Chapter I

Introduction

Canada is marked by a profound diversity in its culture — different races of people speaking several languages populate its varied landscapes. This multiculturalism has often been referred by eminent Indian scholars as a 'mosaic', 'a salad bowl', a 'rainbow of people' indicating that co-existence has been the order of Canadian lifelong before the independence of the country in 1867. The colour-changing maple leaf, which is the centre piece of the Canadian flag perhaps, suggests this colourful arena of people. The inhabitants denote a peace-loving species, advocating an existence in harmony and promoting a multicultural society.

General Perspectives:

The indigenous multiplicity of Canada is mainly due to the fact that it is basically a land of immigrants. The native population — the Inuit of the Arctic coast along with such multiracial global communities as South-Asian Canadians, Japanese Canadians, African - Caribbean Canadians, native Indian tribes of Canada, French Canadians and English Canadians who have settled there constitute the 'mosaic' of multiculturalism.

The experiences of this varied group is as diversified as is human reaction to specific situations; that is, although similar situations have affected this diversified group, the resultant effect it has had on them is invariably so very different that it is in fact astounding. This feature is truly a distinguishing factor in Canadian Literature.

Canadian Literature has a distinct flavour as it is essentially an amalgamation of diversified races, cultures and languages. It may be divided into several parts somewhat like a tree with many great roots. One root is deeply buried in the culture of France. One other is deeply buried in the traditions of English. Other roots are firmly set in European, Asian and African cultures as there have been migrants from these nations ever since
there was a 'Canada'. This mosaic culture of Canada defies any generalisation. This is because the rich experience of the people it houses is as varied and unified as can be. Moreover it is not bound or restricted by any popular ideology as people here have learnt to transform, adapt and evolve a new culture based on compatibility. It is this compatible culture of Canada that is responsible for the different motifs of its literature.

Canada's literature is a reflection of several parts of Canadian life. Nature is one such part. Canadian authors often emphasise the effects of climate and geography in the life and work of their people. Canada's rugged mountains, roaming rivers and harsh winters contrast sharply with its rich valleys, peaceful lakes and mild summers. Frontier life is another part of Canada's experience that appears frequently in its literature. The steady westward march across Canada, the continuing battles to win a living on the sea, the constant challenge to expand borders have been favourite themes. Yet another part of Canadian experience draws attention to Canada's position in the world—Canada's unique geographical and historical situation makes it difficult to discuss the term 'Canadian Literature'. However, questions like "Is there a Canadian identity?" or "Is there a Canadian Literature at all?" have dissolved and the verdict remains stating authentically that there is a literature and an identity which is distinctly Canadian. Furthermore, Canadian Literature has redefined the term “Canada” (a ca nada meant 'nothing here') giving the term its Cree word ka-kanata which translates as 'the land that is clean' thus placing it appropriately on the literary map of the world (Wiebe 39).

Canadian Literature has incorporated the aspirations, the feelings the reactions the response, the expectations, the insecurities, the complacencies and reflections of its ethnic inhabitants. It has furthermore suggested their hopes, strengths, jubilations, faith and fantasies. It has also incorporated the humanistic attitudes and the indomitable steadfastness of this varied group. This has rendered a heady and hearty flavour to
Canadian Literature and in this it surpasses the setback brought by a predominantly strong and indigenous cultural heritage.

The country of Canada was demarcated after the American War of Independence (1775). It has been colonised since; first by the French then by the British. Later it become independent in the year 1867. At this stage the colonial cringe it suffered was marked and the literature produced then leaned heavily towards exerting a national identity. Apart from this, the Canadians also felt the need to prove to the world that they were a people with a definite voice and that there indeed was a Canadian Literature.

Literary endeavour in Canada had to surpass many hurdles—fierce wilderness, political diversities, immigration problems, epidemic diseases and slavery to name a few. Canadians have come a long way since. The mammoth of literature produced, coupled with the true sentiments of its people has, no doubt, proved its worth. Today, Canadian Literature is a separate entity, firmly rooted in Canadian soil with many luscious branches (depicting the genres of fiction, drama and poetry) bearing ripe succulent fruits, to be relished by the discerning reader.

Placed amidst such a multiple background it is only natural that man's inherent need to search for and exert a distinct identity tops the priority list of Canadians too. In literature this finds expression through many ways and can be achieved by many broad categories.

The strong conviction that a literary work's relation to society is inextricable deepens its importance and establishes that no art is created in vacuum. The social milieu, which forms the backdrop of any given literary work, is responsible too for provoking and influencing the artists' or the authors' response. The extent of the provocation corresponds directly to its impact on the author and the resultant work is an amalgamation of these forces - this fruit of labour is invariably entwined in a certain
milieu, born of a certain race and is a reaction to specific and particular incidents or general conditions.

Magdalene Redekop discusses the connection between the story of a nation and the stories written by its citizens in her article "Canadian Literary Criticism and the Idea of a National Literature." She states that although such a connection may be highly problematic, it does exist—"At its best, Canadian Literature is characterized by a readiness to change with its authors and readers. This kind of resilient strength is nowhere more evident than in a willingness to laugh at the impossibility of fixed solutions" (263).

Literature, which is generally defined as a mirror to society, has acquired a greater role in Canada. In the article "Multiculturalism and Canadian Literary Diaspora," Jameela Begum has stated that:

> Literature came to serve the purpose of establishing a national identity and a national unity. It was used to define "who we are" and "where we are". Literature became a product of society and accordingly a portrait, not of its external features, but of its very nature and mode of operation and existence, its process. Taken together they constitute a psychological, geographical and sociological portrait of Canada . . . (5)

Literature has thus helped the Canadians realise their dream of establishing their rightful existence and exerting an identity, distinctly their own.

W.H.New introduces Canadian Literature by focussing on Canada's diverse culture—"how marked by politics and religion, how influenced by differences of language and geography . . . but how fascinated by the mysterious and the uncertain, it is” (1). Tracing it's history, New vests importance on the works of Franz Boaz and Edward Sapir. He remarks that their novice stems from the fact that they helped preserve native
cultures and patterns of talk thereby opening up new vistas for understanding the
significance of custom and belief (4). Thereafter, Indian mythology was reinterpreted
(15); explorer's impressions of their expeditions were documented in journals (50); the
past was reinvented in historical romances (95); nature stories were passionately related
(114) and moral causes were dissected for sound judgements (111).

The 1920s ushered in many marked changes too. Social changes—with national
identity already established, people began to think about cultural identity in political
terms. This replaced the racial definition of culture that had so governed the later years of
the nineteenth century. Civil laws were altered bestowing more rights upon women.
Technological changes—advancements in science led to reduction of distances between
places and increased connectivity in the vast expanse of Canada. Literary changes—real
life subjects like adultery, bigamy, votary rights began to be addressed; lyrical tributes
were produced and man's affinity to land was eulogised (New 137-42).

During the 1920s writers were influenced by the Canadian experience of World
War I and the Great Depression. They emerged realist and were critical of Canadian
values and institutions. Arthur J.M Smith and Francis Reginald Scott who formed part of
the Montreal Group responded to this way of nationalism. They sought to depict truth,
created awareness of Canadian roots, guarded against excessive British or American
influence and depicted concern over social issues. The most remarkable feature was that
they opened avenues for literary criticism falsifying notions that suggested that Canadians
were incapable of self-criticism (New 146).

Since World War II, there has been a heightened sense of national consciousness.
Canadian Literature gained in volume, became experimental in nature and universal in
theme. Humanistic concerns revealed the sensitive sides of poets such as Dorothy
Livesay; materialistic Canadian society was criticized and middle-class morality was
attacked in poems by Raymond Souster, Louis Dudek and Irving Layton. Margaret Atwood pointed to poetic self-realization and brought a feminist outlook to literature while Ethel Wilson's wrote of women's self-fulfillment. International recognition flowed in by way of awards and prizes for Canadian Literature.

Canadian Literature was primarily a production of upper and middle class Canadians until the early twentieth century, when class perspectives were brought into Canada's Literature. Immigrant motifs were thus introduced and this provided an alternate to the theme of survival and the response to the wilderness and enormity of the country. In much Canadian writing, the nature-culture clash came to be strongly expressed. Daphne Marlatt, Alexander Mackenzie, Susanna Moodie are principal exponents for whom the dichotomy had deeper connections. Another motif is the savage-civilised contrast which was the outcome of improved material comforts of life (building of railroads and industrialisation). The aborigine-white settler binary was yet another theme which underwent revisions. The shift in primary focus, giving the Native's point of view brought by Aboriginal writers as Beatrice Culleton, Tom King and Tomson Highway threw light from yet another perspective (Davey 23-27).

In the year 1928 the plan to establish a national broadcasting system came underway and led to a fruitful culmination of the establishment of the Canadian Broadcasting System in 1936. This was instrumental in changing literary forms. The Depression of the 1930s emphasised the need for solutions to erase the national disparities. Therefore, the literature of this period is marked by a strong political tinge. The British Commonwealth that came into being in 1931 brought equality of status to all its members. This was instrumental in making Canada, nationally, a topical literary subject. Literary histories, anthologies and journals were published. Herman Voaden,
A.M. Klein and Sinclair Ross stand out as primary exponents of this period (New 137, 152-53).

Post World War II saw an influx of biographies, memoirs and historical commentaries. During the years 1960-85 new agencies supported the cause of Canadian writing. This ushered in the establishment of Canadian Literature courses in educational institutions. Many serious writers appeared on the scene—Arthur Hailey, Erika Ritter and Rohinton Mistry, to name a few. Literary growth soon paved the way for criticism and its principal exponent, Northrop Frye, indirectly influenced many writers—Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel and Robertson Davies amongst them. In the decades that followed, contemporary writers have both reached beyond national borders seeking parallels and responded directly to traditions inside their own country. Thus the influence of their literary inheritance, multiculturalism and innovative experiments in technique led to the upsurge of indigenous writing (New 296).

Dick Harrison commenting on the nature of Canadian Literature, in his article "The Search for an Authentic Voice in Canadian Literature" says, "While explicit immigrant themes are no longer prominent, ours is still an immigrant literature, an expression of a transplanted culture" (63). According to Harrison, defining a national literature, in such a country as Canada, is prone to be problematic as the existence of two official languages tends to confine literary studies either to one or the other. At the same time, he says, establishing an identity in this bilingual, multi-cultural and pluralistic society is negated because of the absence of basic norms to gauge the characteristics (71). Related themes such as 'alienation from the land' and 'condition of doubleness' recur as a condition. Sinclair Ross' As For Me And My House is an excellent illustration of the former (73). Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel, Margaret Atwood's Surfacing, Robertson Davies' Fifth Business are a few examples for the latter (76).
Portrayal of nature in literature is far from the ordinary in Canada. This Northern nation has been an enigma revealing many different facets of its nature to explorers, colonisers and citizens themselves. Its austere beauty, frightful cold, bountiful resources of raw materials, vast barrenness, harsh northern climate, myriad rivers have captured the imaginations of writers and inspired both fiction and non-fiction writers.

Sherril Grace in her article "North" quotes Stephen Leacock who explains the appeal of the North, thus, "To all of us here, the vast unknown country of the North, reaching away to the polar seas, supplies a peculiar mental background"(819). Examples of nature portrayals in Anglophone literature in fiction are Howard O’ Hagan's *Tay John*, Margaret Atwood's *The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Poetic examples are Henry Beissel's *Cantos North*, Al Purdy's *North of Summer*, J. Michael Yaet's *Great Bear Lakes, Meditations*. In theatre, Wendy Lill's *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, Mansel Robinson's *Colonial Tongues* and Judith Thompson's *Sled* are good examples.

Donna Palmateer Pennee in her article "Gender and Gender Relations" looks at gender relation in Canadian Literature as "both representations of past and present social arrangements and possibilities for changing those arrangements." Gender lines seep into every theme be it, racial, social, economical, or political. According to Pennee the centrality they lend makes people identify as individuals and collectives. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Women of the World*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* epitomise this theme (New 426).

Feminist writings closely follow gender issues as both are inter-related. Feminism brings in the female perspective; being practical and theoretical, it illuminates possibilities for the future. In Canada, contemporary feminist theatre in English emerged in the early 1970s. Playwrights Anne Herbert, Aviva Ravel, Margaret Hollingsworth, Erika Ritter and Sharon Pollock offer fresh perspectives on feminist-related issues.
In Canada, as in every country, the development of drama has followed a similar pattern. National drama has lagged behind other genres of literary expressions. P.A. Abraham attributes various reasons, relating to historical, geographical and cultural factors for this. According to him a play needs an assured concentrated appeal and is dependent on popular acceptance. In Canada, the population is small and scattered. Secondly, the ethnicity of the Canadian population, with its variety of origins, traditions and languages, made this genre not very popular. Another important characteristic is the regional nature of Canadian drama. Canada is divided into several provinces and separated by natural barriers. Therefore localization of drama becomes inevitable. The divisive bicultural aspect of English and French Canada is yet another reason cited for the slow growth of Canadian drama (77-78). However, it is ironically, these very same factors that have contributed to the richness of contemporary Canadian drama.

A survey of the conventional genre of drama in Canada is bifurcated into Anglophone and Francophone writing. The former refer to writings in the English language and has its roots in the traditions of England, while the latter refers to writings in French and reflects the deeply buried culture of France. Rudy Wiebe comments on the plurality of Canadian culture thus:

English - French Canada exists politically because of the French-speaking people of Quebec who are still a quarter of its population; its unique pluralistic culture has been shaped by the ethnic variety of its people, who have come from every area of the world, and by its creative artists, primarily written and painted into existence so that the state of Canada is no longer in doubt. (21)

The nature of the study undertaken however, restricts focus on the lush Anglophone writing. What merits mention is that in their battle for presidency and in their
contestations for attention, Anglophone and Francophone writing in drama complement one another.

The Canadian Encyclopedia authenticates that theatre, on the North American continent, existed much before the invasion of foreign settlers, in the form of the mimetic art of the Indian and Inuit ceremonials. The first significant theatrical event was, however, organized by European explorers (French to be specific). 'Le Theatre de Neptune' was performed before an audience which included some Amerindians in 1606. This performance was followed by the propagation plays of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century. These plays were intended to edify their students as well as to indoctrinate the natives.

The eighteenth century, although restricted to producing plays that could be called Canadian only by virtue of their subject matter, promised a rapid growth for English Canadian drama. In the nineteenth century the mushrooming of theatres in all regions of the country gave an impetus to the development of indigenous dramatic literature ("Theatre, English Language").

Canadian theatre faced overwhelming competition from foreign touring companies - American and British - thus retarding the development of indigenous professional theatre. In 1911 critic Bernard K. Sandwell bemoaned the annexation of the Canadian stage by US theatre magnates. The British Canadian Theatrical Organisation Society attempted to balance this by organising tours of British actors. Even the Trans-Canada Theatre Society which was Canadian owned was purported to organize tours by foreign companies. The reins of the country's theatrical had, therefore, to be picked up by the amateurs, who, in the first half of the 20th century, sought to provide a national self-consciousness. This set the trend for expansion and within a decade, with the help of
festivals and competitions, drama took roots in Canadian soil and attained professionalism (“Theatre, English Language”).

Governor General Earl Grey, created the Earl-Grey Musical and Dramatic Competition in 1907 and encouraged the development of stage plays. The Earl Grey Competition was short lived and had only a minimal effect on Canadian theatre. It, however, set the trend for theatrical self expression. Vincent Massey, a theatre pioneer prophesied the need of Canadian theatres for the production of Canadian drama. Soon this took shape in the form of the founding of Hart House Theatre. The founding of the Hart House Theatre by Vincent Massey in 1919 brought several dramatists to the forefront. As was expected this gave a boost to Canadian plays—two volumes of *Canadian Plays from Hart House* were brought out. Merrill Denison's Published Collection, *The Unheroic North* merits attention. This set the momentum ticking and the 1920s and 30s witnessed a boom in national productions by amateur theatre groups. The establishment of a nation wide competition, the Dominion Drama Festival in 1932 helped amateur theatre to find its roots in Canadian soil. The DDF encouraged the writing and production of Canadian plays through special tropics and cash prizes. The Play Workshop (1934-1936) set by Herman Voaden was yet another of such a kind. Voedan sought to merge the Canadian landscape with theatrical influences and created a synaesthetic form he called "symphonic expressionism". His endeavour resulted in increasing governmental support for theatre. This was simultaneous with the playwrights studio group (Wasserman 10).

Another significant boost for Canadian drama, around the 1920s and 40s came from the segment of radio play broadcasting. It encouraged the production of original scripts. Although this period was short-lived as it was soon over shadowed with the coming of television, radio drama still prevailed as an alternate to live stage. The next milestone in the development of Canadian drama was set by the Shakespearean
TheatreFestival in Stratford, Ontario, which, under the auspices of Robertson Davies, gave Canada a "new vision of the theatre" (Wasserman 11). The Stratford Festival was instrumental in helping Canadian drama gain international importance but with its tendency to devour smaller productions it occupied a controversial place in the Canadian theatrical pantheon.

The founding of the Canada Council in 1957 brought in government funding and provided the necessary infrastructure for the development of Canadian drama. A network of regional theatres spread across Canada: Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1958, Vancouver's Play House and Halifax's Neptune in 1963, Edmonton's Citadel in 1965 and Regina's Globe in 1966 (Wasserman 13). The lament of Nathan Cohen in 1959 that the theatre, as something of value to a discerning public could never be counted in the life of English–language Canada, soon gave way to the assurance of David Peacock, in 1973. He stated that “Canadian theatre is no longer just an idea, a case of wishful thinking or, a dream. As of now it's an established fact” (Ripley 212).

John Ripley in his essay on “Drama and Theatre” has explained the “evolution” or “explosion” of Canadian theatre since 1960 as a “cultural miracle.” He has cited the contributing factors as the financial and artistic success of Stratford; the impact of television drama; the funding by the Canadian Council; a middle class with increased leisure and cash, the challenge to cultural expression and the national self-confidence (212).

Although dramatic writing between 1960-73 brought no masterpieces to the forefront, Canadian theatre, existed; and in this nurtured a potential for growth. A majority of the plays produced suffered due to their short comings in terms of insensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of language, lack of structure, stilted dialogues, poor
handling of the psychology of characters and failure to tap the potential of the actors (Ripley 219).

The first stage in the development of drama can be attributed to the contributions of Collective Creative Presentations. *The Mechanic* (1965), *Chicago’70* (1970), *Mr. Bones* (1972), and *Richard Third Time* (1973) belong to this category. Moving on to plays written exclusively by the dramatist, Arthur Murphy, James Reaney, Ann Henry, John Thomas McDonough, Sharon Pollock, and John Coulter need to be mentioned (Ripley 220).

English-Canadian drama was born in precisely the year 1967 as it marked the beginning of performances by Canadian dramatists in professional theatres. The introduction to *Modern Canadian Plays*, states that “the play that had finally touched the nerve of English Canada” was George Ryga’s, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (Wasserman 14). According to Wasserman it was a landmark production reverberating the nation's collective consciousness. He quotes Jamie Portman to reiterate that the implications that this play brought was dramatic:

This was an indigenous Canadian drama that surfaced and succeeded at a time when indigenous Canadian drama was generally considered to be an aberration. It was a play of merit, worthy of production in any Canadian theatre. It prompted an awareness of the existence of other plays potentially worthy of production. It provided resounding evidence that it was not necessary for any Canadian theatre to rely solely on imported fare. With the arrival of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, Canadian plays ceased to be a rarity in English-speaking Canada. Companies dedicated to the production of new Canadian drama sprang up, and in doing so nurtured the further growth of playwriting activity. Canada’s regional theatres—some of them
grudgingly —found themselves forced to take the Canadian playwright seriously for the first time. (15)

The play was marked strongly by social consciousness thus setting the trend for further such productions. John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* also was of a similar vein. Therefore Wasserman says that "Modern Canadian drama was born out of an amalgam of the new consciousness of the age - social, political and aesthetic - with the new Canadian self-consciousness" (15).

Revitalising of Canadian theatre attained a spectacular result and by the year 1972 the country had a network of regional theatres, and a National Arts Centre (Ottawa); moreover alternative theatres had also begun to establish themselves. This directly led to the production of new Canadian plays (Parker 186).

Brian Parker and Cynthia Zimmerman in their essay ' Theatrical and Drama' decipher six distinct levels of professional theatre in the period 1972-84 — dinner and cabaret theatre (the oldest commercial theatre) which existed simply for a profit; the national theatres which showcased Canadian acting and production skills but not Canadian drama; a network of regional theatres, the most notable achievement was that they were non-commercial establishments. They were designed to serve specific communities and were dependent on subsidy. The Canadian Government encouraged these theatres to favour Canadian plays thus paving the way for original Canadian scripts to appear on regional main stages; the alternate theatres that risked experimentation in context and content; the fringe theatres, "the main seedbeds for new talent" (188) and the theatre for young audiences, designed for children. According to the authors only three amongst the six main levels of professional theatre – the alternates, the fringe and the theatre for young audiences have committed themselves to Canadian Writers (186-89).
Proliferation of theatres became the trend around the 1970s when the country saw the establishment of many theatres from coast to coast. Theatre New Brunswick, Fredericton; Theatre Neptune, Halifax; Centaur, Montreal; Tarragon, Toronto; Toronto Free Theatre, Toronto; Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg; Globe Regina; Citadel Complex, Edmonton; Theatre Calgary, Calgary; Alberta Theatre projects, Calgary; Phoenix, Edmonton; Vancouver Playhouse, British Columbia are a few well known theatres that have worked towards recognition of Canadian talent. Thus the first half of the 20th century that saw the development of a thinning amateur theatre movement which acted as an active ingredient in rustling up theatre activity.

Ken Gass in his essay “There is a Canadian Theatre,” makes an encouraging comment on the market for new plays in Canada—"Now there is one!" He further comments that the Canadian playwright is no longer a rare species and that the production pattern of regional theatres has changed to augment staging of new Canadian plays. He states “. . . today in every region there are numerous theatres whose mandate includes the production of original plays” (255).

In the “Conclusion” of English Canadian Theatre 1765-1826, Yashdip S.Bains has presented the view that apart from other factors the survival of drama is directly linked to the construction of theatres, thus:

For a Canadian, the task of building a theatre meant not so much the writing of plays and training of actors as the erection of physical facilities which could be rented or leased by amateurs or visiting professionals. By building the Theatre Royal in 1825, the merchants of Montreal set an example which was to be emulated by Canadians for the next one hundred and forty years. The availability of these facilities ensured that a town
would have a relatively well-constructed theatre, but their absence would spell disaster. (191-92)

Bains proposes to correct the earlier negative attitudes toward the quality of theatre in Canada by giving a concise picture of the struggle for theatre in small colonial settlements by stressing the initiative of settlers to strengthen cultural institutions and by proclaiming the active work of amateurs and professionals. The Government of Canada created The Canada Council and other such agencies in the 1950s to fund artistic talent; The annual Shakespeare Festival at Stratford and the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-lake in Ontario furthered this cause. He states that commendable progress has been made in the building of theatres despite the prevalence of a pro-British stance, slow economic development and isolated locations (6-8).

The environment of most towns having a theatre was somewhat hospitable to the Canadian dramatist and more plays began to appear. This reflected the presence of a large interested Canadian audience, professionals, performers, producers etc. The Canadian Encyclopedia authenticates that although Canada had produced a first generation of post-war dramatists, writers such as Robertson Davies, John Herbert, James Nichol, Len Peterson, George Ryga, John Coulter, Patricia Joudry, W.O.Mitchell, Lister Sinclair and Wilfred Watson, Canadian plays were seldom seen on regional stages. The formation of Playwrights Coop (now Playwrights Canada) made a formative influence upon the publication of new works. So the 1970s saw hundreds of plays printed and produced in Canada. This was a landmark in Canadian theatre history as it marked the making of professional theatre in Canada making it, "more truly Canadian" (Theatre, English language).

Amongst the second wave, the writers were Carol Bolt, Peter Colley, Micheal Cook, Rex Deverell, David Freeman, David French, Joanna Glass, Sharon Pollock, Erika
Ritter and James Reaney. The atmosphere was most congenial, as in the year 1972, over
ten percentage of the Canadian population attended live theatre annually (1808).
Furthermore the awards (Dora Mavor Moore Awards, Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards)
introduced in the 1980s to boost the production of Canadian plays acted as an impetus.
The battle to perform in Canadian stages had been won. This brought the third wave of
dramatists to light --- Anne Chislett, James De Felica, Tomson Highway, Judith
Thompson, George F. Walker, Linda Griffith, Margaret Hollingsworth and Charles Tidler.
The list has become inexhaustive with new playwrights appearing on the scene ever so
often.

Theatre and drama have become part of urban history, with Canada working
towards establishing an individual identity, thereby proclaiming its independent status
and nationalism. The proof for quantitative production lies in the publication of *The
Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre* in 1976, in the celebration of the 25th
anniversaries of Manitoba Theatre Centre and The Canadian Council. Canada's
professional theatre had thus transformed and has made commendable progress since.

The emergence of a strong feminist voice is yet another important aspect of
drama. Canada has produced several women playwrights of merit, the omission of whom
might cripple the progress made by drama. Mary Humphrey Balridge, Carol Bolt, Joanna
Glass, Linda Griffith, Margaret Hollingsworth, Patricia Joudry, Betty Lambert, Sharon
Pollock, Aviva Ravel, Erika Ritter, Beverly Simons, Judith Thompson are a few who
occupy the forefront as playwrights projecting views from a women's point of view.
Thematical, women have not restricted themselves in discussing or offering
perspectives in familial issues but have displayed a profound range. They have projected
women's issues and have taken men into hitherto untrodden places and have thus
facilitated astounding perspectives in seemingly familiar situations.
Torment of an abortion (*Angel Makers*), condition of hostels for deserted and beaten wives (*Dream Girls*), mental torture suffered on seduction (*Jennie's Story*), inequalities faced by women in all walks of life (*Big X and Little Y*) and about general women's experiences have enriched the rich tapestry of drama by weaving feminine emotions into it. Carol Bolt's *Red Emma*, Diane Grant's *What Glorious Times They Had* and Wendy Hill's *The Fighting Days* are listed as actual pioneers of the women's movement. Women's plays also produced comedy --- Mary Humphrey Baldridge's *Bridge of the Gorilla*, Erika Ritter's *Splits* and Patricia Joudry's *A Very Modest Orgy*.

Margaret Hollingsworth is another consistent writer who probes relationships among women. In *Operators* she stresses the need for non-manipulative friendship between women. The most striking women's play of the period was Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations* which examines the predicament of an acquitted convict (Parker and Zimmerman 196-97).

It is a commonly accepted fact that female cultural perspectives transcend patriarchal and socio-economic boundaries. Sharon Pollock, (1935-) a celebrated and respected Canadian playwright, is a multi-faceted theatre personality, a champion of social issues and a cultural activist. She has written several plays for theatre, this being inclusive of a number of children's plays. She has also worked under various other categories such as actor, director, administrator and playwriting instructor. She has also written over a dozen radio scripts. Although she is a native of Calgary, her plays defy categorization as regional, since they deal with issues that have a social concern. This testifies to her being a recipient of several awards for her plays. The Governor General's Award for *Blood Relations* in 1981 and for *Doc* in 1984, the Alberta Writer's Guild Award in 1985 and the Canada Australian Literary Award in 1987 have established her
status as a major playwright. She remains a committed playwright with an enthusiasm to keep alive the theatre tradition in Canada.

Sharon Pollock began to write plays in 1971, winning the Alberta Playwriting Competition for her first work, A Compulsory Option, an unpublished stage play. Her passion for theatre is reflected in her donning different roles, both on stage and off stage, and in her involvement up to her founding the Garry Theatre in Calgary to produce populist plays for the community.

The Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia website comments on Sharon Pollock's writing as "intelligent, provocative and innovative". It states that "she continues to experiment with structure to explore controversial issues, and to care passionately about Canadian Theatre". It also lists her words as told to Lisa Wilton of the Calgary Sun (March 2000):

I had worked as an actor and a director and at that time (early 1970s) it seems weird to say it, but I had hardly heard of any Canadian plays. Practically speaking, there were no Canadian plays except for one about Louis Riel which kind of meant you were always putting on a voice. I thought, ‘Think of all the stories Canada has to tell. Why are there no plays in which my own reality can be a part of? That moved me towards thinking that if nobody else is going to write them, then I'm going to. It was as simple as that.

Pollock has been awarded four honorary doctorates. Kirsty Johnston reinforces the importance of Pollock's works thus, “Her work and art has been the subject of much academic study and public discourse”. Her plays have been performed on stages across Canada, the United States, Australia and Japan. Even in this day and age her earlier plays, Blood Relations, One Tiger to a Hill and Generations, remain relevant. They portray
continued challenges, illustrate ambiguous truths and project complex realities. The
author cites Anne Nothof’s point that although Pollock's play *Generations* has been less
produced across Canada, it has been extremely popular with drama students generally. It
is interesting to note that a particular production of the play has been performed in India
at a university whose community included many farming families. This goes to prove that
Pollock's themes have a universal understanding and that people from all over are able to
identify with the play both contextually and structurally.

Beverly Raspovich has described Pollock as "a passionate playwright" who
"understands theatre as an art form as well as a political and social force" in the
*Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. She is also described as an innovative and
controversial theatre personality. Her high principles refuse to permit compromises in
theatrical quality and she has always stood her ground against what she perceived to be
the conservatism of theatre. Her protests against cultural authorities who have equated
literary quality with elitist European and American art forms loudly proclaim her longing
to realize national artistic expression, and to reflect on Canadian history and realities.

As a playwright Sharon Pollock has several published stage plays to her credit.
*Walsh* premiered in 1973 and brought to focus a forgotten episode in Canadian history.
The play has for its theme the manipulative traits of the Government and points to the
debacle at Little Big Horn. *The Komagata Maru Incident* that followed closely in 1976
again projected another probably forgotten facet in history. Racism is her main objective
here as she dramatizes the incident of 1914 when the Japanese freighter Komagata Maru
carrying three hundred odd potential immigrants from Punjab in India was refused
permission to anchor at Vancouver.

In her next work *Blood Relations* 1980, she changes her focus to female
repression. The subject of the acquittal of Lizzie Borden, the new England woman, who
in 1892 was charged with the axe murders of her father and step-mother is dealt with, from the viewpoint of the acquitted. Therefore there is a certain ambiguity that shrouds the play.

In *Generations* 1980, the favourite theme of Canadian affinity to the land is handled with great fascination. The attitudes of three generations towards their family homestead is analysed through the characters of Old Eddy, Alfred, Young Eddy and David. *One Tiger to a Hill* 1980 is a hostage-taking prison drama. Pollock sensitizes the audience by throwing light on the atrocities of the maximum security prison. The futility of the hostage is presented as a foil to social justice and social responsibilities. *Whiskey Six Cadenza* of 1983 inquires into the lives of people in the dark collieries of Blaimore. Pollock examines individual lives and shows how dreams of, freedom and self-expression are shattered ending in pathetic catastrophe.

*Doc* 1984, is a kaleidoscope of memory where Catherine confronts her father, the Doc of the title to settle scores. *Fair Liberty's Call* 1995, has the backdrop of Maritime Canada in 1784. The difference in loyalties between family members to the English crown is expounded with a view to expose and educates audience against venerating Loyalist heroes in exile. Her last three plays *Moving Pictures*, 1999; *End Dream*, 2000; and *Angel's Trumpet*, 2001 focus on women struggling to pursue their artistic talents and ambitions within male-dominated environment. These three plays portray the lives of determined, strong-willed women and appraise the price they pay for their passionate pursuit of individual interest.

Pollock is of the conviction that “You don't always come from the place you're born in. The trick is to recognize it” (O'Grady 23). She has never favoured the term 'Canadian', probably because of the danger of confinement that the term accords. She maintains that universality of productions make plays acquire newer and deeper
meanings. Denis Salter cites Malcom Page's apt designation of Pollock, on the web, as a “committed playwright” and elucidates Pollock's primary purpose in writing for the stage:

She is using the theatre to expose deception, to probe the origins of behaviour, to weigh the truth of a character or situation, and to determine people's responsibilities for their actions. She is using the theatre, in other words, as an instrument of moral inquiry, to project (though seldom to achieve) a better world with a better set of values by which to live.

Salter goes on to cite Pollock who has herself stated in *Canadian Playwrights: A Biographical Guide* edited by Don Rubin and Alison Cramer-Byng, “The theatre is not a classroom, the playwright is not a class teacher, but a good play should provoke intelligent discussion about an issue or theme pertinent to our lives”. These words encapsulate the crux of Pollock's ideologies and have sown the seed for the germination of this dissertation. The dissertation seeks to establish that a Sharon Pollock play cannot but be an instrument of ethical investigation. It establishes that audiences, riding on the boat of her modified presentational techniques, find themselves compelled into an active involvement leading them to revise opinions and become retrospective as well as introspective. It also seeks to furnish that her ideologies and conviction are free from any prejudiced notions, transcending narrow borders and divisions set up by the complexities of human life. The charm of Sharon Pollock lies herein that she projects her reasoning in a very subtle and genuine manner; more importantly without any reformist overtones.

**Objective of the Study:**

The dissertation purports to state with a definite clarity that the playwright is able to achieve her ends, which is, to sensitize people to the atrocities happening around them, with a certain ease only because her plays are devoid of the arrogance of authoritative reformist overtures. They are rich in conveying strong social messages without forcibly
thrusting the views of the playwright they are able to bring about a noticeable change in the audience. Pollock draws her audience to empathize and see for themselves the relative pros and cons of decisions taken and acted upon in the past by fellow human beings, thus paving the way to betterment of society and eventually to the betterment of mankind.

**Significance of the Study:**

Are Pollock's ideologies and convictions free from prejudiced notions? Do they transcend narrow borders and divisions set up by man? These questions remain to be answered after a reading of her plays. Pollock's noble cause of furthering the betterment of mankind too, remains to be dissected. After all is this not the ultimate pursuit of mankind? Will not all branches of study, innovative technologies, discoveries and inventions that make man proud become futile if man's actions are not laced with humanitarianism?

This dissertation is thus entitled "Social Conscientiousness in Select Plays of Sharon Pollock - A Study.” Eight of Pollock's plays have been dissected to project the quest for an idealistic society. The repertoire presents ordinary people and common problems but the responses it intends to draw are extraordinary. A few of them have drawn elaborately from the facts of history and have been transmuted for particular reasons. Problematising issues of home, location, nationality and devising methods of humanism to resolve, make these plays endearing, enduring and eternal.

Walsh (1973) belongs to Pollock's early plays and categorizes her historical and political interests. The Komagata Maru Incident (1976) closely follows the former play in that it also revisits another past incident. Blood Relations, Generations and One Tiger to a Hill that premiered in 1980 have family politics, private life and social responsibility as their primary themes respectively. Whiskey Six Cadenza (1983) affords an inquiry into life in the dark collieries where no permanent definitions can be demarcated. Doc (1984)
fashioned along Pollock's childhood, questions priorities of her kith and kin. *Fair Liberty's Call* (1995) again revisits the past to dismantle popular myths perpetuated by history and seeks to establish justice.

*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word ‘social’ as “of or pertaining to society or its organization as a natural or ordinary condition of human life”. It also defines the same as, "concerned with or interested in the constitution of society and the problems and issues presented by this” (2:2930). The definition for ‘conscience’ is given as, “internal conviction; mental recognition or acknowledgement; a moral sense of right or wrong; a sense of responsibility felt for public or private actions, motives etc; the faculty or principle that leads to the approval of right thought or action and condemnation of wrong” (1:483). Further, it has listed the term ‘social conscience’ under the caption, special collocations and combining (form) thus, "a sense of responsibility for or preoccupation with the problems and injustices of society" (2:2930).

The knowledge of the existence of a moral conscience is basic to every society which has a strong commitment towards social ethics. Sharon Pollock kindles this faculty through her plays by mixing them as a concoction, carefully prepared with the right proportions of entertainment and consciousness. She sets the ball of social dynamics rolling. Her plays are suggestive and openly invite people to effect commendable changes. The changes that are to be brought about are to arise spontaneously from one's inward knowledge or inmost thought; therefore they become voluntary actions of love and have the advantage of withstanding the tests of time.

The concept of social conscientiousness has not been elusive in literature. It has been in existence from the distant past and has been handled deftly by renowned writers the world over. The difference lies in the priorities of the times as with the individual mannerisms in handling strongly felt points of tensions. Although separated by centuries
and thousands of nautical miles, the concern for social engineering has brought an affinity in perspective to such playwrights as Tagore, Ibsen, Miller and Shaw.

**Review of Related Works:**

Rabindranath Tagore (1881-1941), India's most celebrated writer, rightly acclaimed by Gandhiji as 'the Great Sentinel' continues to be read, taught and discussed because the issues that his works unravel are pertinent to the literary and social concerns of our times. His play, *Mukta-Dhara* (1922) extols the splendor and magnitude of man's spirit, which in the person of Prince Abhijit refuses to be subjugated but rebels against the callousness of his own country for social justice. The construction of the dam, the political subjugation, subjection of the people of Shiv-Tarai, the motive of the king's tyranny are all beaten against the martyrdom of the Yuvaraja who extols the principles of non-violence to bring about common good.

In *An Enemy of the People* (1882), Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), a Norwegian playwright of high repute, addresses the irrational tendencies of the masses and the hypocritical, corrupt nature of the political system that they support. It is the story of one brave man's struggle to do the right thing and speak the truth in the face of extreme social intolerance. In a scathing rebuttal of both Victorian notion of community and principles of democracy, Dr.Stockmann proclaims that in the matter of right and strong, the individual is stronger to the multitude. It is strange that even the townspeople fail to appreciate his concern and acknowledge the truth that the waters of the bath constructed to boost tourism are contaminated. What ensues embosses that "...the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone".

According to major American dramatist Arthur Miller (1915-2005), a playwright's objective should be to merge surfaces of experiences with cogent emotional life and philosophically or socially meaningful themes so as to make known the public
significance of private engagements. He finds it imperative that the conscience be
tempered by humility and informed by reason; otherwise its degeneration into a savagely
destructive faculty was imminent. Miller infuses the idea that the proper business of
serious drama is to demonstrate the disastrous results of the absence of comradeship and
communication.

In *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Miller illustrates that frustration arises out of the
loss of the American dream of fulfillment. He combines social awareness with a
searching concern for his characters' inner lives. He often relates the family to a larger
context ---society and the world. Miller frequently explains that a serious treatment of a
human being must encompass the society that surrounds him as the force that has
conditioned his thoughts, culture, attitudes and values. This theme of responsibility for
one's actions, not only to one's family but also to the larger world, appears in his *All My
Sons* (1947) also.

Similar to these conscientious writers, Sharon Pollock too contributes her mite to
the common cause of creating awareness, with a view to bringing about healthy changes.
In the process the remarkable unfolding of Canadian expertise in writing, is expounded.
The research undertaken will bring this contemporary and eminent playwright to the
forefront, thus thwarting the general notion of people who tend to consider Margaret
Atwood as the saving grace of Canada. Moreover the predicament of human beings has
always been a perennial source of interest to readers, so, analyzing and studying female
perspectives in contemporary Canadian' society will give a different insight into human
experiences. The study will also project that Pollock's idealistic commitment is to social
justice and purports to determine the 'success' of such socially committed playwrights, for
actual success lies not so much in other criteria as in implementing a change for the
better.
Aims and Method:

The thesis is structurally divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the novice to Canadian Literature, provides the socio-economic background, traces the development of theatre, places the selected playwright against her contemporaries and gives the statement of the thesis topic. The term ‘social-conscientiousness’ is defined and a few plays with similar themes are discussed. The purpose of the dissertation is to highlight that universal humanism is present in Sharon Pollock’s plays. It also seeks to establish that creating conscientiousness is mandatory for societal betterment. Within the limited canvas available for expounding the thesis, this thematic study confines itself to eight of her plays.

The second chapter deals with three plays of Sharon Pollock that have a historical background. History is revisited with a purpose to expose henceforth unknown and hidden truths. *Walsh, The Komagata Maru Incident*, and *Fair Liberty’s Call* are replete with the scars of past incidents. The wounds may have heal with the passage of time, but they have left scars. These remain to remind posterity of the wrongs done in the past. It is Pollock's endeavour to kindle these with the objective of furnishing that the past cannot be extricated from the present and also to present the plea that past experiences should teach posterity to be sensitive towards human suffering.

Chapter III concentrates on the connotations of family politics and its relativity to societal wellbeing. *Generations, Doc*, and *Blood Relations* have the similarity of a familial back drop. Pollock explores the indisputable dictum that contended family produce respectable citizens. In order to arrive at the fact Pollock explores individual prerogatives. Her concern for a peaceful environment reflected through a dissection of the behavioral patterns of individual members in a family. The relativity of family bonding to communal togetherness is focused and its importance is furnished.
The penultimate chapter discusses *One Tiger to a Hill* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and establishes that both of these have sobriety etched on them. The normal activities that make up life are weighed against insensitive newspaper accounts of the happenings. Pollock's objective is to highlight that betterment of society is impossible unless people involve themselves in social activities that affect the common man. Societal betterment rests heavily on the extent of the responsibility shouldered by an individual.

The fifth, concluding chapter presents the vision and the vivid theatrical techniques employed by the playwright to best bring out the desired response to her plays. Her deft employment of style and presentational adaptations go to prove that they produce the maximum effect on our collective consciousness.

It is the culmination which establishes with a definite conviction and with valid supporting details that the literary works discussed in the body of the thesis convey strong social messages. The ultimate feature that distinguishes Pollock’s works from that of other equally established playwrights is stated and the delight of reading a Pollock play is highlighted.
References


