

CHAPTER - IV

CONCLUSION

The present study began by noting a few biographical details of Tennessee Williams, his southern background, and some modern theories of tragedy. But as has been made clear the main focus of the present dissertation is on Tennessee Williams as a tragic playwright of human relations par excellence. Consequently the major context of human relationships in terms of which Tennessee Williams projects his tragic vision have been examined in detail. The plays of Tennessee Williams address themselves to such basic themes as human isolation, impossibility of communication, choices and decisions which ruin the human self and its sustenance in society. In the general context of these basic themes Tennessee shows specific human beings pitted against tragic forces within and without and desperately struggling to establish meaningful relations with others. However, most of his characters fail because of certain obsessions, neurotic fear and psychopathological condition. Added to these are sometimes economic factors and tragic nostalgia.

Sex plays a major role in Tennessee Williams' exploration of human relationships. In plays such as Battle of Angels, Orpheus Descending, The Rose Tattoo, A Streetcar Named Desire, Kingdom of Earth, 27 Wagons full of cotton, In a Bar of Tokyo Hotel and Period of Adjustment Tennessee Williams shows sex in the context of the social institution of marriage. Men and women in their roles as husband and wife are doomed creatures in these plays. In Battle of Angels and

Orpheus Descending the emotional security and stability of marriage are threatened by forces which come from within as well as without. There is sexual frustration on the part of the heroines and there is also an outside agent of destruction - the young dashing lover.

The Rose Tattoo shows Serafina's desperate attempt to remain faithful to the memory of her dead husband. But there is something perverse about this as she tries to impose her set of values on her daughter thereby restricting her individual freedom. The discovery of her own husband's marital infidelity shatters her totally. A Streetcar Named Desire shows violent brutal clash of identities in the characters of Stanley and Blanche. Stanley's marriage is all but destroyed but Stella's sober presence helps to avoid the final disaster and Blanche who has been always lonely is ends up with madness.

Two short plays, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and In a Bar of Tokyo Hotel, show the widening gap between husband and wife. 27 Wagons Full of Cotton portrays Jake and Flora who disregard marital values for the sake of materialistic gains. Williams has portrayed here the Southern situation in which old aristocratic culture is replaced by gross mercantile values. In a Bar of Tokyo Hotel shows how the relationship between Mark and Miriam is characterised by faithlessness, suspicion and frustration. In Kingdom of Earth the marital relationship is once again put on trial. In this play,

Myrtle's interest in her survival is so great that she throws aside all values, she cuckolds her husband, destroys her lover and tries to save herself only. But the dark waters of flood symbolise the ultimate death and disintegration. *Period of Adjustment* is not a tragedy in the regular sense. Williams himself describes it as a 'serious comedy'. The play makes a very pertinent distinction between 'moods' and 'attitude' and shows and states, 'It takes a long time to form basic attitudes and to know what they are'. The play shows how people, incapable of forming and knowing basic attitudes which alone can establish meaningful relations are ultimately trapped in moods of violence, fear and excessive passion. Thus, though a serious comedy the play almost defines the general pattern of Tennessee Williams' tragic exploration of human relations.

Another group of plays analysed in this dissertation deals with three kinds of human relationships, love, homosexuality and lesbian attachment. This group includes Summer and Smoke, The Eccentricities of Nightingale, Sweet Bird of Youth, Camino Real, The Milk Train Does Not Stop Here Anymore, The Night of Iguana, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Small Craft Warning, The Mutilated, Something Unspoken, The Glass Menagerie, and Suddenly last Summer. Summer and Smoke and The Eccentricities of Nightingale deal with man-woman relationship in the context of love. In both these plays Tennessee Williams emphasises the tragedy of idealist

passionate love pitted against pragmatic values. Camino Real describes a kind of dead end where all inhabitants are desperate. More specifically it shows a world in which the values of sincerity, love and kindness are rendered futile by the power of money. In Sweet Bird of Yough, the tragic vision of Tennessee Williams deals with the impossibility of the realisation of love between Heavenly and Chance. In the general collapse of values characterised by money and power. Heavenly like Alma in Summer and Smoke does provide a positive point of reference but even this does not avoid the impossibility of genuine relationship of love. The Milk Train Does not Stop Here anymore deals with the theme of loneliness her loveless life and her approaching death. The Night of the Iguana deals predominantly with the failure of the love relationship between Shannon and Hannah.

Cat on a hot Tin Roof deals with several human relationships. But the homosexual relationship is singled out for analysis because it appears in this play as a major theme. Tennessee Williams here shows the tragic aspects of this relationship. Brick had established a meaningful relationship with Skipper but with Skipper's death, he finds himself increasingly lonely in claimant, hostile world. He simply cannot come to terms with life itself.

Small Carft Warning, The Mutilated and Something Unspoken deal with ^{woman-woman} ~~lesbian~~ attachment. This attachment is exemplified by Leona and Violet, Tinket and Celeste, Cornelia

and Grace. In Small Craft Warning the woman- woman relationship is a failure since Leona's attempts to save violet come to nothing. The Mutilated deals with the mutilated relationship, as indicated by the title itself between Trinket and Celeste. Something Unspoken shows the ambiguities of love- hate relationship between Grace and Cornelia.

Suddenly Last Summer and The Glass Menagerie deal with wider sets of relationships.

Suddenly Last Summer describes Sebastian's tragedy in the context of two relationships; his love relationship with Catharine and his relationship with his mother. The Glass Menagerie shows a tragic failure of communication between mother and son, mother and daughter. Amanda in this play represents the dead past, Laura stands for an impossible future while it is only Tom who shows some awareness of reality and the present.

This brief survey of Tennessee Williams' tragic exploration of human relationships shows that the world of his plays is a 'broken', fragmented one. This fragmented world is characterised by death, disease, violence, hatred, brutal passion, suspicion and jealousy, infidelity, lack of communication, sexual appetite and frustration. Given such a world the characters are lonely creatures pitted against the hostile tragic forces of life. Authentic human relations are impossible because the self fails to come to terms with the other. In the absence of self knowledge no meaningful dialogue with the other

is possible. To conclude by using a statement from Period of Adjustment, the tragic exploration of human relationships in Tennessee Williams shows how human beings, incapable of "forming attitudes" and of "understanding" them, are ultimately swayed by "moods," thereby generating their tragedy.