Chapter - 6

Conclusion
This chapter is the summing up of the preceding chapters and points out the conclusion to the work undertaken. The present study is an attempt to throw light on repression and sublimation operated in the life of Williams and his plays as well. The relevance of the study of repression and sublimation in the context of Williams' life and works springs up from his own accounts that states: "It is almost impossible to pinpoint the start of the play, at least for me. I think that all plays come out of some inner tension in the playwright himself. He is concerned about something, and that concern begins to work itself out in the form of a creative activity . . . . That doesn't mean that you are one of the characters in the play. What it means simply is that the dynamics of the characters in the play, the tensions correspond to something that you are personally going through—the concerns of the play and the tensions of the play and your own concerns and tensions at the time you wrote it. I have always found that to be true." (Wagner 124-125) This account of Williams deserves a psychoanalytic reading of his plays especially from the perspective of repression and sublimation.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism conceives a literary work as the product of a writer, reflecting his/her inner world with its dreams and aspirations, failures and frustrations, trauma and tensions, etc. and more importantly it considers the work as a manifestation of sexual frustrations and repressions. Freud thinks repression is essential to lead a balanced life in
society but too much repression is harmful as it may give rise to various forms of mental disorders. He has given stress on the unconscious that facilitates creative writing and to him a writer has the greater prospect of experiencing sublimation by minimizing the tension between the pressure to express and the compulsion to repress. Williams’ dramatic world is filled up with the poets, the artists, struggling to create from deeper necessities. Freud has given an inferior status to women in compare to men in his discussion of sexuality, and it is reflected in Williams’ treatment of some of the women characters. It is the phallocentric norms of the society that project or create woman as more a repressed personality than man. According to Freud, the conflict between biological impulses and social constrains that were internalized is what builds up a personality.

Unlike Freud, Jung could not consider sexual trauma as the cause of all repression. He recognizes two personalities operating within an individual, one is performing social expectations and the other is driven to follow personal desires without caring for social constrains. The first one is lived with repressing the second one to a greater extent whereas the second cannot be nurtured without violating the first. People tend to repress those psychic contents that are not morally acceptable in the society. The secondary personality is more in terms with the truth, with eternal values. Williams inclines to give expression to this secondary personality of his characters
dominantly and for which he has to introduce unconventional forms of writing as his themes are not suitable for the conventional pattern.

Lacan considers every individual as psychologically castrated being experiencing unfulfilled desires at every moment. He thinks repressed desire is retained in the unconscious and it is never fulfilled creating a lack in the individual. Williams and his characters find themselves castrated because of the cramp of unfulfilled desires. Achievement or success bring momentary relief but fails to provide complete satisfaction because the object to achieve is itself indifferent.

Judith Butler challenges society’s expectations of fixed sexual desires correspondent to fixed sexual identity and following Lacan discards the possibility of any stable fixed identity. Repression is bound to originate due to society’s fixed expectations of sexual desires whereas the truth is that sexual desire is more fluid and impermanent in nature. Some of Williams’ characters exhibits tendencies of having more than a single sexual identity. Being a homosexual Williams suffers repression to its extreme due to society’s heterosexual biasness.

Again the conflict between society’s expectation and individual’s aspiration makes the field for Joan Reviere to formulate his concept of masquerade in his paper “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929). It is about women’s performing womanliness to hide her inherent masculine attributes. A
woman possesses an inherent hatred for man and wants to beat him in public performance but at the same time projects herself as delicate, soft, vulnerable, to draw his warm attention. It is the societal practices that create a woman split up between her performance and her actual being. Williams' Blanche Du Bois and Mrs. Venable better execute Reviere's concept of masquerade.

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* throws light on the concept of repression where he points out its characteristic features in a very simple and straightforward language: "...repression operated as a sentence to disappear...an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know." (Foucault 4). This Foucauldian concept of repression is found enacted violently in some of Williams' plays especially, *Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth*. An in-depth study of Freud and Foucault reveals that there is a little difference between the concepts of repression of the two thinkers. In Freud repression is considered as one of the defense mechanisms where the individual consciously has taken up the responsibility to repress something that is not in conformity to social norms, but in Foucault it is mainly the power mechanisms of the society that imposes the pressure of repression on the individual. Williams' characters are confronted with the both.
The pressure of repression that Williams has to experience throughout his life is originated in his unusual family environment. The influence of an overprotective mother and a threatening father has made a strong contribution in the psychological set up of Williams. Moreover, too much attachment to his schizophrenic sister, Rose, and his partial identification with her also frustrates to a great extent the prospect of leading a normal sex life. The adolescent rivalry with his father takes the form of oedipal complex which probably sustains throughout his life. Many of his plays show their protagonists burdened with the guilt that has its root in oedipal complex. His plays are better demonstrations of his ambivalent attitude towards women, both destructive and innocent. In his Memoirs (1975), Williams recollects his relationship with his crude, dominating father that was never recuperated. He always bore a kind of hatred for his father which was turned up slowly in an obsessive, life long fear of death. But, according to Williams, he came to understand his father much later after his father's death. Ironically this realization has only intensified his guilt conscience. Though he makes attempt to project homosexual as a metaphor for ideal love in his plays, he cannot get rid of the pressure of Puritan conscience that he has inherited from his mother. The plays of Tennessee Williams exhibit his ambivalent attitude towards sex. Sex is projected both as a threat and as a redeeming quality, and, so possesses the germs of repression and a relief from it. In his plays, the characters that are mainly marked for their
sexual vulgarity are also the very characters haunted by a sense of guilt. Williams’ experimentation also creates characters that are not associated with sexual activities but ironically they become lifeless. So in his plays a desperate need to maintain a balance between flesh and spirit can be discerned, which may give finality to his characters. It seems that both the author and the characters are searching for that finality.

The characters of Tennessee Williams are self destructive resembling the very inherent tendency of their author. It seems as if in both the cases ‘ego’ fails to maintain balance between the demands of ‘id” and the restrictions imposed by ‘super ego’. As a consequence Williams and his protagonists are found bundle of contradictory impulses. Nietzsche’s views on history in his discussions of genealogy may throw a light into this crucial experience of emotional turmoil of the subject who is split up into selves though in a different contexts. Nietzsche comments that the study of history makes one “happy, unlike the metaphysicians, to possess in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal ones.” (Foucault, quoting Nietzsche) Each soul is a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis.

Memoirs of Williams play a key in understanding the man who suffers and the artist who creates. When Memoirs came out in 1975, it was reviewed very unfavourably. In order to get a suitable answer for this negative approach
we can quote Robert Brustein, who wrote, “The love that previously dared not to speak its name has now grown hoarse from screaming it,” (Brustein ix) in *The New York Times*. Williams himself has confessed that to know him is not to love him, though ironically it is also true that many critics are of the opinion that the ‘bad’ Williams is better than most of the ‘good’ of his contemporaries. In *Memoirs* we see undisguised self-revelation of the author. To attach ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay’ with Williams is not enough to know him as he never seems “gaily-correct”. “My type doesn’t know who I am,” (William, *Memoirs* x) and this declaration of Williams at once gives us an insight into a world which is devoid of conventionality. As an artist he needs approval for his theatre from the audience and at the same time he has the honest realization that the kind of drama his audience are conditioned to is different from the kind he wishes to practice. He wants to do something altogether of his own, and it is to express his world and his experience of it, and throughout his career it seems that he remains honest to his wishes. Williams never prefers to compromise his work for the demand of the conventions. He himself makes his point clear in Foreword page of *Memoirs*, “Has any of my writing been ‘a professional matter’? I have always written for deeper necessities than the term ‘professional’ implies…” (William, *Memoirs* xviii) Still there are occasions, especially regarding the production of his dramas, when he finds himself to adjust to the external demands but these compromises contribute in generating
his internal struggle. With *The Glass Menagerie* Williams proposed a conception of a new, plastic theatre which was intended to replace 'the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions' and his subsequent plays share the same umbrella of plastic theatre. Enjoying freedom of convention is not preferred to escape the responsibility of a playwright, experimentation with technique is rather sought for getting a closer approach to truth, to reality, which is the first essential attribute of a play.

The experience of *Camino Real* provides us with things we like, things we dislike, and things we are held by without knowing whether we like them or not. This observation of Eric Bentley ("What is Theatre?" 1968) gives us a suitable ground to study Williams' world. Surprisingly most of the protagonists of Williams left us in a position where we are not sure of whether we like them or not. Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), Sebastian Venable (*Suddenly Last Summer*), Chance Wayne and Alexandra (*Sweet Bird of Youth*), Tom and Amanda (*The Glass Menagerie*), Maggie and Brick (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), in no way demand absolute liking from us. Remaining trapped in almost unavoidable circumstances, the characters are struggling either to avoid or to forget something in their desperate drive for survival. They are the victims no doubt, but most of them are with a sense of guilt.
The gloomy and repressive mood of the play *The Glass Menagerie* ends up with intensifying the pressure of repression mainly for the mother. Laura, identified more with her delicate glass animals, exhibits an indifference to emotions, and Tom, being a possessor of the art of poetry and representing the playwright, has lastly discovered himself lying bare his repressed guilt conscience to get rescued. It was not simply the discovery of her husband’s homosexual affair or his subsequent act of committing suicide which traumatized Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but the realization of her being responsible for her husband’s suicide. Her repressed self when coincides with the harsh reality could not sustain her mental balance and secures for her a place in mental asylum. Sebastian Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer* has lastly introduced judgment into his world and his guilt ridden self leads him to be consumed by those some of whom he had consumed sexually earlier. In the same play Catherine is determined to stay with the truth even at the cost of her very existence as a normal human being. She considers herself responsible for Sebastian’s savage end as she fails to help him in his way. So for her to suppress the truth is to magnify the burden of repression which is much more painstaking. Mrs. Venable in the same play is obsessed to project a camouflaging picture of her son and their relationship. Her repression of reality is so deadly that it leads her to exercise power to make other repress the truth that she wants to avoid. The realization of his being responsible for Heavenly’s
venereal disease for which she has to be undergone a whore’s operation forces Chance Wayne’s death instinct or Thenatos to surrender himself to his proposed physical castration in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. For Sebastian or Chance Wayne, the bliss of sublimation is imagined only at the cost of their lives. In *Orpheus Descending*, Lady experiences a sense of release from her life which was ingrained in repression and Val finds out meaning of existence. Both experiences freedom of suppressed emotions by coming in contact with each other but their blissful existence transforms into a momentary one. They are smashed with their dreams, aspiration, and desires for life.

In *Summer and Smoke* and *The Rose Tattoo*, Alma and Serrafina respectively surrender themselves to the instinctual demand without any guilt conscience. Though in both the cases sexual repression finds an outlet to fulfil the repressed desires but both have taken up the step to respond to their ‘Id’ in reaction to the doings of their male partners. John’s rejection of Alma when she is ready to offer herself completely by shaking off her false pride necessitates her desperate drive to the role of a prostitute. The sudden discovery of the infidelity of her dead husband has forced Serafina to break the shackle of herself imposed restrictions and go with the instincts to live her life with pleasure. In both the cases of Alma and Serrafina, the intensity of sexual repression gets mix up with anger, arising out of the sense of being deprived. Their first attempt, as a consequence, is to satisfy the repressed desires of their
senses as it is the sensuous pleasure what their male partners enjoyed most in their lives. But whereas Alma has committed a blunder in her attempt that has finally degraded her position in the structure of social hierarchy, Serafina has not lost anything.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Night of the Iguana*, repression is responded with arguments and counter arguments in between the characters. In both the plays the ultimate solutions come in the form of compromise and compassion. It is the compassion for the dying Big Daddy that brings Brick and Maggie get closer to each other. They develop understanding for each other by releasing their repressed thoughts to each other. In *The Night of the Iguana*, compassion for others is focused to generate communication that ultimately helps to reduce the pressure of repression and makes life endurable. Williams’ search for God’s vision finds a satisfactory solution in this play where both the protagonists are finally playing god to save a God’s creature. This play is filled up more with spiritual flavour than with the sexual overtone of his previous plays. Williams seeks to find his answer in art, poetry, and religion and this play happens to incorporate all the three. *The Night of the Iguana* undoubtedly helps him to taste the bliss of sublimation to a greater extent.

The study has made the impression that Tennessee Williams is not inviting us only to love and appreciate his characters. His position shifts in between a psychologist and a moralist. Sometimes it is felt that even the most
condemned character also deserves an amount of sympathy from us. But whatever it may be, the underlying appeal of the creator is put in the mouth of his character Chance Wayne: “the recognition of me in you . . .” (Williams, *Plays: 1957-1980* 236). But again the cramp of alienation never leaves Williams and it becomes intense after the death of his friend Frankie who was more a life partner of Williams than a mere friend. Even at the time of his death Williams was all alone in his hotel room. The psychoanalyst in Williams goes further to identify loneliness in every individual, either violently prevailed or artificially concealed. In his plays the characters are found disgusted with their alienation and so quite often they attempt to break its existence by talking louder or shouting at someone. What Val says in *Orpheus Descending* is exactly what Williams realizes as the destiny of a human being. In answer to Lady’s query about how does he think people get to know each other, Val says, “Nobody ever gets to know no body! We’re all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! –I’m tellin’ you it’s the truth, we got to face it, we’re under a lifelong sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!” (Williams, *Plays: 1957-1980* 42-43) It is the lack of proper communication that is highlighted again and again in Williams’ plays substantiating his facing the same problem in his own life.
The plays of Tennessee Williams are filled with psychologically disturbed characters torn between their past and present. Blanche Dubois in *Streetcar* is a desperate exceptional woman who lives in her leisured past. Again it is some of the past incidents which she is deliberately trying to avoid. Here Freudian repression (by repression Freud means avoiding /forgetting something) is operating. She quite often tends to make wish fulfilments of her repressed desires, and in this venture speculates false things. But her problem is intensified when she finds herself in direct confrontation with Stanley, the man, to save her dignity. Here Williams explores the difficulty for a single woman to enjoy individual freedom in a hostile environment. In Blanche’s case the possibility of getting rid of her repressed desire at least to some extent is threatened with the external interventions of Kowalski, the man. Likewise in some other plays also external intervention frustrates the character’s effort to gratify the repressed self. The world of Wingfield apartment along with its imagined self gratification is frustrated with external intervention of Jim O’Connor. Though Jim’s arrival in the Wingfield apartment was the most desired one, he failed them in their expectations and multiplied their sufferings. The world of Sebastian and Mrs. Venable with its assumed extraordinary supremacy is broken with Catherin’s intervention in their relationship. Serafina’s memories of ideal relationship with her husband, that becomes the strength of her
existence, is destroyed by the intrusion of a name Estelle Hohengarten in her life.

Freudian notion of constant clash between Eros and Thanatos, the pleasure and death instincts, is aptly applicable in Blanche. She imagines achieving salvation through death and at the same time demands desperately someone to come to rescue her from her predicament. Likewise the members of the Wingfield apartment is in desperate need of someone to come in the form of a gentleman caller to rescue them from depression. But both Blanche and Amanda’s families are thrown into a world of greater depression when their make-believe worlds are shattered in its confrontation with reality. In both *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, repression is led to greater depression as the pressure of repression is magnified causing Laura to resign in an eternal confinement to the world of her glass animals and Blanche to mental asylum. In both the plays, the protagonists tend to take refuge in delusional world which is too delicate to survive the pressure of real world. They prove themselves as misfits for the real world which is made for Jim O’Connors, Stellas, or Kowalskis. The conflict of Eros and Thanatos is also seen in Sebastian Venable, Chance Wayne, and not less in Shannon. Sebastian, a pleasure seeking homosexual, is always haunted by his hidden death instinct that instigates him to find pleasure in the heart breaking image of the carnivorous birds devouring the fleshes of the newly hatched sea-turtles. Finally
his life becomes a demonstration or re-enactment of the same episode in the form of devouring his own flesh by the hungry, naked, band of the street. Chance's unfulfilled love for Heavenly and the subsequent guilt conscience developed from the realization of his being responsible for her distress stimulate his death instinct to accept his proposed castration. Shannon's past action provoked by his unbridled sexual desires leads him to self crucifixion. He is seen taking sadistic pleasure in self inflicted sufferings that is rebuked by Hannah Jelks. In Williams' plays the clash between life and death instincts is correspondent to that of repression and sublimation. Repression seeks sublimation or a sense of relief through contemplating death especially when it becomes impossible to achieve it in life. In his own life the playwright expresses his experiencing the clash between the forces of life and the threats of death. Life force has driven him mad to create but the waning creativity frustrates him time and again. For an artist life is to create and failure to it is similar to death. In an interview to Charles Ruas, he says: "I could have written much more and much better if I had not always been afraid of my inabilities to write." (Ruas 295) So there is always an urgency for writing along with an inherent fear for inability to write. With the passage of time this fear gradually turns up into a mental breakdown and In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel is the last play before his break down. He tells that at the time of writing the play he has
sensed his approaching collapse, and the play  *Tokyo Hotel* reflects his frustrations for his declining creativity.

In  *Orpheus Descending*,  *Suddenly Last Summer*, and  *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the characters, to get rid of their repression, invite destruction for them. But the characters in all these three plays remain honest to the call of their conscience and so even through defeat, they have strongly asserted their identities. To satisfy repressed sexual desires and to fulfil herself by becoming impregnated, the Lady in  *Orpheus Descending* surrenders herself to Val Xaviers. Both are, as a consequence, physically killed but have infused love, fertility in the loveless, barren society. Val’s snakeskin jacket cannot be destroyed and it bears the mark of continuation of existing of Val’s types in ages and in times. In  *Suddenly Last Summer* Sebastian Venable could not bear the burden of his sex life in a society that entertains heterosexual hegemony and so invites his savage end. He has made up his mind beforehand to sacrifice himself to the image of a cruel God chasing him in the form of a band of naked children. Otherwise he could have saved himself, in accordance to Catherine’s version, by following Catherine’s direction. To relieve himself from sexual and psychological repression, he accepts death for himself. Through death he asserts his identity what he failed to do in his life under psychological repression of an over protective mother. In  *Sweet Bird of Youth* Chance Wayne dares to come back to St. Louis, ignoring the threat of castration, for his love
Heavenly. But he could not bear the truth of his being responsible for Heavenly's disease and surrenders himself to the men of Boss Finley with individual dignity. In all the three plays Foucauldian repression is strongly operated than that of Freudian one. In all the three plays the power of society makes the characters experience the pang of repression and the characters are less responsible for their sufferings.

In *Summer and Smoke*, sexual repression is responded by changing the assigned role and position of Alma in society. Too much repression of sex drive is disastrous and this has exactly what happened with Alma. She has embraced her repressed desires by degrading herself. Serafina has got a partner to replace her dead husband, who happens to share the same occupation with that of her husband. In a sense Serafina comes out victorious from her repressed world without letting anything to sacrifice. In delineating the characters of Alma Serafina as repressed personalities than their male counterparts, Williams betrays the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on him. Freud in his discussion of sexuality divides the two sexes with patriarchal biasness and this is what exactly reflected in Williams' plays especially *Summer and Smoke* and *The Rose Tattoo*.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Night of the Iguana*, the protagonists come to a settlement in life by sharing their repressed selves to each other. Compassion and communication help to illuminate their dark world of
repression. In both the plays the characters realize the demand of life where to live for oneself is not enough. Brick in Cat understands Maggie’s crises and vice versa, whereas Maxine Faulk turns out in her humanitarian approach to Shannon in Iguana. Hannah’s deliberation illuminates Maxine’s inner self and she is transformed into a human being from her beastly existence of intense sexual craving. The partners in both the plays have ultimately decided to go with life with a little compromise. In these plays Brick and Shannon are found to experience sublimation by lifting up their individual self in responding to other’s need. In both the plays the inherent message is to harbour companionship than merely to go for sexual relationship. In this context it is important to know what Williams thinks for himself, and it is clearly said in an interview with Charles Ruas: “I’m very grateful that my sexual appetites are waning and that I look more for companionship now than for sexual excitement. I’m not free of Eros, but Eros may be free of me.” (Ruas 288) In this account the first ‘Eros’ denotes life instinct related to creativity in Williams’ case and the second one is related to the crude sexual connotation.

The dramatic world of Tennessee Williams is filled up with the characters unwillingly find themselves trapped in their own predicament. But the responses of the characters to their subsequent situations vary with the writer’s experimentation with the theme. Though sex and death perform dominating roles, his plays seem always in search for something which can give
meaning to the ‘broken world’ of his psychologically disturbed characters. In this search, Williams is found attracted to the oriental philosophy which has left its profound voice in some of his plays viz. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Night of the Iguana*. The value of human compassion and endurance are highly praised in the orient and Williams happened to find his answer here to shower ray of hope in repressed world of his characters where each one is in solitary confinement psychologically. He is depressed due to the absent of feeling any responsibility among people to society where they live in, but he strongly believes that “There’s no such thing as an inescapable corner with two people in it.” (Ruas 288-289)

While sexuality in O’Neill’s plays is never presented as a cause or solution to the problem of life: “Man’s disorientation and Man’s bedevilment is from within and from without” (Cargill et al 325). Williams’ plays strongly displays “sex satiety as a solution to life’s problems.” (Mathur 147) But it is true only partially. In *The Glass Menagerie* it is not sex but absence of proper understanding in the relationship, lack of the warmth of love, that cause psychological alienation of the characters. Williams’ search is in no way stopped back with the solution to life’s problems in sexual satiety. Had it happened then we would never get a character like Hannah Jelks in *The Night of the Iguana*. It is not sex, not even the death, but the sudden revelation of the infidelity of her husband which breaks the dream world of Serafina in *The Rose*
Tattoo. Blanche in *The Streetcar Named Desire* experiences series of sexual confrontation; but what she seeks to find in Mick is not simply a sex partner but the emotional response which she fails to give to her young husband and as a consequence destroys him. Mrs. Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer* could not understand her son’s problem and Catherine fails to support him in his way. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Maggie’s frustration is enhanced mainly because of the indifferent attitude of her husband Brick. Lady has been leading her life in hatred with her husband, Jabe, and Val brings love, compassion, to her life. She is ready to sacrifice her life saving this love and compassion represented by Val, and it is more precious to her than her own life. The sexual relation between Chance and Princess cannot satisfy them completely because there is always something else in between which is missing. Both of them are experiencing the lack but fail to recognize it. It is not sex that brings Hannah and Shannon so much closer to each other that each one spontaneously confesses one’s past to the other. Moreover the relationship between Hannah and her grandfather Nonno is absolutely based on love, affection, and caring for each other without any sexual overtone. Like couples they have been leading their lives and make home of their own wherever they move.

Tennessee Williams has exploited the theme of sexual repression to its extreme in his plays with the basic intention to show its inherent ambiguity and confusion. For him it is the ‘deeper necessities’ in order to communicate his
own confused sexual identity. He himself stated, “my type doesn’t know who I
am.” (Williams, Memoirs x) So only getting a suitable sex partners for his
sexually repressed characters is not enough even though some of his plays
move in that direction. The proposed homosexuality of Brick is not resolved till
the end of the play; Blanche’s sex life is highly confusing; Mrs. Vanable and
Catherine are in confrontation to put a labelling to the dead poet Sebastian’s
sexual identity. What Williams demands for his characters is better
comprehension of their problems with compassion.

Williams who has experienced himself a long period of depression after
the death of his friend and lover Fankie, feels the pain of the inability to
communicate with people. In his Memoirs he puts his realization of that period:
“As long as you can communicate with someone who is inclined to sympathy
you retain a chance to be rescued.” (Williams, Memoirs 204) The ‘rescue’ is
very significant in the sense that the repression that consequently gives rise to
later depression cannot be resolved completely by an outsider. But a brief
communication of love and sympathy can make the pressure endurable.

Williams’ characters are exposed in their crucial moment of depression
caused by their repressed worlds. They are torn in between the physical and the
spiritual as they fail to make a proper amalgamation and as a consequence are
deprived of enjoying the blessing of a normal life. According to Bigsby, the
women in Williams’ plays are: “Desperately sexual beings, the consummation
which they seek is nonetheless spiritual. The body they embrace is physical enough but what they seek is seldom simply sexual satisfaction. They long for completion.” (Bigsby 130) Williams seeks to find his answer in art, religion and most importantly in the extending hands of kindness and compassion to rescue his otherwise repressed characters from complete oblivion. Blanche’s expression to Stella is exactly what Williams believes in. Commenting upon Stanley’s nature Blanche says: “... May be we are a long way from being made in God’s image, but Stella – my sister – there has been some progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginnings! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march to whatever it is we’re approaching....” (Williams, Plays: 1937-1955 510)

Williams’ protagonists are badly in need of that ‘tenderer feelings’. Nothing disturbs them so violently other than unkindness. In Memoirs he writes, “...if you knew me outside of this book, you would find me a man who values kindness and patience with others.” (Williams, Memoirs 242) His characters are also quite often found to express their desperate need of kindness and compassion, the absence of which breaks the delicate world of Laura in The Glass Menagerie, destroys Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, Lady in
Orpheus Descending, shatters Charles Wayne's dream world of love in Sweet Bird of Youth.

In Williams' dramatic world the pressure of repression prevails over both man and woman character. But the pressure is seen extreme in women caused by the gap between the external expectation and their inner actuality. The patriarchal hegemony has made this gap a bigger one for women than for men and the neurotic desperation is seen only in the case of woman. Hence it is the heroines of Williams who has to go for re-adjustment in their life for survival. Though the playwright secures larger than life stature for his woman protagonists, he never hesitates to depict their victimization to the societal norms designed in favour of man. Eva Figes with her account throws light on the status of woman set down by the patriarchal society that split her up before her having the normal understanding of her divided role. She writes:

"Women presented with an image in a mirror has danced to that image in a hypnotic trance.... The first thing that strikes one about the image in the mirror...is the fact that it was created by man, not by men and women jointly for common ends, not by women for themselves, but by men...." (Figes 13-14).

So they are found to reside in two worlds where one is their inner world of actual self, aspirations, dreams, and the outer world of performing in compliance to social norms. The latter world generally intends to get the former repressed and the tussle between the urgency to express and the compulsion to repress continues to operate creating neurotic symptoms in the individual. What
Carl Jung intends to signify by the terminology of ‘shadow’ and ‘persona’ is exactly that of residing in two worlds. This ‘shadow’ and ‘persona’ are rarely met creating for women the necessity for re-adjustment in their life and in doing so sometimes they move towards sublimation.

In understanding Williams’ world from the perspective of repression and sublimation it is necessary to have a look at the psychoanalytic concept of drive as both repression-sublimation and drive are related to sexuality. Lacan has discarded any biological definition of the drive. Psychoanalysis considers drive as “not the instinct precisely because it cannot be reduced to the order of need” (Freud defined it as an internal stimulus only to distinguish it immediately from hunger and thirst). The drive is divisible into pressure, source, object and aim; and it challenges any straightforward concept of satisfaction- the drive can be sublimated and Freud described its object as ‘indifferent’. What matters, therefore, is not what the drive achieves, but its process. For Lacan, that process reveals all the difficulty which characterizes the subject’s relationship to the Other. In his account, the drive is something in the nature of an appeal, or searching out, which always goes beyond the actual relationships on which it turns.” (Lacan 34). The dramas of Tennessee Williams is better recognized as an enactment of the drive operated in various forms in lives of the protagonists. Lacan is of the view that even when demands are fulfilled people still feel dissatisfied. Sublimation can be achieved of the drive
but that does not necessarily mean achieving complete satisfaction. Williams’ dramas are mostly found to end up either on a note of compromise or agreement. Because achievement itself is fictitious as the object to achieve is ‘indifferent’. In *The Glass Menagerie* Tom has deserted his family to fulfil his dreams which is not clear to his vision and he has to retrospect stimulated by his guilt conscience on his past life. In *Streetcar* Blanche has lost her innocent, young husband and since then has been searching out that innocence but fails to locate it as it is also illusory. In this search she has to go on shifting her roles. But the drive changes its nature and so getting initiated to Stella’s world, she is torn in between her hidden desires for the man in Stanely and for the responsible, honest, innocent, partner in Mitch. In *Orpheus Descending* Val, a fugitive haunted for committing an act of rape, finishes his journey in a small city of intrigue. What makes him to stop here is simply a mystery but he delivers fertility to Lady who becomes pregnant by Val. Here a rapist turns into a deliverer of fertility making sublimation of the original drive depending upon the approaches to the act. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Sebastian Venable replaces Catherine for his mother but fails to complete his works. They are made to come closer to each other only to experience a never ending departure from one another, symbolically enacted by their move in two different directions. The drive of consuming others is sublimated to the drive of letting others to consume. Eros is stimulated to Thanatos. But Sebastian’s life and death exhibits
mystery that extends confusions in other two lives that are closely associated with his. Mrs. Venable is torn in between her desires for protecting her son’s image and for destroying Catherine for that purpose. Catherine is, on the other, frayed in between the pressure of repression both within and without. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Chance Wayne’s drive of guilt conscience caused by his realization of giving disastrous wound to Heavenly seeks sublimation by transforming itself into self-inflicted castration. Alma’s spiritual inclination changes into sexual exhilaration that has resulted into her taking up the role of a prostitute. Serafina’s life of boundless love is shifted into a life of self-inflicted withdrawal that again is rescheduled into one of normal, earthly enjoyment. In *The Night of the Iguana*, Shannon’s sexual desperation turns into self-inflicted sufferings that is viewed as self-indulging and ultimately finds him surrendering to Maxine on profit for both. It is the drives that keep on changing its stand and so Lacan thinks that the process is important and not the achievement. In this process repression and sublimation are sparkled simultaneously. In this context Williams states his individual experience of how achievement is lacking in desired satisfaction. Williams in his *Memoirs* writes on the most desired success of *The Glass Menagerie* that executes how the drive goes beyond the actual achievement on which it turns. He says,

“After the success of *Menagerie* ... I felt a great depression, probably because I never believed that anything would continue, would hold. I never thought my advance would maintain its
ground. I always thought there would be a collapse immediately after the advance. Also, I had spent so much of my energy on the climb to success, that when I had ‘made it’ and my play was ‘the hottest ticket in town,’ I felt almost no satisfaction.” (Williams, Memoirs 92)

The pressure of repression can be minimized with the power of sublimation but sublimation does not necessarily mean achieving with a sense of fulfilment. In the plays, the characters those are happened to sublimate their desires are found either to compromise with life or to surrender life itself. But what is the most important about Williams’ plays is their inherent overtone of optimism that is reflected in his characters’ desires to assert their identity and to survive in life even with adversities. Carol says to Val: “I want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt! I want them to know I’m alive!” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 27) They do not want to gradually disappear in their repressed predicament silently but want to challenge it. And in doing so they most of the times violate the norms and never hesitate even to accept destruction. Those who have to surrender their lives, their final exit is made more assertive than most people’s lives. In Williams’ dramatic world repression plays predominantly but it falls short to undermine the dignity of life just as Williams says about himself: “I’ve learned to live with it.” (Ruas 295) Here he refers to his fear for inabilities to write, his inabilities to communicate himself. He learns to continue writing, correspondent to his living, with pressure.
The present study explores the dynamics of repression that works at different levels of their lives in the characters of Williams. Sometimes the characters themselves may appear responsible for the sufferings they experience because of the intensity of the pressure of repression. Again they are found victims of the social network which gripped their repressed soul without letting an easy path to reduce the pressure and achieve normalcy in life. The characters are found struggling to adjust the pleasure principle to the reality principle and the success or failure of this adjustment ultimately leads them to their predicament. Being a homosexual, sexual repression and the psychological turmoil caused by his physical disability and disturbing family environment provided materials for Williams’ plays. He has tried to make use of his creative genius to achieve sublimation of his repressed desires. His psychologically repressed characters are also shown giving outlet to their unfulfilled desires in different ways, some of which even bring devastating consequences. It is seen that both the writer and his characters fail to eliminate the pressure of repression as it is impossible to eliminate completely, and so there is a constant struggle to achieve a balance between order and freedom, between personal and social life.

The plays of Tennessee Williams till date have been studied by various critics from different perspectives where repression and sublimation have come only as a passing reference. But the present study finds that both the creator and
the characters are faced with situations where they are given two options which
are either to accept their predicament with suffering repression or to go for
sublimation. The present research is an elaborate study in this respect which
forms a significant part both in the life of the playwright himself as well as
most of his characters. In Williams’ case there is a very close relationship
between the plays and the playwright. Being a homosexual, his life is
extraordinarily different from that of his contemporaries, and he has taken up
writing more for communicating the difference of his experiences than for
merely professional purpose. Freud designates sexual trauma as the cause of all
repression and Williams’ unconventional sexual life especially contributes in
generating repression in his personal world. The process of giving expression to
his thoughts and emotions that has been initiated with his mother’s providing
him with a type writer is being continued till the end of his life. His repressed
emotions make efforts to come out through his works. The pressure to
communicate his world makes Williams to rewrite many of his works than most
of his contemporaries. But this process of expression is time and again
obstructed and he writes: “Being unable to write has always disturbed me as if
the sky had fallen upon my head.” (Williams, Memoirs 139). Hence a
desperate urge for seeking sublimation of repression through his creative
writings which, in turn, significantly deal chiefly with the theme of repression,
ultimately becomes one of the major means for Tennessee Williams, the man
who suffers, to counter his own repression; and in the process the artistic exploration of the complex subjects in his plays prove to be his forte as a dramatist.
Works cited


