CHAPTER - I

CANADIAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE

Canadian Literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern. Morley Callaghan went to Paris and met the modern writers; he, for Canada experienced the real and symbolic encounter; he heroically and successfully, resisted. The country invented Marshal McLuhan and Northrop Fyre.

- Linda Hutcheon

Canadian Literature written in Canada began as a continuation of what was being produced in Great Britain had to define itself against the American tradition. It developed in the United States and eventually evolved as a distinctive literature. Obviously, Canada’s geography and her historical development were immensely influential factors. But the concept of a Canadian tradition is not easily established. It is neither an abstraction like a sense of identity nor a theme like ‘Survival’. It evolves gradually from the achieved work of literary art that have been written by its people. Canadian literary development consists of a long and slow growth and the majority of Canadian writers up to the present are a continuing interest in the future as Atwood says:
Literature is not only a mirror it’s a map, but geography of the mind: our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as one literature, as the product of whom and where we have been. We need such a map desperately; we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a country or culture, shared knowledge of their place, they’re here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (Survival, 1972)

Margaret Atwood’s well known publication *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, became a most startling book in which she stated that the key pattern in Canadian literature is victimization. The literary nationalist movement, known as the movement of Canadian Thematic Criticism had its roots in Northrop Frye’s *Conclusion to A Literary History of Canada* (1965) and was fostered by the publication of D.G.Jone’s *Butterfly on Rock* (1970) and John Moss’s *Patterns of Isolation* (1974) that fundamentally shaped the character and distinctiveness of English – Canadian Literary cannon of today.

Canadian Literature enjoys an international prestige today with its history that started with the inhabitance of aboriginal peoples for thousands of years, evolving from a group of French and British Colonies into bilingual, multicultural federation. Since Canada is not a self-respecting
nation, the questions that get asked are, why do writers write? How do they write? What do they write about? As Northrop Fyre in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1995) observers that: “Canadians have an identity crisis with a difference for they are less perplexed by the existential question “Who am I?” (220). It begins with the personal, continues through the social or cultural or national and ends with “The Universe”, the universal. Like the literature of every country Canadian Literature is influenced by its socio-political contexts. Therefore a variety of genres were produced by the Canadian writers who were greatly influenced both geographically and historically with the existing cultures of both French and British. So, Canadian literature has encountered a number of obstacles in its growth like other colonial literatures. It has to overcome the oppressive psyche of being dominated by the American and British literary traditions, and took decades of struggle to get persistent efforts to come into visibility in reflecting Canadian experience. Canada’s experience appears frequently in its literature and finally Canada’s position in the world. Atwood’s *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, guarded a global identity and remains the standard introduction to Canadian literature in Canadian studies program internationally.

Theme like ‘Survival’ and the Canadian traditional sense of identity gradually evolved from the works of literary art that were written by its
people. What does Canada mean at any given point of time? Is one practical problem that always confronts the writer on early Canada because the country’s present boundaries were not established until after the Second World War. So, to read Canadian literature is to realize how diverse Canadian culture is, marked by politics and religion, and influenced by differences of language and geography. It’s a country with two official languages English and French and many other un-official, extending almost as the second largest country in the world with a population more or less half that of the United Kingdom. Canada began as a continuation of what was being produced in Great Britain, against the American tradition as it was developed in the United States. Eventually it evolved as a distinctive literature of independence related to, both parent and neighbor. So, the history of Canadian literature in Canada is an account of ways in which the shaping of specific literary accomplishments is not restricted to Canadian settings. Literature in Canada grows from the social attitudes held in common, as well as from historical antecedents and explanation models. Their cultural plurality inside the country fundamentally shaped the way Canadians define their political character and dimensions of their literature. As Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia adds that, Canadian studies thus become an established interdisciplinary field at many American, European, Australian and Asian Universities offering opportunities to encounter the distinctive forms and perspectives of
Canadian writing. New works in Canada continue to address issues of social plurality and cultural difference that inform a diverse and complex population. These works confronts the tensions and convergences of French and English of north and south of indigenous settlers. Canadian writing insists on investigating space and history, the ways territories are inhabited, claimed, disputed and finally remained as the texts of people’s lives. Any national literature depends for its survival on the social, emotional and cultural factors. Canadian culture is also considered as a group of cultures interrelated with two different cultural groups. Since culture ensembles, formalizes in varying degrees of thinking, feeling and behaving, which once learned by the people in a particular and distinct way collectively. There are numberless cultures and sub cultures both regional and ethnic which Canada abounds in. So ‘Survival’ is one of its greatest challenges and the expression of Canadian literature itself is complex, dependent on combinations of variables. The question of homogeneity has been a mother of controversy, where the first common theme deals with the experience of being caught between two cultural worlds, and the second major theme deals with the importance of learning about the values, attitudes, and beliefs of one’s cultural heritage, and acquiring an appreciation of how culture influences identity.
As naming a place, person or a thing gives power, the central symbol of Canada is based on its numerous instances of its occurrences in both English and French in Canadian literature. The native Canadian people welcomed French colonialism as they felt that the French was serving them in a constructive manner. To welcome is to accept or to follow, so the natives used to follow different methods in order to mingle with the French people and survive themselves. Therefore survival was towards many things like poverty, culture, modernity and land protection etc., Northrop Frye in *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (1980) observes: “To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an Ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent”. (282)

The first writings about Canada are narratives by the explorers and missionaries who visited the country in the 17th and 18th centuries and left awesome accounts of the country’s vastness. The first indigenous literary activity in English Canada appeared in the maritime colony of Nova Scotia in 1830s. Since Canada is a colony, a victim, an oppressed minority or exploited or a place from which a profit is made not by the people who live there, but the major profit is made in the center of the empire. So there are cultural side effects that were identified as the colonial mentality, and the common traits found in Canadian literature include, humor, mild-anti-
Americanism, multi-culturalism self-deprecation, self-evaluation and search for self-identity. The Canadian literature is written more precisely in more than one language reflecting regionally multi-cultural society as it was the fruit of British seed planted in American soil. Both ethnic and cultural diversity are reflected in its literature, including the position of Canada in the world, and the Canadian perspective a nature frontier life.

The main fascination of Canadian literature is written in English for the two main streams in the language i.e., British and America. Ever since British North American Colonies came together in 1867 to form the confederation, Canadian cultural nationalist like D. Arcy McGee had been telling for the need of national literature. As a land of immense geography, extreme climates and vast resources, Canadian literature is broadly perceived in two inevitable divisions, intact the French and the British cultures that exist side by side with ongoing foreign influences. Therefore Canadian literature is a tree with two great roots and branches of this tree are purely Canadian. But after the advent of the British in Canada a new kind of literature cropped up and with the entry of missionaries, travelogues, memories and diaries got published.

French-Canadian literature followed a very different evolutionary path than English literature from the early settlement until the 1820s. The rise of Quebec Patriotism and a modern system of primary school
education led to the first surge of French. Though Quebec virtually had no literature to speak of, there were a few historians, journalists and learned priests to publish, but overall output was very low. The first literary theorist of Quebec was Father Henri-Raymond Casgrain (1866). Canadian fiction and the first genres to become popular were the rural novel and the historical novel. So French-Canadian literature began to greatly expand with the turmoil of the Second World War, the beginnings of industrialization in 1950s, and the Quiet Revolution in 1960s. It began to attract a great deal of attention globally with Arcadian novelist, Antonine Maillet and formalist poet Nicole Brossard.

Canadian novel, however, begin to take off in the 1950s with Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Maris Gallant and Sheila Watson. By 1960s Canadian fiction came into its own and liberated from the shackles of influence of other literatures. It is pre-occupied with culture and national identity and marked by a spirit of self-confidence. As various factors affected the territory of Canada from the colonial times, European Canadians were divided into two districts. English and French speaking populations coupled with large number of immigrants who spoke other languages proved to be divisive towards a single national literature. Throughout the history it has a peculiar problem of obliterated environment, because of its empty spaces, unknown rivers, lakes and
islands. So an imaginative sense of locality and unity has become the character of Canadian literature. Canada’s experience appears frequently in its literature as Canadian writers often emphasize on the effects of climate and geography of their people. Canada’s position in the world profoundly affects many Canadian writers as English Canadians are frequently being surrounded by the people and the culture of the United States. In 70s and 80s, Canadian writing was stimulated by renaissance of interest in literature and culture with a definition of Canadian identity that became a national obsession.

In 1867, the British North American Colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Canada combined to become the Dominion of Canada. With the passage of the British North American Act, a political nation had been created, but the question of how this would translate into a cultural nationality remained to be unsolved. As literary historian Claude Bissell pointed out in 1950, English Canadians attempted to create a distinctively Canadian national cultural identity. Anderson Benedict in Reflections on the Origin and spread of Nationalism pointed out: “the central fact of a nation’s identity was that, each citizen be able to imagine that he and his fellow citizens had something in common” (15). English Canadians were part of a world-wide intellectual movement in the development of nationalism as a central defining aspect of people’s lives. English
Canadians nationalists were eager to identify characteristics that were both typical of Canadians different from other national groups. The idea of a state without a corresponding sense of national identity was unimaginable. So by the late 19th Century, Canada became a state. Many educated persons regarded nationalism as a natural and necessary aspect of human life. But the ideological construct had an effect upon English speaking Canadians after the confederation. So the search for national identity became the central concern of the national character of English Speaking Canadians. If Canadians could not produce and consume Canadian stories, they are worried, that they would lose, or never develop, a distinctly Canadian identity. To realize this they focused upon television and the movies; quality and readership of Canadian novels, within the Canadian political construct. Both English and French Canadians had their own set of anxieties regarding the survival of their culture. The national identity was brought by the European Colonists who migrated to other areas of the globe. They began to identity with their new states rather than their imperial homeland.

In an attempt to define a common national character, educated English speakers in both Quebec and Ontario had written about Canada and Canadians. Fiction of Canadian writers characterized their nation as a northern land whose northern climate gave the nation, and its people, a
unique national identity, and showed it as a place of ice and snow which indicates the moral aspect of Canada’s northern character. The definition of Canada as a northern nation provided a basic for racial unity within Canada. Both French and English Canadians were defined as northern races, fundamentally related by their racial heritage and ability to cope with the hospitable Canadian environment. There is a geographic North and has always provided an identifiable marker for Canadianness. Many Canadian nationalists believed that, Canada’s northern location made it the ideal location for the continuation of their superior Anglo – Saxon heritage, which had a basis in Great Britain. So Canada’s northern climate therefore ensured its national vigor, purity and unity. Carl Berger’s essay *The True North strong and Free* (1966) had become base for many historians like Daniel Francis, Eva Maekey and Robert Grant Halliburton in constructing the history of Canada. The ideas of Daruies too, gave a different emphasis to ideas about the relationship between Canada’s northern climate and the Canadian people. The image of Canada as a Northern country with a strenuous and masterful people were reinforced and sustained in the novels, travelogues, and works of scientific exploration that abounded in the period.

After the dispersal of common wealth countries Canada acquired sovereignty. Canada is both young and old and it is young as a nation,
more than one hundred years old. To follow Canada’s historical development is to trace its time as a colony of France, England and most elusively economic colony of United States. History of Canada is partly an account of the slow realization of its own independence, its importance within an international frame work. It has discarding the colonial mentality characterized by the country and its actions after many years. Canadian history shows a service of attempt to unite a land so vast in defying unity. To the present day, Canadians have shown little of the republican sentiment and have to remain a constitutional monarchy. In the phase of colonialism, political freedom has been achieved but habits of thought have persisted and a sense of subordination still continued. So the post colonialists started examining the reasons for the slowness of the change and continued adherence to the west. Through which the relation between the self and culture is no longer a cohesive or a spontaneous one. There was a struggle in between two extremes of post colonial and post independence which indicates a forward looking. So, the self that has come into existence is a divided self. As Canada’s early cannon makers shared a common concern, their perspectives, formulations, and assertions were out of a strong sense of an exclusive identity acquired against the literary backdrop of Canada’s English. So literary pioneers first sought to invoke and then gradually moved from the British and American influences and yearned to carve out their own national identity and forge a literary stance
routed in their own soil and imagination. In Canadian literary history there has been unmistakably an ongoing anti-American theme in a discrete manner. There is a mild sibling rivalry with Canada’s loyalty, and the two roles played by Canada and the United States in Canadian mythology evoked a scholarly enthusiasm.

English speaking Canadians determined to embrace their imperial identity and ties to Great Britain as one defining aspect of their national character. They also tried to adopt French colonial past as part of their national heritage. English Canadian fiction reflected the world view of a particular group of Canadians which is dominant in the construction of Canadian political and cultural life in the late 19th century. The authors were from the educated social classes who provided Canada with religious leaders, politicians, newspaper publishers, educators, lawyers and influential merchants. Both nationalists and imperialists are the group of educated English Canadians. Who are specific about Canada’s future identity, and worked towards Canada’s unique identity. The term imperialist describes that ‘those who believed that Canada would find its true identity within British Empire’. So reflecting the nineteenth century nationalism, writers focused on defining the impact of Canada’s unique land and heritage upon Canadian identity. Mostly English Canadian authors wrote about the transformative effects of both Canadian wilderness
and the Canadian settlement process upon British immigrants. They identified the land as a central aspect of the Canadian character of its natural grandeur, agricultural potential, and northern location, and adaptive strategies for Canadian men and women. They have also included the groups selected for inclusion in the imagined nationality like, Scottish, English, Irish, French and Indian.

The embrace of Canada’s character as a nation of wilderness allowed and required English Canadians to embrace French Indians as part of their national character. One of the important aspects of the wilderness of the land was its ability to transform the people who inhabited it into stronger, more heroic, more virile, and over all superior men. Wilderness ability was seen as source of a unique Canadian national character, and there can be no more dramatic illustration of the diversity of Canadian experience at the turn of the 19th & 20th Centuries.

The three successive phases of the country’s history marked epochs in Canada’s literary enterprise and its subsequent Canonical formulations. The later phases are characterized by the peculiar bent of mind which revealed and participated in the endeavor of nation building. The new directions and parameters suggested for Canadian writings are by A.J.M. Smith, John Sutherland and F.R. Scott. But Smith’s demand for a set of standards was secured in its universal acceptance and a preliminary
spade work was done for the freedom in the choice and treatment of subject. The collections of A.J.M. Smith, A book of *Canadian Poetry* (1943), *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960) and *Modern Canadian Verse* (1987) served critical purpose by defining a tradition. The direction of Canadian fiction was changed in 1940 by the appearance of two classic novels *Two Solitudes* (1945) and *The Precipice* (1948) by Hugh MacLenan. They are widely accepted inspite of their conservative style. Since the late 1950 no single figure dominated any era in the way Mac Lenin did. In 1976 the Canadian critic, Northrop Frye, remarked on the colossal verbal explosion which has taken place in Canada since 1960. There is no doubt that there has been an enormous quantity of expansion in Canadian writing. After the advent of the British in Canada a new kind of literature cropped up, and generated theory and defining positions as it constructs a new identity which negotiates boundaries and confines and relates to different temporal and spatial metaphors. The English man Malcolon and Irish man Brian Moore were two expatriates from other countries who came to Canada and enriched its literature with books like Lowry’s *October Ferry* to Gabriela (1970) and Moore’s *The Lack of Ginger Coffery* (1960). Writers consciously molded a native tradition in their writing for the first time. Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1975) marked a decisive breaking, away from the traditional challenges of the United States and wrote about human nature and psyche. Along with
Grove, Gabriell Roy and Morely Callaghan’s writings represent the emergence of serious Canadian fiction in 1920s and 1930s. Gabriel Roy’s best known novel *Bonheur Occasion* (1945) which was translated in English as *The Tin Flute*, Second novel *La Petite Pouled’eall* (1950) titled as *Where Nests the Water Hen* in English, ranked as the most significant works of psychological realism in the history of Canadian literature. One of the most influential Canadian author, the Governor General’s Award winner (1951) Morley Callaghan works are marked by undertones of Roman Catholicism, with complex characterization and ambiguous treatment of love. His first novel, *Strange Fugitive* (1928) *That Summer in Paris* (1963) *A Fine and Private Place* (1985) and the latest novel, *A Wild Old man Down the Road* (1988) are some of the notable works. Callaghan and Hugh McLennan may rightly be considered as the founding fathers of serious Canadian fiction, who are aware of the real problems of Canada. A firm supporter of Canadians in terms of space and thematic concerns, a nationalist, articulate Canadian was Hugh McLennan. His first novel *Barometer Rising* (1941) brought him national recognition as an author, followed upon the success with *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959) *Voices in Time* (1980).

English Canadian wiring has taken its roots as a localized response to space, distance, local forms of speech and intonation. This phenomenon
is succinctly represented by Hugh McLennan in *Writings*. Apart from the multicultural perspectives, the representation of Universal solitude by Gabriele Roy in *The Tin Flute* has become obvious symbolic cultural significance. But the image of multi-culturalism in Canada suggests a composite of discrete pieces, because of illusory unity within the discontinuity between cultural communities. The development of modernism in Canada had reached the point of “Cell-division” as it showed the clash of generations within contemporary writing and marked further diversification of trends. Eleanor remarks “The history of Canadian literature has been written and documented mainly by Frank Scott and A.J.M. Smith themselves and they have created their own little history” (14). There were as many brands of writing as there were many writers.

The writings of Desmond Pacey, Northrop Frye, and Eli-Mandel, have induced a proliferation of literary responses in a variety of genres and contributed to the emergence of another important phase in the formulation of Canada’s literary canon, foregrounding the essential nature and spirit of a new phase. The Canadian cultural phenomenon is typical of a wider North American or Western Context which draw upon the continent’s themes of exploration, settlement and development through a social imagination. The subsequent lack of Canadian literary tradition ascribes to a quick transition of the British Empire to a component of North America
and finally, a struggle to establish itself as a part of the world. They must now move into their own cultural houses for they are no longer at home in the houses of others as John Newlove says in his poem, “The Pride” (1969):

We stand alone,
we are no longer lonely
But we have roots, (110)

This foreshortening of history has profoundly disturbed Canadian sensibility in terms of defining its identity. As Canadian literature has been neglected in its home territory, the large number of mirror reflection images within the literature suggest a society engaged in a vain search for an image, like A.M.Klein’s ‘Mad Poet’, who shares at a mirror all day long, as if to recognize himself. With the opening of boarder to Asian immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, Ukraine and China, there arose a need for the adoption of new social and political structures that would assist in dealing with the requirements of the changing scenario. The opening decade of the Twentieth Century witnessed not only the political assimilation of the immigrants but the emergence of a distinct Western society that challenged the strange hold that Victorian sensibility exercised on English Canadian society.
The participants of “Writers and Human Rights”, conference in Toronto, catalyzed the immigrant literary endeavors. Writers like Rudy Wiebe, Timothy Findley and Margaret Atwood, spoke of the responsibility that literature had in giving encouragement and voice to the oppressed. By evoking the sense of community, the prominent Canadian writers like Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Joy Kogawa and Austin Clarke, put forward the literary voices and creations of the immigrants. Yet the rift of native and non-native continues in the form of economic, social and cultural inequalities. But the writings of Harold Cardival went a long way in foregrounding the causes. Early Canadian poetry in English too, is dominated by the inheritances of English Romantic and Victorian Poetry. The immensity and power for the unpopulated land, long remained a dominant theme of Canada’s art, and only after a confrontation with the landscape, artists moved to a confrontation with the inhabitants of the land. The Canadian environment figures in writings as a vast, terrifying, cold and empty expanse that reflected the Darwinian premise of nature, but in the late 19th Century, the earlier trend of the man or nature conflict expands into a triangle one of the nature. During the closing decade of the 19th Century, society, individuals and thematic trends articulate the pre-occupations of the Canadian literary mind. Writers like E.J Pratt and Birney, Irving Layton, Avison and Macpherson, each in his fashion affirms the World’s essential sacrificial view of life. The characters in Colin Mc
Dougall’s Execution, Adele Wiseman’s *The Sacrifice* (1956), Douglas Le Pan’s *The Deserter* (1964), and Hugh Mac Lennan’s *The Watch That Ends The Night* (1959) are led to a view of life that not only comprehends suffering and death but the conditions that make possible for the highest human values. Towards the middle of the century, the same pessimistic note is seen even in the poems which contain description of landscape and natural objects. There is an encounter with an animal in French Canadian literature in Gabrielle Roy’s *The Hidden Mountain* where Pierre hunts caribon and kills it and turns upon him a gage full of resignation and suffering and the gage exchanged is usually a deer, moose or caribou where the hunter identifies with his prey as suffering victim. The most famous example of Atwood’s *Survival* suggests how prevalent images and themes in Canadian literature reveal a collective victim mentality that results in Atwood’s view, from Canadians troubled relation with the wilderness and their pervasive feelings of colonial inadequacy. However, one of the earliest Canadian writers virtually always included in Canadian literary anthologies is Thomas Chandleer Haliburton. Other best internationally known Canadian writers are Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. Among all, Atwood bestowed elevation to Canadian literature. By 1990s, Canadian literature was viewed as the World’s best and Canadian authors began to accumulate international awards.
Since 1990s, Canadian literature has gained more and more international recognition. The rise of feminism in the 1960s caused a number of Anglo-Canadian women writers to focus on the question of female Canadian identity. The appreciation of the female pioneer is evident from the 1960s and early 1970s in work set in central Canada by Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence. Few pioneer women took up their pens but majority of them were simply too busy with household chores and wrote about their new environment, focusing much on the private sphere than on the public world. Struggling to define a selfhood that has been denied by the male dominant culture, they frequently represented female subjectivity in terms of emotionality, family life and marginality.

The Canadian novel takes an altogether new turn in the 1960’s with the appearance of women novelists who tend to write as more women than as patriots. Though separated by time and gender the women and the Canadian find, they have much in common. Women and Canadian writers seem to share a necessary, self-defining challenge to the dominant traditions. Thus Feminist writing may appear more conservative but in fact it is just different. Women must define their subjectivity before they can question it; in fact they must first assert the selfhood they have been denied by the dominant culture. Many of Canadian women writers are engaged in a struggle with language and inherited conventions to find more adequate
ways of telling about women’s experience, fighting their way out of silence to project more authentic images of how women feel and what they do through their protagonists. A close study of their novels reveal that the writers focus is so much on the inner world of feeling and sensibility that even the impact of feminist movements has generated more of poetic articulation of the inner tensions of women than social documentaries voicing the cause of women.

A number of accomplished women writers have emerged since 1950, dealing with issues ranging from national identity to gender politics, and themes like of powerlessness, victimization and alienation. In the late sixties and early seventies the majority of Canadian women like Barbara Pressman have focused on the inner world of feeling and sensibility of the inner tensions of women than social documentaries voicing the cause of women. While Alice Munro, Margaret Laure and Atwood represent the well established veterans, the other are comparatively less known and represent the new voices. The aim of women writing in Canada is to bring about remarkable changes in the lives of Canadian women and society. In order to bring gender equality in Canadian society, they have improved women’s life chances and have the sense that women can contribute to the building of a major peaceful caring world.
Many of these novelists depicted how women have been abused exploited and oppressed and with the motivation and courage they broke out traditional patriarchal forms after the women’s movement. They are concerned with exploration and survival and their writings were more towards the discovery of the self and women’s encounter with the world. In their works Canadian feminists attempt to focus on the new woman who is confident, intelligent and assertive, self aware, independent, seeking to evolve an identity of her own.

The aim of the women writings in Canada is to bring gender equality in Canadian society, and to bring remarkable change in Canada. Through their writings they have improved women’s life chances and with a sense that women can contribute to the building of a major peaceful caring world. Amongst, Maris Gallant’s objective of her writings is to reconstruct the state of mind of heart. She received the Governor General’s Award for literature for her collection of short stories in 1989, appointed as a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

The majority of Canadian women worked full time, in the late sixties and early seventies. The Canadian novel took new turn in the 1960s with the appearance of women novelists who tend to write more as women than as Patriots. Many of Canadian women writers are engaged to find more adequate ways of telling about women’s experience, fighting their
way out of silence to project more authentic image of how women feel and do. Their focus is much on the inner world of feeling and sensibility, of the inner tensions of women than social documentaries voicing the cause of women.

The women authors contribution to Canadian literature is prominent and their choice of women as their subjects, rather than creators, is the awareness of feminism. As the society allowed greater freedom to women, the writers increase the variety of characters. Their psychological insight become more profound, so women lose their stereotyped image and gain recognition on their own terms for which they strive individually and collectively in their search for full self-realization: The writings of Canadian literature give greater understanding of self or of women in general, and the reaction to the various works will often be intensely personal, consciously or unconsciously on individual experience. So the readers readily identify themselves with one or the other of characters’ portrayed in the book. That such self-identification may be rewarding or a traumatic experience is discerned in Phyllis Young’s *A Question of Judgment* (1969) P.K. Page’s *The Stenographers.* (1946)

The writings of women in Canadian literature gained a greater appreciation as they helped to probe the complexity of the female psyche. They also highlighted the women’s lives, their roles, their identity or the
milieu imposed on them. The characterization of women and their identity is linked essentially with the lives of others. So the Canadian feminists attempt to focus on the ‘new women’ who is self-aware, independent, seeking to evolve an identity of her own and tried to bring gender equality.

Some of the outstanding women writers of Canadian literature contributed to build a major peaceful world, improving women’s life chances. Among all Mavis Gallant’s main objective is the development of specific situation and reconstruction of the state of mind and heart of women through her collections like: *The Other Paris* (1956), *My Heart is Broken* (1964), *The End of the World* and *Other Stories* (1964), *The Transit* (1988), and *Across the bridge* (1993).

Margaret Atwood focuses on the psychological dimensions of man-woman relationships. The crucial aspect of Atwood’s feminism is that she makes a plea for a balanced, harmonious man-woman relationship in which the two sexes play a complementary role instead of playing a winning or losing game. Her early feminist treatise *The Edible Women* (1969) is story about a young woman, who works for a consumer company. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) the heroine is trapped in a dystopia in which free expression is banned. *Cat’s Eye* (1989) tale of painter who explores her childhood memories. *Alias Grace* (1996) is a fictional exploration of the gender politics surrounding a female alleged
murder. *The Blind Assassin* (2000) is about two sisters, one of whom, Laura Chase dies in a car accident. It’s a novel within a novel, which deals with an affair between a wealthy young woman and her lover.

In her novels Margaret Atwood typically creates women characters who are forced to reconstruct themselves in a more self-reliant and courageous form as they seek to establish their relationship to the world and to the individual around them. Her dissections of contemporary urban life and sexual politics have been particularly welcomed by feminists.

Atwood is thoughtfully a prominent feminist, ecologically sensitive, a clear eye observer of social friends from urban alienation to rural isolation. In poetry and prose talking a variety of modes she gained wider audience. She is a reactionary artist, driven by her sense of social reform and realistic view of a disturbed society. She has explored the assumptions’ of readers. Nobody maps the female psychic territory the way Margaret Atwood does. Atwood’s writings have shown the way to a number of young Canadian women writers’ today like Carol Shields, Elizabeth Brewster, Pegeen Brenhan and Susan Swan who wrote about the lives of women. They reveal an intense awareness of the relation between bonding and bondage.

In a speech in 1995, Atwood said that her literary career began at the age of sixteen when she crossed the schoolyard on her way home. But at
the age of six, Atwood was writing poems, mortality plays, comic books and an unfinished novel about an art. Her high school year book *Quote* had stated that her goal was to write the great Canadian Novel. Since 1961, soon after the completion of her graduation she has produced a highly acclaimed body of work, including poetry, fiction and literary criticism. In her earlier years of childhood, she lived in the Canadian wilderness as a second of the three children of Margaret Dorothy and Dr.Carl Edmund. She used reading as a means of entertainment since her childhood is divided between summers in the woodlands of Quebec, and winters in many different Canadian cities. As her parents continued to take her to northern wilderness in the summers, reading on Grimm’s Fairy tales and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, she has acquired rural sensibility. Since parents are from different culture, great readers, they expected her to make use of her intelligence and abilities. Canada was not a home for writers in the fifties. It’s a country still with little or no respect for literary endeavors, not conversant with its own cultural identity for many of the writers of the period because publication had to take place elsewhere.

Atwood could find her tradition by reading lot of stuff in the extensive Library of Canadian poetry from beginning to end and discovered that Canadian writing was a tremendous by exciting thing because people in the country were writing and publishing books. Atwood
returned to Toronto after two years at Harvard and found employment in a market research company. After accepting a lectureship in English at the University of British Columbia, she returned to Harvard for two more years and completed her doctoral examination. Her dissertation remains incomplete on “The English Metaphysical Romance”, because her creative writing assumed dominant interest in her life. She won the E.J.Pratt Medal for her small collection of poems, Double Persephone, which was privately printed by John Robert Colombo’s Hawkshead Press. In 1966 her full length of volume of poetry, the circle-game was published, and won Canada’s highest award for poetry, the Governor –General’s Award which led to two important connections. During the 70s and 80s Atwood continued to publish regularly, received numerous honourary degrees, and held positions at Universities across North America and Abroad. While working as an editor at the Toronto publishing house Anansi in the early 1970s. She also states that the key pattern in Canadian writing is victimization which consists of denying victim status, and claiming victimization as inescapable fate and becoming non-victim. Her second work of criticism is Second Words (1984) in which she described Canadian poetry and contemporary women’s writing to feminism and international human rights followed by other forms of literary criticism.
Atwood never felt home in the city as she says she has always suffered from ‘culture shock’. Her culture shock experience during her first experience in the United States where she realized that to the Americans Canada was invisible. The roots of Canadian nationalism are developed when she has the common colonial experience of moving to a metropolitan culture. Where people know nothing and care nothing about one’s home place. Atwood’s early phase of writing is contemporaneous with a problematic and crucial period in Canadian literature. Atwood’s early development as a writer was framed by her involvement in promoting a distinctive Canadian literature. She replaces conventional narratives of cohesive, singular development, with outrageous narratives of co-multiple identity. As a feature of work, this has been a particular preoccupation of critics with an interest in Atwood as a postmodern writer.

Reingard M. Nischik in her introduction to Margaret Atwood Works and Impact, draws alleviation to Atwood’s importance in Canadian public life. The year 1972 has marked a turning point in Atwood’s development as a curator and defender of the Canadian literary tradition. The questions raised in surfacing and survival were already in the forefront of Atwood’s literary consciousness. The post colonial interest in reading the nation as a narration, plotting its own fictions provides an appropriate point of entry for elucidating Atwood’s writing. Culture and imperialism draws attention
to the idea that nations themselves are narrations. The Canadian culture renaissance relied exactly in the possibility for change and refusal to be a victim. So, the nations feeling about themselves are relevant to reading Atwood’s early fiction and her female characters at every turn bound up with a transitional reading of Canada. Atwood’s novels contain Canadian inflections, dangers of discourses of national identity etc. Her writings reflect that women must positively name the power that resides in their bodies and their sense of closeness to nature. Atwood rewrites the wilderness from a woman centered point of view and her selfconscious aspect is informed in the relation between nature and women.

Atwood, enjoyed a career of remarkable distinction and success, not only as the highly prolific author of volumes of poetry, novels, two books of literary criticism, collections of short stories, children’s books and editor of anthologies, author of much un collected journalism, major public figure, cultural commentator, and proponent of activist views in areas ranging from Canadian nationalism. She is not only an acclaimed writer, but distinctly quotable on moral, political private and public issues and a stalwart spokesperson for Canadian literature.

Since 1970, Atwood’s reputation raised as a national and international writer and the stages of her rise to fame make an interesting chronicle, coinciding as they did with the rise of feminism and a
resurgence of cultural nationalism centered on Canada’s centennial year 1967. Her maiden novel, *The Edible Women* (1969) both funny and terrifying story about a young woman, who works for a consumer company in which themes of women’s alienation echo those in her poetry. It’s welcomed as the best first novel according to The Times criticism in London. Atwood’s most remarkable novelistic achievement in which the technology nature conflict is cast in political terms in her other novel *Surfacing* (1972). *Lady Oracle* (1976) her third novel, won the city of Toronto Book Award and a Canadian Book Sellers Award. She fashioned her own Buildungsroman of a young Toronto girl who blossomed to 245 pounds by the age of nineteen where heroine is a romance writer who imagines alternative lives. Its an extravagant, macabre and melodramatic which marked the shift to Atwood’s decisive identification as a novelist and it was welcomed in News weeks as “the kind of novel that makes reviewers send fresh green sprouts”. Her fictional world continues with the publication of *Life Before Man* (1979), her most domestic novel with its triangular plot received enthusiastic reviews in the United States on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, and in Britain in *The Times stetus Literary Supplement*, where Toronto’s Royal Ontario Museum is the background for a series of personal imprisonments. She has maintained an active engagement with culture politics and human rights issues not only in Canada but also on the international scene. As her
literary reputation grew, she traveled extensively, reading and lecturing in Britain, Italy, Australia and Afghanistan in the late 70s. Later she moved to Toronto with her family which was their permanent home ever since.

Her later novel *Bodily Harm* (1981) focuses on the contrast between affluent thinking and the brutal reality of power and sexual politics. Atwood chooses a Caribbean setting and for the first time she removes her major fictional setting and heroine outside Canada and she devotes much of her creative energy to her country and its smug preference for the security of non-involvement. The vacuum is that her heroine’s life is finally her own creation and the consequence of her fear of commitment and her unwillingness to assume personal responsibility for her actions and words.

*Her best novel The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) is set in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a dystopian novel portraying a time where women are prized only for their reproductive gift. The brilliance of this international best seller rests in the creation of a future that is too logical extension of many dimensions of the present. Atwood is the only Canadian, a neighbor as well as an outsider to the United States who could create such an unsettling vision of the American future. It received the Governor General’s Award, the Los Angeles Times Prize, and short listed for the
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Booker Prize, Portraying a tale of a bleak future where women are prized only for their reproductive gift with moments of lyrical comfort and wit.

Atwood’s focus is distinctly Canadian though the world becomes her centre, but during her second phase of career she undertook a variety of new tasks such as becoming a cartoonist under the name of Bart Gerrard, creator of Canadian Culture comics, a historian of Canada in days of the rebels 1815-1840. Since mid-eighties until the present, Atwood focuses on contemporary Toronto in her fiction like Cat’s Eye and The Robber Bridge (1993). They are feminist thought provoking novels which examined lifestyle and women’s friendship of Toronto and explores the Question of the women writers’ task and possible subjects for women’s writing.

Cat’s Eye (1988) a nominee for the Booker Prize, shows the inner life and the sensibility of women. The emotional and intellectual development of the protagonist Elaine suggests both the limitations and possibilities of life as lived by both women and men. It features a woman painter, brought up in Toronto in the 1950s and 1960s who returns 30 years later as minor celebrity only to find the place which is de-familiarized by that time. In her first fiction Alias Grace (1996) Atwood portrays the Victorian prison system and asylum life in detail in a fictional form. It’s story on the life of Grace Marks, a Canadian servant girl
convicted in 1842 at the age sixteen for conspiring with a fellow servant. James Mc Dermott (rumored to be her lover) murder her employer Mr. Thomas Kinncar and his house keeper Nancy Montgomery. The most brilliant narrative *The Blind Assassin* (2000) A meta-fictional fairy Tale which earned Booker Prize. It’s a multi-layered narrative collage in which critics praise Atwood’s deft handling of multiple voices, perspectives, and plot lines. The work is intriguingly complex yet always accessible and compellingly readable.

Margaret Atwood returned to the science fiction genre with her novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) Like *Handmaid’s Tale*, the book portrays a dystopian future, with humanity brought to the verge of extinction by contemporary social trends and technologies. This novel is short listed for the Orange prize, the man Booker prize and a Governor General’s Award and the garnered high critical praise and accolades. Atwood adopts the perspective and voice of Penelope in her next fiction, *The Penelopaid* (2005). She invites readers to consider the story of Homer’s Odyssey, backed by a chorus of maidens. Her fiction explores the issues of our time, capturing them in the satirical, self-reflexive mode of the contemporary novel. Its noted for its careful craftsmanship and precision of language, which gives a sense of inevitability and a resonance to her words. The stage adaptation of *The Penelopaid* was premiered by England’s Royal
Shakespeare Company in July 2007. Atwood published two prose collection in 2006, a set of linked stories filed Moral Disorder and the Tent, a series of very short stories and prose fragments. By my understanding *The Year of the Flood* (2009) is her new and the latest novel which has brilliantly retold her own tale through other mouths. It shows how kids become snowman and how the water less flood has long been predicted by God’s Gardeners, a back to nature cult founded by Adam One. Atwood brings out the flaws in her novel *The Year of the Flood* which are part of the pleasure in the life of human beings and also the how the species are threatened, in the depth of human nature.

Atwood focuses attention on the issues that govern women’s lives: the patterns of domination and subordination that occur not only in heterosexual romance but also in mother – daughter relationships and in women’s friendships, including masculinity culture that oppress women. In Atwood writings what recurs are not just the terrors of a childhood spent in fear of the bad mother or one’s best girl friends but also the cultural terrors implicit in fulfilling the prescribed roles of the dutiful daughter or passive wife or those of the sexual object or female victim. In a way Atwood’s writings set out both to expose and fictively redress the wrongs done to women and her fiction deals with the basic fears and persisting conflicts that plague women in a male dominant culture. So Margaret Atwood is
definitely a heroine to both readers and writers of women’s fiction because for Atwood the novel “reflects society” and is a “social vehicle”. She believes that, society must first admit “that it should be changed: to fight the monster, you have to know that there is a Monster” Second Word, (146). She believes that, in order to have change in the society, we need to have general consciousness of what is wrong.

An essayist, Shannon Hengen, makes the claim that Atwood reshapes literary genres as the lyric, the romance the dystopia and the historical novel, with a solid sense of her literary achievement and status in the cannon. Atwood uses novelistic narrative to openly challenge the status of women, in her words a lot of the energy in women’s writing has come from being able to say things that once you could not say and from being able to see things that once you could see, from the stand point of women as a marginalized group with in society. According to Dandson, the new feminism, a myth centered poetry, Frye’s criticism and the growing nationalism of the early sixties all helped to shape Atwood’s literary inheritance. Together they produced a particular sensibility, a mythic imagination reflected in her treatment of the male-female relationship and Canadian nature.

There is no doubt that Atwood is most unequivocally, be called a literary celebrity whose fiction is one of the most deep rooted critiques of
the Canadian society in relation to the values represented by the Canadian dream. As the Canadians pride themselves in their superiority in human values and adherence to old world civilization values, they had refused to go with United States at the time of American War of Independence and had escaped the efforts of second sin, of materialism and throat rivalry which characterized the American dream.

The grim realities of life make modern woman more independent and adventurous and she recognizes and becomes disturbed, frightened individual and gradually withdraws into herself. So individual consciousness gives existence to a collective and national experience. The experience of alienation and isolation found in a regionally diverse society make women become aware of the fact that they are in to social pressures and exploitation. But through the realities of life she comprehends the exploitative behavior of men.

The view point of women as representations of nature is so connected that when we see nature, we are automatically supposed to associate than with nature and vice-versa. Atwood has been variously assessed as a feminist writer, for her incisive commentaries on sex roles, a religious writer for her visions of spiritual ecstasy, a gothic writer for her images of grotesque misfits and surreal disorientations of the psyche, a writer of Canadian wilderness, a nationalist writer and a regionalist. Her
works are profoundly human, like Greene, a humanist, who places her characters in complex, challenging situations, which allow her to ruminate on the way we live and act towards one another. She creates women who are forced to remake themselves, to achieve courage and self-reliance in their attitudes and relationship with others and the world around them. She continuously, surprises her readers with ongoing experimentalism and radical challenges to contemporary social myths and fashionable ideologies.

Atwood demonstrates the types of landscapes that prevail in Canadian literature and the kinds of attitude they mirror. Nature is seen as dead, or alive but indifferent, and actively hostile towards man as a common image in Canadian Literature (1972, 54). Her concern was to free the Canadian psyche from English and American imperialism and to liberate women form their perception of themselves as victims of masculine privilege.

Atwood’s protagonists are against to the reconstruction and unity of the world and they refused doctrine of liberalism and desired to be ‘whole’. As a writer Atwood holds a mirror to actual social status of women in patriarchal society through her female characters who are true to life. As a writer of realistic fiction she presents different concepts of feminism and challenge the traditional roles of women and propose image
of women not just a “two legged womb” but a dynamic human, different from the male but no less human for that. As Atwood says in *Survival*: “women both as characters and as people must be allowed their imperfections. If I create a female character, I would like her to able to show her having emotions all human beings have…..without having her pronounced as a monster, a slur or a bad example”. (227)

Her feminist concerns are, her wider humanitarian concerns with basic human rights and their infringement by institutional oppression. Her fiction provides a comprehensive review of the problems women confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom. The basic premise of Atwood’s feminist thought is survival which shows women the ways of struggle and the means of survival in an antagonistic, male chauvinistic, and sexiest society. By ‘Survival’ she does not mean continuity of mere physical existence, but a striving for dignity in the battle with society and circumstances. Her fiction is a reflection on the violation of women’s rights and it includes her self-respect, her personality and physical or mental capabilities.

Atwood's fiction provides a comprehensive review of the problems women confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, echoes forth the message that: "human
rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights" (Summer100). At each and every stage, Atwood has pondered beyond the issues addressed by the Feminist Movement. Her feminist concerns are her wider humanitarian concerns with basic human rights and their infringement by institutional oppression. Atwood transcends the usual concerns of the feminist world and writes from her sense of the enormous complexity, not only of the relationships between man and woman, but also of those between other abstract intangibles like Art and Life, Form and Content, Writer and Critic, etc. Atwood's writing is involved with human rights of women and thus her feminist ideology has a larger, non-exclusive pictures. As provided in her Second Words, her fiction is a reflection of the violation of women's rights and it includes:

Any act, omission or conduct by means of which physical, sexual or mental suffering is inflicted, directly or indirectly, through deceit, seduction, threat, coercion, or any other means, on any woman with the purpose or effect of intimidating, punishing or humiliating her, or of maintaining her in sex-stereotyped roles, or of denying her human dignity, sexual self-determination, physical, mental and rural integrity, or of un-determining the security of her person, her self-
respect, or her personality, or of diminishing her physical or mental capabilities. (163)

Atwood moves beyond the boundaries of Canada and proposes a model of gender victimization corresponding to the Canadian paradigm. She exposes the silent and hidden operations of gender and confronts its affairs thereby recommending for rewriting of women's history for healthy human relations between man and woman. Through her novels, Atwood not only demands demolition of the gender system - the real source of women's oppression, but also envisions a new world in which men and women are equals at every level of existence. In the process of struggle for change, the protagonists in Atwood's fiction are sought to be organized into a powerful force and are invested with a streak of rebellion. Thus, Atwood's novels are governed by feminist consciousness that runs as an under-current and serves as the unifying principle. Atwood’s writings are perennial reservoirs for the meanings of life. They convey universal perspectives of life and literature. A serious elucidation of her significant works will be carried out in the following chapters.