefore when Atwood writes, like any other female writer she is merely fulfilling this prerequisite. Thus when a woman writes it is a simultaneous refusal of the woman’s world and at the same time it is a construction of a woman’s world from within a ‘masculine world’. It thus touches on both worlds, just like what Atwood tries to portray.

Atwood’s novels represent a number of influences that play their part in influencing the psyche of the characters and the realms that they inhabit, eventually affecting their "functions". Neo-imperialism has been one of them. In Surfacing, Joe shows his disgust towards all that is American by calling the Americans ‘Bloody fascist pig Yanks’ (Atwood, Surfacing 13). The female protagonist cries for the loss of her land and the dilapidation of its environment. The postcolonial dregs are left behind for Canadians to see. A major part of the changes that have taken place in the Canadian family has been due to the evil influences of the American ‘culture’ (if there is one). The hatred towards American forces and American influences make most Canadians feel very bitter. In fact, the disintegration of the mentality of the average Canadian, in other words ‘psychic’ dysfunction and of the environment she/he inhabits can be attributed to a large extent to neo-imperialism.

Deviance from what is acceptable as "normal" can be seen in the behaviour of Atwood's characters. "Deviance is usually defined as any significant departure from social norms. Deviance is described as a movement away from what is normal"(Coser et al 185) In The Edible Woman, Maria McAlpin stops eating food as a protest against the society that puts her down and dictates terms to her. She sees the lady on the cake as a personification of 'her' and she is loathed to think that she is only an object – a fork plunged into the ‘carcass’ (Atwood, The Edible Woman 354). Similarly in The Blind Assassin, Laura just 'drove a car off a bridge' as she wants to teach her brother-in-law a lesson for corrupting her innocence and taking her to where she did not wish to go (Atwood, The Blind Assassin 3). Deviant behaviour has its manifestations in every society but the extent to which these manifestations stretch is what can prove it to be detrimental to society. Hence Laura's death and Maria's refusal to eat is deviant in the sense that happy and well-adjusted individuals would not engage in such behaviour.

Both childhood and youth have subversive elements in Atwood's novels. Elaine Risley sees the society of children that she inhabits as dissident and pretentious and it is a matter of the way in which they have been socialized. When she looks in
retrospect, it makes her feel neurotic and she starts 'chewing her fingers' (Cat's Eye 42). The youth gang led by Cordelia in Cat's Eye is a pointer to a kind of a 'subculture' that exists in the society, the intentions of which are not always healthy (Brake 1). This culture is marked by a set of norms and attitudes, which are characteristic of the group and a die-hard allegiance of the group to these norms. This subculture treads the normal paths of adolescence- of discovering condoms (a 'safe' as they call it) and boyfriends etc (Atwood, Cat’s Eye 101). However, it also becomes subversive when Cordelia and her gang try to kill Elaine and put her to unending humiliation. Margaret Atwood herself grew up in a family that was happy and compact and the wild outdoor life attracted her immensely. It is surprising that she writes about broken families, drunken lechers and parasites. The face of the Canadian social landscape is shown to be gradually changing and for the worse because of the valueless modernity accepted by present-day Canadians.

The degraded landscape of the Canadian land and its firmament in Atwood’s novels also point to a larger issue. It is not just physical scarring. The psychological currents that run along are significant to note. The desolate locale of Flintcomb-Ash in Hardy’s Tess of the D’urbevilles tells of Tess’ ravaged soul, “Here we suffer grief and pain, here we meet to part again;” (Hardy 104) and the mysterious locations of Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code make us feel the larger constructs of the story. The fear of Zenia returning to haunt Tony’s life again is metaphorically shown through the smoky Toixique (the bar) in The Robber Bride. Margaret Atwood frequently alludes to the role that environment has in portraying the slipping away of soul and sanity. There are innumerable changes that the physical environment is going through in Canada, just as it is taking place all over the world and there is a larger relationship that exists between an individual and the environment, than meets the eye. The role that ‘globalization’ and ‘modernization’ have in this depletion cannot be underestimated.

The way in which the environment is treated also has its roots in Christian attitudes towards nature and its treatment. The Judaic-Christian philosophy states that land was a God given property of man (White 1967). In fact White attributes all the problems of modern environment with the Judaic-Christian philosophy, as exploitation was given a free hand (Southwick 135). The metamorphosis of the rural to the urban setup, too, brings with it tremendous changes. The evil influences on the environment and the American hand in its perpetration are clearly seen in most of Atwood’s novels but particularly in Surfacing where the protagonist alludes to
“broken stubs ...ferns trampled ...denting the mud path in front of me like excavations, craters” (Atwood, *Surfacing* 118). The environment stands as a mute spectator to this destruction.

Women are pivotal in Atwood's works as many a time they steer the course of action. The emotional outpourings and power politics determine, to a large extent the turns that take place in the novels. A woman is made to be the ' icing ' on the cake and she is meant to be eaten, (quite literally) in *The Edible Woman*. In *Surfacing*, the protagonist has to 'die' in order to live again. She knows that she has to "be raised from the dead...I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn't" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 71). Her present world gives her no answers. The present status of the Canadian woman is challenged by phenomena like wife beating, high divorce rates, sexual inequality, sexual harassment at the work place and the balancing act between home and work. It is estimated that one in every ten Canadian women is battered by her husband or her partner (Baker 105).

The patterns of violence and inequality may vary but they exist in all of Margaret Atwood's novels. Power politics destroys the relationship between Peter and his wife Anna in *Surfacing*, Laura and her brother-in-law, Richard in *The Blind Assassin*, Marian and Peter in *The Edible Woman* and the unnamed protagonist and David in *Surfacing*. Most women characters in Atwood's works are traumatized by the circumstances that they have gone through and their past haunts them with great force. In *Cat’s Eye* Elaine Risley cannot bear to recall the painful events of a childhood betrayal that nearly killed her and Karen. *The Robber Bride* uses dissociation from her body to cope with sexual abuse. In the 1990s, Atwood’s preoccupation has been with “splintered identities and childhood traumas that closely matched a broader cultural fascination” (Darroch 103).

The dissertation intends to deal with four kinds of dysfunction which are as follows:

1. Familial and Childhood Dysfunction
2. Economic and sexual dysfunction (not in the medical meaning of a ‘sexual dysfunction’) but a social-sexual dysfunction
3. Environmenral and cultural dysfunction
4. Religious dysfunction and Moral dysfunction

The family and the stages of life are the foundations on which lie the stability of any society. The attitudes that are formed at this stage and the general opinions go a
long way in shaping the relations that we form and the interactions that we engage in. Like most Freudians would agree that parent-child interactions in early life produce personality balance or disharmony. In particular, variations in the way in which persons go through the stages of sexual development, from the “oral stage of infancy, throughout the phallic, and latency periods to adult heterosexuality have profound consequences for adult behavior” (Gibbons 161).

Closely related to the family is the environment in which an individual lives. Environmentalism as a social movement involves questioning modern assumptions that “nature and its bounty are infinite”. It has two main strands:

1. One derives from the growing environmental awareness in the West, inspired by the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962, which documented the disruption in the earth’s ecosystems because of modern economic practices. It also talks of the shortcomings of “Western rationalism” insofar as it looks at nature as ‘external to society’ (Mc Michall 215).

2. The second strand in environmentalism appears in active movements to protect some ecological regions from environmentally damaging practices. This is particularly true where states and firms seek to “monetize” and harvest natural resources on which human communities depend.

In Surfacing, we see the rape of the environment by the American mafia. The rape is only the representation of a deep psychological scar that is gradually affecting the mental health of all Canadians when they see the denegation of their environment at the hands of scrupulous individuals for commercial gains. Surfacing maps the “position of a colony and of colonized consciousness defining themselves over against somewhere or someone else- here against a North American culture (or nature) much closer at hand and in the present (Sherwin 17). The novel uncovers how the vulnerability of the Canadian is open to scrutiny and interrogation. “Despite her marginal status within society, the violent woman is depicted as a meaningful and revealing figure that forces a reconsideration of Canada’s central mythologies” (English Studies in Canada 96).

Culture is a very complex term which brings under its ambit various aspects of everyday life. The complexity of the term culture is remarkable. It maybe referred to an ‘inner process’, catering to the ‘intellectual life and the arts’. It could also mean a ‘whole way of life’ (Willaims 17). Culture can also be defined as Matthew Arnold defined it “an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of
circumstances” (Carver 291). The cultural environment has to be reproduced and maintained. Its reproduction and maintenance depend on the “physical reproduction of the group and the organized transmission of specific forms of behaviour”. Socialization must exist in every culture and these must exist by mutual agreement. (Montagu 132). Culture is now treated symbiotically with economy and polity and with reference to “globalization and peripheralization of human society” (Mukherjee 50). When the culture of a community is sabotaged by disrupting movements, the very existence of the society stands to be threatened. In The Handmaid’s Tale, the dystopia of Gilead is a frightful example of the failure of cultural values and the stunting of the growth of society. Culture forms the basis of a society and there are two aspects of culture: the instrumental imperatives of culture and the cultural responses to these imperatives. Bronislaw Malinowski has summarized these responses in the following manner: (Universality of Culture 97)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperatives</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The cultural apparatus of implements and consumer goods must be produced, used, maintained and replaced by new production.</td>
<td>1. Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Human behavior, as regards its technical, customary, legal, or moral prescription, must be codified, regulated in action and sanction</td>
<td>2. Social Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The human material by which every institution is maintained, must be renewed, formed, drilled and provided with full knowledge of tribal tradition.</td>
<td>3. Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Authority within each institution must be defined, equipped with powers, and endowed with means of forceful execution of its orders.</td>
<td>4. Political organization</td>
</tr>
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II Issues/Problems to Be Investigated:
The project will include the following areas of study:
1. To analyse in brief, the cultural history of Canada and its search for ‘Canadianess’ from amongst varied influences. The ‘invention’ of Canada is a long journey and it has taken unto itself various ideologies and practices to be what it is today (Itwaru
110). This has a bearing on the literature of Canada in general and on the works of Margaret Atwood in particular.

2. To examine how “subject-positions” are articulated and re-constructed in the social, cultural and historical contexts of Canada. I will also examine how different power-relations affect the “functions” of individuals and institutions in Canadian society with special reference to Atwood’s novels. Both the sociological and civilizational views of a society will be taken into consideration. Inferences will be drawn from novels already mentioned. In many recent works, we can see alterations that have taken place in the structure of the Canadian family, society and culture, over the ages.

3. To interpret the role that environment plays in shaping the psyche of protagonists in Atwood’s novels. In light of American neo-imperialism and overall decadence of the environment, the Canadian landscape cannot be left far behind. Location in novels is often reflective of mental, physical and social conditions of characters and the worlds they inhabit. Similarly, the environment in the novels of Margaret Atwood speaks of the mental states of the protagonists. The marshy locales in Surfacing, the cold outdoors in The Cat’s Eye and the mysteriousness in The Blind Assassin are only a backdrop of crumbling relationships and lack of better alternatives. The world that the characters of Margaret Atwood inhabit is a world of contradictions and disconnections and the forces of human beings and nature are placed against each other. I will also examine how industrial society systematically destroys nature first and civilization/culture afterwards as Atwood’s novels show us.

4. To study representations of Canadian society and its institutions and influences in Atwood’s novels. Religion, education, politics, the environment, power politics and the economy all have a great role to play in Canadian society and the present shape of this society is a result of this interplay as reflected in Atwood’s novels.

5. Economic deprivations, materialism and the role of a changing Canadian society design the mind maps of individuals and play an important role in altering the societal matrix. The loss of what Mahatma Gandhi calls ‘moral progress’ which is a combination of truth and non-violence is apparent. (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 55). The proposed project intends to read and examine Atwood’s select novels from the Gandhian perspective which is largely ‘moral and civilizational’ in character (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 55).

6. To examine the role that sex and sexual aberrations play in the deviations that exist in society. Atwood’s novels have a number of characters who are sexually perverse
and their demeanour is largely determined by their sexual antics. The female body functions like an object of desire and the so called “perverse” desires are manufactured and disseminated through a mistaken modernity- about which Gandhi cautioned us long ago in Hind Swaraj and his other writings (Gandhi 55).

III Methodology:

No one method will be suitable for the study that I intend to make. Since the study is multidisciplinary, an eclectic approach is what is required. Hence I have chosen to adopt the following methods of study.

1. The basis of my study will be the perusal of six novels of Margaret Atwood, which are as follows:
   a. Surfacing
   b. The Robber Bride
   c. The Edible Woman
   d. Cat’s Eye
   e. The Blind Assassin
   f. The Handmaid’s Tale

2. The following critical approaches, in conjunction with Gandhi’s views on modernity, culture, civilization and good society will be applied in order to delineate the characters and situations in the novels.
   a. Neo-historicism
   b. Post-colonialism
   c. Feminism
   d. Cultural studies
   e. Eco – Feminism

3. Besides this, a study of various books on Sociology, Anthropology and the Environment will also form a part of my study in order to understand and interpret "dysfunction" properly.

4. Study of surveys and reports (by the Canadian government and private agencies) on Canadian society. These trends in the family will be carefully scrutinized in order to corroborate it with the information available in the primary texts that are to be studied.
5. A detailed perusal of the works of Mahatma Gandhi and a drawing of parallels between his ideas on culture and civilization and those of Atwood as portrayed in her texts.

IV A Brief Survey of work done

The area that I have chosen to research is still largely unexplored, as the Gandhian perspective has not been applied to Margaret Atwood’s works as yet. Even dysfunction in Margaret Atwood’s novels has not been discussed and hence I am exploring a new ground.

Most critics have examined such issues as class, suburbia, culture/art, operatic adaptation, utopia, feminism, postmodernism, phallocentricism, the human body, spirit possession, metamorphosis, Canadian identity/nationalism, transgression and related areas. While perusing the MLA International Bibliography, I came across only one critical work on Atwood that had something to do with my study tangentially and that was on ‘ethics’ The work was Oryx and Crake, and it dealt with the treatment of ‘transgression’ ‘genetics’ and ‘ethics’. There is nothing that has been written on the changes in society and how these changes play an important role in the interplay between individuals and society using a Gandhian approach. In other words, it does not deal with “dysfunction” as represented in Atwood novels. It is however, interesting to note that almost every ‘function’ that takes place in society is eventually grounded in self and family.

However, I have given a brief description of related research that has been done in the field of society and its related aspects so as to make a background for the study.


2. Craig Mckie and Keith Thompson. Ed. Canadian Social Trends. Ontario: Thompson. 1990. In this work, the authors tell us that more and more divorces are taking place and marriage is becoming less important in Canada. People in ‘common-law-relationships’ has increased and people are marrying later than before.

3. McGaham, Peter. Urban Sociology in Canada: Toronto: Butterworths.1986. In this book, the Typological Perspective is used to study Canadian society. It says
that the city is significantly the major reason why society changes. Division of labour and other changes have led to breaking down of ‘communal solidarities’ and there are no alternatives for ‘social integration’ (Wellman 1978).

4. McLaren, Arlene Tigan. Gender and Society- Creating a Canadian Women's Sociology. The writer says that there is ‘isolation’ of women in Canada, both ‘social’ and ‘psychological’. It has been said that wives are “appropriate victims” of family violence (Dobash and Dobash 1987). There are various social factors, which prevent unhappy women from dissolving their marriages.


6. Clark, Warren and Grant Schellenburg. Canadian Social Trends, Vol 11: 2006. There is a gradual decline in the following of religious practices. The younger Canadians are less religious while the women tend to be more religious than the men.

7. Atwood, Margaret. Survival-A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: Anansi.1972. Atwood says that the Canadian family is trapped in isolation in its search for identity. Parents and children have interests, which are different from one another and this results in a schism. Both are however fighting for Survival.

8. Earl G. Ingersoll Ed Using Other People's Dreadful Childhoods. Margaret Atwood: Conversations. Ontario: Review. In this famous conversation, Margaret Atwood tells us about the role of other people's childhood and how they influence her works.

9. Maureen, Baker. The Family: Changing Trends in Canada. Toronto: Mc Graw Hill. 1984. Maureen says that family violence is quite common in Canada and it affects both women and children. The means by which violence is perpetrated maybe different but the scars that it leaves are indelible. The law gives punishment but there is a long road from the family to the cells of the jail.

10. Richer, Stephen and Dennis Forcese. Social issues : Sociological Views of Canada. Ontario: Prentice Hall.1988. Women and their issues have slowly begun to become important in Canada over the years. Feminism looks at the ‘universality of patriarchy’ and tries to explain it in various ways. In Canada the
most important reason for the change in women’s condition is their active participation in the labour force. Now a woman is seen as a part of a system and not as one who is outside of it.

V Chapterization

Chapter 1 Introduction

A. Theorising Dysfunction: This section will focus on an introduction to the concept of dysfunction in society. The areas, which become dysfunctional i.e., family, church, education, culture etc will be analyzed. A brief history of Canada will also be sketched.

B. A brief introduction to Margaret Atwood's Life and Works. A brief introduction to dysfunction in Margaret Atwood’s select novels will be discussed in the second section of the second chapter.

C. Atwood, Gandhi and the concept of Dysfunction: The third section of this chapter will focus on Mahatma Gandhi and his concept of dysfunction. His views on cultural degradation and moral turpitude will be analyzed. Long ago, Gandhi stressed the role of “self realization” as a means to achieve moral fortitude (Gandhi Village Swaraj 10).

D. A review of the existing literature, with a view to build a foundation on which to begin.

E. To ascertain the need and scope of the proposed study with a view to establish its importance in terms of changes in Canadian society.

F. To set down the objectives of the proposed study in order to be able to make a road map.

Chapter 2 Cat’s Eye: Familial and Childhood Dysfunction:

This chapter will deal with delinquency and dysfunction in the family as well as childhood politics. The human family must be an institution, with permanent responsibilities transmitted by communication and supported by ‘group sanctions’. The need to survive made an economic surplus necessary and thus we had the division of labour (Kerr 15). Elaine Risley grows up like many Canadian girls of her time-lost in the firmament of a shaky childhood and threatening peers. She forever feels like she does not belong to the school she goes to or to the friends who surround her. All these influences go on to shape her opinions and relationships in later life.
The role that childhood politics plays in the novel is significant. The girls in Risley's 'gang' often engage in subversive tactics and form a "subculture" of their own which is painful for Elaine. They set norms of their own which are to be slavishly followed by the members of the group and failure to comply could have high stakes, ranging from direct insults, practical jokes and even expulsion from the group; all of which could be very demeaning for a growing up girl. In fact, the girl gang even tries to kill her by throwing her into an icy stream. The later attitudes in life and the manner in which she reacts to a range of situations are all deeply embedded in the early experiences of her life, which for the most part of it have been cruel and divisive. The manner in which Elaine Risley tries to get the approval of the group and the heights up to which she is willing to go, show the level of fear and frustration in a pre-teen. In this chapter, the underlying causes of delinquency and their manifestations will be studied in detail.

Chapter 3 The Blind Assassin and The Robber Bride: Economic and sexual Dysfunction.

The chapter will deal with industrial politics, economy and sexual abuse. It will analyze the interplay of the three in charting the course of the novel and the attitudes of the protagonists. Laura Chase commits suicide because her brother-in-law sexually abuses her after her father's death. He not only assaults her sexually, but even takes away the button factory, which belonged to his father-in-law. Thus her rape is a double-edged weapon that Richard uses. Industrial politics and intrigues are intertwined in this chapter, as we see Richard making an all out effort to get into politics. The evils of materialism and the fall out of industrial development will be analyzed in this chapter. The Great Depression of the 1930s had a profound effect on the lives of the people in Canada. The flourishing Button factory and its gradual degradation to an arena of workers disputes and financial intrigues all happen in the backdrop of the Great Depression. The Canadian economy was always characterized by sharp fluctuations in economic activity. By the time the bottom of the Depression was reached in the year 1933, more than one in four Canadians was out of work, municipalities had gone bankrupt and thousands had to shut down their businesses (Narrie and Owran 475).

Mahatma Gandhi had predicted such fallout long before the full-blown effects of economic and cultural degradation were seen. The loss of innocence in the death of Laura is the result of a scarred ethos. This chapter will deal with sexual aberrations,
the institute of marriage and the complex personality of Zenia. Sex, in *The Robber Bride* is not synonymous with love and intimacy but it is a means to an end. Zenia uses her body and her sexuality in order to remain the ‘prima donna’ of her circles. She emerges from nowhere and wrecks the lives of those around her. A detailed analysis into her psyche and the reasons as to why she develops such a warped personality will be made. The study of sex, its aberrations and the ways in which people use sex as a means rather than as end will be analyzed in order to delineate the personality of Zenia. On the other hand, the other female characters act as a foil to Zenia while they attempt to use rational means in order to bring sanity into their lives.

Chapter 4  *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*: Environmental and Cultural Dysfunction.

This chapter will deal with the problem of environmental degradation, materialism and loss of culture. The Canadian landscape has undergone a drastic degradation just like the other parts of the world. In *Surfacing*, the evil American influence has transformed Canada into a land of ‘tins’ and ‘cans’. The search of the protagonist ends when she gives up all the trappings of a ‘civilized world’. The evaluation of the key assessment of humankind in any arrangement of human society, and at any point in time, is internalized and registered by its culture which has been defined as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Muhkerjee 51).

The chapter will also analyze the impermanence of marriage, as the bond is often based on selfish motives. Peter uses his wife to make ‘blue movies’ in order to make good money. The idea of eco-feminism will also be analyzed and its significance in the novel will be traced. The ultimate understanding of the ‘subject position’ vis-à-vis her world is the ultimate discovery. Elaine Showalter says that the way in which women look at their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are very closely related to the cultural environments in which they have been brought in (Showalter 339). In *The Edible Woman*, McAlpin is used to a beastly environment. She is able to see the ulterior motives of all around her. She even finds herself in love but is unable to give into all the demands of a chauvinistic lover. This chapter will analyze the workings of her mind and the unique way in which she chooses to protest against society. This chapter will also examine deviance and look at it from the point of the protagonist who uses it to give expression to a feeling so complex, that it
transcends words and expressions. The concepts of power politics, protest and deviance will also be covered.

Chapter 5 The Handmaids Tale: Religious and Moral Dysfunction.

The chapter deals with dysfunctional elements of religion, the female body and politics. The Kingdom of Gilead is a strange place, where a woman is treated as an object up for sale. Gilead is a republic which is a dystopia and the rules of procreation and the sanctity of the womb is the supreme consideration here. The scarcity of offspring has made pregnant women objects to be deified. Sex is carried out as a common concern, very calibrated, systematic and mechanical. Women are held as common property and the quality of being fertile is the quality that gives you the highest respect. Wombs are for sale in the kingdom of Gilead and a woman does not have an identity that she can call her own. The dysfunctional elements in Christianity itself are amazingly apparent, less in the doctrines and more in the persons who implement them. A handmaid has nothing to do but to satisfy the lust of men and to procreate. For her to even think of her own feelings and emotions is criminal. Durkheim in his analysis of religion says that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden—“beliefs and practices which unite in one simple moral community called the church, all those who adhere to it” (Abraham 120). The sacred symbols of religious belief and practice refer, not to the external environment or to individual human nature but only to the moral reality of society.

In this chapter I will analyze religion, its meaning and what it was really meant to be. The slow degradation of the institution has resulted in skewed ideas and practices. The practice of objectification of the female body will also be studied. Politics has an important role to play in the way in which women are treated at Gilead. It is sad that the entire political system has been created by men and hence it is made to function according to their convenience. Gender inequality and its significance in Canadian society today will be studied.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

A summary of the findings will be made in order to come to the conclusion of the proposed study. A summarization of each chapter will be made so as to arrive at some concluding remarks with an aim to give the thesis its logical end.