CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
(1) The Colonial Period:

It can be said that American Literature may have begun in 1493 when Columbus wrote his famous letters to King Ferdinand of Spain. Other explorers and adventurers, who followed, wrote letters to their friends and relatives at home. These ‘letters home’ mark the beginning of the written record of the dangers they had to face, but also to the wonders that were to be seen everywhere. The curiosity was excited at home because of these letters. The letters gave realistic and vivid accounts. More and more people were tempted to sail for the New World to settle there. Such heroic souls came not from England alone, but these souls came from most other countries of Europe – Spain, Portugal, France, Holland and many others. In this way, there laid the foundation of the ‘unity in diversity’ which is such a prominent feature of American culture.

In 1607, Jamestown was the first successful English colony in North America. Then came the Pilgrim Fathers in the ship called the Mayflower. They founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. The earliest American writers were really European writers living in America. Though they might have left Europe a long time ago, their writing was clearly influenced by European writers. There was, in the beginning, an imitation of European and in particular English literature. It does not mean that there was no
literature in the colonial period. The Colonial American literature depicts the dangerous adventure, the hard work and difficult decisions which went into the process of the building a nation.

The Puritans were the early colonizers who settled round New England. Puritanism exercised considerable influence on the growth of American literature. The earliest of the Puritan poets was Anne Bradstreet (1612-1773). Her poems were published under the title *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up In America*. Another poet Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705) composed *The Day of Doom*. Other writers who contributed to literature from the colonial period were Edward Taylor, Thomas Godfrey, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Benjamin Franklin. The War of Independence was over by 1781. The various colonies had come together to fight against British tyranny and unjust laws made in Great Britain. The war brought political independence, but literary and cultural independence was yet to come. Another important development of the early years of the century was the rise of American democracy. The revolutionary writings of Rousseau and the other makers of the French Revolution and the French Revolution itself with the principles `Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity`, inspired Americans. Walt Whitman is the greatest poet of American voice at the International level. He is the first poet who became famous as the first American poet. His *‘Leaves of Grass’* has been called `the Bible of Democracy.’

Especially in America, where the democratic process brought the people into immediate familiarity with and sensitive response to cultural forces, the literature responded quickly to such pressures. These three-quarters of a century have experienced
world wide upheavals, such as the two World Wars, the spread of Communism and the rise and fall of Fascism, and such localized or national events as the great Dust Bowl disaster to Mid-West agriculture, the Great Depression of the thirties, and the prohibition experiment of the twenties. The increasing urbanization and the concentration of population in suburban areas, the advent of the automobile, the radio, the moving picture theatres, and the electrification of rural America have been factors modifying the social, cultural, and literary life of the nation. We find there were the Southern writers, New England writers, and Western and Mid-Western writers. We have had a literature of the American Indian, the Negro, the Jew; we have had the problem of racial assimilation as a basis for literature. And we have had opposition to assimilation in our literature. The railroads and highways, the mobility given by the automobile, national coverage by radio, television, press associations, Magazines, and advertising campaigns, have encountered the opposition of those advocates of the local and unique cultural values to be found in isolated pockets with dialectical variations and quaint folkways. Thus a continuous critical assessment of factors in American culture has given American literature a self-conscious self-criticism.

The cultural changes accelerated by the war were to change the life of the nation in aspects affecting all phases of individual and social life under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson. The American people gave themselves over to an inflated and impossible idealism. The period from 1910 to 1920 sometimes is called the “teens” and it has many similarities to the condition of teen age adolescence. It was for America period of development as a nation and change in social patterns. Woodrow Wilson, the college professor becoming the President, was a quiet and dignified leader for such compelling
change as were sweeping the country. Wilson’s program of domestic improvement, with which he began his presidency and which was greatly needed by the nation, was interrupted by the war in the summer of 1914. The war brought industrial expansion, increased employment, higher wages, and greater mechanism. The development in medicine and public health increased the life span. Young people could gain employment on their own --and they did. Women entered industry and various employments outside the home in large numbers. The millions of young men in the armed services were seeking new places, learning new ways.

Archibald MacLeish has expressed the changing attitudes and questioning of faith in the following lines:

“We too in whose trustless hearts,
All truth alters and the lights,
Of earth is out........ .”

[Oliver, Egbert S., 1890-1965, p.7]

John Reed, born in Portland, Oregon, a graduate of Harvard University and a successful Journalist, expressed his own interest and that of many others concerned with changing the social conditions of the world in the eye witness account of the Russian Revolution which he called Ten Days that shook the World (1919). In a short autobiography written in 1917, he reflects the mixture of shock and enthusiasm felt by many young people as they witnessed the world break into war and revolution around them. John Reed says:
“I am twenty-nine years old, and I know that this is the end of a part of my life, the end of youth. Sometimes it seems to me the end of the world’s youth too; certainly the Great War has done something to us all. But it is also the beginning of a new phase of life, and the world we live in is so full of swift change and colour and meaning that I can hardly keep from imagining the splendid and terrible possibilities of the time to come. The last ten years I’ve gone up and down the earth drinking experiences, fighting and loving, seeing and hearing and testing things. I’ve travelled all over Europe, and to the boarders of the East and down in Mexico, having adventures seeing men killed and broken, victorious and laughing, men with visions and men with a sense of humour. I’ve watched civilization change and broaden and sweeten in my lifetime; and I’ve watched it wither and crumble in the red blast of war. And war I have seen, too, in the trenches, with the armies. I’m not quite sick of seeing yet, but soon I will be-- I know that. My future life will not be what it has been. And I so want to stop a minute, and look back, and get my bearings.”

[Oliver, Egbert S., 1890-1965. P. 7.]

(2) The American Revolution:

We find that till in the early years of the 17th century, the whole of Western America had been colonized. Other peoples of Europe, who settled in this part of the new continent, were soon absorbed into the dominant British group and acquired its culture and ways of thought. These Atlantic colonies became a homogenous group by the early years of the 17th century. Differences were subordinated to the common culture,
and thus we get that `diversity within unity` which is such a leading characteristic of American literature and American way of life.

This coming together, this feeling of oneness, was further strengthened by common education, the new generation received in universities and colleges. The first American university, the Harvard University, was founded by the early Puritan settlers, and more and more universities and colleges sprang up with the passing of time. Young men from the various Atlantic colonies flocked to these centers of learning, and the youth from one colony mixed and exchanged views with those from the other colonies. This brought them close together. There was the dawn of national consciousness.

This process of the rise of nationalism was further accelerated by the increasing prosperity of the different colonies. The Revolutionary War or the American War of Independence commenced in 1776, and ended victoriously with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781. America was recognized as an independent nation by the Peace of Paris. George Washington became the first President of the U. S. A. in 1789.

(3) Major Writers of the Revolutionary Period:

According to Spiller the period (1760-1790) was perhaps the darkest in the history of the United States, but in the struggles of those days the political and economic life of the new nation was formed by a small group of philosophers’ statesmen, of whom Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the acknowledged leader. It was a revolutionary age. In America the people were divided between the Conservatives or Loyalists and the
As in England, the Augustan Age was an age of enlightenment, an age of prose and reason, so also the Revolutionary Period in America. There is no doubt that there was some development in drama and the plays of Royall Tyler and William Dunlop were staged and attained some measure of popularity. Tyler’s *The Contrast*, first performed in New York in 1787, is a play which in style and plot is reminiscent of *The School for Scandal*, but which most successfully uses Native American characters and themes. Dunlop’s own plays included *The Father, or American Shandyism* (1789), *Ander* (17988), and *Italian Father* (1799). Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was one of the most gifted of the prose-writers of the day.

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the “Declaration of Independence,” which was adopted in the continental convention on July 4, 1776, was the most learned of the scholar-statesmen. He provided leadership during the days of the American crisis. Philip Freneau is the greatest poet of the revolutionary era. He has been called the father of American poetry. His patriotic songs and lyrics fired the hearts of Americans. He has also the credit of being the first great romantic poet of America. We find in his poetry the introduction of new themes, beauty of nature, charm of solitude, the idea of the noble savage and so on. These themes reveal genuine poetical inspiration.

There were a number of centers of art and learning, to which flocked eminent men of letters. They talked, discussed, and exchanged views, and thus grew American
literature with its own ethos, and distinctive features. One such centre was New York. It was a noted industrial centre, but it also became a cultural centre, for its wealth contributed to the growth of literary Magazines, Newspapers, Publishing-Houses, Printing Presses, Schools and Colleges. “The Knickerbockers,” writers, like Irving, Cooper, and Bryant, made it their home early in the century.

Another centre of literary activity was Concord, a small village in Massachusetts. Only twenty miles from Boston, this small town became the house of the transcendentalists. Thoreau was born there, and Emerson came to reside in it in 1834, and he was followed by Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller. The little group of Concord-writers held literary conferences from time to time, to which came eminent men of letters and thus was formed an American theory of literature. Cambridge and Boston were the seats of the two most important American universities and also the abodes of men of letters like William Longfellow, Lowell, and O. W. Holmes. One critic after another commented upon the gracious living of Boston. To Holmes, it was the universe. The middle years of the 19th Century constitute a period of great civil turmoil and unrest. There was Civil War on the question of slavery from 1861-65, ending with the defeat of the South under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln. Most of the writers of the first national period were either dead or had already done their life-work and contributed their best. Cooper and Irving died in the fifties, Poe died in 1849, Thoreau in 1862, and Hawthorne in 1864.

The first important point to note is the rapid Westward expansion of the trouble-tossed country. By the early explorers and colonizers, a number of colonies had been
founded on the Atlantic sea-board. Then had come the War of Independence and the dawn of national consciousness. Now the new nation swiftly grew into a continental nation. The U. S. A. became a Continental nation covering the entire continent from Canada to California and Florida and from the Atlantic in the East to the Pacific in the West. There was a corresponding increase in the means of communication. Construction of roads had already been taken up in an earlier period, and by the middle of the century, there was a net-work of roads linking one part of the country with the other. Travel on the National Highways now became safe and comfortable, and the different parts of the vast continent were thus brought closer together. The net-work of roads went hand-in-hand with the establishment of a net-work of railways.

The population of the new continental nation was also increasing rapidly. Gradually the language that they spoke no longer remained British. In idiom, pronunciation, and vocabulary, it had acquired so many new characteristics that it became American in a strict and definable sense. Other cultural characteristics, like habits of living, fashions and folkways, created similarly new patterns from old materials. Out of the Westward migration and the orientation of the American people to continent, there developed a new civilization. Regionalism and Realism took the place of imagination and idealism, the particular and the local was stressed in place of the general and universal. The major literature of the second half of the 19th century is national in its outlook.

Herman Melville was born in New York City on August, 1, 1818. His father was a rich and prosperous merchant, but this prosperity was short-lived. His work *Moby Dick* is
tragic epic and his fame rests largely on this novel. It is a complex work of art and as such it can be read on many levels. Superficially it can be read as an adventure story in which real men fight a real whale on the high seas. The battle with the sea-monster is a grim one and ultimately the whale is destroyed, but it also causes the destruction of the ship as well as of its crew, excepting the solitary figure of Ishmael who is the narrator of the tale. His crew belongs to different races and nations thus symbolizing the diversity of the American nation and his fight with the whale becomes symbolic of the early settlers `and colonizers` fight against the Red Indians and the great American wilderness. The ship may also be taken to be a symbol of his soul-ship out on its voyage to the other world. Moby Dick symbolizes both good and evil. It symbolizes the Evil forces of Nature.

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819. He published the first edition of the Leaves of Grass on July 4, 1855. It now ranks with the immortal classics of the world literature. In Leaves of Grass, he celebrates himself, and in celebrating himself, he celebrates America also. In writing of himself, he writes of his age and of his country. The `I` whom he celebrates in his book is not Whitman, a definite historical personality, but the average American, the masses of America. This makes him at once the poet of democracy and the poet of America. Whitman`s Leaves of Grass which once considered as “the expression of a beast,” is now regarded as “The Bible of Democracy.” It is the epic of democracy. We have the use of symbolic elements in Leaves of Grass. The `I` in Whitman`s poetry does not stand for the poet alone. It symbolizes the modern American, the modern man, or even Everyman. The `I` may even symbolize a soldier on the battlefield, or a comet rushing through the heavens.
Mark Twain is one of the better known figures in the history of American fiction. He is popular both in Europe and America. His masterpiece *Huckleberry Finn* is a great world-book. It is an adventure story. It can be read and interpreted on several levels. Both characters and incidents are symbolic. Huck’s journey is symbolic of soul’s journey to heaven. The raft is the symbol of peace. The river Mississippi stands for a distinct culture. Jim is the Negro slave of Miss Watson. He is black with a white heart. He is befooled by Tom. The novel shows Mark Twain’s humour at its best.

Emily Dickinson was the greatest woman poet of America. She was born on December 10, 1830. Emily Dickinson never married. She began writing poems during her twenties. Her poems were entitled as ‘*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*.’ Her poetry consists of lyrics, and most of them are very short lyrics. They are an expression of her intensely felt emotional or psychological states and intense spiritual experiences. She is also a great nature-poet and a number of her lyrics deal with nature, but nature in her is always suffused with the poet’s own emotions. We have the beauty of the sunset and the sunrise, the Moon, the beauty of flowers and tress, the seasons in her poetry. She is also a great love poet. Emily lived like a nun, dressed in white; still she has written her poems having love as a deeply felt personal emotion.

Emily also writes about God, Life, Death and Immortality. There is mysticism in her poetry. She speaks of divine love in terms of sexual love, and it becomes difficult to say whether the object of love is God or some earthly being. In one of her poems, ‘*Because I Could Not Stop For Death,*’ Death is a lover. Immortality is one of the major themes of her poetry.
(4) The State of American Drama before O’Neill:

American drama marks an interesting link between the literature of the war
decade and that of the twenties. The work of Ibsen, Shaw, and other great European
playwrights had far overshadowed anything happening in American theatres up to the
advent of Eugene O’Neill. The way was prepared for O’Neill through the interest shown
in drama by two amateur groups in New York, the Washington Square Players, and the
Provincetown Theatre.

We find that before Eugene O’Neill as a playwright, the American drama was
completely divorced from life and lacked in originality. The playwrights were imitating
the British and the European plays. The drama of the previous times was artificial,
commercial, and conventional, generally written for the entertainment of tired
businessmen and workers. Thousands of workers came to city due to the industrial
revolution. They had money to amuse themselves by watching a play, be it a melodrama
or a farce. They had a taste for a play. The play, whether it was a comedy, tragedy, satire,
history or a problem-play had entertainment value. It achieved a success among the
audience, young or old. Thus, they encouraged the production of plays which were far
removed from life and visual appeal but full of the devices of Melodrama.

As Dr. Neeta Dixit rightly observes,
“After the mid nineteenth century, the plays on different subjects were being written. Some writers were completely under foreign influence and the others wrote on native material as Yankee Plays, Indian Plays, Frontier Plays, life-in-the-big-city plays. But with such a division, the playwrights of the century were still beyond the upliftment of the standard of drama. The nineteenth century dramatists were interested in political controversy, business activity, and social and economic issues. They had little energy left to attain any subtle of literary art. No wonder the plays of the time were completely originality. In technique and structure also there was no improvement.”

[Dixit, Neeta, 2004, p.47]

After that, we come across the entire theatrical entertainment was slick and commercial, the plot could be easily grasped and quickly forgotten. The majority of the playwrights could not resist the temptation of commercial profits and adopted themselves to the popular taste. As a result business organizations like the Theatrical Syndicate [organized in 1896] appeared. The aim of such organizations was to make money by presenting the plays under its complete control. The actors like Mansfield, E. H. Sothern, Otis Skinner, and Arnold Daly were famous for their acting in the romantic and sentimental comedies of Shakespeare, and the plays of George Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and some other foreign dramatists.

This group of performers at the end of the nineteenth century was called ‘the actors of transition.’ These actors did a lot to the American world of acting. Mansfield produced and performed the plays of Bernard Shaw and Ibsen. The other actor of
transition was Otis Skinner. Arnold Daly acted in the commercial plays. Among the actors who developed varied skills and became specialists in romantic roles was Eugene’s father James O’Neill who had been a fine Shakespearean actor but later confined himself largely to one role that of the count of Monte Cristo by Alexander Dumas. The role became so dominant in his career that James was called ‘Monte Cristo.’

It is obvious that the American drama since the beginning of its history, was affected, changed, and shaped according to the various foreign influences. The American performer was a product of varied native and foreign influences on him. Huge trusts and monopolies were formed to ensure profits and to increase the play’s reputation thereby. ‘Show business like other businesses, at the start of the twentieth century, was prosperous, lively and colorful. The best of the ideals and traditions which had motivated the theatre of the nineteenth century were dead or dying. The inspiration was gone. In every aspect of the theatre was a crying need for renewed and rebirth. These ideas of Graff B. Wilson in his ‘Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre,’ express a clear picture of the theatrical conditions of the American drama of the time.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the playwrights were keen to bring a kind of drama that would be dissimilar to the common American drama. The change was the need of the hour because many old traditions of society were being outmoded in the democratic atmosphere of America. New ideas, new theories, and techniques were replacing the old ones in every field of science and art. The playwrights also began reshaping the drama of the nineteenth century. The playwrights had an eagerness to do something with the plays but most of them were still devoted to the devices and
methods of melodrama which had prevailed over a hundred years on the American stage. This reform movement turned new writers to experiment in realism. These dramatists were Clyde Fitch, Langdon Mitchell who displayed some literary sophistication. The writers of the early twentieth century drew inspiration from contemporary events and made them the subjects of their drama. But unfortunately none of the realistic playwrights could make any permanent contribution to drama.

We may divide the plays written at the beginning of the twentieth century into four groups. The first group is of the Plays Written for the Sole Purpose of diverting, amusing and entertaining. In this group must be included the hundreds of farces, melodramas, and comedies of all kinds. The second group of the plays offered was usually social comedies that discuss contemporary social problems within the frame work of a more or less amusing plays. The third category contains romantic plays often melodramatic continuing a long past tradition of America. The fourth group might be called romantic plays of ideas. These plays make comments on human condition and had a framework of a poetic or fanciful setting.

The plays of the first category or the plays written to amuse are of many varieties. Some of them create laughter by caricaturing well-known American types or characters. The second group of plays termed as the ‘social comedies’ was used as a means of communicating ideas. These plays convey a sense with the use of effective dialogues, the high purpose belittles when these plays end in comic situations. These plays had the ideas concerning the foibles and pretensions of society, or sometimes took up any specific social problem to deal with. The plot of the plays had been a very small portion
of the serious issue. William Vaughan Moody is a notable name in the development of ‘Romantic Plays with Ideas.’ These dramas do not escape from reality. These plays have romantic setting or poetic treatment as a means of communicating ideas. Moody’s two prose plays ‘The Great Divine (1906),’ and ‘The Faith Healer (1909),’ are the contributions to the regular theatre. These plays are inspired by actual events reported in the newspapers.

Finally it was left to Eugene O’Neill to elevate drama to its maturity and excellence. He demonstrated to the world indisputably that American drama had come of age. Throughout his career O’Neill was obsessed with a search for the meaning of life and for a means whereby man could control his fear of death. He was never satisfied with the surface of things. Whether his subject was big or small, he tried to do a big work. His search never ceased, and the more he wrote the larger grew his concepts and the more comprehensive his plays. His legacy to drama is unmatched in the history of American theatre.

(5) Free-Theatres Movements of the early Twentieth Century:

The idea of an independent theatre began with Germany. It was the influence of the realistic writings of the four major dramatists Ibsen, Strindberg, Anton Chekov and George Bernard Shaw. The idea of free theatres to introduce new dramatists and to experiment with new methods of production, spread from country to country. Even before Antoine had begun his work, provocative new ideals of play-production had been introduced in Germany by George-II. Duke of Saxe Menninger (1826-1914), who earned the title of ‘Theatre Duke,’ was a director and scene-designer. In 1898 ‘The Moscow Arts
Theatre’ began its career with Tsar Fyodor. This theatre started training programmes for actor which evolved into a system for teaching the art of acting. The first American attempt to establish a modern repertory theatre similar to the Moscow Arts Theatre was made in New York in 1909.

The study of drama and dramatic arts had been sponsored since the colonial times in the American colleges. The dramatic presentations had been made as in 1736 when the students of the college of William and Mary performed Joseph Addison’s ‘Cato.’ From that time on the staging of plays continued in many American colleges but the activity was never a part of curriculum. Plays were studied as literature. If those plays were staged, the activity was extra-curricular and earned no college credit.

(6) The Little Theatre Movement:

Like the free theatres of Europe, the little or community theatres grew up all over the nation to reject the slick, superficial entertainment which the merchants of Broadway were turning out. The movement resulted in the establishment of a variety of groups organized under various labels. Some were called ‘little theatres,’ others ‘Community,’ or ‘Civic theatres,’ the ‘University theatre,’ etc., including the other non-Broadway theatres. These were termed as ‘nationwide theatre,’ but the names never caught on.

The three main divisions of the American theatre are University theatre, Community theatre, and Commercial theatre. The little theatres were not confined to big cities; they flourished the towns and villages from Michigan to California. In 1915, the community drama reestablished the three groups of itself.
(I) The Neighbourhood Playhouse: It was built by Alice and Irene Levisohn. During the first five years the company was amateur and later it became professional in its presentation of the variety of dramas.

(II) The Washington Square Players: This theatre group began its brief lifetime of three years and three months in February 1915. It provided an opportunity to the new and talented dramatists like Philip Moeller, Zoe Akins, and Lewis Beach etc.

(III) Provincetown Players of Provincetown and New York: This group was organized in 1915 and had a special claim to immortality. It was Provincetown Players that introduced to the world stage Eugene O'Neill. The formation of the group was accidental. Like the Provincetown Players many other organizations and individuals contributed to the theatrical activity in America. Among them, Sam Hume did a lot to stimulate the creativity in theatre.

O'Neill’s plays played a dominant role in introducing the new drama. O’Neill constantly experimented with the new methods as the expressionistic technique which sought to convey the meaning symbolically rather than by literal realism. O’Neill’s two masterpieces ‘The Emperor Jones,’ and ‘The Hairy Ape,’ are the expressionistic plays. While his psychoanalytical plays as the ‘Desire under the Elms’ (1924), ‘Strange Interlude’ (1927), and ‘Mourning Becomes Electra’ (1931), etc., are notable for their originality and for the introduction of psychological interpretation in the drama of human emotions.

Restive under the restrictions imposed by the theatre, and never satisfied with the success of one form, O’Neill never ceased experimenting with new forms as against the traditional concept of drama. The early one-act plays are realistic but they are not
mere representation of facts. There is an inner revelation of a psychological insight in all these plays. The expressionistic plays deal with real life-type of the protagonists in them. ‘The Hairy Ape’ and ‘The Emperor Jones’ are O’Neill’s experiments in monologues the type of plays in which the purpose of the dramatists is to sketch out the internal conflict of a single character. *The Great God Brown* is a remarkable play in which O’Neill’s handling of the mask device becomes significant. Masks in the plays of O’Neill, have been used to distinguish between the assumed self and the real self of a character. ‘Strange Interlude’ uses their psychological insight. The playwright achieved the most powerful effects in the studies of the disintegration of personality. Besides O’Neill has made free use of Freudian psychology in his plays to reveal the hidden forces that govern the actions of a character. The characters of Eben Cabot in ‘Desire under the Elms,’ and Orin Mannon in ‘Mourning Becomes Electra,’ are laid bare with the help of Oedipus complex. And Electra complex is made to serve the same purpose in the portrayal of Livonia in ‘Mourning Becomes Electra,’ and Nina Leeds in ‘Strange Interlude.’ The various complexes play a vital part in the delineation of O’Neill’s characters. ‘The Emperor Jones,’ reveals breakdown of a Negro’s equilibrium under the stress of fear. ‘The Hairy Ape,’ is a worker’s loss of motivation when he could no longer feel that he ‘belonged.’ ‘Strange Interlude,’ is the mental and moral disintegration of a woman whose finance has been killed in a war. The use of psychological terms in the portrayal of a character makes O’Neill’s plays the representative of the entire American drama.

(7) O’Neill’s Contribution as a Playwright:

The chart of O’Neill’s growth as a dramatic artist can be drawn in an ascending curve. During his dramatic career, extending from his early one-act plays to his late
masterpieces, he experimented with a variety of dramatic forms and modes. There is hardly any dramatic form of device which he did not assay in his attempts to shadow forth of sickness of modern man in his plays. O’Neill’s wide variety of techniques reflects the deep-seated spiritual restlessness. In all his major works, Eugene O’Neill has traced the course of a modern dramatist in search of an aesthetic and spiritual centre. His plays combined the ideas and conflicts of the first half of the 20th century. His plays assimilated its advances in dramatic art and theatrical technique. His plays expressed uneasy aspirations towards tragic insights and dramatic vision.

The American drama was completely divorced from life and lacked in originality, before the emergence of O’Neill as a dramatist. The American dramatists were imitating the British and the European plays. The drama of the previous times was artificial, commercial and conventional. The drama was written for the entertainment of tired businessmen and workers. As Dr. Neeta Dixit rightly observes,

“The industrial revolution had brought to the cities thousands of workers who had money to amuse themselves by watching a play, be it a melodrama or a farce. They had a taste for a play, which was varied, fast paced and spectacular. As the number of such audience multiplied, the numbers and he size of theatres grew immensely. And a play, whether it was a comedy, tragedy, satire, history or a problem-play, it had entertainment value; it achieved a success among the audience young or old. Thus they encouraged the production of plays which were far removed from life and visual but full of the devices of melodrama.”

[Dixit, Neeta, 2004, p.46]
O’Neill’s plays are not so much the summary of an era as a new mode and a new theme for American stage. In one of his letters to George Jean Nathan, he contributed the real objective of a playwright. O’Neill says:

“The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he sees it, the depth of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work now-a-days musts have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is scribing around the surface of things.”

[Quoted in Crutch, J.W., 1959, p.34]

O’Neill is not only a dramatic poet, but also a mystic. Generations of Celtic ancestry flower in him, just as the generations of the Puritan mystic flowered in Hawthorne and Emerson. In him, the Celtic nature, with its intimate relations with the past, catches a gleam now and then of the dim regions where God brought into being a nobler form of life than had before existed. O’Neill goes down into the depths of human life to study apparently degraded forms. O’Neill’s Celtic ancestry leads him to symbolism. The race, in its painting, its poetry, its religion, thinks in symbols, knowing that mysticism has to be tied down to reality by some concrete expression. O’Neill declines to be limited in his theme or locality. His roots are in America, often in the New England where he lived so long and which he understood so well, from its farms to its police courts, which
as a reporter had to frequent. He can describe the decadent aristocracy of the small town in New England.

(8) Symbolism:

A symbol in the broadest sense of the term is anything which signifies something else; in this sense all words are symbols. As commonly used in discussing literature however, symbol is applied only to a word, or set of words that signifies an object or event which itself signifies something else; that is the words refer to something which suggests a range of reference beyond itself. ‘Symbolism’ a name primarily associated with a school of French poets writing in the second half of the 19th century. It means the use of symbols to represent things esp. in art and literature; the symbols used in this way.

Symbolism is a literary device and the writer makes use of the character, setting, incident, language and expresses his thoughts. The playwright clarifies his ideas, concepts in a short way by making the use of the symbols in his plays. The mind of the character is disclosed with the use of symbols.

(9) The Justification of the Study:

The justification to conduct a research on the symbolism in Eugene O’Neill’s plays, in present era of human development, lies in the fact that O’Neill’s works are depictions of the real conditions of the American society. America nowadays has become an ideal of a section of educated masses who believe that the system in America is the real expression of a society which does not have anything odd for its general masses.

(10) Hypotheses:
In this research work the main hypotheses have been substantiated on the basis of relevant information about symbolism in the plays of Eugene O’Neill which enhances the effectiveness of the ways.

(11) Research Methodology:

The entire literary contribution of Eugene O’Neill especially his plays have been examined under this theoretical frame. His protagonists, themes, problems to be dealt therein and remedial or diagnostic approaches to each problem have been examined on this line of action. The proposed research work would depend upon the Textual Analysis of Primary sources and the Secondary sources [Books having references to the writer’s works, articles, reviews in journals and magazines, websites].

(12) Sources:

This research has dwelt much upon the original texts of O’Neill’s plays especially Beyond the Horizon, The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, Marco Millions, All God’s Chillun Got Wings, Desire under the Elms, Lazarus Laughed, The Great Got Brown, Dynamo, Mourning Becomes Electra, Long Day’s Journey into Night which have provided it a base for theoretical hypothecation of the entire research. Besides them, some commentaries on Eugene O’Neill’s literary contributions and autobiographical writings have been used as its source materials. In brief, the original texts have cemented the research ground to erect this entire structure, and the published materials have their roles too, but not more than supplementary.

(13) Objective:
I have selected this author for my research work because he is very prominent playwright in the modern age but his some aspects have not been properly focused by the scholars so I would like to focus on neglected aspects, especially symbolism, in his plays which will be very useful for the scholars in future.

(14) Research Strategy:

The proposed research work has been divided into the following chapters broadly:

[I] Introduction:

The First chapter is entitled as *Introduction* in which an attempt has been made to study a brief survey of American literature in general and American drama in particular up to Eugene O’Neill, his contribution as a playwright, the aspects related to the symbolic setting. We find that American literature may have begun in 1493 when Columbus wrote his famous letters to King Ferdinand of Spain. The earliest American writers were really European writers living in America. Though they might have left Europe a long time ago, their writing was clearly influenced by European writers.

The Puritans were the early colonizers who settled round New England. Puritanism exercised considerable influence on the growth of American literature. The revolutionary writings of Rousseau and other makers of the French Revolution and the French Revolution itself with the principles ‘Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,’ inspired Americans. Walt Whitman is the greatest poet of American democracy. His ‘*Leaves of Grass,*’ has been called ‘the Bible of Democracy.’ Mark Twain is one of the better known figures in the history of American fiction. He is popular both in Europe and America. His
masterpiece Huckleberry Finn is a great world-book. It is an adventure story. Emily Dickinson was the greatest woman poet of America. Her poems were entitled as ‘The Poems of Emily Dickinson.’ There is mysticism in her poetry. She writes about God, Life, Death, and Immortality.

American drama marks an interesting link between the literature of the war decade and that of the twenties. The work of Ibsen, Shaw, and other great European playwrights had far overshadowed anything happening in American theatres up to the advent of Eugene O’Neill. We find that before Eugene O’Neill as a playwright, the American drama was completely divorced from life and lacked in originality. At the beginning of the twentieth century the playwrights were keen to bring a kind of drama that would be dissimilar to the common American drama. The change was the need of the hour. The playwrights also began reshaping the drama of the nineteenth century. The playwrights had an eagerness to do something with the plays. Eugene O’Neill demonstrated to the world indisputably that American drama had come of age. Throughout his career O’Neill was obsessed with a search for the meaning of life and for a means whereby man could control his fear of death. His legacy to drama is unmatched in the history of American theatre.

[II] His Life and Works:

Chapter second of this thesis is entitled as His Life and Works. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study the life and works of the author which may be reflected in his plays. Eugene Gladstone O’Neill was born October 16, 1888 in New York. His plays are among the first to introduce into American drama the techniques of realism, associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, Norwegian playwright Henry Ibsen,
and Swedish playwright August Strindberg. His plays were among the first to include speeches in American vernacular and involve characters on the fringes of society, engaging in depraved behavior, where they struggle to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately slide into disillusionment and despair. O’Neill wrote only one well-known comedy *Ah, Wilderness!* Nearly all of his other plays involve some degree of tragedy and personal pessimism.

He was the son of Irish actor James O’Neill and Ella Quinlan. Because of his father’s profession, O’Neill was sent to a Catholic boarding school where he found his only solace in books. O’Neill spent his summers in New London, Connecticut. After being suspended from Princeton University, he spent several years at sea, during which he suffered from depression and alcoholism. O’Neill’s parents and elder brother Jamie died within three years of one another, and O’Neill turned to writing as a form of escape. Despite his depression he had a deep love for the sea, and it became a prominent theme in most of his plays, several of which are set onboard ships like the ones that he worked on.

O’Neill was married to Kathleen Jenkins from October 2, 1909 to 1912, during which time they had one son, Eugene Jr. (1910-1950). In 1917, O’Neill met Agnes Bolton, a successful writer of commercial fiction, and they married on April 12, 1918. The years of their marriage during which the couple had two children, Shane and Oona. They divorced in 1929, after O’Neill abandoned Bolton and the children for the actress Carlotta Monterey. O’Neill and Carlotta married less than a month after he officially divorced his previous wife.
O’Neill’s first published play, *Beyond the Horizon*, opened on Broadway in 1920 to great acclaim, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. His best-known plays include *Anna Christie* (Pulitzer Prize 1922), *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *Strange Interlude* (Pulitzer Prize 1928), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), and his only well-known comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* In 1936 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. O’Neill died on November 27, 1953, at the age of 65.

**(III) Definition of Symbolism:**

Chapter third is entitled as *Definition of Symbolism*. In this chapter, it has been ventured to discuss the definitions of symbolism made by various writers in English literature. The word symbol derives from the Greek verb symballein, ‘to throw together,’ and its noun symbolon, ‘mark,’ ‘emblem,’ ‘token,’ or ‘sign.’ It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or ‘stands for’ something else. A Coleridge put it; a symbol ‘is characterized by a translucence of the special [i.e. the species] in the individual.’ A symbol differs from an allegorical sign in that it has a real existence, whereas an allegorical sign is arbitrary. Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts. In literature, the movement had its roots in *Les Fleurs du ma* (*The Flowers of Evil, 1857*) by Charles Baudelaire. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire greatly admired and translated into French, were a significant influence and the source of many stock tropes and images. The label “symbolist” itself comes from the critic Jean Moreas, who coined it in order to distinguish the symbolists from the related decadent movement in literature and art. Symbolism was largely a reaction against Naturalism and Realism, anti-idealistic movements which attempted to capture reality in its gritty particularity, and to elevate the humble and the
ordinary over the ideal. These movements invited a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams; the path to symbolism began with that reaction.

Symbolists believed that art should aim to capture more absolute truths which could only be accessed by indirect methods. Thus, they wrote in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. The earlier Romantic movement of poetry used symbols, but these symbols were unique and privileged objects. The symbolists took this further, investing all things, even vowels and perfumes, with potential symbolic value. Symbolist symbols are not allegories, intended to represent; they are instead intended to evoke particular states of mind. A number of important literary publications were founded by symbolists or became associated with the movement. Symbolism in literature is distinct from symbolism in art although the two overlapped on a number of points. The symbolist painters mined mythology and dream imagery for a visual language of the soul. Symbolism had some influence in music as well. Many symbolist writers and critics were early enthusiasts of the music of Richard Wagner, a fellow student of Schopenhauer.

Symbolism had a significant influence on modernism, and its traces can be seen in the work of many modernist artists, including T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Conrad Aiken, Hart Crane, and William Butler Yeats. The symbolist painters were an important influence on expressionism and surrealism in painting, two movements which descend directly from symbolism proper. Symbolism in literature was a mid 19th to early 20th century European literary phenomenon that employed symbols and evocative suggestion in place of direct statement. From Symbolism developed the many `isms of the 20th century:
Modernism, Postmodernism, Futurism, Surrealism, Dada and the New Romantics. Symbolism is when the author uses an object or reference to add deeper meaning to a story. Symbolism in literature can be subtle or obvious, used sparingly or heavy-handedly. An author may repeatedly use the same object to convey deeper meaning or may use variations of the same object to create an overarching mood or feeling. Symbolism is often used to support a literary theme in a subtle manner.

Eugene O’Neill has very effectively made use of the symbolism in his plays. This is an important aspect of the plays of O’Neill. This is an important technique which is his conscious and studied use of symbolism. This is done with care and designed to extend the scope and meaning of the play beyond the limited boundary of straightforward realism. The examination of the plays of O’Neill reveals us certain conclusions regarding the treatment of symbolism and the theme of isolation and loneliness. His plays The Emperor Jones, Beyond the Horizon, The Hairy Ape, Desire Under the Elms, Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, Mourning Becomes Electra, Dynamo, Long Days Journey into Night etc., are full of symbols. The language, setting characters, acts and scenes, dialogues, conversations of the characters are full of symbolism. The playwright has also made the use of the other dramatic devices _the masks, soliloquies, aside, sound, animals the sun, the moon, the night, months, seasons, etc., as the symbols in his plays.

(IV) Themes of O’Neill’s Plays:

Chapter fourth deals with the themes of O’Neill’s plays. Eugene O’Neill is the dramatist of an idea. Shouted, whispered, or silently assumed, one theme unites all his plays, from the earliest to his last mature work. The theme is rooted in O’Neill’s own
personal need, and its power to shape both form and meaning in the plays is derived from this source. It represents an attempt at once to express and to assuage the lifelong torment of a mind in conflict. O’Neill thought of himself as a writer of “ ironic tragedy,” but irony requires a detachment which he found impossible. Pity, indignation, despair at the human position, robbed his tragedies of the irony he intended them to convey. O’Neill is chiefly concerned with the resolution of inner conflicts; with the search for a philosophy which can give order and meaning to such inevitable conflict.

O’Neill deals with life in a very realistic and authentic manner, and presents a faithful dramatization of human situation. The most important issue of the contemporary American society is man’s failure to “belong” or to find roots anywhere in this hostile world. Man is isolated not only from himself but also from nature, culture, society, religion and God. The sense of isolation and loneliness in the plays of O’Neill causes suffering to his characters, and their failure to control it in an effective manner brings tragedy in their lives. The Hairy Ape proved to be the most interesting in regard to its theme of its expressionistic presentation. It is the tragedy of a man who formerly thought himself to be at the root of the capitalistic class. Desire under the Elms is the first great tragedy comes to focus on man. The Great God Brown contains a superior sense of rhythm and harmony and multifariousness of life. Marco Millions is an exquisite presentation of O’Neill’s Philosophy of the existence of Death.

The play All God’s Chillun got Wings is about the way the racial problem oppresses a mixed couple. Strange Interlude is a complete picture of the inner conflicts in a woman Nina who was supposed to live a happy life in her love with Gordon Shaw.
O’Neill’s primary interest in writing the plays was to justify the ways of God to Man. He believed that a really worthwhile life is always tragic. According to him the high ideals or nobility of life can be found only in tragedy. We find that too much mechanization of modern life is also one of the important factors responsible to generate the sense of isolation, loneliness, estrangement and insecurity in the life of an individual. It has destabilized human life. The tensions in O’Neill’s plays are nearly always connected with man’s struggle against isolation and loneliness. His plays make it certain that he is the dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation all through his illustrious literary career.

(V) Use of Symbolism in O’Neill’s Plays:

Chapter fifth is entitled as Use of Symbolism in O’Neill’s Plays in which an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the use of symbolism in the plays of O’Neill and how the use of symbolism makes O’Neill a great playwright. Symbolism is a literary device and the writer makes use of the character, setting, incident, language and his thoughts. The playwright clarifies his ideas, concepts in a short way by making the use of the symbols in his plays. The mind of the character is disclosed with the use of symbols. His plays The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, Desire under the Elms, Beyond the Horizon, The Great God Brown, Marco Millions, All Gods Chillun Got Wings, Dynamo, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude, Long Days Journey into Night etc., are full of symbolism.

There is a network of symbolism in the play The Emperor Jones. He uses it from the beginning to the end of the play. And all these symbols are related to one another and moves around the central figure, Brutus Jones. The action of this play starts in the afternoon that symbolizes confidence. In this play, the night, day, forest, daylight, moonlight, are full of symbolism. We come across that the beating of tom-tom, the silver
bullet, the white colour, dazzling scarlet, red colour of the blood, the crocodile are all symbolically used in the play. The night is the symbol of terror, retrogression, and disintegration.

The play *The Hairy Ape* is a symbolic play. The Hairy Ape is Yank who is a symbol of man. He has lost his old harmony with nature. Yank is the main symbol of modern man’s quest for identity. The machine age is also symbolic. Mildred symbolizes the fashionable humanists. The ending of the play is ambiguous. The setting of the play, characters, dialogues, techniques, language etc., is symbolic. *Beyond the Horizon* is also full of symbols. The road, the horizon, hills, fields, stone walls, rough snake fences, the dark earth, fall-sown rye, piled rocks, apple tree, twisted branches, twilight of a day in May, the horizon hills etc., are used as the symbols. The title *Long Days Journey into Night* is very suggestive. It signifies the characters’ separation from reality. It is not a forward journey but a journey in the backward direction, especially for Mary. The interior set has its symbolic value too. Mary is also the inverse image of the Earth Mother for whom her sons long. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the use of external and internal scenes becomes symbolic. The external scenes in this play convey the main characters who desire to escape into some land of peace, on the other hand the internal scenes represent the suppression and denial of natural instinct to live. The characters have a ‘mask like face’ and it suggests their split, and inner disharmony. The song by Seth explores the theme of the play. It also symbolizes an un navigable gulf.

(VI) Conclusion:
Finally, Chapter sixth is entitled as *Conclusion* which has been concluded with the findings out and summations. An attempt has been made to assign a rightful place to the playwright Eugene O’Neill among the major American Dramatists.
: WORKS CITED:


[All the parenthetical references hereafter are taken from the same publications.]