CHAPTER II

Cat’s Eve: Familial and Childhood Dysfunction

This chapter will deal with the representations of familial and childhood dysfunction in Atwood’s novels which will be critically analyzed within the framework of Gandhian perspective on modern civilization. Gandhi saw the legitimization of self-indulgence and easy consumerism as a trivialization of humanity. He felt that the moral life is integral to this world and the human form is the only means of achieving it (Sondh 194).

Every social institution has been established with the objective of bringing about welfare and stability in society by delegating responsibility, organizing hierarchical systems and providing a security blanket to its members. Almost all such social organizations would strive towards the achievement of these goals despite changes that take place in the matrix of society or perceptible differences in outlook among the members of that social organization. The family has been one of the most hallowed institutions of society, which is also the most useful institution for the growth and sustenance of society as it serves its members by providing them financial provisions, emotional security and abounding love. However, when a family is unable to provide the succour that it ordinarily is supposed to, it may become a breeding surface of discontent and strife and in turn could more dangerously lead to dysfunction at various levels. This dysfunction translated could mean strained interpersonal relationships, domestic violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, insecurity and even suicidal tendencies and sexual abuse within the family.

Similarly, the experiences of childhood are idealistically painted and imagined. The foundations of an adult life are firmly laid at this stage. The interplay of experiences and circumstances of childhood verily become the canvas on which all other future experiences and action will take place. Idealistically, the experiences of childhood are meant to be directed towards moulding and nurturing the child. However not every experience is ideal and childhood experiences can sometimes be counter-productive and harsh. It is under these circumstances that childhood itself becomes dysfunctional and a child could face various crises like personality disorders, low self-esteem, suicidal tendencies and inability to build healthy inter-personal relationships. The reasons that maybe accrued to the problem are numerous but the
result is one-imbalanced personality who finds it hard to connect with the world around and is perpetually bombarded with unpleasant stimuli. Childhood dysfunction can have far reaching effects on the psyche of an individual and can lead to later life unpleasant experiences.

I will be studying both familial and childhood dysfunction in the two above mentioned novels while making a Gandhian analysis of these two aspects. 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 a 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.

Gandhi was a strong advocate of the values that a family symbolized and he saw childhood as an age of innocence and exploration. It is for this reason that he advocated nai taalim which was a system of education in which a child was to be taught through nature and drawing rather than through rote and the three Rs. He said education was to be integrated into the life of a child. Similarly, Gandhi promoted strong family values and unconditional loyalty in marriage, unless an exigency arose. Gandhi said that the education and upbringing of a child was a process of arduous labour and love. It in fact began right at the time of conception. He said that the physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception are reproduced in the baby. Then during the period of pregnancy it continues to be affected by the mother’s moods, desires and temperament, as also by her ways of life. After birth the child imitates the parents, and for a considerable number of years entirely depends on them for its growth (Gandhi, *My Experiments* 188).

*Cat’s Eye* can be read as a critique of dysfunction in the family. The role that family plays in the growth and development of personality is a determining factor of personality development. Similarly, childhood experiences are the pathways that lead to the roads of adulthood. They can have far reaching effects on the psyche of an adult as the impressions that they leave are very firmly embossed on the mind of a child which is an impressionistic medium. In order to understand the relationship between childhood experiences and the influence of the family on these experiences, a study of
family and marriage will be undertaken as the first step. A family can be defined as “two or more people related by blood, marriage, adoption and residing together”. These are two crucial aspects to the definition of the family: the persons must be related and they must customarily maintain a common residence. If they are not related, they form a household and not a family (James 286). It may also be defined as an“intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties” (Marshall 223). The family is a social unit that has been able to tide over upheavals throughout the centuries and even though its shape and functions may have altered, it essentially remains the same all over the world. The forms and functions of family have gone through many changes in order to adapt to changes in the technological and economic superstructure of society (Singh 174).

Marriage is traditionally conceived to be a relationship that has legal bindings; between an adult male and female and it has certain rights and obligations (Marshall 388). Marriage is widely considered to be the basis of a strong and stable network of social relationships which go to make the larger social unit which is the family. Like family, marriage too has undergone numerous changes, thereby not only bringing in its ambit unconventional forms of marriage like same sex marriages, but also bringing with it changes in the duration of the institution and changes in the expectations of the partners of the institution.

The Canadian family has undergone a number of changes since its inception. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines have Canadians more and more aware of the changes that are taking place in the family during the several past decades. “The public is bombarded with statistics revealing more divorce, fewer births, more premarital pregnancies with subsequent abortion or children born to never-married mothers, and an alleged increase in childless couples” (Nett 2). In addition to this there are numerous other social problems like child prostitution, juvenile delinquency, family violence of all kinds, chemical substance abuse by children and teenage suicide which have become part of the ‘national consciousness’ and are casually linked to the changes in the family (Nett 3). There is an intrinsic relationship that exists between the ‘lifestyle’ of a family and how these lifestyles could give rise to various types of dysfunctions. The Canadian family has undergone numerous changes in both its composition and functions, much like many families of the world. These changes in turn have brought about many dysfunctions in the Canadian family which are adequately represented in almost all Atwood’s works. Mahatma Gandhi
propagated that the family was a source of all goodness that would become the basis of an individual’s character later in life. For Gandhi, every civilization was “inspired and energized by a distinct conception of human beings” (Parekh 78). If that conception was mistaken, it corrupted the entire civilization and made it a “force of evil”. In Gandhi’s view that was the case with modern civilization. It undoubtedly had many achievements to its credit; it was flawed as its nature was essentially aggressive, imperialist, violent, exploitative, brutal, unhappy, restless, and devoid of a sense of direction and purpose. Gandhi thought that this was because modern civilization neglected the soul, privileged the body, misunderstood the nature and limits of reason, and had no appreciation of the individual swabhava. Gandhi said that such a view radically misconceived and violated the inner balance and hierarchy of human nature.

In Cat’s Eye, the role of the family and the labyrinth of childhood experiences is distinctly seen in the shaping of personality. Elaine Risley grows up like many Canadian girls of her time-lost in a shaky childhood and intimidated by threatening peers. All these influences go on to shape her opinions and relationships in later life. The role that childhood experiences play 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 (Brake 14). In fact, they even try to kill her by throwing her into an icy stream. In this chapter, delinquency and its manifestations will be studied.

Skolnick (1987) said that there has been a switch from the "golden age of the family" in the 1950s to the politics of the family (James 320). The Canadian family is no exception to these changes. The Canadian family has moved from being an extended or a traditional family to a conjugal one in which chief importance is placed on the husband and wife relationship rather than on blood relationships. The Canadian family has adapted to the changes in society and the economic opportunities available, just like a large number of families around the world have changed. Canadian family began as the good old extended family or what may also be called the traditional family. A traditional family or an extended family maybe defined as one which is usually contrasted with industrial, urbanized, capitalistic 'modern society'. The term may also refer to a family system in which several generations live in one household (Marshall 221). Families are a special subset of social systems and are structured by a unique set of intergender and intergenerational relationships. (Broderick 51) However
even though everyone knows what a family is it is difficult to really assign an appropriate definition of the word family.

The slow change in the pattern of the family to the more nuclear one has brought with it many changes. In Canada the need for a family has been more one of survival. People got together and formed families as they feared getting lost in the wilderness. Canadian families were represented by a dominating grandfather who called the shots and the other members of the family wanted to break away from the unit. The slow change in the pattern of the family to the more nuclear one has brought with it many changes. In Canada the need for a family has been more one of survival. People got together and formed families as they feared getting lost in the wilderness. Canadian families were represented by a dominating grandfather who called the shots and the other members of the family wanted to break away from the unit. (Atwood, *Survival* 8). Thus even in the beginning, the family was more a need of security rather than one of great kinship and love.

The situation in the Canadian family has undergone drastic changes with the shift from agrarian to mechanized society and larger participation of women in the economy. Gandhi dealt at length with the problems of machinery and the importance of an agrarian set up. Gandhi said that it was machinery that had impoverished India. He also said that machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Gandhi said that machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 81). He also said that machinery was like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Gandhi spearheaded a simple life which was based on village communities and village industries. Gandhi viewed an agrarian society as an ideal where under intelligent guidance the village income could be doubled as distinguished from individual income. He knew that our villages have “inexhaustible resources not for commercial purposes in every case but certainly for local purposes in almost every case” (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 14). In the light of Gandhi’s views, it will be easy to understand that any major change in a society is always accompanied by some angst and anguish, which is really an effort at coping with the new situation. When the great Canadian family turned from the traditional setup to a modern one there have been visible changes. Nuclear families have put more pressure on children and spouses and the new generation of children is battling with more than the absence of their parents for long periods of time but also the pressures of normal growing up and lonely
childhood. In Cat's Eye the pressures on Elaine are more than just a family that has moved from an unfashionable locality in the wild to a happening one in Canada. It is a total change in lifestyle and outlook.

A family is understood to have a number of functions which assist in the growth of society, as it is the most important unit of social order. Every culture has norms that govern family life which include "relationships between family members, marriage partnerships, safety and welfare of children and the roles of family members" (Nagnur 14). A traditional family would generally have as its functions more simplistic and conventional functions to perform but a so called ‘modern’ family's functions would be more specialized and sometimes even unconventional (like helping an unwed pregnant daughter through an abortion or getting a child to undergo a rehab in a de-addiction centre). However there will be a general agreement on the basic functions of a family which would include adding new members, imparting knowledge of culture to children, participation in the economy and maintaining physical, mental, moral and economic welfare of family members (Ripley 39). Whenever an individual deviates from behaviour which can be termed as ‘normal’, the role of the family comes into sharp focus. Clear evidence exists to show that family circumstances can have profound effects on child development, including the possibility of "delinquency and various anti social behaviours" (Kerr and Michalski 32). In the preface to The Division of Labour in Society (1893) Durkheim studies the facts of moral life and to look at the laws that govern them. His main argument is that the conditions under which people live, give rise to moral rules and these rules change when society changes (Hale 144). Canadian society has been steadily changing over the ages and the result has been a drastic new pattern in the moral rules and norms of society.

Marriage, considered to be one of the most sanctimonious of all social institutions does not hold good favour in the eyes of Cordelia in Cat’s Eye. Her outburst on marriage is very similar to Laura’s description of her parents’ relationship in The Blind Assassin. Laura says that her parents were caught in a loveless relationship and it seemed as though they had partaken of a potion which just kept them together but forever apart in the same house. Elaine says that she does not want to get married to 'Josef or anyone else' as she has come to consider "marriage as dishonourable, a crass trade-off rather than a free gift" (Atwood, Cat’s Eye 54). Marriage in Canada is becoming less and less important even as late marriages,
childless marriages and common-law relationships are becoming more and more common. The aim of a marriage is to nurture the spouses and children in the marriage. One of the important functions of highly developed animal societies is care and protection of the young. In order to achieve this aim it is essential that the 'young animal' must be attached to members of its own kind while at the same time it must be in a position to make a distinction between these and the others. This is called "primary socialization" (Smart and Smart 78), as it is the first way in which the behaviour of an individual is modified in relation to the other members of the society. This socialization lays the foundation for the formation of all social relationships and the formation of emotional attachments.

Thus the marriage of individuals sets the tempo for the raising of all the building blocks of the development of the child. Elaine considers marriage to be trash and when she is expecting out of wedlock, she knows that Joe would tell her to get rid of the baby as though it were a tooth that needed extraction. Children seem like an accident in the novel and the fact is corroborated by facts about changes in Canadian society. Marriages have lessened and the duration before divorce has also lessened too. The preference for a child is fast dwindling with more and more couples opting for a no child relationship (Dhruva and Adams 147). In fact, Margaret Atwood’s aunt said that one never thought of not marrying. “There wasn’t any choice about it. It was just what you did” (Howells 45). So whereas marriage was an essential prerequisite for girls of Atwood’s aunt’s vintage, it is more of a choice for Elaine and Grace and Suzie, an uncomfortable choice nonetheless. Gandhi looked upon marriage as a sanctimonious sacrament. He said it was a natural thing and the ideal was to look upon it as a sacrament and therefore to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate. Marriage in Hinduism is one of the four "ashramas. In fact all the other three are based on it (Gandhi, All Men 208). Marriage confirms the right of union between two partners to the exclusion of all the others when in their joint opinion they consider such union to be desirable, but it confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other to one’s wish for union. For Gandhi marriage was for keeps and loyalty to ones partner was the inevitable corollary of such a union.

Besides these problems that plague marriage of various characters, lack of communication can be considered to be one of the major problems. The damaging role that poor communication can play in marital relations was clearly demonstrated in a study of couples getting a divorce by Cleek and Pearson (1985). In this study
communication problems were the most frequent problem among both husbands and wives. According to another study by Heavey, Christensen and Malmuth in 1995 they said that many partners respond to conflict by withdrawing and refusing to communicate which is a pattern associated with deteriorating marital satisfaction over time (Weiten and Lloyd 283).

The formation of character types begins at a very early stage. Whereas some children develop in the direction of the acquisition of power and seek to choose to seek recognition through courage and self-assertiveness, others appear to “trade on their own weaknesses and set out to demonstrate them in all manner of ways” (Adler 40). Cordelia seems to be a case of the second type. On the outside she appears to be the most suave and the most happening girl in the school but inside she is quite the opposite of what her exterior she portrays. She is different from what she appears to be. Her story is quite another story like what Atwood tells us in one of her poems. She says that the true story lies among other stories, “a mess of colours, like jumbled clothing thrown off or away...the true story is vicious and multiple and untrue” (Atwood, True Stories 11).

Gandhi was in his early writings skeptical about the western concept of sanctity of marriage. He realized that the importance of marriage had dwindled as rapidly as there was free availability of sex in the open. In traditional societies the attraction of sex remains one of the major impetuses to marriage. The lack of its availability outside marriage or the very few opportunities to its access makes it even more attractive to the uninitiated. In more liberal societies where sex is not considered sanctimonious, its free availability reduces its attraction and furthers its misuse. Gandhi said that money rendered a man helpless. The other thing which is equally harmful is sexual vice. Gandhi has reiterated his stand on self control. He said that a person must be able to control not only lust but all other senses as well. He spoke against promiscuity as it violated the very spirit of purity of a human being. A person who managed to make this conquest will become a karm yogi who will fear no temptation at all. Gandhi considered both the evils of money and lust as poisons. However he said that whereas money destroyed only the body, sexual vice destroyed body, mind and soul (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj 82). In Cat's Eye too the escapades that Elaine has with her partners are never very satisfying to her. She often goes through the routine of sex as if it were some mundane chore. However she carries on as it gives her a sense of being wanted by both Josef and Jon.
Deviance is described as any significant departure from socially accepted norms. Deviance is a movement away from what is normal (Coser et al 185). This is seen in the novel under discussion and deviance exhibits itself in various forms and at various stages. Childhood is a period in the life of an individual generally ranging between 2-12 years, although even puberty is sometimes included in this period. Cats Eye is populated by children of the age group 10-12 and their activities range from simple ticklish fun to demonic and sometimes even murderous adventures. This stage of the 'school years' is one in which peer pressure and relationships play a significant role. At this stage "tensions are generated by group demands" as the opinions of friends is very important (Shepherd 162). Essential developments-both physical and mental which lay down the foundations of later life take place during this time. Bullying, domination and discrimination are an integral part of this stage as the effort is to establish ones reputation and crave for acceptance from peers.

It is also quite characteristic for a girl around 10 years of age to have a special and a faithful friend, who occupies a very special place in her life, but who also makes her suffer if the friend becomes angry and stops talking to her (Shepherd 140). This is precisely what happens in the case of Elaine Risley. She is at once attracted and repulsed by Cordelia and she craves to be accepted by Cordelia and her gang. "I have never had any (friends) before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please" (Atwood, Cats Eye 162). Elaine wants exactly this and she goes to all possible heights and lengths in order to please. It is significant to note that when we meet Elaine at the beginning of the story she is neurotic. She does not have her bearings correctly about her and she chews her fingers. She chews on her fingers and they begin to bleed. She tastes blood and it's like eating 'orange Popsicles, penny gumballs, red licorice...'. (Cat's Eye 5). She is literally bloodletting and she has been doing it since she was a child. At one point she remarks that her mother did not notice anything and even if she did notice she never said anything. This seems to be an ample indication of the loose familial ties that exist in the families in the novel and this too in the family of Elaine which is far better than the rest.

Elaine says that fathers are never to be seen. Whether it is Carol's father or Cordelia's father: "in the daily life of houses, fathers are largely invisible" (Cat's Eye 45). The comment that Elaine makes about fathers is also significant and rather eerie. Elaine's friend Carol gets beaten by her father with a belt as she had dared to put on lipstick. She is brutally beaten and Elaine says that fathers are to be really
feared. She says that fathers have a nocturnal existence and mothers are for the day. The role that a father plays in the life of a child in general and specifically in the life of a daughter is significant. The role that the father plays in the life of his daughter in a sense lays the foundation of the relationships that she will share with other men in her life. A relationship of love and trust is therefore the bedrock of this relationship. It is sad that Elaine has to remark that fathers are worth fearing although the fact remains that the loving father daughter relationship has been much discussed and researched. It has been found that the relationship that a daughter shares with her father determines at all times the romantic relationships that the girl gets into at later life.

Research has found that women with abusive or absent fathers often chose partners who abuse or abandon them (Katorski). Fathers have a unique role in the upbringing of children. Time after time clergyman, councilors and psychologists have come across cases in which even grown up children and even grown up men talk of the lack of demonstrative love from their fathers (Bennet 52). Such overt expressions give the essentially needed assurance and encouragement to a child. In *Cat's Eye* fathers are truly invisible. They play the role of strict disciplinarians and nothing else. The role of enforcing discipline that a father has can never be underestimated as a father is supposed to "set limits". Children do look for order in order to be able to lead a fruitful life. If a child is sitting on a chair in an unfamiliar dark room, it is only when he or she finds the walls that she is able to "explore the room, full of curiosity and without fear (Bennet 45).

In *Cat's Eye* Elaine has great reassurance in the company of boys but some of the male characters such as Josef and her friend's fathers "are again dominating, patronizing and misogynist" (Howells 62). All this and much are evident in *Cat's Eye*. Elaine's entire perspective of life has really been founded on the relationship that she shared with the once lovely and the other times diabolical Cordelia. She tries to run away from the fascination of the girl but she can only go a very short distance. She sees herself as an alter-ego of Cordelia and she is bound to her for her entire existence. The attitudes that she forms and the outlook that she develops to life are in a very large way determined by the influences of Cordelia. The deep rooted scars that have formed in her psyche come haunting to her as memories of her childhood not only influence her feelings in later life, they also play a role in her artistic expressions. Mrs Smeath remains a strange enigma to Elaine when she was a child and the image
of the lady seated in a stoically mum position surfaces in her paintings even later in life.

Cat's Eye has the appearance of being a simple story of a bunch of innocent girls (not really all of them really) who are passing through the rough and tumble of everyday ‘teenage’ growing up even though they are not teenagers but preteens. They love to have undulating discussions on boys and necking with them in some dingy lounge. They go on about lingerie and the dreaded ‘blood between your legs’. They find adults a kind of an anachronism and they have their own rules by which all are to abide. In fact they have a kind of a subculture that exists among them. Derision of Elaine forms a major part of their agenda. The simple etymologist's daughter who is used to the forest and shabby clothes is thrown into a world which is not hers and she has to live up to the expectations of her peer group. She now begins to desire the thing that she never ever really wanted to posses—chief among them is favour in the eyes of Cordelia. In fact she even reaches a stage when she begins to think like the group and she says that she enjoys giving pain to others. She becomes sadistic along the way.

Mahatma Gandhi was fond of children and he spent considerable amounts of time with children in his ashram. He would amuse children by making funny faces at them and directing funny remarks to them. He believed in the goodness of children. “Children are innocent, loving and benevolent by nature....Evil comes to them when they become older” (Fischer 269). This view is similar to the one that Rousseau had when he said that a child is naturally good and it is the duty of the mother to shield it from “the crushing force of social conventions” (Rousseau 5) Rousseau says that a child is born sensitive and we are regularly exposed to various stimuli. As a child becomes aware of his or her sensations it tends to shun or seek the things that cause them, initially because they are negative or positive, then because they suit or not, and at last because of judgments formed by the ideas of happiness which reason gives us (Rousseau 7). Similarly in Cat's Eye we see the shifting attitudes of Elaine through the mist of the experiences that she has, most of them unpleasant. These childhood experiences haunt her throughout her life and make her lonely and neurotic. The torments that she faces and the near death experience of her childhood change her forever.

The majority of the brain development takes place in the early years, but growth and change don’t end there. Important developmental changes are still taking place in
a big way in the adolescent years and into a person’s mid 20’s. Thus studies confirm what many parents have always suspected “Adolescents might as well be a whole different species” (Underwood 75). Even when we see this preteen group growing, they have distinctive patterns of behavior which show their attempts at being a different tribe trying hard to do things differently.

Negative behaviour is many a time a sign of parental time deficiency. Young children equate love with parental attention. If they do not receive their fill of positive attention, they sometimes resort to behaviour that will, without question bring negative attention. In their way of thinking, even negative attention is better than no attention at all (Kuzma 10). In Cat’s Eye, the role that family plays in the development of the child is significant. Cordelia comes from a rich family where she is indulged in and allowed a free hand in whatever she does. She leads a sort of an existence that does not seem to matter at all to her parents. Undoubtedly, she is at an age when parental control does waver tremendously, leading to children treating parents as nerds and dimwits. However she inhabits an alternative universe, the realms of which have no access to even the closest of allies. Cordelia, it isn’t surprising has to later go to an asylum after she begins to loose her way in life. It is amazing that a girl who was what every girl wanted to be has to land up so distraught and vulnerable. She now stays at the Dorothy Lyndwick Rest Home, (which ironically gives her no rest at all) and she admits to having attempted suicide. She popped pills but she was caught by the manager of the hotel and then her stomach was 'pumped'. She is strangely vague about the reason of her suicide, saying that she was 'just tired'.

There is a level of dissatisfaction in Cordelia’s life and she sees suicide as the only remedy. In fact Cordelia in some ways maybe called a delinquent as she strays away from what maybe called acceptable to society. Delinquents have generally been found to be have attention problems and are “socially assertive, defiant, ambivalent to authority, lacking in achievement motivation, resentful, hostile, suspicious and destructive, impulsive and lacking in self control” (Aradhana14). Cordelia has almost all these traits in ample measure. She is even murderous when she and her trickster gang throw Elaine in the chilly waters and leave her to die. She is also made to get into the ravine where she is frightened about men and their evil ways. She gets the better of every situation but in the end her circumstances get the better of her.

Elaine's father like Atwood's father is an etymologist and they are used to a very simple outdoor life. Coming to Montreal is a horrific experience for Elaine. The
same situation does not really ruffle the feathers of her parents or her brother. At school Elaine is depressed because of her shoddy clothes and her barbaric hair. The more she sees Cordelia and her group the more she is abashed at her wilting condition. Her preteen tendencies push her to seek the approval from those who she thinks matter the most, her friends. She is on the threshold of a new life, with a change in her temper and a constant stirring of the mind. She is now deaf to the influences she used to obey like Rousseau’s Emile (Rousseau 12). She is like every other pre teen of her group. There are a flood of emotions that engulf her and she is more than willing to slight everything that is different from her friends. Elaine grows up in the constant fear of being laughed at. Ridicule of children is a “well night-crime” (Adler 68). It leaves a permanent mark on the psyche of children which resurfaces in the habits and actions of their adult lives. Such children when they grow into adults cannot get rid of the fear of appearing ridiculous again. Elaine strives to be accepted by the society she lives in, whether it is the men she loves or the paintings that she creates for her ‘retrospectives’.

She now slowly falls prey to a group which has a subculture of its own. A subculture is an alternative culture adopted by a youth group, which is an effort 'to break away' from what the accepted norms of society are (Brake 7). A subculture is what Cordelia and her 'gang' subscribes to. They, like many of their age wish to do all that is forbidden. They talk of tabooed issues like sex and menstruation and men's penises which Cordelia calls 'carrots'. They move through the alleys of dark secrets about their bodies and they keep looking for those signs of 'blood between their legs' and the size of their breasts. They make a sincere effort at carving a niche by dating the most stylish boys and wearing the best clothes. The subculture they follow is perfectly acceptable when it focuses around these 'normal' events of growing up. However Cordelia and her gang go much beyond this. They use Elaine as a target and they put her to horrors that one cannot really imagine. They throw her into a ravine near an icy stream and leave her to die. They use her small town credentials and simple background to pull fast at her and they nearly succeed. They even throw her into a hole and cover her with mud pretending that she is Mary Queen of Scots 'already headless'. She is also pushed into a ravine which was supposed to be 'where the bad men are, where we're never supposed to go' with the premise that she will be forgiven' (for what, really is the question?) (Cat's Eye 251).
She is extremely afraid and she is left to her own devices to save herself from
the 'men'. It is hard to believe that the group that she idealizes in more ways than one
is really willing to leave her to die. Her hat is thrown in the icy water and as she tries
to get it she falls into the water and she is left to die by her so called friends. She is
covered with snow, her head filling with 'black sawdust; little specks of the darkness'
are getting into her eyes. It is interesting to note what she says when she is about to
die. She says" I will be a dead person, peaceful and clear like them" (Cat's Eye). She
is brought to the extremity of tolerance when she makes this comment. It is only in
death that she can achieve what she cannot in flesh and blood. The pressure of the
peer group is so profound that she feels it is death that can put her at a level where the
ethereal group of hers belongs. The subculture here has a negative role in that it sets
up an alternative culture which is detrimental to the health of its own members who
also at points in time do not hesitate to go to any lengths. She also begins to develop a
new personality which comes within the parameters of what the subculture subscribes
to. In fact she comments, "I've begun to want things I've never wanted before" (Cat's
Eye 112). She also becomes sadistic and enjoys when she knows that she has
deliberately hurt Cordelia.

Group formation is a very essential part of the school and the adolescent years.
David H Smith defines a group as a set of two or more individuals who have certain
common characteristics. Smith says that a group has a 'network of relevant
communications' along with a 'shared sense of collective identity' and one or more
'shared dispositions with associated normative strength' (Chhabra 118). One of the
features of a group are common objectives and the achievement of these goals is a
matter of importance to all the members. In the group that is inhabited by Elaine,
there is a little schism in that there is a variance of these objectives. Cordelia is on
one plane with her gang while Elaine is on another plane, though not all together. She
tries her best to gain acceptance in the group but she has to strive harder as she is a
new member and the initial inertia of the group is pretty acceptable. However she
identifies with the ideology of the group (no matter how subversive it may be) and she
builds up a new persona based on this change. The group that Cordelia and her gang
form has the characteristics of a primary group in which there is 'relatively close
association between members' and 'group loyalty is very strong' (Chhabra 119). This
group is strange in that loyalty exists between the members on a different level and it
is a loyalty that is directed to the leader of the group which very naturally turns out to
be Cordelia. Cordelia very naturally becomes a natural leader of the group and it is not difficult to tell why. She is endowed with style and beauty and she has an enigmatic persona about her. It is thus not unnatural for Elaine to wish to be a part of the group and more importantly gain acceptance among the members of the group. There are various patterns that are followed almost unconsciously when a group is formed.

Most groups are formed on the basis of common interests while others are formed on the basis of basic needs. The family as a group is formed on the basis of the need for love and security while a cricket team is formed for the achievement of a goal which maybe winning an impending match to be played. Similarly groups among children too follow a distinct pattern. Between the ages of five and ten, boys and girls tend to separate themselves into groups of the same sex and similar age (Shepherd 155). Generally children that form a group are bound by similar needs and desires. However, in Cat's Eye it is interesting to notice that great disparities exist among the friends who form a part of the gang of Cordelelia. They are of the same sex and the same age but they are quite different in their mentality and economic strata. While Cordelia emerges as the strongest of all the team mates, Elaine is the weakest and the most different both in terms of status and interests. She is taken into the group and used as a target of all jokes and evil games. Cordelia influences the members of the group so strongly that they are willing to do anything at her bidding. Bullying forms an intrinsic part of the process of growing up and at times it is fraught with the greatest of dangers if it reaches extremities like it does in the case of Cordelia and her relationship with Elaine. Cordelia's character is characterized by vanity and ambition. A certain amount of vanity and ambition is a necessary part of an individual's personality as it is an impetus to move ahead. Cordelia wants to be a social butterfly and she is willing to go to any extent to achieve her aims. Vanity maybe defined as 'conceit and desire for admiration of one's personal attainments and achievements' (Tulloch 1739).

As a result of vanity an individual makes the pursuance of power and superiority the most important goal in his or her life. The greatest danger of vanity is that the individual loses sense with reality. They lose an understanding of human relationships and they develop an imprecise attitude to life which puts them at a great disadvantage in life (Adler 157). The vanity that Cordelia has leads her to all sorts of vicious plans against Elaine. Vanity begins very early in childhood but the ramifications are far
fetched. A vain person looks at whatever is happening around him or her with a certain sense of distrust and so almost every other is an enemy. A vain person 'assumes a position of offence or defense' (Adler 160). Cordelia very truly fits the bill as she meanders between a smug sense of self and a frightened doubt of her own abilities. It is not very surprising that she has to visit a shrink later and even attempts suicide in the course of the novel. Vain individuals usually end up frittering away their opportunities and being unable to cope with the demands of an ordinary life. They generally fail miserably as they are far removed from the realities of life and even mundane activities hold no water for them. Cordelia slowly loses her bearings and her relationship with reality. She has to be admitted to a mental hospital after she consumes an overdose of sleeping pills.

Elaine has developed attitudes to men which are also based on her childhood experiences. She is very attached to her brother Stephen but she is also dominated by him. At every game and at every fight she always plays second fiddle to her brother. It is surprising to see that the Canadian society that Atwood paints is largely male dominated and patriarchal. Even the female bullies have their origins in what maybe termed as patriarchal, hierarchical and conformist. They are possessed by an insecure need to victimize, enforce subordination and experience power vicariously. (Nischik 88). The relationship that Elaine has with males at various points in time in the novel is a testimony to the attitudes that she has developed toward men over a period of time, whether the influences have been her brother Stephen or her father. The patriarchal contradictions that she internalizes during childhood are in a world which is almost all female “a world in which men are perceived either as shadowy, peripheral forces, or as “secret allies” (Ahern 9). She develops a stifling relationship with Jon, while an artistic and an ethereal relationship with Josef to begin with ends up in cold love making and squabbles about the house and finance. Even though Elaine was very fond of her brother Stephen, at the back of her mind she knows that he is dominating, patriarchal and unbending in more ways than one.

Gandhi’s writings have fore grounded these aspects on society very long ago, even before such practices were rampant in Indian society. Gandhi talks of the development of morality as an intrinsic part of society. He was of the view that civilization cannot be considered to be the multiplication of wants but rather the restriction of wants (Gandhi, All Men are my Brothers 140). The growing lust for both physical pleasures and material possessions has been rampant in ‘Western society’ and
Gandhi attributed the evils that society faced to this blind lust for things that do not necessarily give mental peace. Gandhi reiterated that civilization is a mode of conduct which points out to a man the path of duty (Gandhi, Sarvodaya 7). There is little reason to debate on where this mode of conduct is first taught. Undoubtedly this training begins at home in the family. Hence the foundations that are laid in the family can never be underestimated throughout the life of an individual. The role that family plays has been elucidated by Mahatma Gandhi in many of his works and specifically in his autobiography. Gandhi has reiterated in his many works that the thirst for power can bring one to ruin like the hunger for materialistic possessions can.

The lust for the power to control and reign over the mind of Cordelia brings Elaine to ruin. She manipulates the mind of Elaine and it is remarkable how Cordelia haunts (to the extent of influencing almost all that she thinks about) Elaine all through her life, inspite of the cruelty that she has suffered at the hands of Cordelia. Right from the very beginning, Cordelia finds in Elaine a convenient punch bag that she can sock at her will. The desire to dominate and exploit is very much like the domination an exploitative ruler shows unto his subjects. In Cordelia’s domination there is something of a patriarchal sting which makes Elaine writhe in submission. Cordelia does not believe in democratic ideals and she is the self-assumed leader of the group expecting absolute obedience from her coterie. She wants to survive and hence she goes on obeying the dictates of Cordelia. "I don’t want to do these things, I’m afraid of them. But I think about Cordelia telling me to do them... (Cat’s Eye 210). However she blames it on herself and not on the gang that she is a part of. Her mother tells her not to be ‘spineless’. Elaine then concludes "What is happening to me is my own fault, for not having more backbone" (Cat’s Eye 212). According to Watson environment is much more important than heredity in the determination of behavior. Freud’s school has laid stress on the importance of early experiences of home in the formation of personality of the child. Love, affection and sympathy in early childhood develop positive attitudes in the child towards life. The Gestalt school also supports this view (Nagar and Divya 12).

Gandhi has out rightly ostracized this kind of a domination of one individual over the other. He believed in the true spirit of democracy in which every nation had to be free from foreign yoke and have the right to elect its own representative. However there was a larger connotation to his idea of democracy than that meets the eye. He strongly advocated freedom of the individual and his or her corresponding rights. He
believed in the all pervading idea of Swaraj. Swaraj as Gandhi enunciated was a Vedic word which means self-rule and self-restraint and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' generally means (Gandhi, *India of my Dreams*, 7). There is little self-rule and self-restraint in the politics of childhood in *Cat's Eye*. In fact there is unlimited pain and deliberate wound infliction. Almost all of our attitudes and opinions have been strongly grounded by the time we reach the stage of early childhood and they remain with an individual for a long long time. All that we see in the personalities of most of the characters of *Cat's Eye* and particularly in the personality of Elaine are all traits that have had their foundation in very early experiences of childhood. Elaine has not been able to really come out of the shadow of Cordelia and the attitudes that governed their group.

Violence is provided in large doses in *Cat's Eye*. It ranges from small time pranks that the girls play to making others flinch in pain and attempting to cause death. A society that uses violence as a means to achieve its aims can never be called progressive in any way. Even though Cordelia considers herself to be the most happening in the society she inhabits, she uses violence as a means to attain her end and hence the results are very damaging. Gandhi has advocated Ahimsa at every stage of life. In fact he advocated non-violence even when faced with violent situations and individuals. Gandhi said that non-violence does not mean meek submission of the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting ones whole soul against the will of the tyrant. (Prabhru 27). He advocated Ahimsa as the panache to all evils in society. In *The Edible Woman* we see how the protagonist uses silent protest by stopping consumption of food as a means of registering protest against a consumerist, debased society. In *Surfacing* too the protagonist silently gives society a message by ‘going back to nature’.

Canadian society, like most other societies of the world has undergone a major metamorphosis after the participation of women in the labour force. In fact this issue has been the focus of much debate and diatribe. The participation of women in the economic process has obviously given them more teeth and ability to take decisions both within the family and outside of it as well. However this has also caused the double burden of juggling two arenas for the woman. However in *Cat's Eye* the women we see are more homebound and subjugated. If the men are ‘invisible’ the women are ‘inaudible,’ save for the exception of Elaine’s mother who is a woman of the outdoors. The condition of the women in *Cat's Eye* strike as being both subjugated
and submissive. They have an identity which occupies the veiled walls of their homes. Throughout the novel there are no voices which belong to strong women. Even the voices of women who appear to be strong like the voice of Cordelia is only a voice of a shadow as she only revels in bossing those weaker than her while she really does not have a voice of her own.

It is clearly evident that the experiences of Iris in *The Blind Assassin* shape all her later attitudes and perspectives in life. She gets married and has a daughter by Jon but she remains forever estranged from her. Mahatma Gandhi had always stressed upon the importance of the family in the nurturing of children. The attitudes and the approaches that we have to life are the foundations of what have been laid in our childhood. The corruption in the relationship that we can see between Iris and her daughter and subsequently with her granddaughter is all a result of the lack of trust and dependence between the two individuals. The role that a grandmother plays in the life of a grandchild is particularly important especially in a fast changing, nuclear family set up. The participation of the woman in the labour force and her long absence from home has made an alternative home care system come into sharp focus. The most reliable system however can be the grandparents and the grandmother in particular as she can care of the child just as the mother does. It is most usual to see a very cozy relationship to exist between a grandmother and her grandchildren as she is able to see life through a double reflecting prism—that of age and experience on the one hand and on the other hand she filters unpleasant experiences of her motherhood days with her children and she passes on the best to her grandchildren. So what a grandparent is able to give his or her grandchild is unadulterated love. Iris’ grand daughter hates her and does not want to associate with her in any way. The failure of this tie is so bleak and Iris has to deal with the fact that she has a grandchild and she doesn’t know where she is but she definitely knows that she is beyond her reach.

Religion is a set of ideals that is meant to keep a community together. The function of religion is more than just symbolic as it is a means of reinforcing a certain faith that a people have in a body of ideals or beliefs. In *Cat’s Eye*, religion is a means of playing pranks and criticizing the church and all that it stands for. Elaine goes for both religious classes as well as Sunday Mass. She however is torn between what religion preaches and what it really means. At times she wishes to be all angelic and untainted while at other times she is evil and makes a total mockery of religion. In a very religious vein she says that she wishes to ‘shine like a candle’, *(Cat’s Eye* 168)*
'be good', 'to follow instructions' to do 'what Jesus bids'. She has a desire to be really kind to her neighbours as she knows that the 'Kingdom of God' is within her. She in a sense mirrors the thoughts that Gandhi had towards religion when he called it 'self-realization or knowledge of self' (Gandhi, *The Story of my Experiments* 29). However all this is near impossible and she concludes by saying that 'all this seems less and less possible'. She looks to religion to give her answers but instead it poses more and more questions to her while she loses faith more than ever. The family she lives in undoubtedly gives her the religious grounding that she needs but it is not able to give her the correct direction that she is looking for.

Adolescence is a stage of major shifts in attitude and behavior. The tumults and the storms are more than just arguments about which dress to wear or how late to get back home. It is one of a surge in the desire to make a place for oneself among the rank and file. All the children in *Cat’s Eye* are doing exactly this and the ways which each one adopts is only different. In Erik Erikson’s developmental theory the basic conflict of adolescence is the role between ‘role confusion’ and ‘role identity’ (Morgan 472). Erikson says that seeking identity really involves understanding ones abilities, knowing the path ahead and logically expecting recognition from those who really matter.

An adolescent who is able to find his or her identity gains in two ways: he or she gets a feeling of “being at home in one’s body” and a sense of psychological welfare” (Morgan 472). Cordelia is unable to find her identity. She is unable to identify with her objectives and she really does not know who really matters to her. We see later that she suffers from depression and is just tired of her life. She seeks approval but not necessarily from those who really matter. Cordelia has not been able to pass the dangerous threshold of adolescence successfully and hence she carries on the mental problems that she faces in her later years. “However it is Elaine’s curse and her fantasy that Cordelia, responsible in childhood for so many brutal acts, disappears finally in obscurity and misery while Elaine herself enjoys the success imaged in the “retrospective” of her works” (Nischik 162-163).

The unhappy and the bored household in *Cat’s Eye* is similar to the households in other Atwood's' novels. In *Life before Man* the Nate and Elizabeth household in is in a state of ruin: “It’s like rummaging through a drawer of jumbled clothes. Leftovers in jars, bean sprouts gone bad, spinach in plastic bags starting to decay, giving off that smell of decomposing lawn”(3) It is as if life has come to a
standstill and there is little else but mould and mildew, not only in the house but also in the lives that inhabit the household. Similarly parents have no place in the scheme of the younger generations. There is an echo of this negligent feeling in Surfacing when the protagonist says that all her friends have disowned their parents. Joe never mentions his father and mother, Anna says hers were nothing people and David calls his “The Pigs” (Surfacing 23). The callousness with which the older generation is treated speaks of a great disjoint in the feelings and expectations of the younger generation.

The case of Elaine's brother is also interesting, even though we just see him in spurts here and there and he does not make very significant appearances in the novel. He is free spirited, has a scientific bent of mind and does not believe in going around with the silly girls of the school. His personal life however is not as straight as the definitions of science that he often makes. He had informed his parents that he was getting married via a postcard. He had gone into complete oblivion thereafter. After a year his parents receive another post card to say that he has been divorced. Marriage and divorce are like two board games to be played while you are bored. The way in which he announces his marriage is very much like the way in which the protagonist in Surfacing announces her marriage to her parents. Elaine looks at him with much admiration but at the same time she fears his presence and his superiority as though he were a male patriarch. The role of male relatives in the life of Cordelia has a long lasting impact on her psyche and her spirit. In Cat's Eye we see dominating and invisible fathers, physically dominating brothers and felling-less husbands. It as though the life strings of Elaine and Grace and Cordelia are in the hands of male patriarchs who call the shots, no matter how progressive Canadian society maybe considered to be.

There is infidelity in many relationships in Cat's Eye. The manner in which Jon and Elaine fight is violent and the only saving grace is that they wait for Sarah to be asleep or playing in the park before they begin their battles. Each suspects the other of infidelity and their rows end up in finance and rent. They even make love but it is not love at all. Elaine says their love making is "harsh, war-coloured, metallic" (Cats Eye 499). Jon is making it out with a woman called Trisha and he has no qualms in admitting it. In fact Elaine finds hair pins on her bed and she accuses Jon of being adulterous in her bed. The accusations are also made by Jon in ample degree and the stress is on decibel and fury. By now Elaine is distressed and
depressed. She loses all the sheen and in some poignant words she says she has nothingness washing all over her... I am inadequate, and stupid without worth, might as well be dead (Cat’s Eye 501). The very next moment we see Elaine in an emergency ward with a slit wrist, all white and drained of blood. The worthlessness that she feels towards her life is translated into an attempt at suicide. When a relationship pushes an individual to the brink of suicide, it could then be counted as the final breakdown of all that there exists in that bond. The feeling that she has after the suicide attempt is even more frightening. She feels purged and cleansed and “purified and peaceful”. She needs an amount of blood letting in order to bring back her sanity. Elaine is then never the same again. Jon and she finally divorce “by long distance” (Cat’s Eye 511). She begins life again but things are never the same again for her. The juggling of a number of partners and the subsequent dissatisfaction with the new one seem to be the norm. It is a feeling of losing out on life for everyone. It is a satiation with love and sex and the overwhelming feeling of being nowhere that leads to wrist slitting, hesitant visits to shrinks and admission into lunatic asylums.

In fact when Jon and Elaine begin to fight fiercely everyday it gets really violent and things are thrown around the house. It never seems that they could have been in love sometime. Sometimes it is a glass of milk and sometimes it is an ashtray from nowhere. In a sinister remark that Jon makes about Elaine we can see how as a chauvinistic and regressive traditional male he is nurtures several stereotypes about a woman. Jon is sitting with one of the painters and he hears Elaine slamming around pots. In reply to the query made by the painter, Jon says of Elaine, “She’s mad because she’s a woman” (Cat’s Eye 464). To this Elaine says that she is not mad because she is a woman but because he is ‘an asshole’. Elaine feels that this is the most regressive statement that Jon makes at it stereotypes women into hysterics and old hags. The patriarchal dominance does not go so easily even though the society that Jon comes from is supposedly ‘open minded’ and ‘modern’.

Elaine as an artist too is lonely and neurotic. She uses art as an expression of her feelings and her hidden loneliness but at the same time she is afraid of letting the world see her artistic expression. In The Madwoman in the Attic, Gilbert and Gubar studied Harold Bloom’s Oedipal model of literary theory and they defined a woman artist “as displaced, disinherited and excluded” (Lodge 336). The loneliness that Elaine faces as a renowned artist is based on a lifetime of life changing experiences.
at home and in the playground. Her condition is like what Elaine Showalter writes about the woman artist. “The loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors and... her anxiety about her inventions make her struggle for self-definition” (Lodge 337). She uses her art to express her loneliness and fight her battle with the dualities of her existence. Her experiences of her childhood change her life forever and haunt her wherever she goes. She surprisingly brings Mrs Smeath very prominently into her paintings even though as a child she had a loathing for this woman. Mrs Smeath deserves her representation as an “imagined body, white as a burdock root, flabby as pork fat. Hairy as the middle of an ear” (Reingard M Nischik).

Freud assumed that behavior is the outcome of a series of internal conflicts. Freud believed that conflicts dominate people’s lives. He asserted that individuals careen from one conflict to another. Freud believed that lingering conflicts rooted in childhood experiences cause most personality disturbances. Most often than not, these prolonged and troublesome conflicts involve sexual and aggressive impulses that society wants to tame. These conflicts are often played out entirely in the unconscious. Although they may not be aware of these unconscious battles they can produce anxiety that slips to the surface of conscious awareness. There are efforts to ward off these anxieties which are called Defence Mechanisms. These mechanisms are largely unconscious reactions that protect a person from painful emotions such as anxiety and guilt.

Elaine too uses such mechanisms while she fights the anxiety and guilt of her being. In fact she turns to be very much like Cordelia while actually making every effort to wad away the evil that she exudes. “I know myself to be vengeful, greedy, secretive and shy” (Cat’s Eye 207). The “flagship in the psychoanalytical fleet of defense mechanisms”, repression is the most common and widely used defense mechanisms (Weiten and Llyod 39). Repression involves keeping distressing thoughts and feelings buried in the unconscious. An individual attempts to repress desires that make him or her feel guilty, conflicts that make them anxious and memories that are painful. Repression is “motivated forgetting” (Weiten and Llyod, 39). Elaine is so flustered with the onslaught of demands and criticisms by the girl group that she represses her feelings. In fact we see this very prominently when she goes to meet Cordelia in the hospital. She is uncomfortable when she goes in and
she sort of deliberately ignores Cordelia. She says “I want to twist her arm, rub her face in the snow” (Cat’s Eye 83).

Her mother does not know anything that is happening to her. In fact the chasm that exists between them can be read as more than a familial dysfunction, it is more of an impairment of relationships that can exist between a mother and a daughter. Elaine knows what she would have done if she had been her mother. She felt that her mother must have realized what was happening to her. “Even toward the beginning she must have noted my silences, my bitten fingers, the dark scabs on my lips when I’d pulled off patches of the skin” (156). She also feels that if it were happening now to a child of her own, she would have definitely known not just what was happening, but she would also know what to do. However she rues that “There were fewer choices, and a great deal less was said” (Cat’s Eye 203).

The lack of communication on the part of the members of the same family reaches such a stage that the slow change of a child from normal to neurotic cannot really be made out by a mother who lives in the same house and apparently loves her daughter enough and takes part in the things that her daughter does. At another instance she rues “My mother does not say, where have you been? Or why are you so late? She says, “Where are your overshoes?” (Cat’s Eye 256). It is the more utilitarian aspect of her absence that she rues upon although she does take care to rectify the problem that she faces in the near death experience of the stream. She feels her father’s hand upon her head for a while but it soon “fades to a shadow” (Cat’s Eye 257), reiterating the ‘invisibility’ of fathers in the whole scheme of things.

The free availability of sex in western society does not necessarily make the perils of sex any less. In fact the satiation of it is what we see. Contraceptives too fail where sex is unplanned and unexpected. The case of Suzie’s death is a glaring case in this direction. The lack of commitment between partners is glaring and Suzie does not tell Josef of her pregnancy as she is afraid he might get ‘mad’. Instead she induces an abortion and is lying in splotches of blood, “spreading out like bright red wings too either side of her” (Cats Eye 429) all over the bed. The attitude of the ambulance attendants is also surprisingly disgusting and callous. “What’d she use, a knitting needle?” (Ibid). Open sex shows its perils in the condition of Suzan who almost loses her life to the casual sex she has with Josef. In fact when Elaine asks Josef if he was willing to marry Suzan, he says “You are cruel to me” (Cats Eye 54).
Gandhi’s views on sex were very clear and the sanctity that he attached to it is evident from this statement. “Sex urge is a fine and a noble thing... If we begin to believe in the indulgence in animal passion is necessary, harmless and sinless, we shall want to give reins to it and shall be powerless to resist it.” (Rao 117). The lack of commitment is blatant and the ties that bind men and women in the novel is amazingly loose. The even more painful thing about the whole Suzan episode is what Elaine says while she sees her friend almost bleeding to death. She says that there is also another voice (one voice tells her that this episode could have happened to her) “which is small and mean, ancient and smug, that comes from somewhere deep inside my head: It serves her right” (Cat’s Eye 430). The cruelty and insensitivity that Elaine develops is a result of constant abuse at the hands of her own group that she considers to be her friends.

Thus Cat’s Eye can be read as a chronicle of the family and childhood of Margaret Atwood’s Canadian world. The inter-weaving of the influences of the family and childhood experience results in development of personality. The dysfunctions maybe observed at various points in the novel and ‘neurotic, shrink visiting, pill popping, wrist slitting, casual necking and highly insensitive individuals dot the firmament of the novel’s landscape. The comment that Gandhi makes on the family as being the most basic of all institutions which have the seeds of all that a person will grow into becomes more and more significant as we leaf through the pages of the novel, while the characters slowly creek and crumble to meet their gradual moral downfall.