

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This dissertation started with the possibility of exploring various themes in the novels of Matt Cohen with particular reference to his Ontario novels and ex hypothesi it is observed that Matt Cohen in his Ontario novels deals with the two major themes of sexuality and violence.

Matt Cohen, who writes with a modernist outlook, realistically takes into consideration the Ontario ethos of Canada. He particularly deals with the family structure of patriarchal nature in which the legacy is transferred from one's father to his eldest son. Naturally in this structure women are marginalized, they are the 'outsiders' who are brought in for the sake of the continuation of the family line. Besides, women are mostly used by the men for the gratification of their sexual desires. In this respect John Moss has observed:

Sons remain within their father's shadow or deny their birth-right and depart. Genealogies which perpetuate these sexual distortions are paramount and seem as naturally indifferent to individual necessity as the land which sustains them in a rhythm of work and renewal. Continuity on the farm disrupts only enough to accommodate birth, marriage and death.¹

The world of these people is closed and rigidly structured which revolves around the family farm. Matt Cohen's three novels - The Disinherited, Wooden Hunters and The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone - reveal such a life quite realistically and that is probably one of the most important contributions made by Cohen to the Canadian novel.

As studied earlier the themes of sexuality and violence have been dealt with by the writer with reference to their socio-cultural implications. While dealing with the sexuality Cohen takes into account its various aspects like extramarital relationships and lesbianism. It is to be noted here that Cohen highlights the deviations in the accepted norms pertaining to the sexual relations. The perversions in the extramarital relationships and lesbian relationships are the pointers towards the decadence of the so called upper class families as referred to by Cohen in his novels. These deviations are not only found in the upper classes only, but in the poor families as well. It all indicates the lack of social and cultural morals in the contemporary Canadian society dealt with by Matt Cohen.

The theme of violence is necessarily linked up with the theme of sexuality. The pervert sexual relations lead to the violent outbreaks in the lives of the people. Cohen has shown violence on

two levels, i.e., personal level and social level. On the personal plane violence emerges out of the tensions in love relations as seen in The Disinherited and The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone. However, the violence in the Wooden Hunters is of a different nature. It emerges out of the outsiders' attack on the native culture. It reflects how the native people sacrifice their lives to free their native land and the culture from the clutches of the exploitative invasion of the loggers. In this respect it can be said that Cohen also deals with the theme of decolonization which is a major concern of a modernist writer. Thus the novels of Matt Cohen appear to have a universal context. In this respect Gerald Noonan rightly points out:

...Cohen's novel transcends the terrain of Ontario's rural east and illuminates the real and the irrational in the human mind. Upon a layer of thin soil, each generation confronts its morality, as well as the false promise of hard work, cheap rye and the relief of sex and violence.²

Though Matt Cohen is a modernist writer in the handling of his themes, he appears to be a bit traditional in dealing with the form of the novel. Mostly he follows the traditional norms of the genre, i.e. the plot, characters, language etc. His language is

highly polished and suitable to the creation of the setting and atmosphere or central situations in his novels. At times he makes a brilliant use of irony and symbolism to suit his novelistic vision. Thus though traditional in form, Matt Cohen is quite modern in content.

Notes and References

1. John Moss, Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) p. 187.
2. Gerald Noonan, "Matt Cohen's Novel Is a Triumph", Rev. of The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, The Toronto Star, 24 Feb., 1979, Sec. D, p. 7

[Quoted from George Woodcock's Matt Cohen and His Works]