Chapter- V
The Contemporary Phase

Sharon Pollock depicted the Behavioral patterns in her works in a very natural and realistic way. She has showcased various attitudes, angles and dimensions in a very artistic and subtle way. The opposite characteristics and traits are explored in a very natural way that the personalities of the character seem to be in conflict with each other. Famous Personality Theory of Jung also confirms that the Psychological Theory of Personality is based on the principle of conflicts and opposition, as the tensions created by the conflicting elements brings out the gist of life. Without conflict, no energy is produced and no personality is shaped. The conflict between the rational and irrational forces of the psyche never ends and the oppositions and struggle becomes the reality of life. The plays like Blood Relations, Walsh and My name is Lisbeth has shown the natural characterization where the personality of the individual becomes the product and container of its ancestral history and the particular personality of the character is formed due to the cumulative experiences of the past. The foundations of Personality and psyche are archaic, primitive, innate, unconscious and probably universal. Thus Carl Jung’s theory is well justified and supported by the development of the characteristics of the protagonists in Sharon’s plays.
In 1982 Sharon Pollock herself declared that every play has a politic in a personal interview. She has insisted that mostly the people do not understand the politics and it becomes more alarming. Politic means the ideological patterns which later give rise to the characteristics of the personality of an individual, group or a society. Theatre was the only tool for Sharon Pollock to expose the irregularities of the society, to explore the deceptive patterns and to explore the reasons of particular characters to behave in particular manner, under the specific circumstances and conditions. The medium of theatre is utilized, to explain the responsibilities of the people under specific circumstances and conditions. The resultant actions should be justified to the particular tensions and pressure created due to the particular situations. The theatre is used as an instrument of moral inquiry to prepare a better world with the probable best set of values. – Sharon Pollock has treated her subject and the audience in a very pragmatic way and she has quoted that the theatre should not be taken as a classroom where the tactics and strategies are shown and the playwright is not a teacher who dictates the guidelines and rules to live the life. But she insisted that a good play, forces to think about certain issues and some intelligent discussion can be initiated.

Sharon Pollock has been a cultural activist and her works had supported her ideologies and views. She had wanted her audience to understand and evaluate the
issues themselves. In *Blood Relations, Doc* and *Whisky Six Cadenza*, Pollock has experimented with various ‘dramatic engagement techniques’. Much tension and pressure is created in the three plays that audience had to react actively under the tensions. They could not be the passive participant. She has proved that how the author or playwright tries to harness and channelize the emotions, intelligence and moral values of the audience. Audience gets directly influenced by the dramatic action, and they feel a part of the drama and relate with the characters of her plays. Her plays are sometimes the ethical investigation. She has beautifully developed and played with the traits and circumstances of her characters in her plays and justified the roles and responsibilities of each important individual of craftily prepared plays.

The historical play *Walsh* revolves around the story of Major Walsh. Sharon Pollock started researching on the actual issues related to his story and extracted several untold accounts from his life and got annoyed over the historians attitude for hiding the facts. She herself found out the accounts of Walsh, a major of the Northwest Mounted Police who had attempted to prevent Sitting Bull and Sioux from being sent back from Canada to the United States to stand trial for the death of General Custer and his men at the battle of Little Big Horn. While studying and digging out the facts, Pollock found out that series of lies was told to her regarding the issue. The newspapers, diary entries and the government records did not match
to her findings. Sharon Pollock had a strong inclination towards 'the message through work' and she firmly believed that the readers will understand her idea in her works. She tried to rework on the ideological patterns, the structure of the storyline and the characterization. The theatre was a medium to make the people aware about their responsibilities and action individual. The works have tried to portray the characters, with a message of better moral values. She firmly believed that a good work is the one which can compel the readers to think and act for the betterment of society. Sharon Pollock had worked as a cultural activist and through her innovative techniques, she was able to invoke a discussion in her audience about any desired important issue...Her concern that audiences might not recognize, let alone understand, a play’s ideological conclusions is a recurring theme in several interviews. It seems that mal-patterns of behavior are present in society. Several points are gently touched and explored to point out the behavioral attitudes of the characters. Her characterization has been strong enough to draw the attention through all angles.

In the most significant plays like *Blood Relations*, *Walsh* and *Doc*, excellent presentational techniques have been applied to keep the audiences involved and relate with the subject. The actions taken by the characters get perfectly justified and the development of the plot seems very natural and obvious.
Sharon Pollock had a strong fascination for historical data and interpretations and she studied a lot about the history of Walsh, a history play. She had the shocking revelations that the historians did not share the exact historical facts. She carried out her own research in order to develop the content of Walsh and discovered some new information related to the play, *Walsh*. Major Walsh was working with North-West Mounted Police who played crucial role in preventing Sitting Bull and the Sioux to the United States from Canada to attend the legal trial. As the study went deeper, the new facts about the case of Walsh annoyed Sharon Pollock that the historians did not share everything with her. A cluster of lies were caught. She wrote the Walsh with full information available with her and tried to over-burden her by presenting the actual facts to her audience.

The final version included the famous Induction-Scene set in the Klondike in 1898. Through this Induction-Scene Pollock tried to justify the famous question raised during the proceeding that how did Walsh changed from 1873 to 1898? This famous scene of Induction depends on the popular psycho-dramatic techniques of role playing to justify the various contradictions and limitations in Walsh's behavior. Sharon Pollock craftily used the technique of visual repetition and has beautifully presented the inner turbulence of Walsh with its effect of concentration. She has been successful in proving that Walsh himself was a victim of his extra-ordinary traits. The role of induction scene is to direct the plot by historical and
psychological forces in a very powerful way (Theory of Carl-Jung and Sigmund Freud support the same) We play the role more of because of these forces than that of the structure and theme.

Sharon Pollock has beautifully developed and played with the traits and circumstances of her characters in her plays and justifying the roles and responsibilities of each important individual of craftily structured plays. Sharon Pollock is a mature author who loved to play tactfully with the words. A gentle discussion is invoked through her presented characters and her message transferred to society. She has interwoven the scenario of unhealthy relationships, suffocation, identity crisis, emotionally traumatic lives, guilt and confusion in her works. The subject in *Blood Relations* developed the characteristic traits and circumstances of her characters as very justifiable and seemed to the natural outcome of the circumstances. The main character Lisbeth is depicted to be trapped in the circumstances and Para characters due to which she takes the drastic step of killing her step-mother and her own father. The dual killing fetches the sympathy to her instead of repulsion and hatred.

The plays of Sharon Pollock display a perfect panorama of guilt, dreams, suffocated and unhealthy relationships. The suppression and repression are the most common features. The plays deal with the perfect presentation of caricature building and exhibit the problems, schemes and moral issues. *Walsh* is a perfect
example of downfall of moral values, but it fails to develop any strong induction scene and the play moves further in linear direction. In *Walsh* the various sub-themes are valorized by developing the symbolical connections between circumstances and characters. The subjective value is developed with the help of symbols.

This means that the role of Walsh is presented as a victim of Political mechanism. It has been suggested that The United States is a very dangerous, barbaric and non-conducive place where aggression or arrogance is a common view which on the higher side even leads to the death of people. While Britain, is depicted as a place of imperial policy, Byzantine is explained as a very complex powerful and remote distance. Ottawa is a weak pawn of British and American foreign policies. Brockville is symbolized as an emblem of private integrity as the wife of Walsh lives here along with her two daughters. The West is portrayed as the romantic destination of new world hopes and noble savages. The play ends with few scenes of Walsh and his men planning to dress up like Indians to make mock attacks to the trains carrying the Eastern visitors attempting to visit the last best West. Somewhere in the action, Walsh takes off his red tunic and gun which symbolizes the dis-association from the role which had been drastic on him. Unfortunately he is not able to do so as Clarence, at the same time reports about the brutal murder of Sitting Bull, “they shot him twice and put the boots to
him…and little Crow says the soldiers dropped him in pit of lime, so his people couldn’t bury him proper” (Walsh, 1983, 128)

In the background the voice of Sitting Bull is heard, “My cup is broken. It has passed away.” (Walsh, 1983, 129) In the Climax scene we discovered that Walsh is not able to achieve anything which is further depicted by slamming his hands on his desk which is later followed by the blackout.

_The Komagata Maru Incident_ (1976) again had the tracings of historical references and provided the author, an opportunity to research the issue of settlement of the West. The main subject of this work is racism. It is related with the incident of Canadian Government when it prohibited a boat from entering Canada full of Indian immigrants, even though they were permitted to do so British Citizen. This boat remained at harbor for more than two months in Vancouver Harbor while negotiations took place and the Indians starved and faced unhealthy living conditions. Pollock wrote that being a Canadian she realized that the history presented to the outer world was distorted and inadequate, the facts were hidden, She wrote, “Until we recognize our past, we cannot change the future” Pollock laid her own probe to the history and background of this racial issue and wrote the incident as _The Komagata Maru Incident_ as a theatrical inquiry, She herself acknowledged that It was a theatrical impression of her mind instead of a documentary account. The play is presented in basically three significant parts and
encompassed the facts, time and place with certain dramatic strokes. The three main playing areas were inter-related in a number of significant ways. One of the main areas, is a Brothel where two prostitutes, Evy and Sophie, are presented entertaining their lovers – George, an immigrant from Germany and William Hopkinson, an official from Immigration department. Sharon has craftily presented his own inner struggle against racial attitudes. The discrimination was so deep rooted in his mind that in his real life also, he failed to show his unbiased attitude towards the Indian Immigrants trapped in ship. Behind the brothel, there is a runway, where The Master of Ceremonies, The System (T.S.) surrounds the entire brothel, creating the atmosphere of German Carnival. The third part showcases the impression of a cage and the structure of ship. In this section an East Indian woman and her child who represented all the immigrants on the board, which the audience was never able to see. Sharon Pollock kept the characters on stage with natural movements, there were no blackouts and the scenes were sequential, and simultaneous. The audience flowed with the created illusion of drama and real incident, felt involved as jury of the action.

In the Contemporary phase One Tiger to the Hill was again a drama authored by Sharon Pollock, inspired by real-life incidents. The lawyer, main character of the play, just like Walsh got involved into the issue, considering the social responsibility. The plot revolves around an incident of hostage-taking
drama. The main lead got involved on his personal cost. The play is an ideal example of social justice and presents a kind of moral awakening which is rarely seen to the society these days. The play is very significant on psychological aspects of characterization as Chalmers remains in the psychological prison in most of the times. He feels the importance of taking certain moral decisions. He wanted to radicalize himself by adopting the different set of moral assumptions, so that he can set himself free of all psychological and social restrictions. In one of her excellent works, *Generations*... The life of Nurlins living in Alberta for three consecutive generations, the story line includes the details of a land which has been tilled and brought to the service of a prairie family through the generations and it is the land only which epitomizes the conflicts that arise within a family. Nurlin Family in farming for years is again considered as a Case Study where the characterization and their expressions are mapped as per psychological development. The prime issue revolves around a big piece of land. The work is a celebration of the rural values and beliefs, the sincerity and hard work of the folks. It discuss about the sacrifice done by the Elder Eddy, Alfred, his wife Margaret and David. It has beautifully dealt with shallow pursuits of Bonnie and young Eddy which were more self-centric. In this work Pollock applied naturalistic settings for the development of her domestic themes. The family history is presented in a more vivid way. The suggestive interaction of character,
surrounding and conversation establishes a realistic picture of contemporary farming life. The characters of Pollock always have the possibility of transformation with a kind of realism and a mystic energy. She insists that we can always perform freer, less-restricted and like an imaginative and impulsive fellow. This play suggests that the family and the personal identity do not remain same. The socio-economic and psychological factors have a rare control on the character’s desire of murdering anyone. This shocking revelation is proved by her, “I am saying that all of us are capable of murder given the right situation.” Related to the play *My Name is Lisbeth*, She further adds that I don’t say that Lizzie did it. The defense says she is not guilty. The Actress says she’s guilty.” Pollock has wonderfully managed the sympathetic re-construction of Lizzie as an oppressed Victorian Spinster and she is explained as a product and victim of the materialistic bourgeois society which gives no breathing space to the individuality or eccentricity. Lizzie is depicted to struggle with too many complexities,

Lizzie: Did you know Papa killed my birds with ax? He chopped off their heads. Mrs. Borden is uneasy…It’s alright. At first I felt bad, but I feel much better now…If I am a woman of decisions, Mrs. Borden. When I decide to do things, I do them, yes I do. Smiles How many times Papa said---when *Lizzie puts* her mind to a thing, she does it –and I do …It’s always me who puts the slug poison out because they eat all the flowers and you don’t like that, do you? They are bad things, they must die. You see, not all life is precious, is it?
Thus a complex caricature is drawn before the audience in the form of Lizzie Bordon who in her real life got acquitted of the dual murders but several questions related to this case kept raising through all angles, including psychological and legal both.

The value of Sharon Pollock’s works lies in her bold and actual presentation of certain society issues. She has created some very challenging and uncompromising plays and carried them in an innovative way. Now three plays Moving Pictures, End Dream and Angel’s Trumpet again contributed to the powerful theatre out of public and private affairs.

Moving Pictures, was premiered on 10 March 1999 with Calgary’s theatre Junction under the direction of Brian Richmond is based on the life and the autobiography of the actress and silent filmmaker, Nell Shipman, it depicts the actress’ painful struggle to make a meaning of her life, the moments of victim and victory, her success and failure are dramatized. The journey of surviving the ruthless politics and economic monopolies of the emerging Hollywood studio system is presented. Sharon Pollock loved to sketch the psychological images of her characters. Nell shipman feels her trapped by contemporary socio-political powerful structures in the man dominated society. The dramatic tension develops steadily as the characters jockey for control of storytelling process. Sharon charged Nell that she was addicted to the art and she went beyond to cater her own
satisfaction, she sacrificed everything to it. The emotional tug of war continues creeping as the characters like ‘Helen’ or ‘Nell’ attempt to grow over the traumas of the past, The protagonist forces them to face to some harsh truths – that she ignored her mother’s self – sacrifice, her father was neglected by her, she failed to understand the business at her end and put all her money into the making of her signature film Back to God’s Country (1919) Nell exploited the men in her life and got conditioned by the men in Power.

Sharon Pollock wanted her audience and readers to understand the message from this play she said,

Never, Never give up, never stop asking the hard questions never conform to conventions of social, sexual or aesthetic aspects, Never betray your vision and the most significant, never disregard your relationships with others and your place in a complex social context. Pay attention to the voice-overs because they condition, finally, the basis of your humanity, without which you will never be an artist and never deserve to wear the red shoes of art.

Through her above quoted statement she answered her critics that why she opted to work on the auto-biography of Nell Shipman at such peak stage of her career. End Dream was again an example of her literary instincts, she chose this as a watershed moment as that of Komagata Maru Incident and Walsh. The story is picked up from a very sensational and politically charged incident of Vancouver when a young Scots nursemaid, Janet Smith (1902-24) was found dead in the
basement of her rich employer’s home. The Chinese houseboy became the suspect. The rhetoric of racism dominated much of the debate surrounding the case, the hatred against the Asians was criticized and the journalists, lawyers, Police all went wary to find out the reason and story behind her death. The newspaper went wild and the rumors of drug dealing, drunken parties, rape and torture filled the headlines. The people do not still know that whether it was a suicide or a murder. Sharon Pollock dug out her own detail that there was some drug dealing people involved in this case. Unfortunately despite several investigations and legal trials, a host of conflicting details, a number of possible suspects, and a potential motive, the clues were destroyed and covered up.

The play opened up for its world premiere on 8 March 2000 in its Calgary theatre. Sharon Pollock herself admitted that she wanted to do something bigger than the mystery. Dreamscape technique was applied to explain the storyline. Sharon has involved all her sound effects, lightening and all the stage performing techniques including space, which is one of the crucial segments of Sharon Pollock’s works. Through all Dream-scaping the audience is allowed to enter to the mental status of Janet’s troubled mind, her confusion and her fear after understanding the existence of dreadful existence of corruption and drug mafia.
Sharon Pollock attempted to express her concern on racial attitude and the failure of our Police, lawyer and media segments that despite having such intense investigations and legal system, evidences and proofs, Janet Smith death mystery could not be disclosed. The murderer remained out of the law.

Thus *End Dream* again remained a case study of the death of Janet Smith that who killed her and what are the present social, legal and moral issues to be raised in the society.

*Angel’s Trumpet* is another one of the most recent works of Sharon Pollock. The title has been derived from the name of a flower; it is a large trumpet shaped flower. The story is inspired of the real story Fitzgerald couple. Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald’s favorite flower was Angel Trumpet, though she painted beautiful lilies, Peonies also. The spectacular couple had a horrifying life; Zelda Fitzgerald had turned to an ugly alcoholic who had transformed from a beautiful young lady to a mature woman who had tired partying and of the role assigned to her by Scott, of wife, mother, muse, and raw material for his fiction. Zelda had tried to create her own identity through her artistic expressions, first through writing small stories (which her husband signed and released in his own name) sometimes with ballet dance and finally through paintings. The stress in the lives of celebrity couple finally precipitated in the form of serious instability and breakdown.
Zelda got treated in several hospitals and psychiatric clinics and when her own novel *Save me from Waltz* got published. There were severe protests from her husband publically and then she altered and cut several piece of writings from her novel and in this process she was losing control of patience, so she called a press conference in the presence of her doctor and secretary. The personal drama of the couple became public and this rose a storm among the so called elite and creative class of women for self-identity and own space.

Sharon Pollock’s works keep analyzing the interpersonal relationships of the characters, the suffocation and stress in the environment. The power struggle and the constant fight for self-identity remains the core issues of her protagonists. She had been constantly raising her issues regarding Authority, Power and about the institution of marriage. Her quest for the historical data and issues gave her enough footage to frame the plots revolving human nature, its psyche and the interpersonal conflicts.

The last three plays of her Contemporary phase have confirmed the nature and stature of Sharon Pollock. They are the perfect examples of her commitment towards genuine work. In her works she had been exploring the subjects of human psyche –the motivation, survival; independence, creativity etc are probed deeper and deeper. The innovation and experimentation is carried out with a free hand. In Pollock’s world we are all Potential story tellers and we have a responsibility
towards ourselves and our surroundings. In the final analysis Pollock is very optimistic in her message; she has been an inspiring source of sunny attitudes and system of life. She always encourage us never to give up our struggle against the odd things of life and survival like Eddie in Fair Liberty’s call…a better world is always awaiting, we just require a leap of faith and an act of imagination. She inspires us to put on the red shoes (symbol of change) and dance to the new tunes of life.