

Chapter VI

Summing up

Text is a linear medium like a film. It covers the whole issues of everything that is intended to show. This study is an attempt to reveal Shields' familial and societal sensibility, her moral vision and narrative –virtuosity. This study of the selected novels of Carol Shields reveals that she is a novelist of ordinary and common people. She has densely colored her works with certain postmodern nuances and cherished dealing with ordinary but mandatory familial subject of modern times. Shields herself said: "I love domesticity, I love the idea of home and I think that is, in the end what serious novels are about, the search for home" (CLC 285,Vol.193). These lines simply prove how Shields is conscious of her themes. She unearthed the invisible power battle of men and women in family and in their vocation through her novels. Women's familial relationship and her own life have been examined by Shields. This study has confined itself to the domestic lives of women who are prepared to accustom to the familial ways laid by patriarchy. Shields has floated many creative women in her works. Almost all of Shields' heroines are writers whose careers are hugely been hindered by the dominance of men at various levels and stages of life. Across the global level and especially in the North American context, and also in Canada, women's position is not alike. Women's family, society and their career are varied across the global level because they largely depend upon their education, achievement, opportunity and their comprehension of world. But the ground reality is that even though they perform multiple tasks, women have been addressed with simple dictum: "After all they are women". Apart from

Shields, contemporary Canadian women writers such as Margaret Atwood and others too have addressed similar concerns in their novels.

Shields' *Small Ceremonies* speaks of the concerns of a very small family comprising husband and wife, son and daughter, and other minor characters whose lives are narrated. Martin Gill and Judith Gill, an academic couple went to England on a sabbatical leave along with their two children, Meredith aged sixteen and Richard, aged twelve. The couple stayed in England and brought back the culture of Sunday high tea. In this novel, Shields, to the greater extent, espoused the perennial issues like love, hate, affection, concern, care, familial duty, and friendship, commitment to writing, hypocrisy and plagiarism. Judith, the heroine of the novel, after having experienced her familial responsibility and her writing career, with a sense of frustration says, 'Tears stood like pin pricks in the backs of my eyes, I was prepared to cry over anything'. Thief is a thief is a thief', (SC-107). The tasks of Judith are: one is to become a novelist; the other one is to be a wife to Martin, and to keep herself to be good house. These conflicting tasks create a disturbing notion to her inner consciousness. The phrase 'girding my Loins occurred to me', I would need to arm myself for all I walk still weak hardly able to look a meal without flopping back into bed.... (SC 28) The statement clearly stated that Judith was under the entrapment of unavoidable familial responsibility. The term home is often used by Shields's characters believing that women expressed their personalities through their houses. Judith's husband Martin, an expert in Miltonic studies is always busy with his innovative approach in presenting Milton's Paradise Lost in a pictorial form. Spaldings, a writer in Birmingham Flat had seven unsuccessful and unpublished novels. Judith borrows the plot from the most original of Spalding's novels but it was clandestinely reused again by her novelist friend Furlong Eberhart in his

commercially successful and critically acclaimed book *Graven Images*. The love between Richard and Anita Spalding has become the central force of this novel. Nancy and Paul Krantz, Roger and Ruthie, Ben and Polly Stanley are the other couples introduced in this novel. The broken marital relationship between John Spalding and Isabel has also been presented. This novel ends with a marriage between Roger and Ruthie and with a gift of a baby boy Roger St. Pierre Martin Ramsay.

The novel ends with the couple visiting restaurant where they saw some people busy with their cups of wine. Martin and Judith saw that they were shaking hands and exchanging through their fluttering fingers a few final remarks. Upon seeing the couple, Judith remembers; 'I am watching. My own life will never enough for me' (SC 179). Thus Judith believes that the world has lot to see and do. Her husband Martin was merely watching. Judith says it as, 'I am watching them, and out of the corner of eye I see Martin watching – not them- but me. He has no need of the bizarre. What he need is something infinitely more complex: what he needs is my possession of that need' (SC 179). The understanding between the couple is clearly depicted. And Judith's dominant role in the institution of the family and society is also highlighted.

Thus the novel throws light on how women are important for men to see the world. The lines are: 'I am translator to him, reporter of visions he can't see for himself' (SC 179).

Swann: A Mystery is a story about the mysterious and shocking death of a poet and the novel has been classified into five different chapters. Each chapter of the novel is titled with the names of the prominent characters. Also, in this novel, Shields

has freely employed narrative techniques. Women's subjection to and their relegation to ignominy and oppression has also been broadly prevalent in this novel. In Sarah's words, women have been knitting for centuries, and probably they've been constructing in their heads, lines of poetry that never got down. Mary Swann, a poet's life in *Swann: A Mystery* remained perilous and precarious at the hands of her cynical husband. Agnus Swann-the husband, a dirt poor farmer brutally murdered his wife. As Mary was vociferous reader, she often paid visits to the library which provoked her husband. He gave her little time and often got angry. After the poet was bludgeoned to death with an axe, her body had been dumped in a Silo. The Poet's life and fame was discovered posthumously by eminent scholars like Sarah Maloney, Morton Jimroy, Rose Hindmarch, Frederic Cruzzi and others. Morton Jimroy, a biographer explored Mary Swann's life and observed as 'the power of these recurring seasons overwhelms the fragile scurrying of that obscure farm wife, Mary Swann, and what is left is a record of dullness and drudgery and a heart breaking absence of celebrations, a life lived; as the saying goes in the avoidance of biography' (SAM 110). Dr. Sarah Maloney, a mermaid researcher, Morton Jimroy, a biographer, Rose Hindmarch, the librarian, Frederic Cruzzi, the editor and others were attending the Swann symposium in the final scene. The unexpected and sudden twists and turns had put every expectation of the readers upside down. It was through one of such tapestries, Shields had simply brought her readers to the new light of understanding. Shields brings to the public domain, the sad reality of how women are crucified by the iron hands of their husbands. Wife beating is also seen in this novel. When Swann's poetry was tampered mistakenly by Hilde, the infuriated Cruzzi, her husband, threw his wife off violently with the whole force of his body. It is said as 'he threw her off violently and arm reached out, his arm, striking her at the

side of her neck, they both know it was a blow delivered without restraint. I sent her talking to the floor, slipping on the fish guts, out of control, banding her jaw on the edge of the table as she went down' (SAM 220). Shields' narrative shift had been interwoven with multiple voices. The technique of polyphony has been subtly employed to hone the character's voice and vision in the novel. In *Swann: A Mystery*, with all these characters, Shields tries to establish a nexus between society and family. Because the characters she had created in her novel, are born out of her keen observation of an ordinary class of the society. According to Shields, the 'man - woman relationship', is deeply cemented with the perfect understanding of the soul but not with the sensuous ecstasy of body. The simple life of Mary Swann is finally discovered with the multiple voices, suggestions, findings, assumptions, interpretations, with the multiple scholarly presentations at the symposium in the end.

The Stone Diaries is based on Daisy's experience. In the novel, Shields documents a very ordinary life of an individual of the society. This is the story which can go much close to the heart of the readers, with life-like matters. Mercy was unaware of her own pregnancy and gave birth to a female baby Daisy in a kitchen. And the baby was raised under the care of the neighbor Clarentine Flett. Daisy was not emotionally attached to her father Cuyler Goodwill as he got married to Maria Faraci. Cuyler showed much interest in building a monument for his dead wife Mercy, born in Stone Wall, a place meant for orphans. Though, it is a customary method of storytelling, Shields narrates the story in such a way that the text reduces the proximity between readers and the novel.

Daisy, as a protagonist plays a vital role in this novel. She was married to Harold A. Hoad, who was always under the influence of alcohol. The couple embarked on honey moon where Harold in an inebriated mood fell down from the

window of the hotel and died. After eight long years of widowhood, Daisy again married Baker Flett who was a professor of Botany. Daisy raised three children Alice, Warren, Joan and became a columnist under the pen name Mrs. Green Thumb. This job as a columnist was short lived. She lost her job to a man called Pinky Fulham. And there was another dominant female character Clarentine Flett, who was estranged from her husband. Despite the estrangement, she had taken care of Mercy. More importantly, Clarentine's help during her maternal twinges was unparalleled. She brought up her daughter in her home.

Ultimately, *The Stone Diaries* is the story of an incomplete and frustrating attempt by a woman trying to reconstruct her long life. Daisy's final confession, 'I am not at Peace' (TSD 361), shows her frustration in trying to share her life story. The perpetual issues of domestic life relationship of men - women, mother - daughter, father- daughter, family and familial sentiments, friendship, neighbors, marital life, children, struggling for survival, all have been thickly merged in the novel.

The Republic of Love speaks of fragmented love, consolation and reconciliation with some compromises at the end. The novel has its own quest for love that exorbitantly found in every drive of the author. The story begins with the hero's name Tom, a radio anchor of Niteline, who had three divorces. The heroine Fay McLeod, a mermaid researcher, teacher, translator and gregarious by nature, had three broken marriages with Nelo Marino, Willy Gifford, and Peter Knightly, and had been working in National Centre for Folklore Studies. Fay's parents (Peggy McLeod, Richard McLeod) were well educated; her mother was a doctor by profession. Many academicians, lawyers, doctors and others are employed as characters in the novel. Sonia, wife of Clyde, (brother of Fay), was a very humorous

woman and Lawyer for a women's right group. Also, this novel is very rich with characters. Shields had deployed those multiple characters on part of her narrative technique to make the novel colorful. The title of the novel is self explanatory which provides prosperous ground for its characters to play their inevitable roles. A great number of couples such as Peggy McLeod and Richard McLeod (Fay's parents), Betty Avery and Mike Barbour (Tom's parents) and Tom and Suzanne, Shiela, Peter and Firtzi, Clyde and Sonya, Onion and Storm, Frank Morris and Anne Morris etc. figure in the novel. The couples in the novel are confronted with many twists and turns in their familial relationships. The torment, tribulations and challenges of everyday life faced by these couples are exposed. The novel boldly underlines that the lack of romance among the couples, leads to the broken relationships. Shields says, 'to be romantic it is to believe anything can happen to us' (TRL 37). Also, the didactic nature of the novel intends to teach that marriage, family, vocation, separation and reunion are the inseparable issues of the human life. With an intensive frustration, Fritzi says, 'It was like a bomb dropping in another country, though it cured her forever of the idea of marriage. It is clear I'm lousy marriage material' (TRL 48). The wounded souls of the couples present in the novels are seeking comfort forever. Tom represents the troubled children, born to parents who estranged later. Tom asked his mother about his father. Knowing not well about his father, Tom was broken. His mother speaks of her disorderly life she led. She speaks; 'Just sixteen a wild one, I had a lot of boy friends' / she sighed, dropping her eyes and doing her little tricks with her mouth, just which one was your father?. Well I never exactly sure.

With many get together, divorces and reconciliation, all of Fay's family members are to celebrate the fortieth wedding anniversary of Peggy McLeod and

Richard McLeod (Fay's Parents) as they are bound to each other biologically, socially, intellectually and spiritually. At the end, Shields philosophises about the most important part of marriage in human life saying, 'Marriage symbolizes the ultimate intimacy between man and woman, and is based on love which is the most elusive of human bonds' (TRL358 -59).

The novel *Unless* speaks of the unhappiness of ordinary people's lives. The true happiness of life lies in the familial bond but it is portrayed as a troubled one at the beginning and middle of the novel. Reta Winter, Tom Winter and their three daughters Norah, Nataline and Christine have become the 'leitmotif' of this novel with which Shields weaves familial vicissitudes for the public domain. Reta was a writer of light novel and her husband Tom was a specialist in Miltonic studies. Reta was fond of her eldest daughter but who was begging at the street with the sign board around her neck that read 'goodness'. Her daughter's plight was tormenting Reta. Being a writer, she had choices before her: either to settle for familial harmony or to pursue writing her novel titled *Thyme in Bloom*. Shields presents two sides of human life through her characters in the novel.

This novel foregrounds fertile notions of familial attachment and harmony. Myth and metafiction are freely employed to sustain the interest of its readers. Shields' common interests in portraying ordinary lives have attained a new form with the simple style of showcasing a small family. Also with her multiple narrative techniques in portraying the characters in various forms, Shields shows the characters at the point of reconciliation. Norah was away from the home for a long period of time. She lived with a boy friend and got her fingers burnt when she had attempted to

rescue a Muslim girl from her suicidal attempt. Finally Norah was brought home after consistent attempts made by Reta and Tom.

Though some women are made to be subservient like Judith, some are relegated to the marginal positions like Mercy and Daisy, some are victimized, crucified, beaten up and murdered like Mary Swann at the hands of their husbands, Shields strives to find the remedy and solution for their tormented lives by offering them avenues to channelize their creativity as novelists, doctors, poets and researchers. Therefore, Shields novels are unique in nature in their portrayals of very ordinary families that had multiple ebbs and tides of Joys, sufferings, separation, alienation, seclusion, entrapment and reconciliation. Shields attempts to re-establish the family in her novels. In her novels the reader could extract an idea that, the sense of the family is always a basic necessity to mould up human beings as humane. Her women characters face problems such as broken love, broken marriages, a sense of seclusion and alienation and frustration. But still they believe in new awakenings and new beginnings in life. Shields's women are portrayed, reeling under a loss of identity but battling to regain it. But finally, they themselves, arrived at the new findings of life with their understanding and succession in their lives.

To conclude, Carol Shields is a prolific writer on domestic/feminist themes. Her creative works challenge comparison with the works of other writers. Her works could be compared with fellow Canadian Writers like Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel etc. Her works could be also compared with the works of Indian Women-novelists in English like Shashi Deshpande.