CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The involvement of America in the two World Wars leads the new generation to come out with its ethnic, regional, and social character and is somehow different from that of the preceding one. The rise of science and technologies as well as the materialistic ideologies trap this generation leading to new cultural confines. American drama especially postwar drama plays a significant role in portraying how gradually the social change and the cultural mutation took place. The themes are varied including the horrors of the wars, great depression, the failure of the American dream, family fragmentation, social and moral issues, the dehumanization of the modern society, individual resisting social values and responsibilities, the psychological disorder, race and gender issues, abusing alcohol and drugs, consumerism, and many other themes touching the soul of the modern society. Such themes portraying real historical events resulted in various cultural dimensions that are changing gradually and consequently. Also because of the mass movement of people from the South to the West and North and the intensive immigration from different countries to the United States after the World War II, the culture needs to be adapted in order to shape people’s acceptance of the situation and normally that will add new cultures specially to the urbanized North and West of America.

Jean Francois Lyotard’s cultural theory, The Fall of Grand Narratives in the Postmodern Condition, projects the cultural mutation. According to Lyotard, the metanarratives that traditionally used to give cultural paradigms have lost their credibility since the Second World War. That’s a clear sign of the cultural mutation which occurred in postwar and postmodern America.

War production and experimentation led to new technologies, including the nuclear bomb. All of that helped mainly shaping the cultural and social change. The first atomic bombs were created in America and dropped by Americans. Americans were threatened and horrified by the disfigurements of the Hiroshima
maidens brought to the United States for surgeries. Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand as signposts marking an era of moral ambiguity and uncertainty. People fear the bomb itself. It is the larger cultural effects of the nuclear age. Upton Sinclair’s *A Giant’s Strength* and Herman Wouk’s *The Traitor* portray the disaster of the nuclear weapons. While Robert E. Sherwood and Lillian Hellman are playwrights who were interested in portraying America’s involvement in the World War II.

Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller dominated the American stage during the years immediately following the Second World War exploring social issues specifically the human costs of postwar industrial capitalism and the contradictory nature of the American Dream. Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* deal with the transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society brought on by the war and its impact on those left behind, as they struggle to adapt and survive. *A Streetcar Named Desire* introduced a diseased post-war America characterized by prostitution, homosexuality, rape, domestic violence, alcoholism, mental breakdown.

Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* portrays Willy and Biff as victims of depression era. In *All My Sons*, Miller portrays Joe Keller and Chris as victims of the World War II. Keller is unable to reject and resist the capitalistic ideology of the 20th century capitalist American society. In *Broken Glass* Sylvia Gellburg is the victim of Nazi’s attack on Jewish people. She is an act of the paralysis everyone showed in the face of Hitler.

Shepard’s characters all live in a state of shock. It is World War II, from which men returned no longer able to relate the women they had left behind. Shepard criticizes the abundant violence on the female characters and the irresponsibility of men and also he is angry with the weak females who are treated as a material for man to abuse and enjoy and then to dispose.

Vietnam War was the first war opposed actively by thoughtful citizens including playwrights and students from universities. Miller supports and participates in the civil rights struggle, opposes the Vietnam War, and criticizes
the American invasion of Iraq. Dramas relating to the war reflected the turmoil and reveal contradictions of acting and being. Representations of the Vietnam War, in the theatre, films, television incorporated war into America’s modern cultural psyche as a permanent scar on American life as well as physical and psychic fragmentation. Thus Vietnam War is one of the strongest and most effective American dreadful historical events leading to cultural mutation.

Ideologies, foods, artistic movements, behavioral change- from cohabitation to long hair to the drug culture to Pop art to the Black Panthers to Women’s Liberation to acid rock – all represented cultural responses to the unsettled times that were the 1960s. All the new exciting, radical events and trends of the 60s continued to develop in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and beyond so that the current social and political issues are an outgrowth of the changes that occurred in the 1960s, Occupy Wall Street Movement nowadays is an example.

Because of the global economic crisis, Occupy Wall Street Movement starts in September 2011. Across the world, people still suffer from homelessness, poverty, foreclosure, and economic inequality. The movement is an ongoing series of demonstrations in New York City’s Wall Street financial district. The protests are against social and economic inequality, high unemployment, greed, corruption, and the influence of financial service sector on government. It refers to the huge difference in wealth between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population in America. Obama, the American President, connects it to the frustrations of the biggest financial crisis of the Great Depression. A Slovenian philosopher gives a speech in Wall Street in support of the movement saying that they are not dreamers; they are awakening from a dream which is turning into a nightmare. Over one thousand authors also announced their support for the movement including Jeff Sharlet, Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, Noam Chomsky, Alice Walker, and many others.

During the 60s different protest movements including the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam movement, the feminist movement, the African
American movement, and gay rights movement took place. Each helps changing government policy and how almost every American lives today and marked a new and very important social and cultural confine. It created a movement toward liberation in society demanding more freedoms and rights. Including all the movements, the cultural revolutions of the 1960s is merely a cultural mutation.

The drama of the 60s mainly reflects frustrating contradictions and meaningless existence and movies began to break taboos such as violence, sex, gender and race and social, political, economical, and cultural issues.

American identity was the notion of African American playwrights. Playwrights like LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ed Bullins, and Ron Milner were prominent figures of the black arts movement. Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange’s highly symbolic language and fragmented structures reflected the cultural experience of being black woman in America showing a specific cultural, economic, and political response to the situation. Baraka’s two best known plays *The Slave* and *Dutchman* both challenge society’s assumptions about race. August Wilson’s *Fences* explores an African-American family’s search of the American Dream. Edward Albee’s *The Death of Bessie Smith* portrays how unfair the treatment of Afro-Americans in the United States. Hip hop as a style of expression is a genre of African American cultural expression to explore the contradictions of identity. Despite facing racism and segregation in the North, African Americans became an important part of the cultural fabric of the nation.

Before the 60s, women had just little, weak voice in the society. They had to be young, charm, well-brought up in order to marry the man who would support them. The traditional family is falling apart in a society that worships the self-made-man, the competitor. So for women the situation is worse. But the United States feminist movement involved new practices that produced a shift in gender relations, altering both gender and economic structures. Women started to demand equality and to face discrimination on the basis of their sex and it is an ideological shift and a type of cultural change.
Williams writes his plays in which there are winners and losers. The female characters, Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, represent two unfit women who cannot fight for success and achieve a secure place in society. They fall because they are women, not married, do not have a family, and live in an ancient world which goes against the modern capitalist lifestyle. In *The Glass Menagerie* the real tragedy in Laura and Amanda is that they cannot adapt to a different status in life. The tragedy is perhaps one of the whole society from which they are derived. It is a very tragic image when Laura feels that she does not fit the world outside the home so she left the school. Also a tragic wounded female in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is Blanche DuBois. Her insistence on behaving like a Southern lady in a hostile environment reflects her inability to change her behaviour to fit her new circumstances. In the Southern culture, women are completely dependent on men and that leads to alienation, isolation and destruction, the destruction of the old South and the culture they represent. But in *The Night of the Iguana* female roles are of two directions. Hanna plays the role of wise character who is realistic and carrying high social values; she proves that woman can be an effective member in the society whereas Maxine plays the role demanding the complete freedom of women including sexual freedom. Hence, both of them symbolize two essential demands of feminist movement in America during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Here, Tennessee Williams traces a kind of a cultural mutation in the American society.

Miller portrays mothers, in *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons*, as aimless and participate in the family destruction. But in *Broken Glass*, the female heroin is weak and a victim of a communal disaster. Shepard’s *A Lie of the Mind* explores how women are used and abused in the protagonist's quest for male identity. In *True West* the mother is aimless and weak that she cannot even stop her children’s fight.

Arthur Miller considers the competitive and capitalist society responsible for dehumanizing the individual and transforming the promising agrarian
American dream into an urban nightmare. Willy Lowman, in Miller’s *Death of a
Salesman*, believes in the American dream in a way he denies basic reality. He
wishes to be a successful salesman on the basis of being liked but the models of
business success in the play like Charlie, Ben, and Howard have different vision.
*Death of a Salesman* has a powerful portrayal of a timeless human dilemma. It
tells the story of a man who wants to justify his life and who falls a victim of
wrong values he strongly believes in. *All My Sons* is regarded as a criticism of the
American dream. Keller wins a factory to secure his sons’ future but responsible
for the death of 21 American pilots. Here the American dream has become like an
American nightmare and Miller portrays a picture of a typical American family
life after World War II. His wife is ill, Chris is discontent, Larry has committed
suicide as a result of his father shameful decision. Miller depicts the society
looking to get rich at any cost and that is rooted in his dark vision of the war and
the great depression. Miller’s play *Broken Glass* deals with the complexities of
post depression life for a couple whose sense of belonging to the great American
dream is under attack. Phillip rejects his Jewish identity and continues his life in
denial and allusion.

Amanda, in Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, is like Willy Loman in *Death
of a Salesman*. She insists on her daughter to develop charm and vivacity to
overcome the difficulties to achieve success but all of them fail. Her son, Tom,
breaks her dreams and leaves his job and the family altogether. Williams, in *A
Streetcar Named Desire*, makes Stanley an immigrant who is proud to be part of
the new society of a multi-cultural America. He couldn’t achieve the American
Dream as it is shown by his living conditions. Consequently, he turns to destroy
Blanche as a result of losing his American Dream source, the Belle Reve.

Shepard’s *Buried Child* contrasts the American dream. The males in the
family are seen as disappointed, since they have not fulfilled the dream of being
successful. The American Dreams are all shattered and Halie portrayed the
opposite of what the wife in the American dream is supposed to be. It shows the
break of Grand narratives and the fall of enlightenment. In *A Lie of the Mind*, Jake’s wife is successful in her job but he starts suspecting her fidelity, beats her and destroys their dream of a harmonious family.

In a modern world where market by its capitalist and materialist ideologies dictates the dream, daily life, and values of its people, the meaning of dignity, and freedom of man goes under question. Man in this situation has lost his dignity and humanity and it is a big break of the Grand narratives. The plays completely explore the failure of the American dream.

Under the continuous movement in and out of jobs in America lie deep narcissistic wounds which the worker tries to ease by searching for the perfect job. That is why American psychology considers frequent job change as an emotional disturbance. It is clearly in the studied plays with the characters of Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*, and Austin and his brother Lee in *True West*.

Williams as well as Miller and Shepard explore the psychological condition and the crisis of illusion versus reality brought by technological advance and the price people pay for progress. Mitch in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is enforcing Blanche to face her reality; facing the reality to get rid of the illusionary world she is living in. She is here like Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* who is enforced by her son to face the reality about her nagging nature and her daughter’s personality and future as she is crippled. Also it has some similarities with the tragedy of the Mother in *All My Sons* who is enforced by her son to meet the reality about the death of his brother. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is also enforced to meet the reality of his own and his children’s identity and failure. Even Sylvia in *Broken Glass* and Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana* are suffering of deep psychological crisis. *True West* is a metaphorical representation of the divided self so Shepard depicts Austin and Lee as cultural archetypes, that they represent two halves of his own personality. Denying reality in *Buried Child* is a deep psychological crisis leads to dreadful disasters on the individual and the family. In
*A Lie of the Mind*, Beth’s injured body and brain are the direct result of her husband’s interior fears and insecurities projected upon her. It is clear that the psychological crisis of loneliness, alienation, and losing reality has interred into the psyche of modern man causes a psychological disorder and fragmented identities.

The construction of centred identities is becoming increasingly difficult in postmodernity. Postmodernists argue that culture in postindustrial societies is fragmented. Since culture and identity are closely related, if the identity is fragmented, it is because of the fragmentation of culture. Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* addresses loss of identity and man’s inability to accept change within himself and society around him. Shame with the sense of inadequacy and inferiority manifest in the need to prove oneself to others, is evident in Loman men. Their shame propels them into wrongdoing and guilt and a search of identity. In *Broken Glass*, an event like the Holocaust involves everyone; there can be no turning away without cost. The denial, resignation, and ignorance are clearly shown in the play.

Williams concentrates on the frustrations and disappointments that the modern individual faces to find a place in society or constitute an identity. The early plays deals with hypersensitive characters who cannot face the world because of weakness or disability. Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* cannot meet the ordinary problems of life as well as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Both lack the ability to realize their identities, go out of their illusionary world, and to have job and stands by themselves.

*True West* is a play about the quest for identity. Austin realizes that his entire identity—which focused on achieving his dream—is completely wrong. For Austin that means giving up everything he has worked for and retreating to the desert. Austin and Lee, each one is searching for a new identity that suits his wishes and dreams. Vince returns with a new identity but quickly becomes both confused and corrupted by the environment of home. Initially, he is rejected by his
family members and feels a stray because he is not recognized. All have a shattered identity caused by the disintegration that hits the family.

The 20th century American drama has demonstrated family disintegration as a prevalent trend. The various family disintegration issues are shown in plays of some prominent American playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, Marsha Norman, August Wilson, and many others. With different themes related to family in American drama, one could find it that the family becomes a personal hell in spite of living in a culture that idealizes the family as the perfect unit of human community. The domestic harmony has been fundamental to the definition of a culture, and when losing this harmony, culture starts to take a new trend and it is a cultural mutation.

Same Shapard’s plays are examples of how the decline of the nuclear family is represented in twentieth century American drama. In Shepard family, physical boundaries are broken on a regular basis, contributing to the high level of mistrust and paranoia among its members. Such boundary ambiguity creates additional anxiety. So their inability to connect with the outside society is itself a big break of grand narratives of social relations. In Shepard’s Buried Child, he continues to focus on father and son relationships and the generational conflicts. The incestuous relationship of Tilden and Halie does not match the standards of the traditional, moral, American family. It is this shame that cripples the family and brings the emotional destruction so the family disintegration is fed by both distrustfulness and loneliness. The family in Buried Child suffers from the tyranny of the past, turning their day-to-day existence into a nightmare. True West is characterized as a civil war of family life, a showdown between brothers. In the play, Shepard continues to explore struggles within the family and to search for the meaning of home. The father and the mother have separated. The play depicts an example of betrayal and revenge, which are two emotions inherent in all of Shepard’s family plays and also inherent in the American family. It shows a break of family peace and harmony. A Lie of the Mind is a story of two families with
rejecting and brutal fathers, ineffectual mothers, and their dysfunctional offspring. The two families are suffering of psychological dysfunctions and a lack of understanding. The fracturing of the female body in this play is set up as reflections of the fractured psyche of its male characters.

The contradictions inherent in American’s culture have strained the American myth of family harmony. Hence, as a result, cultural values of the family modified by a capitalistic influence pervaded all of the American society. Family members view themselves and each other in terms of money and that is grounded within capitalistic ideology. It is a kind of social change and cultural mutations in America.

Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* are plays domestic quarrels between a father and a son, of a conflict between capitalism and communism, between self and soul, psyche and conscience, and between the individual and society. The disconnection, isolation, children’s reject of their fathers’ dreams, and the generation gap between fathers and their children mark a clear break of the grand narratives and highlight a cultural mutation. The troubled violence which Blanche, in Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, faces and sees in Stanley who returns from the war reflects the stress by experiencing the major traumatic events in the war. The violence perceived to stem from a need to prove one's self a man. The sons in Shepard’s *True West*, *Buried Child*, and *A Lie of the Mind* inherit a violent image of male identity from their fathers. The plays explore the American psyche at a time of failed dreams and lost vision in which the women characters are victims of male violence. The male characters often beat their female counterparts. They show an increasing violence on women. In the opening scene of *A Lie of the Mind*, we are informed that Jake, the husband has beaten his wife, Beth severely and thinks that she is dead; brutality crowds *Buried Child* in which an incestuous baby has been buried after being strangled; Lee and Austin fight fiercely in *True West*. His characters seem to have a sadistic revelling in this violence.
Globalization is a historical process that results from human innovation and technological progress and includes a series of social, economical, technological, cultural, and political changes. The ways of global flows of technology and ideologies have destructive as well as productive effects. Yet, the down turning of local and global conflicts, repression of human rights and civil liberties, and general increase in fear and anxiety are regarded as results of globalization. The young generation is adversely affected and influenced by globalization of media, travels, fashions, and economic changes. The values of older people and the young generation begin to clash.

The shopping malls, the fast food centres, the net cafes are becoming the marks of cultural consumerism. Society is undergoing a rapid change. The consumer culture rose after World War II. Miller criticizes the consumer society and its capitalist logic. In consumer society money seems to be the key factor that drives society to this level of corruption. Fall of Grand narratives is also obvious. Moral and humanistic values are replaced by false needs and business language games as it is in All My Sons. The impact leads to corruption, crime, sexual vulgarism, civil and ethnic conflict leading to acts of violence, and denial of fundamental rights of humanity. The ideology brought about by capitalism leads to psychological instability and disorder. It replaces the ideology that values human being for his humanity. It is breaking the Grand narratives and marks a cultural mutation.

Willy Loman is an indictment against the machine civilization of America which has deprived man of his real content and peace of mind. As well, Williams criticizes civilization. Here in The Night of the Iguana, the setting of Maxine’s hotel reflects a civilized oasis surrounded by violence. Williams wants to say that civilization brings about violence as well as the civilized man loses the relationship with God. This loss is a kind of breaking the Grand narratives and leads to nervous breakdown and instability of characters’ life. It shows that this civilization leads to a deep change in peoples’ believes and faith, it means a
cultural mutation which in turn brings about negative consequences. The geographical meeting place, between two wests, between savagery and civilization is extended by Shepard into a psychological boundary. Here the cultural change affecting the society resulted in a clash between the savagery and civilization. Lee brings uncivilized behavior to the civilized area by stealing residents’ house objects. It is further ironic that because of their physical struggle with each other, they turn the paradise of mother’s house into a wasteland. The destruction of this symbol of paradise raises the irony that the men destroy their own parent’s home and that indicates their rejection of her values as well as the values of civilization.

The function of culture is to satisfy fixed known needs. In America as well as in industrialized cultures, it is only the deliberate creation of needs that permits the culture to continue. This is the first phase of the psychic revolution of contemporary life. So Miller’s *All My Sons* as well as *Death of a Salesman* describe the violent rebellion sons against fathers. By means of father-son relationship, Miller may be examining his own mixed feelings as a culturally assimilated Jew. So Chris’s rejecting to lead the family business and the generation gap between them regarding the social responsibility is a clear sign of his cultural assimilation. It represents a cultural change after another. The regained idealism and the feeling of social responsibility represented by Chris come after the capitalistic ideology that the society comes to, represented by Joe. Because of the American culture in the depression era, Miller describes Willy in *Death of a Salesman* as a childlike victim of the cultural values he adopts virtually without question or considering the change.

The loss of faith is a cultural problem arisen in the play *The Night of the Iguana*. Shannon represents everyman suffering from such a problem that caused him psychological breakdown. It means that Williams wants to highlight this cultural problem that hits the society and leads to instability and social disorder. It is a kind of cultural change happened in the society with deep and dangerous effects. But by the humanistic role played by Hanna, it is clear that such a problem
can be overcome by the reintegration into the social mainstream and in most by regaining faith in God. Freeing the society from the restrictions of religions is a kind of cultural mutations. Cultural clash in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is caused by the cultural differences and the new ideologies occupy the American society. The play portrays the decline of Blanche’s culture and the subsequent rise of Stanley’s one, the triumph of the brutal world over the ethics world, and that creates a tension and an instable environment between them. Many of Williams’s female characters speak with Southern accents and that means they are stuck to their Southern values and culture and that caused them much trouble and suffering.

In Shepard’s *True West*, Lee’s frustrated attempt to assimilate into Austin’s culture has led him to recognize his own unsuitability for urban life. He confesses that his way life is not a kind of philosophical decision but a result of his inability to make his living in the city. The same situation is Laura’s situation in Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*. That is due to the social and cultural change.

Sam Shepard shows a rich variety of cultural concerns, and his central subject in his plays is the American family. Nevertheless, The Cowboy is a recurrent image which Shepard connects mythologically to such twentieth-century images of masculinity as the gangster and the rock star. The traditional values embodied in the cowboy are no longer adequate, and that one must move through or beyond them to find new ones.

The form of language determines individual thought and specific cultural traits. Miller’s characters’ language has no roots in their consciousness. Willy in *Death of a Salesman* uses the language of advertisements which is detached from his being. Williams’s characters resist the language which seeks to contain and define them. And many of Shepard’s characters reflect the culture of violence in their language. In *Buried Child*, the breakdown in dialogue contributes to the members’ inability to sustain interpersonal relationships. It reinforces a deep sense of distrust among all the members.
To sum up, the attendant horrors of World War II produced a widespread sense of the utter meaninglessness and arbitrariness of human existence. It is clear that all the people face the experience of the World War Second; it is a social action in which all are involved willy-nilly. Because of moral unease and uncertainty and a collapse of faith in the patterns of social relationships, there is a search of new patterns. Moreover, moral and ethical values are no longer accepted as absolutes. The breakdown of the economic system has much to do with the breakdown of social and moral values. The rapid changes affecting America and the world have seen led by economic and technological forces. These core values require renewal because of the challenges of globalization engendered by modern commerce and technology. In addition to all of that, automation produces various sorts of fears in various sorts of individuals—fear of change, fear of technology itself, fear of displacement, fear of machines, and fear of science in general.

Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shepard address loss of identity and a man’s inability to accept change within himself and society around him. Their work deals with various elements such as fall of the Grand narratives, disintegration of family ties, failure of the American Dream, distance between illusion and reality, the loss of social responsibility, the sense of isolation, lack of understanding, generations gap, cultural assimilation, cultural clash, fear, violence, effects of World War II, and the struggle for being. It is about the paradoxes of being alive in a technological society; it is about the sense of isolation brought by technological advancement and the price people pay for progress. They also show that change happens to society because of industrialization, civilization, and capitalism and modern technologies become essential part of people’s life in a consumer society after the World War Second. Their drama is seen as a study of the death of the ideal, fall of Enlightenment, the failure of society to offer the meaning which the individual seeks, and how capitalism that values money more than moral and human values in such a technological era affects the society leading to social and cultural mutation.
The American drama from the World War I to the Great Depression, to the World War II and the atomic age, to Vietnam War, to the economical, political, and the social revolution of the 60s show a cultural change. It is shown through the new invented, industrial technological devices as cultural objects that lead to social experience based on materialism. It creates intensive social criticism, regarding family problems, anger, fear, losing jobs, hope, trust, and fear of the unknown future. All of these aspects are explored and explained by the plays chosen for this study. The vulgar side of materialism is believed to have pushed humanity to the cut-throat world of capitalism and consumerism with utter disregard for human values and ecological concerns. All of these aspects are clearly shown and explored in the plays of Miller, Williams, and Shepard chosen for this study. Their dramatic discourses microscopically manifest the cultural transformation that keeps transforming both, life and literature, in the present case drama.