CHAPTER 2
"Personal experience" it has been rightly said "is the basis of all real literature" Personal sufferings influence the work of the artist when these have been transmitted to his work. Every personality has its own special features. If we study a man as an artist it is very necessary to know the artist as a man because personal attitude also reflects the work of art. William Motter Inge or Bill Inge was born in May 3, 1913 in Independence Kansas. His father Mr. Luther Clayton Inge was a salesman. His mother Mrs. Maude Sarah Gibson Inge was a woman of strong personality Inge was very close to his mother because of his father's long absence. His sisters were also his good companions. William love for stage was natural. His mother's elder brother John Gibson was a successful actor but he had to give up his career as an artist due to some domestic problems. Young William was the only child in his family with whom his uncle could share his experiences of stage because other children were not interested in stage life. He felt proud to know that Edwin Booth, a famous figure of stage, was his relative. William's interest for acting started at the age of seven while he
recited a monologue, his sister Helen had been memorizing. Inge's first experience made him excited because "the third grade incident revealed him to himself from the moment he saw the stilled upturned faces of his classmates—-

Inge was the youngest of five children; therefore, he was more protected than the average child. He was a good listener and a keen observer of the people. He was more sensitive than the other normal boys. In school and college he participated in dramatic activities. He suffered from depression for some times during his college education. He acted in tent shows and the experience helped him to learn dealing with small time show business show people and harsh realities of life. He faced financial crisis. He joined a high school in Columbus and later Stephense College Columbia for teaching English and dramatics. During World War II he was appointed as drama editor of St. Louis Star Times in 1943 to take Reed Hynd's place. In 1947 he had to leave his job when Hyde came back. But the job gave a precious opportunity to meet Tennessee Williams for an interview. Inge and Williams became good friends. Williams motivated him for play writing. Later Inge wrote many plays, short plays, film scripts, criticism, novels and reviews. His four plays — Come Back Little Sheba, Picnic, Bus Stop and The Dark at the Top of the Stairs became mega hits in
Broadway Theatre in 1950's.

After *The dark at the Top of the Stairs* Inge other production brought failure for him. Due to literary failures he again started teaching. On 10 June 1973 he died because of a lot of depression and loneliness.

Like any other artist Inge was also influence by his biographical atmosphere. His experience of life reflected his work. He had a sharp eye for observing the process of life.

What George Eliot said of art in general is specially true of the art of literature: it 'is the nearest thing of life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with other fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.'

Inge belonged to a middle class family in a small town of America. His characters often lead despairing lives. He deals with the characters’ psychological problems deeply. It shows the writer's close study of human psyche and probably the dramatist might have faced the same state of mind in his earlier life.

Inge's problems were similar to other middle class Americans. His biography provides the fact that being the youngest child of his family he was over protected. According to the psychological theory, the youngest child develops in an extraordinary way. He feels himself superior and does not want to accept
any defeat. Inge also suffered from this situation. He was a man of reserved nature who did not want publicity. In his childhood he was very close to his mother meanwhile he never got affection from his father who was a salesman. Similarly in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, Inge created a father who was a salesman and a strong mother like his own mother. The character Sonny is the reflection of the child William Inge. The play has an autobiographical touch. The play "is formed from pretty nostalgic memories of childhood without being very autobiographical." The time and setting of the play is similar to Inge's surroundings of childhood. Like Inge Sonny flood has the quality to recite poems. In his childhood Inge was fond of collecting pictures of silent film stars. Sonny Flood also collects the pictures to escape from the dull reality of life. The close relationship of Inge and his mother helped him to understand the mother-son relationship. He has dealt with mother-son relationship in detail in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and in some other plays Inge's mother had to do all house work in her husband's absence. She was the only person in the family who could fulfill his need and expectations while he never got affection from his father. In his four successful plays *Come Back Little Sheba*, *Picnic*, *Bus Stop* and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* most of his characters fail to get affection of their fathers. For Lola in *Come Back Little Sheba* and
Sonny in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs father means an object of fear. In Picnic and Bus Stop Madge, Millie, Cherie and Bo are also fatherless characters. In contrast Inge’s mother are careful and affectionate mothers. They are very much concerned with their children and are very busy to do their duties. The impact of his personal life seems in the portrayal of careful mothers and careless fathers.

As a person Inge was a man of reserved nature who did not want publicity. He hardly used to share his personal matters with others. He did not get married so he was an isolated and depressed fellow. After the death of his parents his isolation became painful when his sister and cousins were busy in their own life. He had no companion with whom he could share his happiness as well as problems.

Generally Inge’s characters suffer from the problem of sexual frustration and possibly it was also the problem of Inge’s personal life. His isolation and depression reflected most of his characters. He was keenly, personally aware of alienation, loneliness and isolation. His characters suffer from these problems. Doc and Dr. Lyman try to find a solution of their problem through wine while Sammy commit suicide. Inge himself used to drink wine during the last days of his life and committed suicide. His own
experience as a teacher helped him in portraying professor Lyman's portrayal. He "is flawed because of the stereotype that Inge had been a college professor."³

Inge's professors are not fully participating members of society. They are merely spectators who have no fundamental contribution to make to society and who are unconvincing as human beings, always on the periphery.

Rosemary Sidney, a school teacher in a small Midwestern town, has same shades in Picnic. Rosemary and Lyman are sexually frustrated persons. Rosemary's life is like Inge's life that "he himself experienced when taught in a small Midwestern town."⁴

Inge was unmarried and perhaps he was very much sensitive to the domination of women. Besides he had a controlling mother who on account of his father's regular absences, exercised an autocratic authority over her family."⁵ He also observed other strong women as Audrey Wood and Margo Jones for artistic advice and guidance. His "unresolved attitude towards his homoerotic tendencies seems also to have played a part in his attitude toward women."⁵

Inge's women are sexually stronger than men. Most of his female characters Rosemary Sidney, Lola Delaney, Lottie Lacy and Cora Flood are bent on dominating their men. They are modern women. His first Broadway hits are intensely realistic. He found that
there was a great deal of fraud and hypocrisy in human behavior, particularly in human sexuality. He observed in his childhood that the women protested while the men pursued suggesting that women hated men. But finally he realized that "there was an artificiality in this scenario, that some women are embarrassed by the extent of their love and passion which makes them dependent on men." A keen observation of male-female relationships made him successful in examining it in his plays. Besides Inge’s women do not suffer from any mental maladies except Reenie in The Dark at the Top of the Stairs.

However Inge’s works are reflected by his own experience. The characters of Come Back Little Sheba and Picnic are inspired by his own surroundings. The characters of the garrulous Lola is based on a sister of Inge’s mother. He got the inspiration for the characters of Bo and Cherie in Bus Stop during a journey between St. Louis and Kansas City. He saw a Vagrant young man who was in avid pursuit a stranger girl. The Dark at the Top of the Stairs is a memory play which was formed form pretty nostalgic memories of his childhood. The play was “an attempt to come to terms with the past, to rearrange its parts and make them balance to bring a nature understanding to everyday phenomena that mystified me as a boy.” He himself admits the fact that he was the little boy Sonny.
The play is a kind of fiction which was interwoven "around the members of my family." In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* Inge has developed oedipal theme and attempted to examine some darker sides of his own personality with an objectivity and dispassion.

Freudian school of criticism describes that a work of art is a result of psychological struggle and an artist transmits his experience in his works. In Inge's case he has also translated his sufferings in his works. To him a playwright thinks and sees life in a certain way. A playwright has the tendency to convert his life's experiences when he reflects upon them into theatre. Creative theatre 'brings something of life itself which gives the theatre something new to grow on'. According to him his plays represent something of him. His plays are the means of presenting his personal view of life. They are unique because no one else could offer in quite the same style and form. He regarded a play "as a composition rather than a story, as a distillation of life rather than a narration of it." Inge was always a inspired by perhaps a mood or a memory of the feeling at sometime in the past or a character who seemed to him compelling. A play "may come out of memories or it may come out of one's desire to deal with experience." He himself admitted the fact that his plays have something which had already
happened in the past.

Inge had been most concerned "with dramatizing something of the dynamism I myself find in human behavior."10 "William Inge" as author Mcclure has said "was that of the lingering heart." He addressed the old joys and the old simplicities of life but "his lingering heart ultimately could not cope with life as he knew it near the end."11 He was very sad man. In his last days he also faced the problems of isolation and depression. He also tried to find the solution of his problems in wine and suicide like his characters in his plays. He tried to escape from the stark realities of life.

Ing's interest was human behavior and he investigated the typical behavior of seemingly conventional characters. He was not attracted by the geographical or natural aspects but by the social aspects. Once Inge wrote "may be we find beauty only in what we know Mountains have never intrigued me. They have none of the mystery of the prairie, where one can always feel close to some eternal truth concerning man and his place in the universe."12 His dialogues are simple and can be understood easily. His characters speaks common or ordinary language belonged to Midwestern town. Inge has not used artificial language. He does not follow Tennessee Williams technique of dialogues. Williams has used poetic dialogues while Inge's dialogues have simple words.
Inge's "ear is carefully attend to the dialogue of the people he writes about."  

Thus Inge followed Realism. His Realism was successful in explaining psychological insight of the ordinary of people of the Midwest. His personal experience helped him to create effective characters as well as effective themes. His personal experience played an important role to create real characters. Probably the quality attracted the American mass towards theatre and made his plays successful in Broadway. It is true that "every individual represents both a unity of personality and the individual fashioning of that unity. The individual is thus both the picture and the artist. He is the artist of his own personality ---------."  

However Inge was "a gifted artist, a consummate gentleman, a warm and sensitive creator."
NOTES AND REFERENCES

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
8. Walter Wager; The Playwrights Speak; New York Delacorte Press . P.155
11. Ibid.
13. Alfred Adler; The Individual Psychology; New York Harper and Row P.177
**II. INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY LITERARY PERSONALITIES AND THEIR WORKS**

Literary influence also helps to form the shape of a good author. Modern American drama began in the second decade of the 20th century. Many brilliant writers contributed to the richness of American drama. Eugene O’Neill, Elmer Rice, Clifford Odet, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and a lot of other playwrights revolutionized American drama. Inge grew old in the atmosphere of these remarkable playwrights.

In his childhood William Inge used to share the acting experiences of his mother’s elder brother Mr. John Gibson who had to give up his career as an artist due to some domestic problems. Inge took admission in Montgomery County High School in Independence in 1927 and participated in the dramatic activities there. He was taken on trips to Kansas City where he saw several plays including ‘The Barrets of Wimpole Street’ starring Katharine Cornell. He was deeply impressed by her performance. He graduated from high school in 1930 and then attended the university of Kansas. He continued to take part in speech and drama and to give his performances in leading roles in university productions including Androcles and the Lion.
and *Juno and the Pyecok*. He acted in tent shows where he played juvenile roles. The experience helped him to learn dealing with small time show business. In his college life he acted in the summer theatre sponsored by the Culver Military Academy and appeared by in plays by Rachel Crothers, J.B. Priestley, Sutton Vane and other modern dramatists. He liked these plays and got the membership of the National Collegiate Players. He submitted his thesis on 'David Belasco and the age of photographic Realism in the American theatre'. He was influenced by Realism because in 1920's and 1930's Realism was the main trend of American drama.

David Belasco was New York's leading showman during the end of the 19th century and early in 20th century. He produced many plays in Broadway theatre. *Zaza, The Easiest Way, The Lily, The Return of Peter Gimm, The Case of Becky* and others. During the period the drama turned away from the moralistic view point and to deal with the theme of sexual frustration. He also followed Freud's theory to portray human psychology. Inge joined Stephense College Columbia Missourie to teach English composition and dramatics after he had finished his dissertation. In the college he came in contact with Albert Chirst Janer head of Stephese and his wife Virginia.
They became very close friends and "made his years at Stephense more rewarding than they might otherwise have been."1 These three friends shared their problems, dramas and opinions for the theatre. The couple made Inge think that he was misplaced in teaching. They inspired him to study drama and theatre. In Stephense College he also worked with Miss Maude Adams who had retired to the academic world of Broadway now. Inge liked her very much as an artist of the stage. She used to share her sweet memories of her past stage life which influenced him most. She discussed on Eleanora Duse and Sarah Bernard and other great stars with Inge. Inge found her "to be capable, tireless, charming."2 He admired her "intelligence and envied her experience."3 Earlier Inge began his career as a teacher. Probably he did not think of being a playwright until he met Tennessee Williams. During World War II he was appointed as drama editor of the St. Louis Star Times in 1943 to take Reed Hynd's place who went overseas with the armed services. He edited the "entertainment and culture page" of the newspaper and wrote criticisms of drama, music, art, books and films. In the year of 1944 when Williams' The Glass Menagerie was ready for its first performance in Chicago on the stage, Inge requested Williams for an interview for the article "Home Town Boy make good". Though
Inge had been interested in theatre since his childhood days but his meeting with Tennessee Williams was the turning point of his life. Williams' first hit *The Glass Menagerie* inspired him to be a successful playwright. He was deeply moved when he saw Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Inge saw it with Williams in Chicago. After the show he was greatly impressed by the beauty of the performance and called the play "the finest thing I'd seen in the theatre in years." Watching the play Inge felt little ashamed for having lead an in-productive life. These reactions indicated towards his ambition to be a playwright but at first Williams was not sure of it. Later when he came to know his sincerity Williams advised him on the script of his first play *Farther off from Heaven*. Apparently Williams motivated Inge to produce plays and obviously he was most influenced by Williams as a playwright. Tennessee Williams and William Inge have the same theme of their plays i.e. isolation and sexual frustration. Inge was "a protégé of Tennessee Williams whose plays suggest a kind of domesticated Williams, sensitive and sympathetic studies of lonely and frightened people." The main concern of these two writers is the quest of an individual to achieve harmony with his physical environment leading to emotional as well as material security in life. Williams
and Inge have dealt with the conflict between reality and illusion in their major plays. Doc and Lola, Madge and Hal, Rosemary and Howard, Bo and Cherie, Rubin and Cora—all these characters face the same problem faced by the characters created by Williams. Like Williams Inge deals with particular family circles in the same milieu and at the same time. Both of them have the same purpose and ask us to see what we really are and then to make whatever correction there is to be made. ‘The need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances’ is the concern of both these writers. Like Williams Inge also emphasizes on women characters in his plays. Their characters face almost the same problems i.e. loneliness, homosexuality and alcoholism and both of the dramatists have used sexuality as a solution to the world’s problems. Often Inge suggests that sex is the great leveler as Williams does with Stella and Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire.’

Tennessee Williams’ impact is observed in Inge’s first successful play Come Back Little Sheba. The character of Turk is his attempt to form the Stanley Kowalski type that ‘Williams popularized in A Streetcar Named Desire.’ Turk and Stanley are long on bulging biceps short on brains. The plot situation of Inge’s second hit play Picnic resembles Williams’ Orpheus Descending.
The presentation of repression in the women of Picnic is like that in Tennessee Williams' Summer And Smoke in a minor key. Inge shares with Williams' concept that "no source of comfort however fragile or ephemeral, should be disdained in a frightening and inhospitable World." The conviction reappears in Inge's another play Bus Stop. It is a light comedy. The last hit play by Inge is The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. The story of the play was derived from his very first play Farther Off from Heaven. Inge wrote the play just after he had watched Williams The Glass Menagerie. So there are some similarities between them. Both of the plays have autobiographical touch. The character of Reenie in Dark has the shade of Laura in The Glass Menagerie. Reenie like Laura Wingfield "had a physical imperfection of which she was keenly aware. One of her front teeth was broken." Laura tries to escape from the stark realities of life by means of her glass animals while Reenie uses piano to overlook the fact of life.

Inge's hero like Williams' is physically attractive. He has not the quality of maturity and intelligence. He is dressed in blue jeans, cowboy boots and tee-shirts. He is equipped with bulging biceps and enormous sexual potency. Like Williams Inge writes she – dramas and gives privotal roles to his female characters. Arthur Miller, a famous contemporary dramatist of Tennessee
Williams in Broadway wrote serious American drama. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams dominated the mid-century American drama and they forced history to judge the period by their work. Obviously Inge was also influenced by Miller's technique. In *Death of Salesman*, Miller shows the failures of the Loman family. He deals with how the family becomes separated and how it fails to communicate. In *Dark* Rubin faces similar problem. His separation from his children is the result of his feelings of alienation from his society. He wonders how he can offer his children anything when the world so alien to him. Both find common ground with their audience by dealing with matters familiar to middle and lower classes.

Thus William Inge comes closest to in the league of Miller and Williams. The stories of these three dramatists show the chaotic situation of current American drama in the twenty postwar years. Like Williams and Miller, Inge puts his characters face to face “with the compromises which they are forced to make in a society which is at best impassive and which may often be actively malevolent.”

Though Williams inspired Inge to write plays, but the study of his plays shows that he was influenced by the techniques of Eugene O'Neill's playwriting. Inge's works are similar to the works
of O’Neill in many ways. Alienation, loneliness and seeking solution of personal problems in love are the characteristics, which are presented by both writers very well. O’Neill characters face difficulties in the modern world. They find problems to adjust in the atmosphere of given world. Like O’Neill Inge has presented domestic realism. His plays take place in homes. Inge has presented the theme of loneliness and personal isolation. The theme is so dominant and so consistently developed as it is in the plays of O’Neill. O’Neill’s plays are based on a particular idea of life. To him a man must compromise if life is to have any hope for him. His several plays express external reality as well as internal reality. O’Neill’s Beyond the Horizon presents human frustration and The Emperor Jones shows fear stricken life of its characters. Inge’s characters also suffer this state of mind. Lola, Rosemary, Grace, Cora, Turk, Dr. Lyman Doc, Sammy and Rubin Flood – all are isolated human beings who are afraid to accept the reality of life. Like O’Neill’s characters, Inge’s people also struggle to survive in the world. The chief characteristic of O’Neill’s presentation is the description of Freudian psychology. Inge has also followed this technique to present deep psychological conditions. O’Neill Mourning Becomes Electra presents Freudian inner turmoil and Different presents a study of sex – inhibited New England spinster.
Welded is a story of isolated couple. All God's Chillum shows a doomed inter racial marriage in which the wife is unable to escape from her husbands blackness. Inge's plays also shows the relationship of husband and wife in which they try to escape from each other's weaknesses. They fear to accept their mistakes. Inge's all successful plays end with a new hope for life. O'Neill and Inge have presented sexually frustrated people. O'Neill's Desire Under Elms, Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra are the dramas of sex repressions. Inge has also emphasized upon sex in his successful plays. His characters attempt to find the solution of their isolation through sex in the place of real understanding.

O'Neill and Inge both the writers have used the philosophy of love in narrow sense. All their characters seek that all kind of love which can provide them sexual pleasure. They are hungry for physical love and they are not able to understand the spiritual love. Both have used the term 'Love' in materialistic way. O'Neill has presented the Freudian relationship between wife-husband, mother-son, mother-daughter, woman-lover, between daughter-mother-father-lover, between son-mother-father etc. His Anna Christie and Strange Interlude narrate about the relationship between father-daughter and between woman-lover. Inge's Come Back Little Sheba presents the relationship between husband and
wife, between woman and lover and between father and daughter. Picnic deals with the relationship between mother and daughter and woman and lover. In Bus Stop Inge has dealt with the problem of one sided love. The Dark at the Top of the Stairs is a detailed study of the relationship between mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son and husband-wife. Apparently in some degree Inge’s themes are inspired by O’Neill’s drama. Their characters are incapable to fulfill their romantic dreams.

Inge himself admitted that he had “never been influenced by the Greeks.” Modern dramatists always fascinated him. He finds himself close to two Irish writers – Synge and O’Casy and says—’--- I feel most affiliation I think, with the Irish writers Synge particularly and he is not a very popular writer now, but I feel closer, I think to Synge and some of the early O’Casey.”

The other two writers who influenced him are Chekhov and Thornton Wilder. Chekhov a famous Russian dramatist of 19th century was considered to be a serious literary writer. He produced his qualitative works late in 19th century. His naturalistic plays became inspiration for the playwright of the early 20th century in American theatre. Inge studied his plays when he was in college. Chekhov was “— a great experience for me, I mean really opened up the whole world for me when I first began writing as a student
back in college.”¹¹ Chekhov wrote of “realistic characters in
domestic situation ——.”¹² Inge followed the naturalism of Chekhov
in his works. Like Chekhovian characters Inge’s men and women
want to live and not to die. They seek life and joy.

Inge’s first hit in Broadway Come Back Little Sheba can be
considered to have some Chekhovian qualities. John Champman in
the New York Daily News of 16th February 1950 thought that the
play was “part Chekhov, part Arthur Miller and part the Divine
Gospel of Alcoholic Anonymous.”¹³ The climax of the play is also a
Chekhovian climax in which Lola finally accepts the fact that Sheba
is never coming back. In The Dark at the Top of the Stairs the
glimpses of Chekhovian style can be felt. The use of indirect
method in the play makes up think of Chekhov in some degree.
Thornton Wilder also attracted Inge. He acted in Wilder’s Our Town
when he was the student of college. Inge found some thing in
Thornton Wilder’s work “that makes me feel, I have been influenced
somewhat by him ——.”¹⁴ Wilder attempted to portray the life of
people in small Midwestern town in America during 20th century.
Like Wilder Inge examined the petty frustrations and painful
determinism of desperate lives while for the most part celebrating
the simple process of life.

Inge was also influenced by Osborne and Pinter. Osborne’s
early plays fascinated him. His *On Borrowed Time* and *Morning’s at Seven* are important comedies. His characters serve provincialism. Brooks Atkinson called *Morning’s at Seven* original portrait of human folly in which “everyone can see the glimpses of his own reflection.” Pinter’s *Caretaker* also moved him profoundly.

Besides the impact of other modern writers can be observed in his plays. In characterization Inge followed Odet’s technique in his famous play *Bus Stop*. He created several characters of equal importance as Clifford Odets did in *Awake and Sing*. Doc and Lola in *Come Back Little Sheba* are like Edward and his wife Lavinia in *The Cocktail Party* of T.S. Eliot who simply resign themselves to making the best of a hopeless situation. Inge’s *Bus Stop* depends upon a confined microcosm. The microcosm is reminiscent in Robert Sherwood’s *Petrified Forest*, and Sebastian Brant’s rambling 15th century poem *Das Narrenschiff*. All these works depend upon “a confined environment, a trap to bring cohesion to their story.” The character of Elma Duckworth in *Bus Stop* is similar to the character of Gabby in Robert Sherwood’s *The Petrified Forest* who gathers the information of the other characters in the play. Like Arthur Laurents Inge has undergone psychoanalysis and is able to utilize its insight without following outworn literary patterns.
Inge also wrote some novels in which he examined small town life in the Midwest. He himself was very fond of reading novels. He read Santayana’s *The Last Curtain* when “I was quite young ---------. It is a beautiful piece of work.”¹⁶

Existentialism also influenced him as a playwright. "I feel in my way I am existentialist.”¹⁷ He studied the early existentialists Kiekegaard and pascal. They were religious men. He also studies the French existentialists “who have been atheistic.”

He said that the people should not misunderstand the existentialists’ concept of life that ‘life is worth nothing’. He was also most influenced by Camus’ philosophy of the absurd. To him “we have to accept many of the happenings in life as absurd --------- and absurd in the sense that they mean nothing.”¹⁸ In addition, he was also influenced by naturalism. He attempted to follow Ibsen and Chekhov in his dramas. He tried to show naturalism in his plays because he was impressed by the naturalistic authors of early 20th century like Eugene O’Neill Tennessee Williams and others.

The most unavoidable factor which influenced Inge was Freudian psychology. The theory was given by a famous psychologist Freud. The Americans were introduced to Freud theory in 1909 by Dr. Ernest Jones who began publishing his theories in journals. Freud’s language was German but in 1909 and
1910 his books were translated into English which made him popular in America. The new dramatists in later years adopted his theories to show psychological analysis in their plays. Inge was one of them. Freud's theory show over-emphasis upon sex. Similarly in William Inge's dramas sex is the most important factor. His *Come Back Little Sheba* proved to be a remarkably well motivated drama with fine suspense and Freudian influence. His other plays also have the impact of the Freudian psychoanalysis.

Thus Inge wrote his plays according to the fashion of contemporary period. He was a literary personality and it was possible that the literary atmosphere of contemporary period had also effected him. But undoubtedly he was a gifted artist.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

3. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
(iii) IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

According to a well known fact the work of art is considered as a mirror of the society. Literature is a social product and as such it inevitably reflects the life of the era out of which it springs. The greatest literary masterpieces are true to time and space. Literature is the expression of life as a whole but is expressed through the medium of the particular ages and generation of mankind.

Every writer grows up as a member of a particular society and his personality, his view of life and his emotional conflicts and communications are conditioned by social factors. He is likely, moreover, to be generally receptive to those broad currents of thought and feelings, which are shared by the other members of his society. For this reason the contents of his work including its deeper emotional quality as for as its subject matter, cannot be explained without reference to his social background.

Hence the American playwrights were also inspired by the people and society of contemporary period. American drama became completely “American” when it attained full maturity in the plays of Eugene O’Neill, Robert Sharewood Elmer Rice, Sidney
Horward and other Playwrights of 1920's. These playwrights started showing native American manners and Customs, characteristics and ideals, issues and conflicts. Like other culture the American culture is a product of adaptations of the cultures and experience. In 20th century, enormous changes started taking place in American society. The modern dramatists attempted to express the American group mind.

In American drama "America's heart land its sprawling Midwest, has long engaged the interest and imaginative powers of America's most celebrative writers."¹ Some prominent writers including Theodore Dreiser, Edger Lee Masters, Willa Cother, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson etc. were attracted by the Midwest or small towns. The writers were taking interest in rural small town people and their lives. They attempted to portray the lives of the people of the heartland in stories and poetry. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams continued to portray the common American people's lives. William Inge followed their tradition of expressing the frustration, sorrow and suffering of little people.

Before Inge most of the drama were "set in that area presented Midwesterners stereotyped either as a hearty breed of milkmaids and cowpokes..."² But Inge was a successful playwright who tried to examine the People's psychological insight of the
Midwest. His plays show small town life on the plains and the prairies of the heartland. He used the Midwest and Freudian psychology as motivational elements in his dramas.

Inge himself belonged to the Midwest. He was born in Independence Kansas, and spent his first thirty five years in the region. So it is obvious that he had observed the small town life closely. He was a provincial man and accepted the fact in an interview. "I am a very provincial man. I have never been abroad."³

Inge grew old at the time when the society was struggling against established social system. The race of the contemporary period was becoming more and more materialistic. The people of the middle class families had a thirst for money and luxurious life. He had observed that modern American people always sought for sexual pleasures. They are sexually frustrated people. Inge has attempted to pose the question of what love means in modern society. His characters face the problems of personal isolation which is both physical and spiritual and "they all have difficulty communicating on any but a superficial level—a common problem among 20th century Americans."⁴

William Inge has 'true and wonderful talent which is for offering first the genial surface of common American life.' As he grew old in small town, he was able to explain his characters
psychology deeply. He himself represented a middle class family and faced a middle class family's problems. His characters struggled to survive in the society. They are simple ordinary people who have no artificiality. Inge liked small town hated big cities like New York: "I just have claustrophobia in New York ------. I never liked New York. I lose my feelings of identification their ------. I was born and grew up with the natural world around me." Small towns and its people always fascinated Inge. Midwest was the real world of the William Inge. To him people exist as individuals in small towns. Everybody knows else's business but not so in cities.

The people of his native town are 'as plain and level and unadorned as the scenery'. The small towns were free from riots, strikes or demonstrations. Inge had great love and affection for his own community and society and his characters always accept who they are. That is why his plays are real rather than ideal. The setting and characterization of his plays suggest that Inge was influenced by his own Midwestern background. He was a keen observer and his plays provide a keen observation of the contemporary society. He observed the region's sociological uniqueness and he knew how the uniqueness could be presented in his plays. His characters are ordinary American people who are 'products of their own compulsions and of the small towns
environment in which they live.

Inge observed the small town society, where he had resided was a place "where hypocritical standards of middle class morality had a significant effect on most of the citizens." He has revealed ordinary people's struggle with hidden neuroses and their repression and prejudices. Inge "presented with astounding veracity the oppressive banality of the lives of his characters" and "may justifiably be called the first playwright to examine the Midwest." Inge's first Broadway hit Come Back Little Sheba is "true Americana of a kind that has become rather rare on the stage for the past 10 years or more." Inge tried to translate a feeling about American lower middle class life to the stage. It is the story of a middle aged and intellectually mismatched couple. The characters Doc, Lola, Marie, Turk and others are the natives of Inge's own small town society. They live lives of quite desperation knowing the fact that their narrow world will not improve yet clinging to hope. The center of the play is a real picture of little repressed people living with all their inhibitions moral confusion, awry ideals and profound isolation in a kind of middle town heart break house. The atmosphere is a "drab spiritual desert" which is lightened by the hopeful ending. Inge's use of effective words to show the rural Midwestern locale indicates towards the influence of contemporary
society on him as: "Marie wears a sheer dainty negligee and smart, feathery Mules on her feet, furniture is heavy and rounded looking and sofa is called a davenport, no industry whatsoever has been spent in making it one of those White Cheerful rooms that we commonly think Kitchen to be." In Picnic, Inge's another successful play, "the even tenor of small town life was interrupted by the arrival of a vital Vagrant, and an American semi-Collegiate Peer Gynt," and he spread a tragical-comical excitement everywhere in a particular group of women. The play describes the story of a group in a small town with Midwestern characters. The characters and the setting of the play are also inspired by the contemporary social atmosphere. It is an intimate and powerful handling of the emotional needs of a group of women in a small monotonous Kansas town. Gassner has called it "a pathetic pastoral."

Inge's conscious concern with dramatizing something of the dynamism of human motivation and behavior is evident in the play.

The contemporary society was the worshipper of physical beauty. The play shows that a beautiful woman may dominate here husband or lover: "A pretty girl ... is the Equal of kings and she
can ... live in a palace ...."  

Being a beautiful girl, Madge draws everyone's attention towards her while she lacks intelligence. Millie, Madge's sister is the only one who rebels against a society which worships beauty but even she tries to look feminine and beautiful when Hal appears on the scene.

Like an ordinary housewife, Flo Owens is always busy in her household work. Her aim of life is to settle down her daughters so she tried to search suitable dates for them. In a small town the people know each other very well. When Howard offers wine to Rosemary, she refuses because being a school teacher, she has some limitation. If she drinks wine the news can break out all over the town: "what if someone'd come by and tell the School Board? I'd lose my job...." Thus the school teachers in a small Midwestern town are "expected to be paragons of virtue, upholding the codes of middle-class morality."

*Picnic* moves around a particular family like Inge's earlier play *Come Back Little Sheba*. Each character in the story has an essence with whom spectator identify themselves. The setting of the play is the porch and yard of a shabby house shows the common features of small town houses in 20th century America. *Picnic* is a "tragical comical excitement which broke out in the neighborhood provides a fluid drama with provincial life —
humorous, casual, honest.¹²

Inge has written of the power and beauty of Kansas which
was not noticed by the outsiders. Picnic "is set against the colorful,
sweeping vastness of Kansas skies and fields of grain elevators
and busy yards."¹³

In his next play Inge has attempted to portray his
own experience of social surrounding, In Bus Stop the action takes
place in a street corner restaurant in a country town about thirty
miles west of Kansas city. The restaurant, situated between Kansas
and Wichita, is an ordinary dingy small-town restaurant where
'science calendars and pretty girl posters decorate the solid walls,
and illumination comes from to badly shaded light bulbs that hang
on a dangling cards from the ceiling, in the center are several
quartet tables with chairs for dining at for left is counters with six
stools before it...."¹⁴ The description shows his keen observation of
contemporary surrounding. Inge got the inspiration for the play from
his one trip between St. Louis and Kansas City. It was the time
when he was teaching at Stephen's College and usually he rode
the bus between St. Louis and Kansas City most weekends. On
one trip he found a vagrant young man who was in avid pursuit of a
girl whom he did not know and during the journey he usually
 cuddled beside he and tried to talk her into getting of the bus with
him when they reached Kansas City.

Apparently Inge got the idea for the characters of Bo Decker and Cherie form the trip. The other characters are also simple ordinary people based on his own experience and observation. There is a Kansas Sheriff, a husky bus driver, a scholarly derelict, a rough and ready cowboy, waitresses and nightclub singer. Bo, a provincial character, is a loud mounted cowboy from Timber Hill Montana. Dr. Lyman, Will Masters and Carl are simple easterners who “don’t know anything about any of the country west of the Hudson river.” Inge has described his characters carefully. He writes “Her (Cherie) origin in the Ozarks and her speech is southern: she sang in the Blue Dragon night club in the stock yards of Kansas City.” He mentions the “Menniger Clinic “in Topeka as well as Joplin Missouri and “Kanz City”, which reflect a local and regional pronunciation.

Inge’s another play The Dark at the Top of the stairs can be said to be a penetrating drama of small town ways. It is an autobiographical play of action although Inge has changed the place of action from his native town Kansas to Oklahoma. Rubin and Cora are not happy with their relationship. They have two children Reenie, of 16 years old and Sonny of 10 years old. Being a middle class girl Reenie has a stress to be a nice girl. Inge’s
psychological study of the people around him can be seen in the play. To him the man "in the midst of modern confusion and frightening change needs faith in personal value." Inge's has been successful to show the psychological struggle in the play. The setting of the play and the characters belong to a small town in the early 1920's. Ingel's keen observation helped to show the violence and the domestic tirades, the humors and the tenderness and the tears in the small town home of Rubin Flood.

Rubin's house represents the contemporary small town houses where Ingel grew old. The play is "a memory. Play" so the time and setting, the early 1920's in a small Midwestern town, must have been similar to Ingel's surrounding when he was ten years old, the age of Sonny Flood.

The play shows the impact of the changing times and way of life of the twenties upon small town people and upon town itself. Rubin himself admits.

"Times are changing, Cora and I dunno where they're goin." The old pattern of life started vanishing with the discovery of oil. The physical appearance of the town has been changed because new school buildings, churches, country clubs. The ordinary men were becoming millionaires and "drivin' down the
street in big limousines, goin' out to the country club and getting drunk. acting like they was the lords of creation.  

A man, belonged to the middle class family, has no option except he should prepare himself for the new circumstances of the contemporary society. Rubin confessed that "a fellow's gotta get into the swim. There's nothing else to do." The Dark at the Top of the Stairs therefore, is a sombre picture a family haunted by prejudices, regrets and unfocused fears, also profit from Inge's knowledge of small town life and his ability to give form to the deep-though unsensatstional yearking and quilts of simple people. The critic has considered the play as an honest, gentle portrait of conventionally pathetic individuals. The portrayal of the common people is impossible without the keen observation of the society. In the play he has presented the problems of a family which are not imagined. They are real. He has presented the different psychological problems which are the problems of all middle class people of his surrounding. Ima Honakar Heron considered the play as "a perceptive and tender portrayal of ordinary humanity...." Thus Inge's Midwest is a land where the gift of milky happiness is obtained when some obstacle is removed. Inge deals with the problem of sex and violence in Midwest. His Midwestern tone makes him a significant writer.
Inge has tried to deal with all the possible relationship in has plays. We have ‘the emasculated husband the frustrated wife the mother fixated child the sexually exploited young man or woman’. Inge’s *Come Back Little Sheba* presents the relationships between husband and wife, between woman and lover and between father and daughter. *Picnic* describes the relationship between mother and daughter and woman and lover. In *Bus Stop* Inge has dealt with the relationship of man and woman. *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* is a detailed study of the relationships between mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son and husband-wife.

However Inge’s plays show the contemporary social changes and their impact in the ordinary people of America’s small towns. Most of his characters are based upon his keen objective observation in his earlier life. Inge himself writes that he feels a duty “to find all that I can in the human lives that I know and are available to me... and find the meanings in those lives secondarily.”

Inge’s presentation of the Midwest society shows both his general understanding of human psychology, and behavior and his experience with feelings relating to psychoanalysis and homosexuality. In his major plays the psychological problems of the
major characters has been presented very carefully. In other words Inge was able to draw upon Freudian insight in his dramas. Inge’s female characters are stronger than male characters because he grew old in woman-dominating surrounding and enjoyed the company of many famous and strong woman personalities, like his mother Maude Sarah Gibson, Margo Wood and Margo Jones.

Though Inge’s characters and setting belong to his own Midwestern society, he can not be considered a provincial playwright. His themes and characters have universal appeal. The middle class people have same anxieties and dramas all over the world. So his plays are “provincial” with no “provincialism.”

Inge therefore, was a man with a sensibility and sensitivity for the lonely, the troubled, the sexually frustrated or the afraid. Apparently, the contemporary people were suffering from the problem like loneliness and sexual frustration. As an author Inge has drawn his subject matter as well as characters from the social atmosphere around him. Inge has presented the society as he experienced and remembered it through out his life. Probably, Inge was successful portraying people of the lower middle class. He seems most convincing when he put his characters in the Midwestern background of the 20’s. His “few excursions away from this class, this time and this place have lacked the authencity that
helped Inge to create his reputation as an accurate recorder of Midwestern life in America, a consummate realist." His "talent lies in his sympathy with and Organic understanding of his people." Inge wrote of the sweetness of character that the people of his contemporary society possessed. In 1968 Inge wrote the Introduction to The Plains State which shows his great attachment with his people who lined in his surroundings.

He writes: -

"The Plains States are the heart of our nation and that heart beats slow and sure year after year while the cities on the cost lines, crowded, competitively industrial, 'cosmopolite and more seemingly vulnerable to foreign influences as well as attacked in times of war, manifest our nations violent, anxieties and antagonisms. Nowhere can we find a closer correlation of landscape and character than in the Plains States."
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