CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

Canadian Literature is a literary output, developed out of a confluence of the two main traditions in the English language - British and American. As a colony of Britain, Canada inherited their male-centred traditions along with British cultural and literary models. The impulse towards new possibilities inspired the rejection of old tradition and out of this new faith Canada began to distance itself from Britain. Even though it was a difficult task, Canadian literature very soon gained a unique identity of its own transcending cultural and racial barriers. It began to flourish in 1920s and 1930s of this century. Canadian literature asserted its nationalism by developing its independent tradition thereby giving voice to a new perspective.

Drama has always been the neglected form in Canadian literature. In the late eighteenth century, Canadian playwrights, performers and designers were given little encouragement to exercise their art in their own land. Several factors that inhibited the growth of Canadian drama during this period are a sparse population spread over a large geographical area, the lack of a metropolitan centre, the competition of plays and films coming from London and New York, the reticence and inarticulateness of national character and the
opposition from the clergy. Inspite of these factors a few plays of merit have been produced during the early period of its growth. Vincent Massey questions the status of Canadian drama thus, “The Canadian drama, as a matter of fact, at present represents no more than twelve of fifteen produced plays. On this slender foundation, what can be built?”. (197).

The eastern Canada was the battle-ground for English and French hegemony in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period Canadian drama was confined to the military barracks where amateur artists performed well known English and French plays. The British colonial officers encouraged public theatricals as a way of civil stability asserting British cultural and political supremacy. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the indigenous dramatic literature began to develop despite the domination of Canadian theatre by touring French and American companies which presented British, American European classics and romantic plays or melodramas. The poetic dramas of the nineteenth century lacked theatrical vitality and literary originality. Charles Heavy Sege’s Saul (Montreal, 1857), Sarah Curzon’s Laura Second: The Heroine of 1812 (1876) and The Sweet Girl Graduate (1882), Charles Mair’s Tecumseh (Toronto, 1886), which attacks discrimination against women at the University of Toronto, were some of the prominent poetic dramas of the period. John Hunter
Duvar, John Harper, Bliss Carman and W.W. Campbell also wrote plays during the turn of the century. 

Political and social satires became more popular than verse drama during the 1850s. The Female Consistory of Brockville (1865), written under the pseudonym ‘Caroli Candidus’, depicts a small town incident. The play is a sharp attack on hypocrisy in the Presbyterian church. Two more political sketches by Sam Scribble, Dolorsolatio and The King of the Beavers (Montreal, 1865) were popular. Nicholas Flood Davin’s The Fair Grit; or, The Advantages of Coalition (1876) is one of the best political satires in which the son of a Tory and the daughter of a Grit find their love opposed, until the Tory parent sees personal advantage in the marriage. The play is an attack on opportunism in the marriage. The play is an attack on opportunism and corruption in public office. Similarly Fiddle, Faddle and Foozle (1853) written by a native Canadian, John Nickinson, became a popular hit. The most popular playwright of this period was William A. Tremayne. His first play Lost 24 Hours (1895), produced in New York follows the tradition of English melodrama and farce. Alan Filewood comments about the Canadian drama; “As in most western cultures, the institution of the theatre as an art form and industry in Canada legitimize a hierarchy of value”. (48).
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Canada was entering a period of theatrical boom with the opening of numerous theatres across the country. Little Theatre Movement of the early twentieth century was an attempt to reclaim the theatre in Canada from foreign domination and pave the way for the emergence of a truly national expression. Eschewing commercial ideology and expectations, the Little Theatre Movement dedicated itself to innovation and experiment in dramatic production. It differed from commercial theatre in outlook, in method and in values. It succeeded in filling the vacuum caused by the gradual disappearance of mainstream training companies in the 1920s and in meeting the challenge of cinema and radio.

Hart House Theatre was the most prominent of Canada’s Little Theatres, but many other theatres were established across the country including the Ottawa Dramatic League (1913), the Vancouver Little Theatre (1921), the Community Players of Winnipeg (1921), the Montreal Repertory Theatre (1930), the Halifax Theatre Arts Guild (1931) and paved the way for the modern Canadian drama. The stage productions were further encouraged by the decline in foreign touring companies because of increased costs, the popularity of movies and the establishment of competitions like Earl Grey Musical and Dramatic
Competition (1907-11) and the Dominion Drama Festival (1932 - 71). The DDF to a great extent succeeded in giving a national shape to amateur theatre establishing overall standards and providing opportunities for developing at the amateur level, until it was replaced by the non-competitive Theatre Canada in 1971. The Challenge Trophy (1934) and Bessborough Trophy gave the necessary boost to Canadian playwriting.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1932) also nurtured the growth of Canadian drama. During the first thirty years of its existence, it produced about three thousand original Canadian dramas, mostly short ones and also paid for its writers. Lister Sinclair, W.O. Mitchell, Earl Birney, John Coulter, Merril Denison, Timothy Findley and Michael Cook were some of the radio dramatists who also made an impact on the stage. Eugene Benson and William Toye comments, “The immediate post-war years were enlivened by the renewal of various amateur activities at the local and Dominion Drama Festivals, by the establishment of university drama programmes and by the founding of nearly two dozen professionally originated companies”. (303).

Workers Experimental Theatre, an amateur company, made use of the stage for social, economic and political reforms following the trend of similar movements in Europe and the United
States. The most important play of the Workers Theatre is the collectively written *Eight Men speak* (1933) protest against the joining of eight members of the communist party of Canada’s Political Bureau. Other companies committed to staging new Canadian plays were Playwrights Studio Group, founded by the Canadian Women’s Press Club in 1932, and Herman Voaden’s Play Workshop founded in 1934. Voaden’s experiments in dramatic form, often called “symphonic expressionism”, tried to synthesize all the arts in stage production. He began his career with realistic dramas such as *Wilderness: A Play of the North* (1931) and turned to experimenting with his symphonic expressionist dramas such as *Earth Song: A Drama in Rhythmic Prose and Light* (1932), *Hill Land* (1934), *Murder Pattern* (1936) and *Ascend As The Sun* (1942).

Voaden was one of the most inventive contributors to twentieth century Canadian theatre. His research exceeded his grasp but his innovative and unrealistic ideas challenged conventional thinking. The dramatist Gwen Pharis Ringwood who emerged in this period had written more than forty plays during her career, which included three Indian plays, *Lament for Harmonica* (1975), *The Stranger* (1979) and *The Furies* (1982). *Still Stands The House* (1938) was considered to be a classic of Canadian theatre and a realistic
portrayal of spiritual emptiness in the provinces. Another important
dramatist Robertson Davies was an active supporter and participant of
the Dominion Drama Festival. Although his career as a playwright
encompasses the early years of the new professionalism in Canadian
theatre he had written much of his best work for amateur Little
Theatres. His works included At My Heart’s Core (1950), Question
Time (1925) and Brothers In The Black Art (1981).

The large influx of emigrants from Europe after the World
War II provided receptive audience for the growth of arts and theatre
in Canada. The establishment of Stratford Shakespearean Festival in
Toronto in 1959 served as a centre of national culture pride. Dora
Movor Moore’s New Play Society (Toronto) produced forty – seven
new plays between 1946 and 1956 and thus created an important
landmark in the history of Canadian theatre. During the centennial
celebrations in 1967, there were three productions of new Canadian
plays, which suggested something in general about the direction
Canadian theatre was to take in the 1960s and 1970s. John Herbert’s
prison drama, Fortune And Men’s Eyes opened at the Actor’s Play
House in New York city on 23 February 1967. James Reaney’s Colours
In The Dark had its premiere at Stratford’s Avon Theatre and George
Ryga’s The Ecstasy Of Rita Joe was produced by the Vancouver Play
House. In 1960s one can find a whole galaxy of Canadian playwrights which includes such great dramatists as Robertson Davies, James Reaney, John Herbert, David French, David Freeman, George Ryga, Michel Tremblay, Sharon Pollock and a host of others. Thus the post-war scenario witnessed an extraordinary flowering of Canadian drama.

The most significant event in Canada’s cultural life was the establishment of Canada Council by the Government of Canada in 1957 for fostering drama and theatre. The formation of the Canada Council changed the nature of theatre in Canada more than any other single movement and provided a sudden massive influx of government funding for buildings, companies and individuals engaged in the arts. Money was made available for the establishment of a string of professionally managed theatre companies across the country. In 1960 money became available to create Montreal’s bilingual National Theatre School and a chain of major professional theatres. In Winnipeg a merger of the Winnipeg Little Theatre and semi-professional groups, Theatre 77 enabled John Hirsch and Tom Henry to found the Manitoba Theatre Centre, the first of the country’s large regional theatres. Other Theatres included, the Vancouver Playhouse and the Neptune Theatre in Halifax in 1963, the Citadel in Edmonton in 1965, Regina’s Globe in 1966, the Saidye Bronfman
Centres in Montreal in 1967; Theatre Calgary and Theatre New Brunswick in 1968, Toronto’s St. Lawrence centre in 1970 and the National Arts Centre in 1969.

The government subsidy helped to establish a string of professionally managed theatre companies across the country. The emergence of an indigenous professional theatre coincided with the golden age of radio drama and the birth of television drama. (Ex.) Len Peterson’s *One Act Burlap Bags* (1972), W.O.Mitchell’s, *The Devil’s Instrument* (1973) and Patricia Joudry’s *Teach Me How To Cry* (1953).

P.A Abraham observes the regional characteristics of Canadian drama,

> Being a multicultural society, Canada has so many diverse qualities and culture that a national identity could be evolved only in mosaic from every province comes plays representing the characteristics of that area. This regional drama at times strikes a universal chord and it is at such a moment that Canada emerges as a nation. (78).

The Regional Theatres which were established in 1960’s were intended to stimulate the professional development of Canadian theatre in all its aspects. The founding of the Manitoba Theatre centre in 1958 introduced what is called the ‘regional’ theatre movement. Assisted by the Canada Council and funded by local finances, they provided stability, employed a large number of professionals and came
to be seen as established theatres. This Regional Theatre Movement, combined with the wave of nationalism surrounding the centennial year, helped to create an unprecedented increase in the quality and quantity of drama in the late sixties. Notable among the regional dramatists are Sharon Pollock, David French, Michael Cook, Ken Mitchell, George Ryga and Paul Thompson. Mavor Moore has pointed out,

> It may very well be that in time to come the most valuable aspect of Canadian theatre will turn out to be its difference from that of others; that it will offer the world not only an alternative North American art, but a model for greater diversity in general—because we are a really national theatre can ever exist nor should be expected to. (15)

The Alternate Theatre Movement emerged in the 1960's from various aesthetic, cultural and political influences. The Movement with its strong political overtones began in Toronto as a reaction to the traditional attitude of regional theatres. This theatre which opposes established values and conventions rejected the traditional author—actor—director triangle, and represented the use of non-traditional space, a new approach to the audience improvisation and collective creation and gave an emphasis on 'process' rather than 'product'. In
fact, some of the major dramatists like James Reaney, John Herbert and David French were promoted by Alternate Theatre.

The development of a distinctively Canadian Alternate Theatre was prompted more by a changing political climate at home and Canadian’s interest in their history and culture than by American influences. Spurred by celebrations such as the festival of Underground Theatre held in Toronto in 1970 and the financial assistance received from the Local Initiatives Programme and Opportunities for Youth, Alternate Theatre companies multiplied across the country: Vancouver’s New Play Centre (1970) and Tamahnous Theatre (1971), Calgary’s Alberta Theatre projects (1972), Edmonton’s Theatre 3 (1970) and Theatre Network (1975); Saskatoon’s 25 Street Theatre (1971), Halifax’s Pier One (1971), New Foundland’s Mummers Troupe (1972) and Codco (1973) and several in Toronto including Theatre Passe Murraile (1963), Factory Theatre Lab (1970), Tarragon Theatre (1971) and Toronto Free Theatre (1972). While several of Canada’s Alternate Theatres specialized in collective creations and documentaries in which text was not a pre-eminent consideration, other alternatives offered direct encouragement and opportunities to the Canadian playwrights. (Ex) Rick Salutin’s The Farmer’s Revolt
(1975) and Les Canadiens (1977) show documentary and collective characteristics.

One of the distinguishing features of Canadian drama in the sixties of the twentieth century has been its tendency to give a stage voice to the dispossessed: those living outside or on the fringes of Canadian mainstream. Canadian playwrights dealt with the life and problems of aboriginal people. (Ex) George Ryga’s, The Ecstasy Rita Joe, stirred the consciousness of Canadians towards the problem of the native people. The play deals with the martyrdom of an Indian girl, who is forced by city life into crime and prostitution, is finally murdered by a gang of rapists. Ryga’s others plays are Indian, Grass And Wild Strawberries, Captives Of The Faceless Drummer and Sunrise On Sarah.

Another development in the Canadian theatrical scenario is the emergence of Native Playwrights and Native Performing groups. With the tentative attempts by Duke Redbird, George Kenny and Nora Benedict in the 1970s, preparing the way for the development of Native drama, the 80s saw what could be termed the flowering of Native drama. By the late 80s a number of Native theatre companies had sprung up across the country, which gave a fillip to many a Native playwright. Some of the important theatres are Native Earth (Toronto),
Spirit Sing (Vancouver), The Sen Klip Native Theatre Company (B.C) and The Native Theatre School (Toronto). Ida Labillois, playwright, actress and director, has been the moving force in English-speaking Native Theatre in Montreal. Her plays Beads, Feathers and Highrises (1985), and I Hear the Same Drums treat the problems that plague Indians in cities. Linda Griffiths has co-authored with Paul Thomson, Maggie and Pierre (1980) which won the Dora Mavor Moor award. She has also participated in many of Paul Thomson’s collective creations.

Among the Native playwrights, Tomson Highway, Sadie Worn Staff and Margo Kane have already established themselves. Daniel David Moses, Val Dudoward, John McLeod, Darrel Wildcat and Drew Taylor are beginning to be known, while Evan Adams, Lynn Phelonn and Ruby Alex give promise of achievements. Tomson Highway, whose first two productions, The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing were an instant success. The Rez Sisters (1988) tells the story of seven Indian women who go to Toronto to try their luck in the biggest bingo in the world and thereby, they win, fulfil their dreams and desires. But the play is not just a play about Rez Sisters’ simple dreams; it also shows how these native women, in spite of pain and suffering, express a sense of affirmation and reveal a
positive attitude towards life. Dry Lips is a sequel to The Rez Sisters and deals with the life of seven men. While the former depicts a life of affirmation, the latter presents a violent and disturbing world which shocks the readers. This is deliberately intended to make the natives understand the implications of their complacent and compromising attitude to native values which are detrimental to their very existence. Most of the other playwrights have taken up the contemporary social problems facing the Native Canadians, such as alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, family violence, loneliness, rejection as well as modern day environmental issues.

Contemporary Canadian theatre has been further enriched by the growth of multi-cultural companies. With the huge influx of immigrants in Canada, ethnic groups have established firm identities in many Canadian cities like the Yiddish Theatre of Montreal, Vancouver’s German Theatre, Montreal’s Black Theatre Workshop, Winnipeg’s Gujarati East Indian Theatre and Toronto’s Jewish Theatre.

The factors that inhibited the development of Canadian drama were cultural and political, and not climatic. Modern Canadian dramatists have redefined the past in order to say something about the present by reaching back to key historical figures like the Donnellys. But the task of the Canadian writer in formulating a mythology is
hampered by the problem of establishing a Canadian identity which is common to both English and French Canada. Thus the search for mythology or for roots became a major concern in the writings of dramatists like George Ryga and Sharon Pollock.

Conventional Realism was another major form which was very popular during the seventies. (Ex) David Freeman’s *Creeps* (1972) and *Battering Ram* (1972) deal with the physically and psychologically handicapped. By the late 80s a number of native theatre companies had sprung up across the country, which gave a fillip to many native playwrights. Some of the important theatres are Native Earth (Toronto), Spirit Sing (Vancouver), The Son Klip Native Theatre Company and the native Theatre School of the Native playwrights - Tomson Highway, Sadie Worn Staff and Margo Kane have already established themselves.

Ethnic theatres or multi cultural theatres were formed by the immigrants with a desire to preserve the culture of the country. One of the earthiest multicultural theatres is the Ukrainian theatre which progressed through the 1930s and 1940s presented specialized dramatic work. Canadian theatre has moved into the eighties with renewed vigour, confidence and variety. Canada’s increased exposure to theatrical activities outside Canada through international festivals
has helped the Canadian theatre to become more innovative and experimental. The increasing interest in theatre criticism was further encouraged by the Toronto Drama Branch (1972) which offers the annual Chalmers Award for the best Canadian play of the year and also by the Association for Canadian Theatre History (1976) with its literacy organ, Theatre history in Canada. This along with Canadian Theatre Review and Canadian Drama help to disseminate information on national and regional developments in Canadian drama and theatre.

A new aspect of Canadian drama in 1970s is the emergence of a strong feminist voice. A large portion of Canada’s leading dramatists are now women. (Ex.) Carol Bolt’s Red Emma (1974) is an episodic portrait of a feminist while Erika Ritter’s Automatic Pilot (1980) deals with the exploitation of stand up comedienne/writer by the masculine world around her. Margaret Hollingsworth explored psychological relationships in addition to feminist issues in plays like Alli Alli Oh (1977), Mother Country and Ever Loving (1980). The development of feminist theatre has been encouraged by festivals and playwriting competitions. Current feminist theatre is experimental in theme, technique and medium.
Thus we can see that a truly indigenous theatre has developed in Canada during the seventies and the eighties dealing with Canadian politics, history, identity, women’s issues and other cultural problems.

THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST THEATRE/ DRAMA

Canada’s post-colonial search for a cultural self-image and the Canadian women playwright’s gradual discovery of their own voice demand careful analysis. In a wide range of disciplines, feminist thought has wrought a sea-change in Canadian studies. In the late 60’s the feminist critic Showalter, who formed a part of the female literary tradition or subculture observes, “Female literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society”. (12). The political urgency of writing through a feminist consciousness as a way of exploring women’s consciousness about their oppression in the society is an important development of the 20th century. Virginia Woolf complains that nineteenth century literature was dominated by men and she stresses that women both as readers and writers, should develop a passion for women’s writing. She adds that women writers think back through their mothers. This idea is opposed by Penny Farfan, “in dramatic literature of Canada there aren’t many mothers to think
back through”. (57). Farfan points out the absence of women dramatists in Canadian theatrical scene and finds that the younger generation could not fall back on them as their models.

The silence of the women’s voices in the old traditions led feminist historians who were interested in women playwrights, to explore the periods in which they emerged. Many writers tried to study the images of women within plays written by men. (Ex) Kate Millet’s influential book *Sexual Politics* (1970) helps to recognize and interpret the images of women in male literature of the classical period as misogynistic. There are two basic types of image of women portrayed in men’s plays. (1) The plays by men portray a surplus of misogynistic roles commonly identified as the Bitch, the Witch, the Vamp and the Virgin / Goddess. (2) The plays portrayed women as independent, intelligent and even heroic. The ‘woman’ characters are played by male actors in drag, which real women were banned from the stage. Their roles reflected the perspective of the period and the theatrical tradition imposed on women. Showalter observes, “Thus each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex”. (11). Within the paradigm of gender, woman is considered as man’s antithesis, where the man is active in the public sphere and
woman confines herself to the conventional life. Drama by men over the centuries has projected a ‘fictional woman’ and portrayed woman as man wanted to see her. They did not depict the ‘real woman’ in her socio-historical context.

Women have confined themselves to the domestic domain and they were denied admission to the public arena. Women’s focus has been directed to the personal networks of family and friends which did not lend themselves to articulation in the public sphere. There were no extant texts written by women for the stage until the nineteenth century. It produced a rather astounding sense of absence in the classical traditions of the theatre. The approach of the traditional socio-economic histories tends to exhibit the same absence of women as does the literature. The old tradition of literature and the criticism was merely one-sided and biased. The works were interpreted based on male experiences and the findings of the analysis were communicated through male voice. Women were affected by gender discrimination, “In dismissing the substance of women’s lives as insignificant, inappropriate, uninteresting and bland, the theory of gender discrimination finds its most efficient strategy”. (Fraticelli 13). The women who were removed from the public life of the intellect and the soul, confined themselves to the world of domestic labour, child bearing and concomitant sexual duties.
For centuries the theatrical achievements of women remained largely invisible. Women were excluded from the dominant culture and their part in theatre history differed from that of men. But the improvement of the economic condition of women radically altered the role of women in public life. As a further move, women performed within the parameters of their own experience. They struggle to establish an alternative tradition to the standard history of men in theatre.

In 1970s and 1980s, when the Feminist Movement was a potent influence on the awareness of women writers, one can find the emergence of women playwrights on the Canadian dramatic scene. Feminism influenced the lives of women. It “was creative and alive in the 70s and early 80s, when artists had something to say through their art. The theatre of the late 80s was ordinary theatre” (Beauchamp 63). During the 1980s feminist theory has risen to prominence both within the feminist movement and dominant theoretical practices. In theatre feminists applied the social critique of the movement to the organization of theatre practice and the analytical perception of art leading to critical discoveries. They explored the sexualization of women on stage, the omission of women’s narratives, the paucity of strong roles for women and patriarchal power structure affecting women. Feminist critics tried
to reconstruct the history of women in theatre to make women visible, to find their voice by rejecting the suppression of women in the theatre.

The nineteenth century quest for national identity gave impetus to a new feminist consciousness. Canada tried to liberate itself from the yoke of British imperialism and the feminist awareness tried to get recognition in a strongly paternalistic society. This awareness helped to examine the dichotomy between women's private sphere as home maker and the masculine control of the public world. But a greater part of the Canadian society remained unaffected by the thrust of change and clung inexorably to the traditions of the past. This belief in the traditions of the past prevented them to accept the change. The early supporters of women's emancipation were optimistic that the women's contribution to social reform would secure them a life free from patriarchal oppression. In the early seventies due to the fortunate confluence of these factors, occurred a burst of theatrical activities involving women. This period can also be called as the Golden Age of Canadian Theatre Showalter expresses, “the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories”.

(131)
In Canada since 1970 a generation of self-conscious women dramatists have emerged and their political perspectives and experimental approaches to the practice of writing has dramatically changed the course of Canadian drama. The contemporary Canadian women dramatists have been influenced by the Feminist Movement and with their frames of reference of feminist thought and the experimental nature of the feminine in writing, they attempted to explore certain problems confronting women alone along with depicting the social position of women.

*Women surface as playwrights when the conditions are right. When there are changes in the dominant - sexual morality which benefit the social position of women, when a movement for political change includes a feminist component or when revolutions in the theatre itself make it possible for women to seize the time and make their own mark* (Wandor 8).

The women dramatists used their texts to theorize on the status of women in patriarchal culture and to delegitimize male authority by undermining the rigid, constricting forms of its discourse. By attempting to locate the most fertile sites of their own feminine creativity, they have explored the multiple sources of women's oppression and their empowerment in the society. Their artistic vision
attempts to show each writer’s evolving approach to a self-consciously gender-marked writing. The Feminist theatre retrieves women from the misrepresentation she had been subjected to in traditional theatre. The emergence of the women playwrights in the Canadian drama dealt with their struggle to find their identity in the male dominated theatre and find self-fulfilment through their works. Women playwrights work gained more attention and their works appeared not only on the stages but also on library shelves and the course curriculum. Women playwrights who made conflicting attempts to explore women’s experience in writing are firmly grounded in recent feminist analysis of the unequal power relations in patriarchal culture. Their works appeared to step beyond patriarchal boundaries altogether, to speak of and form a utopian future where the lives, needs and creative expression of women would be fully integrated. Kolodny expresses, “the need for all readers, male and female alike, to learn to penetrate the otherwise unfamiliar universes of symbolic action that comprise women’s writings, past and present”. (149).

Bolstered by the conceptual force of feminism and deconstruction these new women’s work attempts to traverse the limitations and thereby try to move women’s writing out of the realm of colonized writing into a space of multiplicity leading to women’s
empowerment. Instead of a conventional theatrical relationship based on the separation of the fictional and the real world or between performers and audience, these feminist shows built a collective persona to which both performer and audience belonged and through which they could communicate.

Feminist playwrights have broken the traditional boundaries of time and have gone beyond realism to reconstruct a feminine space. A desirable feminist project would be one which could enable the voices of all women playwrights to be heard by the audience. An exclusive approach to Canadian women’s playwrighting may actually work towards expanding the corpus of dramatic literature written by women and that can be seen to have a feminist effect, if not an explicitly feminist agenda. To make this effect more apparent, a wider framework needs to be established to understand feminist writing that should be put it into practice.

Feminist theory holds the view that, “like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies” (Foucault -142). The theory of multiple relations in power strategies displaces the conventional notion of power resistance that is occurring between dominators and dominated in the traditional feminist criticism of drama. The Post - Structuralist position calls the power resistance
strategies as ‘relations of domination’, that construct and are constructed by various changing discourses. It is possible for an individual or group to be simultaneously empowered within one discourse and resisting within another. In Post-Structuralist theory, resistance does not signify the necessarily transgress and futile actions of the naturally powerless, rather resistance to power in occupying the same place as power. The feminist post-structuralist concept of gender politics often refers to the discursive deployment known as the essentialist fallacy: that men are superior and women are inferior by nature. Toril Moi observes, “The question about ‘Politics of theory’ has in fact mostly been raised by Post-Structuralists, whose theories have to do with language, discourse and subjectivity”. (180).

The dramatic literature written in English by Canadian women over the past two centuries deals with the power-resistance strategies to advocate the empowerment of women by means of resistance to institutional discourses functioning to serve and install oppressive pro-masculine gender relations. Thus we find that a gender politics of resistance having a feminist – effect can be identified in Canadian women’s playwrighting in English. A Feminist perspective is described as one that “results from the conflict and contradictions between dominant institutionalized definitions of women’s nature and social
role, inherent in contemporary sexual division of labour, the structure of the family, access to work and politics". (Weedon 5).

The study of the chosen playwrights Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock and Margaret Hollingsworth shows that they have focused their attention on the oppression of women in their works by patriarchal power structure. The women in their plays try to liberate themselves from gender constructs and try to assert their rights. The key aspects of Post-Structuralist theoretical framework insist that the power resistance strategies lead to empowerment of women. During the 1970s many feminist critics adopted a female-oriented perspective focusing on literature by women and rejecting the patriarchal stereotypes. The main objective of feminist criticism has always been political and it seeks to expose the patriarchal practices and gender constructs prevailing in the society. Feminist theory is called as a “broad church with a number of co-operating and competing approaches. It is probably more appropriate to talk of feminist theories, rather than Feminist theory”. (Eagleton 2).

Showalter in A Literature Of Their Own classifies nineteenth century women’s writing by dividing it into three phases ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’. The terms ‘feminine’ points out an imitative phase, ‘feminist’ shows the protest or belligerent phase and
'female' indicates women's work towards self-discovery. The playwrights Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock, and Margaret Hollingsworth protest against the patriarchal structure leading to their protagonist's empowerment. Showalter distinguishes between two forms of feminist criticism. The first mode is concerned with women as reader and is labelled 'feminist critique'. The second mode deals with women as writer and Showalter calls this 'gynocritics'. The study of the chosen playwrights would thus fall within the rubric of gyno criticism.

Virginia Woolf in her work *A Room Of One's Own* discusses the influences of patriarchy on women. She comments that the patriarchal power structure does not allow women to enter the world of letters due to its unjust gender assumptions. Simon de Beauvoir gives a brief account of the patriarchal assessment of women down the centuries. In the East and the West, masculinity is centralized by marginalizing feminity. Beauvoir traces this phenomenon to man's tendency "to view the world under the sign of duality" (10). She in *The Second Sex* lashes against patriarchy for having thus inferiorizing women. Thus Feminist literary criticism in general foregrounds the issues of marginalization and gender discrimination faced by women writers.
LITERATURE SURVEY

Dramatic Criticism in Canada is of recent origin. The number of plays written by mainstream dramatists is limited in number when compared to the number of poets and novelists who had appeared on the Canadian literary scene. Inspite of so many limiting factors Canada had witnessed an upsurge in theatrical activities in terms of number of plays written especially by men and women along with their innovative theatrical techniques. Especially after 1960's the number of women playwrights who have appeared in the Canadian theatrical scene has been impressive. Here one could mention a number of playwrights like Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock, Margaret Hollingsworth and Judith Thompson and the critical analysis of their plays that have appeared in leading journals like Canadian Drama, Canadian Literature and Canadian Theatrical Review. There have also appeared a few books exclusively devoted to the development of Canadian Drama from the early times up to the present. English Canadian Theatre by Eugene Benson and L.W. Connolly traces the history of Canadian drama right from the days of colonialism up to the present. This book highlights the contributions made by the Canadian Professional Theatre towards establishing a Canadian theatrical identity. The book titled The Canadian Dramatist Volume Two :
Playwrights of Collective Creation by Diane Bessai again traces the history of the Collective Creation in Canada along with the contribution made to the Collective Theatrical Movement by dramatists like Rick Salutin, John Grey and Linda Griffiths. Contemporary Issues in Canadian Drama edited by Per Brask again contains a number of essays on native drama, drama in British Columbia, Quebec dramas by Robert Lepage and South Asian drama.

The book titled On Stage and Off Stage - English Canadian Drama in Discourse edited by Albert Reiner Glaap and Rolf Althof has a number of essays on individual playwrights like John Herbert, George Walker, Judith Thompson, George Ryga etc and their contribution to the development of Canadian drama. Cynthia Zimmerman’s Playwrighting Women: Female Voices in English Canada traces the growth of Feminist Theatre in Canada along with discussion of the plays written by Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock, Margaret Hollingsworth, Anne Chislett, Erika Ritter, and Judith Thompson in terms of themes and techniques. The book titled Women on the Canadian Stage: The Legacy of Hrotsvit edited by Rita Much again contains a number of articles on the contributions made by women playwrights like Ann-Marie Mac Donald, Judith Thompson and Wendy Lill etc towards the development of Feminist Drama in Canada. Sharon Pollock: Essays on
her works is a collection of essays edited by Anne. F.Nothof, contains essays on Sharon Pollock’s plays from the point of view of racism, revision of history and women’s issues.

The present dissertation makes a departure from the earlier studies attempted so far in that this study concentrates on the female empowerment running as a predominant theme in the plays Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock and Margaret Hollingsworth. The present dissertation groups these three playwrights’ works together under one common theme, the theme of “Female Empowerment” operating at three different levels – politics, family and society.

The present dissertation examines the selected plays of three contemporary Canadian women playwrights Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock and Margaret Hollingsworth in terms of their treatment of women’s issues and shows how the female protagonists in these plays challenge the patriarchal values imposed on them in the realm of politics, family and society and succeed in carving out a path of their own leading to their empowerment. The playwrights chosen for this study began their career in 1970s as professional playwrights with the birth of Alternative Theatre in Canada. They represent the first generation, the first group of Canadian women who succeeded in establishing careers as playwrights. These three playwrights represent
a growing awareness of artistic identity grounded in a firm recognition of space. Their plays articulate the estrangement and disorientation faced by women. In a metaphorical sense, the feminist playwrights are re-writing their scripts by uncovering and interpreting the voices and experiences of women. The women in their plays try to achieve self-realization rooted in feminized space.

During the eighties the second generation of playwrights emerged namely Sally Clark, Colleen Curran, Wendy Lill, Ann-Marie Mac- Donald, John Mac-Leod, Banuta Rubess, Mary Walsh, and Judith Thomson. These women playwrights attempted to write about the dramatizing of the female viewpoint on such women’s issues as pregnancy, motherhood, lesbianism, romance and prostitution: the rewriting of men’s images of women and re-presenting the sex - war from both sides, the challenging of patriarchy and the important task of reviewing and re-visioning history and depicting the story from a female perspective.

**THESIS STRUCTURE**

Chapter I (Introduction) deals with the evolution of English Canadian drama in the twentieth century ushering in a period of theatrical boom witnessed in recent times. This section, besides
highlighting the reasons for the renewed dramatic interest from 1945, resulting in the establishment of number of theatrical activities in Canada, like the growth of the Little Theatre Movement, the establishment of the Canada Council for the promotion of dramatic talents, the burgeoning of the regional theatres, the spread of Alternative Theatre Movement with its strong political overtones, the emergence of Native Playwrights and Native Performing Groups, the establishment of many multicultural and ethnic theatres and lastly the emergence of a strong feminist theatre in Canada. This section also shows, how the Canadian artists, have begun to use true Canadian mythology or subject matter coupled with innovative dramaturgy in their plays. This chapter ends with the rise of the Feminist Theatre Movement in Canada that has succeeded in freeing itself from the clutches of the male-dominated theatre, resulting in the expression of women’s voices and feelings leading to female empowerment witnessed in the Canadian theatrical scene today. The present dissertation examines the selected plays of three contemporary women playwrights Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock and Margaret Hollingsworth in terms of their treatment of women’s issues and shows how the female protagonists in these plays, challenge the patriarchal values imposed on them by the society and succeed in carving out a path of their own
through their aggressive self-will and determination leading to their empowerment.

Chapter II (Carol Bolt : Women in Politics and Female Empowerment) focuses on Carol Bolt’s Red Emma and Shelter and Bolt as a woman and as a politically conscious woman, gives challenging roles to women and brings out women’s issues in her plays. Red Emma deals with the life of a young anarchist and union fighter. Emma who initially surrenders herself to authority in the anarchic movement by repeating Johann Most’s – a revolutionary pamphleteer’s words, later on moves to an independent position to express her own ideas in search of her identity to give voice to feminist perspective. Bolt’s use of episodic scene changes, the interweaving of songs, marches, union hall speeches and direct audience address makes the play effective on the stage. Shelter examines the life of Jory, widow of a former Saskatchewan MP, a totally collapsed victim who decides to run for office herself and becomes a viable, confident, outspoken, politically informed nationalist, to work as an independent person and thereby succeeds in her attempt towards female empowerment. The dramatic style of these plays varies from the flamboyant theatricality of Red Emma to the modified naturalism of Shelter.
Chapter III (Sharon Pollock : Women in Family and Female Empowerment) tries to examine Sharon Pollock’s three plays Blood Relations, Whiskey Six Cadenza and Doc from the point of view of female empowerment. **Blood Relations** examines the life of a female protagonist - Lizzie Borden, trapped by the oppressive social forces and patriarchal control, is denied her due share of wealth and the freedom to choose her husband. She resists patriarchal control by murdering her father and step mother and thereby succeeds in acquiring a female identity and autonomy of her own. **Whiskey Six Cadenza** deals with the life of a young woman Leah, who confronts her authoritarian ‘father’ when her life becomes intolerable. This young eleven year old girl is rescued and exploited sexually by Mr. Big for his own selfish ends. When she exercises her free choice to become independent by choosing her own life to be united with her lover Johny, she really attains a true autonomy and a selfhood though killed by her ‘father’. **Doc** deals with the life of Catherine, the feisty and unconventional daughter fighting her autocratic father and unsupported by her mother who ultimately gives in to his patriarchal authority. While Bob is trapped, Catherine the resourceful daughter succeeds in getting out leading to her assertion of female identity. All the plays of Sharon Pollock besides dealing with social issues show
how the female characters achieve a true state of autonomy and selfhood leading to their empowerment. This chapter also examines the use of Pollock’s dramatic devices like the ‘game play’ device or ‘play with in the play’ technique in Blood Relations, the use of ‘memory play’ structure, resulting in the complicated bending of time and space in Doc.

Chapter IV (Margaret Hollingsworth: Women in Society and Female Empowerment) examines Margaret Hollingsworth’s two plays Islands and Ever Loving to delineate the female character’s search for self discovery leading to female assertion and independence. Islands focuses on the life of the young woman Muriel who rejects the traditional role assigned to women, constructs a female space on her own terms by raising farming operations (for ages carried out by men) in the secluded island and seeks her autonomy and self-realization leading to her acquiring empowerment. Ever Loving deals with the psychological and social displacement experienced by immigrant women and expresses different levels of female experiences distorted by patriarchal conditioning. These female protagonists, by charting out their own independent career, achieve a sense of autonomy leading to their empowerment. The play is structured in an unchronological fashion, leading to breakdown of time and space.
Chapter V (Conclusion) is a summing up of the discussions of the previous chapters to show the emergence of a strong feminist voice in contemporary Canadian drama. As women writers and true Canadian artists Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock, Margaret Hollingsworth in their struggle to ‘decolonize the mind’ have challenged the dominant, male British / American traditions. The protagonists of the three playwrights by rebelling against the patriarchal control, have not only succeeded in creating a space for themselves leading to their empowerment but also offer social criticism by pointing out the social ills of the society. While women protagonists in Carol Bolt’s plays assert their female identity in political sphere, the protagonists of the Sharon Pollock’s plays assert their will and power in the familial sphere. The protagonists of Margaret Hollingsworth’s plays succeed in acquiring female empowerment in society by operating at the individual and psychological spheres.

Thus the three playwrights chosen for the study – Carol Bolt, Sharon Pollock and Margaret Hollingsworth, attempted to write about the imposition of patriarchal values on women and depicted the gender discrimination existed in the realm of politics, family and society. They explore the nature of domains of the female world in the respective sphere and thereby try to reconstruct the lost or suppressed
feelings of female experience. Their plays try to foreground the female experiences in the context of their exclusion from the male-dominated society. The playwrights create a synthesized vision which reflects their feminist aesthetic sense. These women playwrights through their writings try to ‘decolonize’ the mind, and have challenged the old patriarchal tradition. These women playwrights by projecting their vision through the plays enable the protagonists to move out of the silent margins into a vocal celebration of life.