ABSTRACT

Great artists illumine the life of a timeless world. If the greatest makers of literature are those whose inner visions are the widest and thoughts profound, Maxwell Anderson (1888 - 1959) can be acclaimed as one of the greatest American dramatists who changed the world's perception of American Drama with his lofty ideals and artistic credo. A prolific and versatile playwright, he exhibits a dramatic talent that is rich, varied and copious. During a career of just over three decades, he produced thirty-three plays encompassing tragedies, comedies, melodramas, one act plays, plays in verse and in prose, satires, musicals and plays of social protest. His prodigious variety of artistic output and theories suggest the achievement of two or more authors. His proven command of a wide variety of dramatic forms and styles and his attempt to restore poetry to the theatre have no contemporary parallels.

The testament of Anderson's work is a ceaseless endeavour to define the periphery between man's acknowledgement of the immutability of debilitating forces and the faith in his ability to confront and transcend it. Focusing on social and political forces, his plays portray conflicts arising out of the nebulous boundaries between man and the communal spheres of human activity.
The study “Facets of Conflict in the Plays of Maxwell Anderson” is an attempt to examine the dimensions of conflict and present Anderson’s visions of human life in dramatic vehicles, each of which postulates a distinct moral value. The object of this thesis is to explore the paradigm of conflicts in the inner world of the protagonists and the outer world of social reality and to establish the hypothesis that individual’s positive response to the conflicts is based on moral precepts.

Every conflict carries within it an implicit idea which Anderson analyses and investigates. As an artist, he imposes an order and form upon the raw materials of experience and his characters are carefully moulded to fit an intellectual conception. The nine plays taken for scrutiny seek to answer the eternal problem of man’s response to the contending forces in the world.

The first chapter ‘The Spectrum’ provides the matrix for the study of conflict. Tracing the antiquity of conflict, it demonstrates the fact that human life is inextricably intertwined with the interplay of varied forces. The importance of the inexorable pull and counter pull between forces - cosmic, material, physical and spiritual and its impact on man are captured. The treatment of the theme of conflict in literature and a review of the contours of conflict expounded by different schools of thought are recorded. Besides taking a wider perspective of Anderson’s milieu and offering a brief appraisal of his
dynamic and diverse creative output, the chapter surveys Anderson's dramatic universe that would enlighten this study.

The second chapter, "Crossing the Colour Bar" focuses on racial conflict. It analyses the plays *The Wingless Victory* and *Lost in the Stars* from the point of view of conflicts arising from racial prejudice. The study depicts Anderson's concern over the hideous practice of racial discrimination which distorts human values and debases society. The various levels of conflicts produced by racial prejudice on individuals and the saga of how they grapple to come to terms with this horrendous force are given detailed treatment. Anderson's deep faith in the innate goodness of individuals to transcend the colour bar is explored in the treatment of the protagonists' response to the challenges that confront them. The handling of the contemporary issue of racial discrimination without subscribing to any ideological school and the objectivity which endows the message of love and brotherhood, a universal and practical significance are traced.

The third chapter "Emerging from the Social Labyrinth" examines social conflicts and the resultant question of justice. It analyses the constituents of social tension that characterized the renowned Sacco-Vanzetti case. Anderson detests social and legal injustice arising out of capitalistic tyranny which manifests in the abuse of criminal justice system. The plays *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset* focus on
individuals' fight for right and justice and reflect Anderson's social sensibility. *Gods of the Lightning* dissects the divergent external forces of the socio-economic order which victimize the innocent individuals. *Winterset* studies the psychological aftermath of these conflicts and its debilitating effects. The inner dilemma of the individual to seek revenge is juxtaposed with the healing power of love. Anderson emphasizes individual vigilance to counter the evils of the society and suggests sensitivity to the eternal values of justice and ennoblement of character.

The fourth chapter "Unlocking the Power Vault" treats political conflict. It details the conflicts arising out of institutionalized power and the individual's need to assert his freedom. The conflicting forces of power and freedom are examined in the plays *The Masque of Kings*, *Second Overture* and *Barefoot in Athens*. A keen observer of contemporary politics, Anderson reacts to the encroachments on the rights of the individual by government with trepidation. His views on this vexatious issue are dissected. He is aware that the freedom of the individual has to be sacrificed at the altar of the needs of the society to avoid chaos. Yet, Anderson is not prepared to grant unrestrained power to the government. This chapter analyses how the plays set in different political climates and times assert the sanctity of freedom, and exhort vigorous individual response when confronted by adverse political forces.
The fifth chapter "Tearing the Tangled Net" examines moral conflict begotten by the social and political forces. Anderson is not a social scientist who regards man as a helpless creature caught in the web of conflicting social forces. He conceives him as an ethical being subject to a greater confrontation of choice between good and evil. The plays *Key Largo* and *Candle in the Wind* delineate the conflicts brought out by evil within and without. In the contention with overwhelming evil and in the face of personal peril, the protagonists are called to affirm the basic human values of commitment and integrity. The study observes that emphasis of the conflict is shifted to the moral demands made on man.

The sixth and concluding chapter, "The Inner Rainbow" recapitulates the varied hues of conflicts in the life journey of man. There is deep-rooted faith in the potentiality of man and it is towards this faith that the conflicts converge. The question whether the playwright is an idealist or a defeatist is also analysed within the framework of the plays discussed. Anderson has encoded a rich moral vision in his plays. The chapter attempts to decode the components of this vision and the necessity of ethical values in the fractionalized world and dwells on the lofty ideals and moral fibre that invest his plays with universality and timelessness.