Chapter I

Introduction

Canadian literature has over the years registered its distinct identity and unmistakable authenticity. It has come a long way from imitation and borrowed forms to vernacular spontaneity of the indigenous people. Social, political and cultural pressures have contributed more to the moulding and shaping of Canadian psyche. A Canadian’s consciousness is ruled by ethnic variety, cultural pluralism, dialectics of centric and eccentric debates.

In each generation Canada had to learn how to live with each other in this big land. In Canada, thirteen colonies won their independence in 1783. After winning independence Canadians started bringing out new social ideologies for the better development of the new Canadian society. New social ideologies gave birth to new literary ideologies. Hence Canadian social ideologies and literary ideologies are interconnected with each other.

There was an urgent need for identity and recognition in Canada. It resulted in change of social order. Canada is known for cultural polarity and multi-racial global communities. The cultural polarity exists between the Anglo-phones and the Franco-phones. Canadian literature is dominated by multi-racial, multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-regional aspects.

As Manorama Trikha comments: “In Canada multi-racial and multi-cultural pressures including the South-Asians have contributed significantly to its culture and society” (9). The cosmopolitan education and the growth of the official languages French and English helped the writers to enrich Canadian literature. In Canada, many of the writers of various genres have the idea of Canadinizing the Canadians
by their literary influence. They wanted to canadianize the Canadians who lived
beneath their self of cynicism and self-deprecation. Since the 1890s the Canadian
writers started wrestling with the problems faced by the indigenous people, the
natives, in Canada. They wanted to bring out a natural outlook among the Canadians
through Canadianization. Hence the Canadian dramatists insisted on the need of a
natural theater. The Canadian dramatists like George Ryga and James Reaney focus
on the fourth world status of the pluralistic Canadian society. Natives in Canada
aspired for fourth world status after getting independence.

Canada is a new nation of desperate and diverse geographic and economic
culture and linguistic communities. The aboriginal people who are considered as the
first Canadians were once immigrants to Canada. The Canadian historian John
Saywell declares: "Aboriginal peoples were the first Canadians, but they, like all
Canadians were once immigrants to a new land (qtd, in Trikha 9).

The aboriginal population brought radical transformation in the traditional
ways of life. Most of the anthropologists assure that less than half of the population
of Canada traces their origin to England, Scotland and Ireland. Before the First
World War almost sixty percentage of the population of Canada were British and
thirty percentage of population were French. Hence Canada has been facing
traditional imbalance, cultural conflicts and imperialistic oppression. Critics on
Canadian literature confirm the fact that multi-nationalism, multiculturalism, and
multi-racialism dominate the minds of the Canadian writers. Canadian literature
attempts to project the total cultural renewal standing in perfect unison with Frye’s
Theory of Cultural Revolution, and advance steadily towards trans-cultural, global
preoccupation. The postmodern writers of United Canada aspire for peace and
harmony. Most of the Canadian writers play the roles of reformers and educators. In
general Canadian literature reflects the protest voices against oppression, marginalization, regionalism, racialism, culturalism and power supremacy.

Drama is an art which needs action and performance. Among the genres in literature, drama attracts the attention of the audience through the visual image. An understanding of European theatrical tradition helps to provide a background for English Canadian drama in the nineteenth century. For the first time poetic drama became diverted from the popular theatre. At the same time the quality of popular drama declined to melodrama or farce of little literary merit because theatre managers frequently centered to unruly working class audience.

In Canada there was no tradition to encourage the writings of indigenous drama that could be successfully performed in the theatre. Theatres and opera houses became established in many Canadian cities followed by the touring companies which covered Canada from the 1880s until the First World War. But nearly all the plays presented were British, American or European classics, romantic plays or melodramas.

Canadian drama mostly written in the standard poetic convention was generally isolated from the theatre of the nineteenth century. Like much of the heroic tragedy of the eighteenth century, a half the dramas were little more than a pastiche of Elizabethan tragedy filled with heroic themes of love and revenge, rhetorical verse and one dimensional character. The first Canadian dramatist writing in this convention was Charles Hevysege who had immigrated from England to Montreal in 1853. He produced two heroic plays: Saul (1857) and Count Filitto (1860).

The first play Saul made some impact in its day though it was only a closet drama intended for reading. No dramatists rose to challenge the style of the play and
began a fresh approach to playwriting. The works of a number of other dramatists appeared in succeeding years. Thomas D. Arcy Megeecon, the founding father of confederation, wrote Sebastian or The Roman Martyr in 1861. Thomas Bush wrote an exceptional melodramatic play Santiago in 1866. It was based on a contemporary incident in Chile. In 1876 Samuel Watson, librarian of the legislative library of Ontario, published Ravlan. John Gamier, a poet and physician, imitated Elizabethan drama in his Prince Pedro in 1877.

A number of other minor dramas in the conventional heroic poetic style appeared at the turn of the nineteenth century. John Hunter’s Duvaris De Roberval (1888) and John Harper’s Champlain (1909) are both concerned with the early history of the French People in Canada. Two plays written jointly by C-F- Newcomb and J.M. Foxx were The Fire Worshipers and Dermot McMurrough. These plays were published in 1882. Some of the “confederation poets” tried their hands at drama. Bliss Carman wrote Education Masques. William Wilfred Campbell published four poetical tragedies, Mordred, Hilde Brand (1895), Dulac and Morning (1908).

Duncan Campbell Scott wrote a few plays in the 1970s. At the end of the nineteenth century the form of comic opera was also used to deal with problems of immigration. Inmelwritich's play Pirarmigan or A Canadian Carnival (1985) deals with the problem of immigration. William A. Tremayne was the most popular playwright at the end of the nineteenth century. His play Lost 24 Hours written in 1895 was the first play by a Canadian to be produced in New York.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century there were remarkable major changes which altered the face of the European theatre regarding themes techniques and characterization. There were a few attempts to develop a theatre
movement on the European model in the early twentieth century Canada. Till the end of the nineteenth century the Canadian theatre seemed content to go along with the old traditions in blissful ignorance of the revolutionary movements.

The European countries followed the major innovations of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. Chekhov became popular with Moscow Art Theatre in Russia. German expressionists revolutionized the art of playwriting and the Theatre presentation. Kenneth Macgewan and Robert Edmond Jones brought the ideas of the European theatre to the United States. They published their book *Continental Stage Craft* in 1922. This book contained the ideas of the European theatre.

Eugene O’Neill and other dramatists began to experiment with the new forms of theatrical expression in United States. In Canada Roy Mitchell established “Arts and Letters club players” and he directed successfully from 1908 to 1914. This theatre was abandoned during the outbreak of the First World War. With the advice of Vincent Masssey, Mitchell became the artistic director of the Hart House Theatre.

This theatre functioned effectively from 1919 to 1921 under the directorship of Mitchell. Mitchell requested Merrill Denison to turn a story of a college principal and a backwoodsman into a play. Denison wrote a one-act play “Brothers in Arms” which become Canada's first original model play. Tremayne was the last playwright of the old school in Canada and Denison was the first playwright of the new school. He went on to write other bag woods comedies. His major play *Marsh Hay* (1923) depicted the hardships of Ontario farming life. It was not performed till 1974. The play was widely recognized as an important dramatic work comparable with the early O’Neil’s plays. Later Denison became one of the earliest writers of Canadian Radio Drama from 1907 to 1911. There had been amateur dramatic societies which were encouraged by Canada's ninth Governor General Earl Grey. The Little Theatre
Movement continued to grow during 1920s. O’Kanagan Fruit Grower Carroll Aikins wrote a famous play *The God of Gods*. This play was presented by Sir Bazzy Jackson, the British director, in 1929 at his famous Birmingham Repertory Theatre in England. When he spoke in Edmonton he advocated for a National Theatre in Canada.

In 1929 Edmonton Little Theater Association was formed Alberta Drama Festival was organized in 1931. Depression in Canada destroyed the professional touring drama companies. Lord Bess Borough who was appointed Governor General of Canada in 1931 encouraged the Little Theatre activity by inaugurating the Dominion drama festival. From 1933 onwards regional drama festivals were held each year from which the best amateur groups were chosen by adjudicators to perform at the national competition.

The winner was awarded the “Bess Borough Trophy”. A body of adjudicators, many of whom were the members of British, European and American theatres gave expert advice to the companies. Among the more notable adjudicators were J.J. Grein Hariey Grah Ville Barker, Malcolm Morley, Michel St Denis, Bazzett Clark, Robert Spaight and Philip Hope Wallace.

In the face of criticism The Dominion Drama Festival (DDF) encouraged the maintenance of an amateur status. Its organizer argued that the “Moscow Art and the Abbey Theatre” in Dublin had grown from amateur associations to become internationally esteemed professional companies. They also argued that the DDF was encouraging large enough audiences for any theatre association to form its own professional company. The DDF’s role in the development of professional Theatre in Canada was thus an indirect one.
Canadian play writing was given an enormous boost. Inspite of the successes, the number of original Canadian plays offered at the Dominion Drama Festivals continued to be small, compared with the constant succession of popular successes from the standard international repertoire. The writing and production of Canadian plays was, however, encouraged by many of the little theatre groups that developed during the 1920s and 1930s.

One amateur company that was formed in the same year as the DDF began was the Worker’s Experimental Theatre. Following the trend of Workers Theatre Movements in Europe and the United States, it demonstrated its intention of using drama to expose and ridicule bourgeois society that it considered was exploiting its workers. A workers cultural movement was started in Canada and it was supported by the Agitprop Theatre (workers theatre).

Plays were written by and for the workers. Plays performed by the Workers Theatre demonstrated the class struggle between the imperialists and the working class people. The play entitled *Eight Men Speak* was collectively written by a group of playwrights; Oscar Ryan, Edward Cecil Smith, Frank love and Mildred Goldberg. This play received sensitive applause and wider appreciation from the audience since its theme was politically sensational. This play presented the story of an attempted murder of a communist political prisoner. This play brought a tremendous effect among the enthusiastic audience in Toronto when it was presented at Toronto’s Standard Theatre in December 1933. Though the police tried to suppress the theatre, political prisoners were released because of public pressure after the performance of this play at Toronto. Carol Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump* reflects the influence of Agitprop plays of 1930s both in its style and subject.
The revolution in Canadian drama started with the origin of “The National Theatre School’. This theatre was opened in November 1960 in Montreal. The National Theatre acted as a co-lingual theatre and organized many drama festivals in different parts of Canada for the growth and enrichment of Canadian Drama Stratford Festival. The Show Festival and Charlotte Town Festivals were the major important drama festivals which encouraged the dramatists and enriched dramatic literature in Canada. In the early 1970s Paul Thompson turned the Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM) into an Experimental Theatre Company for new Canadian writers in Toronto.

This company worked successfully under the leadership of Paul Thompson. It observed and experienced the rural, farm life of the multi-communal people by visiting and staying with them. When Richard Perkins describes the function of this experimental theatre, he comments:

The whole company lived for six weeks on a farm near Clinton, Ontario to absorb totally the community life of its people before creating the farm show in 1972, and original collage stories, poems and song with both monologue and dialogue which portrays with realism and affection, the rural life the performers had experienced.

(14)

Another experimental theatre, Tamahnous Theatre was found with the help of John Gray in Vancouver. Gray has become one of the most successful ever Canadian playwrights with his musical plays Eighteen Wheels and Rockend Rosie. Gray has gained international reputation for his dramatic creation Billy Bishop Goes to War. David French's Leaving Home is one of most popular Canadian plays ever written and the most frequently staged play in Canada. In 1972, the Toronto Free
Theatre started by Tom Hendry, John Palmer and Martin Kinch specifically staged the new Canadian plays.

David Fennario is admired for his bi-lingual dramatic creations since he remains the first bi-lingual Canadian dramatist. Fennario’s admirable bi-lingual play is Balconville. As Richard Perkins comments:

The Centaur Theatre in Montreal has had some of it is greatest successes with the plays of David Fennario’s whose Balconville has also been seen in the United Kingdom and who is generally recognized as the first writer of truly bi-lingual play which portray working-class life in Montreal. (13)

There has been a Union for the career development of the playwrights in Canada. Formerly the union was called playwright's circle and then it was changed into ‘Playwright Co-op’. In 1971 Carol Bolt modified and renewed the union and called it as ‘Playwrights Canada’. In April 1984 it was called as Playwright Union of Canada. The evolution of Canadian drama and theatre also increased the interest of theatre critics, historians and academics.

In 1972 “The Toronto Bench” (Union of Critics) was founded to encourage theatre criticism and to offer the annual ‘Chalmer’s Award' for the best Canadian play of the year’ and The Association for ‘Canadian Theatre History’ was founded in 1976 with its literary organ Theatre History in Canada. This magazine joined Canadian Theatre Review and Canadian Drama as a journal devoted almost exclusively to the furthering of information on national and regional developments in theatrical fields.

It must be acknowledged at the outset that drama has not developed on a par with the other arts in Canada. From the earliest years the English-Canadian
playwright has been confronted with a uniquely unpropitious set of circumstances. The problem of creating a national dramatic literature meaningful to a cross section of the population is intensified in a vast, sparsely inhabited country comprised two main national stocks.

In addition, the amorphous nature of Canadian society, its lack of distinctive features that may be readily projected onstage, has presented a particularly elusive challenge. Moreover, the pioneer conditions of Canada’s early history, conditions which made energetic work an end in it, left place for the theater or any drama that sought to define significant social conflicts. The communal indifference to the theater was reinforced by the two fold puritan heritage of Scotland and New England, which perpetuated a view of the theater as a suspect, or at any rate an expendable commodity. It was not until the 1920s that widespread interest in the creation of a distinctively Canadian drama began to take root. But by this time the films were changing the entertainment routine of the nation, depriving the potential playwright of most of his audience at the moment he was beginning to find his voice.

The position of Canadian drama is that of a cultural colony. Before Confederation in 1867, much theatrical fare has been imported from abroad. Canada has so much in common with both England and the United States that the dramatists of these latter countries can offer immediate entertainment to Canadian audiences. When the distinctive qualities of one group of playwrights begin to all palls, a second group is available.

Such authors as Charles Heavysege (1816-1876), J. Hunter-Duvar (1830-1899), Charles Mair (1838-1917), and Wilfred Campbell (1858-1918), writing in the
last decades of the nineteenth century, were drawn in the main to biblical or historical subjects, which they dramatized with high-minded energy. Their works have a certain historical interest and are occasionally redeemed by an effective passage, but as plays their merit is minimal. The reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, these dramas were composed in a pseudo-Shakespearean verse measure, which was the fashion for much English literary drama of the time. Although Ibsen and then Shaw were creating revolutionary concepts of theater, their influence did not extend to Canada.

Moreover, these Canadian writers were imprisoned, not only by a dead linguistic convention but also by the rigid moral attitudes of a provincial society. They clearly aspired to elevate art but the part moral formulas and pasteboard characterizations of melodrama appeared everywhere in their work. Finally, and most significantly, their complete separation from the practical stage and the conditions of performance deprived them of the chance to learn the essentials of their craft.

The efforts of Canada’s nineteenth century verse playwrights, then, proved a false start and a dead end. The history of Canadian drama properly begins with the rise of the little theater movement, with the rapid growth of amateur, community theaters in the years after the First World War. The optimistic excitement that attended this development prompted the composition of numerous plays. Would-be dramatists throughout the country essayed a wide variety of genres, but unfortunately the great mass of this writing was without literary or theatrical distinction. In almost every case, originality, intensity, and technique were absent.
The only playwright of merit to emerge from this ferment was Merrill Denison, whose plays were performed at Hart House Theatre at the University of Toronto in the active years immediately following its foundation in 1919. A group of his plays collected in a volume entitled *The Unheroic North* (1923) range from somber, rural tragedy to satirical farce contrived to puncture idealistic notions about life in the Ontario northland. The various other collection of plays published during this period illustrate, for the most part, the dangers of trying to create a national drama through earnest, self-conscious determination.

In the early years of the 1930s, Canadian plays continued to appear in profusion, although as the Depression wore on, their numbers diminished. Various associations and little theaters continued to encourage writers through competitions and prizes, such as the Dominion Drama Festival’s award for the best performance of a native play. But in spite of all inducements, few first-rate dramas were forthcoming.

A considerable number of the plays that appeared during these years were directly inspired by the Great Depression. Most had sociological interest only, but the pity and anger they reflected, rare emotions on the Canadian stage, were often impressive. The chief drawback of almost all these plays is a confusion of art with propaganda. Two figures of the period who stand somewhat apart are Gwen Pharis Ringwood and John Coulter. Ringwood is the author of several plays, most of them set in her native province of Alberta.

They dramatize with considerable power the relation between the inhabitants of the prairies and their harsh but compelling environment. Some of Coulter’s best plays are set in Ireland, the country of his birth, and show the influence of Ireland’s celebrated group of dramatists; Lady Gregory in particular, and Synge less often. In
addition to his Irish settings, Coulter has also used Canada’s northwest for a
background in Riel (1950), the best Canadian historical drama.

The Second World War interrupted many of the country’s dramatic activities
and after it far fewer plays appeared, in published form at least. It is as if the first
optimistic experiments had been tried and it had become discouragingly clear to all
that playmaking is a difficult and delusive craft. In addition, developments in radio
and later in television had the effect of diverting the energies of potential
playwrights to these remunerative media.

During the 1940s, however, Canada’s most prolific dramatist Robertson
Davies made his appearance. Davies’ plays display a large measure of theatrical
invention, satiric flair, and refreshingly literate dialogue. Among his preoccupations
are the widespread philistinism, narrowness, and prudery of life in Canada, the
conflict between the many who would liberate it, and the fate of the creative
imagination in an inhospitable climate, which is home and hence inescapable. What
distinguish Davies from his predecessors are the greater insight, energy, and
technique with which he explores these themes.

During the 1950s and 1960s, dramatists like Norman Williams, Patricia
Joudry, Lister Sinclair, John Reeves, and most notably James Reaney wrote for the
stage with varying degrees of success. Reeves’ A Beach of Strangers: An Excursion
(1959), an allegory about human solitude and the precarious reprieve from isolation
that love accomplishes, won an international award in 1959. One continuing
problem for these playwrights is that the publication of plays in Canada is a very
haphazard process. Merit is not by any means always the criterion.

It is hard to discern any significant continuity or pattern of development in
the course of English Canadian drama beyond some tenuous points of contact
between such figures as Denison and Davies and certain recurrent themes. As one might expect, several of the plays set in a rural context have at their center the struggle with an intimidating natural environment, while many of those set in the city present in some form the conflict between the exuberant, creative individual and a censorious, life-denying society.

In both cases it is the precise quality of this conflict that gives these plays, the better ones at least, their distinctively Canadian character. However, the overriding impression one receives from a review of drama in Canada is of a group of playwrights, some with considerable gifts, separated primarily not by space and time but by the absence of a native dramatic tradition, a tradition that may be accepted or challenged but within which action produces reaction.

In an important sense the Canadian playwright has hardly anything to follow or repudiate. He must begin each time to build from the bottom, and in such circumstances it takes a dramatist of formidable energy and skill to build very high. The spectacular success, however, of the Ontario Stratford Festival, the building of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and the growth of professional theater in various regions of the country offer increasingly opportunity for the native playwright. Measured by international standards of excellence, the achievement of English Canadian dramatists is not great, but the future holds promise.

James Reaney’s *The Donnellys Trilogy* was first performed at Tarragan Theatre. In this Trilogy Reaney presented the family feud between the two families (the Donnellys family and Marssay family) and the conflict within the fragmented Christianity in terms of characters whose individual impulses merge with the historical process. The trilogy comprises three plays: *Sticks and Stones*, *The St Nicholas Hotel* W M Donnelly Prop and *Handcuffs*. 
Reaney started writing the trilogy after doing perfect research on the Donnellys story. He had discussions with the people of Canada to collect authentic details about the myth and the history of the Donnellys. The following words of Reaney prove his sincerity and commitment in collecting the accurate details for his artistic creation.

I have been working on the Donnelly or The Biddulph Tragedy, an attempt to apply what techniques I have collected to a story in the past with all its long hand archival details. When I started this play about an Ontario family who were massacred by their neighbours on the night of Feb 3, 1880. I could tell that a lot had changed. I kept seeing all the Donnelly events in two viewpoints that cross - some tell in the way; the Donnellys were decent people who were persecuted- the Donnellys were mad dogs who were to be destroyed. This resulted in stage movement. (qtd. in Parker 125)

The above said words of Reaney prove the fact that the people who had humane sense and social consciousness considered the Donnellys as decent people and the enemies of the Donnellys who were inhumane and autocratic degraded the Donnellys as dogs. The two import factors, communal discrimination and religious antagonism created and operated the struggle between the Donnellys and their enemies. The existential problem of the Donnellys results in the conflict between two groups of people, the oppressors, the enemies of the Donnellys, and the oppressed victims, the Donnellys.

The survival of the Donnellys in the township of Biddulph hangs between two choices; whether they have to bow or not to bow; to kneel or not to kneel; to change themselves or not to change themselves; to quit Biddulph or not to quit
Biddulph; to be the victims to the oppressors or to be the rebels to the oppressors; to be the silent suffers or to raise their voice; to lose their individual freedom or to safeguard their individual freedom; to surrender themselves to slavery or to live as the Donnellys and to remain as ‘Blackfoot’ (Roman Catholics) or to join the ‘White foot’ (Protestants).

Before the Canada Council was created in 1957 theatre had to survive without the benefit of Government support. In 1946 Sydney founded the Everyman Theatre Company in Vancouver and ran the theatre successfully for seven years. Dora Mavor Moore a Glaswegian trained as an actress at London formed a New Play Society in Toronto. A nonprofit but professional group, the NPS (New Play Society) was opened in October 1946 in the Royal Ontario Museum Theatre with a production of John Millington Synge’s *The Play Boy of the Western World*.

The NPS produced many Canadian plays. Lister Sinclair’s *The Man in the Blue Moon*, performed in May 1947 was the first NPS Canadian play. This play was followed by the works by the other NPS playwrights Mavor Moore (son of Dora Mavor Moore), Andrew Allan, Morley Callaghan, Mazdelta Roche and Henrry Voyle. John Coulter’s epic *Riel* staged in February 1950 was one of the most notable NPS plays. NPS functioned effectively throughout the 1950s and 1960s. NPS produced many notable plays during Canadian play festival from 1950 to 1970.

Toronto’s professional company, Jupiter Professional Company and Crest Theatres were the other professional theatres during 1950s and 1960s. Jupiter professional company survived from 1951 to 1954. The Crest Professional Company founded by Broilers Donald and Murray Davis had a longer life. It survived from 1954 to 1966. It produced plays by Canadian playwrights Robertson Davies, Tedd Alien, John Gray, Mary Jukes, Marsel Dube, Mavor Moore, and Bernard Slade.
Herbert Whittaker, Henry Caplen, Robert Grill, Douglas Campbell, John Holden, Malcolm Black, Barry Morse, Mavor Moore, Leon Major, Jean Roberts, Powys Thomas, David Gardner, Alien Lund, Kurt Reis Marigold, Charlesworth, John Hirsch, Donald Davis and George M.C. Cowan were the best eminent directors of The Crest Professional Company. The Royal Commission in Canada suggested and recommended for the formation of ‘Canada Council’ which would encourage the study of acts, Letters, humanities and social sciences.

The recommendation was accepted and the Canada Council was created by an act of Parliament in March 1957. The professional theatres were operating successfully with the grants supplied by the Canada Council. Canada Broadcast Corporation (CBC) Radio made an important contribution to theatre. It provided opportunities to playwrights, actors and directors to develop their careers. Playwrights who wrote for radio also wrote plays for televisions. Unlike radio, television provided opportunities for actors, playwrights, directors and designers. Some of the prominent playwrights in the professional theatres wrote plays for television.

George Ryga’s Indian was produced on CBC’s “Quest Series” in 1962 and Carol Bolt’s plays were seen on series in 1970s. A group of playwrights in the professional theatre were encouraged by the media of Linda Griffith. Linda’s Maggie and Pierre, David Fennario’s Balconville and John Gray's Billy Bishop Goes to War attracted a large national audience through television. There were regional theatres which focused on its community and language. Though there was a general neglect to the Canadian plays by the regional theatres, some regional theatres acknowledged the merits of the Canadian plays. Rexderverel, The Globe Theatres longtime playwright has contributed many plays based on local and regional
concerns. Until the 1980s Canadian plays achieved only a token presence in their repertoires.

The Alternate Theatre in Canada emerged in the 1960s from various aesthetic, cultural and political influences. It was an international phenomenon that manifested itself in diverse ways. It opposed the established values and conventions. The development of Canadian Alternate Theatre was prompted more by a changing political climate in Canada and Canadians interest in history, culture and society than by American influences.

Canada's first alternate theatre was Toronto’s Workshop Production (TWP). It was politically motivated. This theatre gave importance to theatrical imaginations and skills rather than textual sophistication. This approach led to many successful productions. Canadian Alternate Theatre Movement was started in Canada more on the ground of international perspective culture and politics than on the national perspective.

There was a transition from national outlook to international outlook. Hence the Alternate Theatre played an important role in bringing global perspective among the Canadians regarding politics and culture. Paul Thompson became the artistic director in 1971 and he added a nationalistic dimension to Garrard’s “Artaudian Views” (global views). Jim Garrard founded the Alternate Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM). It was influenced by the aesthetics of the International Theatre. It was also influenced by the theories of French actor and director, Antonin Artaud. TPM as a trade mark expressed social and political awareness through its collective creations.

Alternate Theatre seeks to demythologize the dramatist, the director and even the individual actor. Theatre Passe Muraille provided an example and often offered
help to other companies across Canada. In general, the plays produced and presented by the Alternate Theatres reflected the west coast American culture (particularly California), use of drugs, dreams and fantasies. American cultural influence, socio-political and psychological conditions become the predominant themes of The Alternate Theatres. During 1970s, the Canadian playwrights were nurtured by Toronto Free Theatre. Among the Alternate Theatres Toronto Free Theatre become popular because of it is free admission to the playwrights until 1974.

Toronto Free Theatre presented the plays of the leading Canadian playwrights, Anne Chislett, David Fennario and George Walker. The playwrights were also strongly supported by the other two alternate in Toronto Theatres, Factory Theatre lab and Tarragon Theatre. Ken Gass, called his Factory Theatre Lab as "The Home of the Canadian Playwrights." David Freeman, Larry Fineberg, Herschel Hardin, Hrant Alianak, Louis Del Grande Michael Hollingsworth, John Palmer, and Bryan wade are the other Canadian playwrights whose plays were presented by the Factory Theatre Lab.

Tarragon Theatre was founded by Bill Glassco. It made its reputation by discovering new Canadian playwrights and producing their works with "imaginative professionalism" in a small theatre that originally seated only one hundred and eighty. Tarragon Theatre made its distinctive identity by not excluding the non-Canadian plays. Tarragon Theatre had more commitment to the Canadian playwrights than the other playwrights of Alternate Theatres. Because it not only received scripts from the dramatists but also developed them according to the contemporary expectation of the audience.
Urjo Kareda, successor of Glassco, became the artistic director of Tarragon Theatre. He established an organization Six Playwrights Unit in 1982 in order to check and develop or modify the scripts of the dramatists. Tarragon Theatre became popular among the audience by presenting David French’s Leaving Home and of the Fields lately James Reaney’s is Donnelly Trilogy, Michel Tremblay's Hosanna and Forever Yours and David Freeman's Creeps and Battering Ram.

Dozens of Canadian playwrights began their careers in the Alternate Theatres in 1970s. Among them three stand out for the quality and durability of their works: David Freeman and George Walker at Factory Theatre Lab and David French at Tarragon Theatre. Regionalism becomes one of the dominating aspects of Canadian drama. It has a lengthy tradition in Canadian drama. It is particularly prominent in the 1970s. It influenced the playwrights David Fennario, Michael Cook, Ken Mitchell and Sharon Pollock and shaped the repertoire both of Major Civic Theatres and Alternates.

Michael Cook’s Colour the Flesh, The Colour of Dust and The Head David Fennarios’s Baiconville, John Murrell's Memoir, Waiting for the Parade and New World, Sharon Pollock’s Blood Relations, and Ken Mitchell's Showdown at Sand Valley are the remarkable plays which are considered to be the epitome of regionalism and cultural importance. The aspect of regionalism provides eternal values to these plays Diane Bessai, the Canadian critic advocates for regionalism. She argues that regionalism should not be regarded as “narrow, limited, parochial, backward, outdated or isolated, rather it is rooted indigenous, shaped by a specific social, cultural and physical milieu” (96).
In 1968 feminist issues entered the Canadian Theatre. Nightwood Theatre was founded in 1979 by Synthia Grant Mary Vingoe, Maureen White and Kim Renders. These dramatists produced plays focusing on music and painting. *Banuta Rubess* and *Pope Joam* produced in 1984 by Nightwood Theatre had distinct feminist perspective. Women playwrights were encouraged and feminist issues became identifiable with their contribution to Canadian Theatre.

Betty Lambert, Judith Thompson, Margaret Hollingsworth, Joanna Class Cam Hubert, Annie Chislett Carrollbolt, and Sharon Pollock are the distinguished women playwrights who brought out a considerable change in Canadian dramatic perspective with feminist issues. In 1953, ‘Holiday Theatre’ was founded in Vancouver. This theatre was the first professional company which performed dramas for children and young people. Now there are dozens of Canadian children’s plays available by the accomplished playwrights, Len Peterson, James Reaney, Carrol Bolt, Paddy Campbell, Rex Deverell, Eric Nicol, Dennis Foon and John Lazarus.

The quality of Canadian Theater for young people has been tested and enhanced by exposure to international activity. The Vancouver International Children’s Festival began in 1978 and it became popular by exposing instrumental in bringing theatre companies from another Canadian city and around the world to Vancouver. During 1980s The Young People’s Theatre founded in 1966 became popular by exposing teenage sexual conflicts. Peter Moss, an artistic director, staged a play *John and Joan Lazarus. Dreaming Duelling* staged at “The Young People’s Theatre” stands an example for the frank exposure of teenage sexual conflicts.

“Green Thumb Theatre” founded in 1975 gained admiration from the Canadian audience by dealing with the current subjects, such as divorce, learning
disabilities, nuclear war and sexual abuse. “Green Thumb Theatre” presented Joe Wiesenfeld’s *Hilary’s Birthday* (Theme divorce). John Lazarus’s *Not so Dumb* (theatre learning disabilities), Colin Thomas’ *One Thousand Cranes* (Nuclear War-theme) and Thomas’s *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* (theme - sexual abuse).

The growth of Dinner Theatres remains one of the commercial theatre activities during 1960s and 1970s. Instant Theatre in Montreal (1965) City stage in Montreal (1972) Lunch Box Theatre (1975) in Calgary and “Northern Light Theatre” in Edmonton (1975) are the Dinner Theatres which invited audience to bring them lunch and they served as lunch time theatres. But Dinner Theatre is significantly different. Stage West-theatre founded in Edmonton in 1975 is one of the well known Dinner Theatres. All the dinner theatres provided full dinner and admission price to the audience (five dollars per person).

Contemporary Canadian Theatre has been further enriched by the consolidation and growth of multicultural companies with a history going back to the major influx of immigrants to Canada. In the early 1900s, Ethnic Theatre groups have established firm identities in many Canadian cities and several new groups had emerged to extend the work of well-established companies such as the Deutsehes Theatre, Theatre of Montreal (1952), The Yiddish Theatre of Montreal. (Founded in 1956) and Winnipeg’s Ukrainian Dramatic Ensemble (1956). Newer companies include Montreal’s Le Maschere (1974), Vanconver Germen Theatre (1971), Jewish Heritage Theatre (1972), Winnipeg’s Mennonite Theatre (1972), Edmonton’s Ukrainian’s Story Theatre for children (1979) and Toronto’s Black Theatre (1973).

These and many other companies belong to the “National Multicultural Theatre Association” founded in 1975 which sponsors a vibrant annual festival of Canadian Multicultural Theatre. Three national journals are devoted to the study

The development of French Canadian theatre had rather been very slow when compared to prose and poetry. Even though there were original dramatic works in Quebec, it was only by the middle of the nineteenth century that theatre (French Canadian Theatre) emerged as a distinctive and dynamic national form. The New Theatre (French Canadian Theatre) was founded in Quebec during 1960s for political and cultural reasons. The early European immigrants brought along with them their European cultural traditions.

The first French Language theatrical production was Marchlescarvot's *Le Theatre De Neptune en la Nouvelie* - France in 1606. There were touring French and American troupes which were highly successful. Some of the professional companies from Europe also began to tour North America. These tours had a tremendous impact on local theatres. In 1902 there were three important professional theatres presenting French plays in Montreal; Theatre Des varieties; The Theatre National and the Theatre Ddes Nouveautes. The French Canadian troupes performed their own variety shows using the language of the working class in Montreal.

The First World War brought an end to the touring companies and sent numerous professional troupes back to Europe. Only a few professional companies returned to Canada after the war. During the first third of the twentieth century there were no productions of any French Canadian plays of quality. Most of what was presented in Montreal as late as the 1930s had been written in French. Most of the ‘Francophone’ plays produced during this period were complacent retelling of popular myths. After 1935 Quebec theatre was divided into two different theatres;
Popular Theatre and Avant-garde Theatre. The Popular Theatre put up what was collected the 'sketches' or humorous reviews.

These sketches and reviews were a mixture of songs, dance and dialogues and it provided an outlet for criticism of government, Church' and Society. The most famous and influential of these reviews began in 1937. In 1932 Emile Legault a Holy Cross priest and professor of French at the college De St Laurent in suburban Montreal set up a theatre company called the Compagnons De St Laurent which presented classical and modern plays. He tried to bring European forms and techniques. He insisted on the importance of cultural and spiritual values.

In course of time his theatre became a centre to learn spiritual and cultural education of the public. During 1930s a number of professional companies were formed whose experimental plays were influenced by surrealism and the French Theater of the Absurd. Some of them also attempted to use songs, placards, masks chorus and other distinctive techniques. During the 1950s and 60s the change in the political and cultural atmosphere made the conditions favourable for the birth of The New Theatre, in Quebec with the production of the plays of Michel Tremblay, Jean Barbeah, Jean Claude, Roland Le Page and other dramatists.

Trembley's use of the language is very significant in Les Belles Soeurs. He develops a language that combines ‘Jouel’ with poetic elements to form a specifically theatrical language. Trembley moves away from realism and turns towards another concept of theatre that combines reality with classical and religious elements. The popularity and success of Tremblay's plays inspired other playwrights like Jean Claude, Jermaih, Jean Barbean, Roland Lepage and other French Canadian dramatists, French Canadian playwrights in general raised
the questions of Nationalism. They focused on the problems and conflicts in the Quebec society.

At the end of 1970 French Canadian playwrights gradually abandoned the nationalistic interpretation of Quebec reality and turned to express their concerns of an individual nature. Though there was a charge in the French Canadian Theatre after the change of rule from French to British, the French Canadian Theatre still manages to survive. French Canadian theatres happen to suffer and face some problems since they are caught between the state and the church. The CBC French Network Radio Canada began to acquaint French Canadian listening audience with the knowledge of theatre and dramatic literature. The first universally popular French Canadian full length play was Gratien Gelina’s Tit-Co. Radio Canada attracted the audience with the great heritage of French drama and paved the way for more Canadian dramatists to practice in this medium.

CBC Radio drama had played a major role since the 1930s in the development of both French and English Canadian drama. Among the French Canadian dramatists Michel Tremblay is considered to be the most influencing dramatist whose plays are innovative and original and known for realism. Tremblay’s plays portray the life of people who belong to all classes in Montreal. Tremblay's plays are set on the plateau of Montreal a working class neighbourhood in east Montreal. It was here that Trembley was born in 1942 and it was from this neighbourhood that he derived the inspiration for his plays. Les Belies Sourers is written in Joyal, a French Canadian slang common to the people living in the eastern part of Montreal. It is a kind of vulgar end crude language, full of curses and hard to the ear. Tremblay believed that "Joual" is the only language that can describe the form life of the working class people in Montreal.
Aboriginal playwrights produced Aborigiance in a recent phenomenon. Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halt Broad* (1973) is considered as a seminal work and it stands as a lonely forerunner of native literature for ten years. The native writers started filling the gap during 1980s in every genre providing insight into Canadian aboriginal culture which rarely glimpsed before. In recent times Canadians generally have become aware of the rich heritage that once existed. Contemporary aboriginal Canadian writers pick up the strands of the rich heritage and produce works which interpret the ancient beliefs and values. Tomson Highway is the most well known Canadian aboriginal playwright.

After ten years a group of playwrights started writing plays. Drew Hayden Taylor, Margo Kane, Monique Mosca and Daniel David Moses are the other aboriginal playwrights who have made outstanding contributions to the field of drama. Almost all the aboriginal playwrights share the common ideas and experiences among themselves. Issues of race, class, colonialism, discrimination, oppression, cultural degradation redefinition of culture, humour, pathos, stark realism, rage, love, joy, optimism, pride, ritual and celebration are the themes and aspects of the dramatic literature of the aboriginal playwrights.

Today the native voices are allowed to speak for themselves. Lenore Keeshing Jobias insisted on the need of safeguarding native culture from political oppression. The themes and directions of aboriginal writings present new dimension for Canadian drama. The ‘stark realism’ of aboriginal history is not overlooked by the native playwrights. Many aboriginal playwrights are grieving over the relentless destruction of native culture and his lasting impact on aboriginal people today.

Drew Hayden Taylor's *Education is Our Right* brings out the agony of the aboriginal people who grieve over the painful loss of cultural values. Native
languages have been so devalued in Canada since the non-natives have little knowledge of them. Native mythology plays an integral part in all aboriginal literary productions either directly or indirectly. Some of the aboriginal playwrights handle the theme of "search for identity" in their plays. Regarding aboriginal literature, drama portrays the aboriginal mythology better than the other genres.

Native people are accurately portrayed with humour and laughter. Native humour is healthy and spontaneous and is often directed at misfortune turned into a joke. It is often used to deal with the pain that inevitably accompanies poverty and marginalization. Unique native humour surfaces on Tomson Highways's writing but it is by no means "dark" humour. Aboriginal playwrights used native humour to stress the importance of cultural values. Aboriginal playwrights keep safe distances from the non-native playwrights.

Through the medium of drama, natives themselves have began to present different concepts of time, different mythologies, a different kind of spirituality, different attitudes towards sexuality, different concepts of relationship among people and a different attitude towards land. Unlike the English Canadian and French Canadian dramatists, the aboriginal playwrights have produced profound effect on the western modes of thinking.

The following research works have been done on Reaney. Margaret Atwood has celebrated the poetic excellence and dramatic merit on the title “Reaney Collected Canadian Literature”. Stane Dragland's “James Reaney's Pulsating Dance is out of form; The Human Elements” analyses Reaney's contribution to Canadian literature. Marina Jones in “The College in Motion: Staging the Document in Reaney's Sticks and Stones” discusses the social, political and religious aspects in the play.
The book *James Reaney and His Works* written by Richard Stingle discusses
the various aspects of Reaney's plays. Alvin A. Lee and James Stuart Reaney
worked on the same title *James Reaney*. These two research works pass impartial
comments on Reaney's works. Brian Parker, James Noonan, Eugene Benson, L. W.
Connolly, Gerald D. Parker, Richard Perkins and Ajay Heble are the major critics on
Reaney.

Dr. T. Jayakumar, has done on analogical study often on the select plays of
James Reaney and George Ryga for his Ph.D. research. In his doctoral thesis, he has
discussed the social milieu end political climate as reflected in the works of James
Reaney and George Ryga. The present research entitled “Theme of Oppression and
Protest” attempts to investigate the social, political, religious communal and
academic issues.

Oppression is one of the most condemnable social evils. It is a force or entity
which victimizes a person or group or nation to be subordinate or submissive. It
causes domination and slavery. The oppressor becomes dominant and the oppressed
victim becomes a slave. Unlimited force of oppression causes protest. The prime
objective of the research is to examine the dramatic vision of James Reaney in terms
of oppression and protest.

Literature is an artistic instrument which plays a vital role in the society.
Every writer is consciously or unconsciously controlled by the society in which he
lives. In the study of literature the social dimension is absolutely indispensable. No
writer or critic can escape from the effect of society. Reaney has a constant tendency
to treat characters and incidents to express his contempt against social injustice,
political imperialism and power domination. His dramatic world reflects
contradictions within society and the individuals. Canadian Literature inherits the 'tradition' of a larger body of world literature in English as well as enjoys the advantages of its marginality. Canadian writers, typically, use their marginal and belated conditions to interrogate quietly and modify virally the traditions they inherits. The multi-lingual, multi-regional and multi-cultural aspects of the Canadian 'mosaic' have assisted the attention of a good number of Indian Scholars, possibly because they themselves are confronted with a similar phenomena in their own land. If Canadians speak more than eighty five different languages, including two major languages, English and French, Indians use twenty two officially accredited languages, brides a large number of dialects and other languages.

The research on select plays of James Reaney investigates the conflicts between groups, between individuals and between nations. The research provides information to understand Reaney’s vision on family, society, politics and academic institutions. The analysis on characters crystallizes the two contrastive forces of oppression and protest. The effect of the operation of the two forces aims to bring out harmony and peace in family on the one hand, and society and academic institutions, on the other.

An attempt has been made to examine Reaney’s literary realism and its utility to family, society and academic institutions. The study of the plays Waccousta!, The Canadian Brothers and The Donnellys Trilogy provides information about the history of Canada. The oppressed individuals become the victims to the oppressors and oppressors fall as the victims to family feud, professional jealousy, political imperialism and power domination.
Every society has its power structure. Power conflict and protest have been the central themes for a majority of writers in Third World Literature. The present research provides scope for the research on the themes like revenge, power conflict, psychological conflict and social vision of James Reaney. An attempt has been made to study oppression in four levels: familial, social, political and academic levels.

The thesis attempts to create awareness among parents against the oppression of children, among the people in the society against social injustice, among the academicians against power domination, and among the nations against political imperialism. All Marxists aspire to study literatures in its social context. They are especially interested in class and social structure. They are specifically attentive to people with power and people with no power. They vehemently attack the social exploitation of individuals or groups.

Racism, gender and economic class consciousness have been some of the dynamisms operative in every society. Most of the writers of Third World Literature raise their voices against power politics which is considered as one of the major social evils. Hence, James Reaney, the Canadian dramatist is not an exception to this kind of power politics. Reaney deals with the power struggle and oppressive forces among the white settlers in the Canadian society.

In the context of this observation, the thesis seeks to study resistance to power and hegemony within the Canadian society. Power is a measure of an entity's ability to control the environment around itself including the behaviour of other entities. The term authority is often used for power. Power can be seen as evil or unjust and it exists in all places in all levels.

Eight plays have been chosen for the present study and the thesis comprises five chapters. Three distinct phases of protest for oppression could be observed in
select plays of James Reaney. There is a struggle in the first phase but it remains inarticulate. When the plot progresses, the struggle becomes articulate in the second phase, and in the third phase, it becomes wild and well pronounced.

Chapter - I, the introductory chapter traces the origin and development of Canadian theatre. National theatre, Agit Prop Theatre, The Theatre Passive Muraille, Holiday Theatre, Professional Theatre, Tarragon Theatre, The Alternate Theatre and Northern Light Theatre are some of the English Canadian theatres. Also, it records Reaney's contribution to the field of Canadian literature. A detailed study is attempted to identify the pioneers of the English Canadian Theatres and dramatists.

Chapter - II entitled “Struggle for Survival” analyses The Donnellys Trilogy (Sticks and Stones, The St. Nicholas Hotel W.M. Donnelly Prop and HandCuffs) in terms of social, political and religious level oppressions. In Sticks and Stones James Donnelly is oppressed by the social, religious and political authorities. The wild force of protest makes James Donnelly a murderer and prisoner for seven years. When the Biddulph society wants the Donnellys to be submissive to it, the Donnellys decide to be Donnellys and resist domination.

In The St. Nicholas Hotel W.M. Donnelly Prop, the Donnelly boys are persecuted by their persecutors. They protest against the oppression. There is a coach race between the Donnelly boys and their enemies. Though the Donnelly boys win the race, Michael Donnelly is brutally murdered by the enemies. In HandCuffs the murdered Donnellys rise from their graves to take revenge on the materialists of the Biddulph society.

Chapter - III entitled “Oppression in Family and Academic Institution” analyses Mask of Childhood. The oppression and loss of freedom of individuals, oppression of children and parents’ exercise of power over their children are
discussed with reference to select plays *The Easter Egg*, *The Killdeer* and *Three Desks*. Eli in *The Killdeer* is exploited by his mother, Madam Fay. Kenneth in *The Easter Egg* is oppressed by his step-mother Bethal and Dr. Jacob Waterman in *Three Desks* is suppressed by Prof. Niles who becomes the Head of the Department of English by cunning methods.

Eli and Kenneth protest against oppression and struggle for self-identity. But Dr. Jacob Waterman struggles for academic identity. Eli and Kenneth restore their self-identity with the help of Polly and Rebecca. But Dr. Jacob Waterman protests against oppression and becomes a murderer by strangulating Niles, the vicious Professor.

Chapter - IV entitled “Struggle for Power” examines *Wacousta!* and its sequel *The Canadian Brothers* in terms of individual and political level oppressions. In *Wacousta!* or *Prophecy*, Reginald Morton, who is promoted into the chief army general, is oppressed by Charles De Haldimer who becomes jealous of Morton’s promotion. With the wild force of protest, Morton takes revenge on Haldimer’s family and grows like Wacousta (The Red Indian).

In *The Canadian Brothers*, the family feud between the two families is traced back to the youth. Phil, the grandson of Wacousta attempts to take revenge on the Canadian brothers Henry and Gerald. Henry and Gerald, the grandsons of Charles De Haldimer are oppressed by the social and political authorities like the Donnellys. They protest against oppression but they die in the war.

This chapter also analyses the political oppression of Canada, imperialistic attitude of America, and the war between Canada and America. Canada protests against America and gets victory in the war. The concluding Chapter sums up all the previous chapters besides giving some solutions for the eradication of the social evil
of oppression. The consequences of the conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed are elaborately presented. The forces of oppression and protest bring out tragedies in *The Donnellys Trilogy*, *Wacousta!* and *The Canadian Brothers*.

The members and the religious authorities of Biddulph, Bethal, Madam Fay, Professor Niles, Charles De Haldimer and the American government share unity among themselves as oppressors. The Donnellys, Kenneth, Eli, Dr. Jacob Watermen, Mr. Edward Durelle, and the Wacousta family stand as the oppressed victims. Based on the analysis of select plays, Reaney's dramatic world remains a charged one with the human follies inherent in humanity and Reaney advocates for the eradication of the social evil through his imaginary historical and living characters.

James Reaney, one of the high counting voices in Canadian Literature was born on September 1, 1926 at Easthope, in Ontario, Canada to James Nesbitt Reaney and Elizabeth Henrietta Crerar. He died on 11.06.2008. Reaney's plays are centered on society, politics, culture, child-centered riving and realism. Reaney, the poet turned dramatist aspires for the eradication of social evils like racial discrimination, religions antagonism, cultural polarity, communal disgrace, academic conflict and political imperialism. As a social reformer he dreams for peace and harmony in Canada in particular and the Universe in general. The study on the select plays *Sticks and Stones, The St. Nicholas Hotel WM Donnelly Prop, Hand Cuffs, The Easter Egg, Three Desks, The Kill Deer, Wacousta!* and *The Canadian Brothers*, reflects the dramatic vision of Reaney and stresses the need for global peace, social harmony and individual freedom. The study of the select plays stresses the fact that Reaney radically questions the power structures and power conflict through his artistic vision. The postcolonial literatures significantly dismantle the power roles and bring together the ‘other’ to the centre.