

## INTRODUCTION

American drama was not truly American upto 1910. In 1911 a Drama League of America was formed. The playwrights of the League wrote the plays of native origin. In 1914 and 1915 the movement reached to the climax. Robert Edmond Jones, Philip Moeller, Helen Westley, Lawrence Langer, Lee Simpson, Maurice Wertheim. Edward Goodman and others started performing one act plays. After 1919 they founded the Theatre Guild.

After the First World War, there were rapid changes. America became a world power. There were changes in economic, social, and political fields. The period brought great changes in thinking also.

In 1915 a group started its movements in the artists' colony of Provincetown. Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Robert Edmond Jones and others were the leading members. O'Neill wrote many dramas. The Emperor Jones, Mourning Becomes Electra, Iceman Cometh, etc., became very famous. With O'Neill, there were other playwrights. In the twenties, there was Militant Staging like the Simonson's production of Masses and Man, Jed Harris production Our Town, etc..

After that came George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart and others. Philip Barry wrote following the comedy of manners. His plays, like He and she, Mary the Third, were popular. He was followed by Behrman who produced comedy of ideas. Robert Sherwood presented

comedy, melodrama and biographical drama. Maxwell Anderson was famous for his realism and romance. Some writers like Howard, Elmer Rice and Paul Green tried to portray American Scene without anyone's influence.

The decade 1929-1939, was the period of Depression the writers naturally turned their attention to the situation of the people. The theatre of this period was called "The Theatre Engage", because the dramatists of the period were engaged with the problems of the people. There were two groups of the Theatre Engage in America. The first group consisted of Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson and S.N. Behrman. The other consisted of the young dramatists like Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets and Irwin shaw. The elder group was rather rightist, the younger was leftist. They both had deep sympathy for the middle classes and the lower classes. They attacked the economic policies, judiciary, church, Social institutions political relations, etc.. They suggested many new ways to overcome the dire situation of the time. Many new theatres came into existence.

Lillian Hellman was born in New Orleans on 20th June 1905. Her mother's family was from Albama and her father's from Louisiana. Her father acquired a large shoe-store. He wanted to expand his business, so they used to spend six months in New York and six in New Orleans. In New York, she completed her high school education. She continued her education at New York University. But she left before graduation to work in Morace Liveright's

publishing house. Morace Liveright was a wellknown publisher. Miss Hellman began writing short stories, two of those published in American Spectator in September 1933 and January 1934. But she could not achieve success. She had constant love for writing. And because of this love she joined Morace.

In 1925, she married Arther Kober, a young writer, newspaperman, and dramatist, but the marriage ended amicably in 1930, when she met Dashiell Hammett in Hollywood. She began reviewing books for the New York Herald Tribune. She used to read plays for New York producers. In 1932, she returned to New York and she was reading plays for producer Herman Shumlin. She collaborated with Louis Kronenberger on a farce called The Deer Queen.

There were many changes in traditional drama and she began to understand the difficult demands of professional writing. At the same time, Hammett encouraged her and also criticised her. She was reading William Roughhead's Closed Doors, or, the Great Drumsheugh Case, the record of a suit for scandal fought in the Scottish Courts in the early nineteenth century. Hellman liked it very much and she was inspired to write her first play The Children's Hour. The play was read by Herman Shumlin, her friend and former boss. Shumlin successfully produced and directed it in 1935. The play was long - running hit. The play was discussed by many critics. Hellman was criticised for them. After a great stir it was accepted by the critics.

The plot of 'The Children's Hour is based on the narrative of an actual trial. Two headmistresses of boarding school are accused of a lesbian attachment. The lie is spread by a sixteen year-old school girl. The girl's grand-mother believes the accusation and the news spreads. She tells everyone about the relation and the parents believe the accusation. They withdraw their children from the school. The teachers have to suffer because of libel suit and the case is dragged for ten years. In the end they are declared dauntless by the House of Lords. But by this time they are destroyed socially and economically. In the play Hellman used more details to sharpen the effect.

The theme of the play is an unconventional one. Homosexuality was never the subject for American writers. So critics and especially moralists have much sharpened opinions for the play. English and French writers adopted the theme previously. Hellman says that the play is about good and evil and the terms did not apply to the theme of homosexuality, but to that of destructive scandal-mongering, the smear and the big lie. And, Simultaneously to the power of the old and rich. There are much discussions about the theme. There is much controversy. According to some critics the theme is about character-assassination.

Some critics point out that the true theme is the curse of scandal mongering. Which easily wrecks the lives of innocent persons.

In Hellman's plays, characters are looked objectively. The play has been consistently praised for its dialogue and characterization. Characters are developed by what they say and do. The interest of the play is centered upon the character of Mary. The character is much discussed by the critics. While portraying the character, Hellman uses the important thing and that is her concrete dialogues about a missing bracelet and allowance money, and a broken vase, and flowers and a book read furtively. At the same time her actions are very important for her characterization. The character of Lily Mortar is drawn with the same technique. Her speech and her remembering of the past makes her character an important one. When Mary is off the stage yet she dominates the play.

While portraying the characters of the two teachers, she goes rather slow. In their conversation, there are frequent references of other characters. In the Act III the teachers are realized. At the same time Mrs. Tilford's character becomes important for her. She loves her grandchild so much that she is not ready to judge Mary's information, when it is so disastrous. Because of her behaviour, havoc is created.

Her second play Days to come opened in 1936. The play was sheer frustration for Hellman. Because what she actually felt she could not convey it to the readers properly. She wanted to put forth labourer's problem but the whole approach of the play puts forth the problem of relations. Hellman said that the play is about individuals but critics say that the strike is the story and there is no connection between the strike and the relation of the personal lives of the characters.

The failure of the play has many reasons. According to some critics Hellman uses the same theme for all her plays. The theme can be said to be the theme of mis-understanding human's tragedy. And, the self realization turns into self deception.

The plot is full of loosely related elements blackmail, adultery, etc. Satirical sketches of the rich in the play, is ineffectual. There is a family and there is encounter between the family and workers. Every character is a frustrated one. Rodman is bankrupt. His wife's affair with Ellicott has gone sour. The workers have gone back to their tedious underpaid jobs, and the Rodmans go back to their unsatisfying lives.

In the play Hellman uses a technique which she masters later. She wants to show more sides of a character than the drama normally reveals. As critics say that the play is novelistic one, she confesses that she has been influenced by novelists. The play reveals Hellman's strong ability to enter into character's lives with great understanding.

In 1932, The Little Foxes was produced with great success. Hellman was much troubled because of Days to Come and she took much care in The Little Foxes. She studied the south very closely and the outcome is the play. The play was a great success which enabled her to buy the farm in Pleasantville. After that she spent many productive years with Hammett on the farm.

Ben and Oscar are brother of Regina Giddens. They want to establish a new factory of cotton with Mr. Marshall. They don't have money and so they are waiting for Horace, who has been treated by Dr. Hopkins at other place. Before his arrival Oscar's son, Leo, steals 80,000 bonds from Horace's Safe deposite. Meanwhile Regina is bargaining with her brothers for a larger share. Horace discovers the theft but prevents Regina's getting the upperhand. When Horace Giddens calls theft as loan, Regina becomes angry. Regina blackmails her brother, after the death of her husband. When he is dying she remains there cold - bloodedly. He tries to get medicine but she does not move. Then Regina threatens to send them to jail and she gets a larger share in new business. When her daughter comes to know everything about her mother, she declares that she is leaving the house. There is crisis, the plot is gripping. There are twists and turns in the plot. The climax of the play is shocking. The plot consists of tricks, malpractices, cheating and getting the superior position.

The play deals with two instincts in man; good and evil. The play shows weak point of good and strong points of evil. Hellman wants to show greed in man. In the play they are no more human beings but they are foxes who eat the earth.

In the play, we see Hellman's skill as a realist. Audiences are attracted towards the play because of its realistic atmosphere. Hellman deals with social event in the play and her effort to presents it is praiseworthy. She knew the South well and she saw

social, economic and political condition. She portrays these events in the play and makes the play realistic.

The characterization of the play is interesting. The Hubbards are modeled on the real people. They are greedy and money - dominated. Regina and Ben become vital characters. Regina outwits her brothers. She threatens them. Ben and Oscar are business - minded. Birdie, Horace, and Alexandra are contrasted with Regina, Ben and Oscar.

Later on, the play adapted for an opera named 'Regina', in 1949. In 1941, the movie was presented which was based on the play. In the revival of the play and there was controversy. According to some critics the play is well - made and some think that it is the classic of American Literature.

In 1941, Watch on the Rhine was produced and it won the New York Drama Critics' circle Award. On subsequent trips of Europe she saw the destruction of human life and the destruction of human freedom, through the drama, she points out evils of war. Watch on the Rhine is remarkable for its theme, characters and plot.

Watch on the Rhine focuses on the character of Kurt Muller. He is an anti - fascist, who has fought in Spain. He has escaped from Nazi - tyranny and arrives at Farelly's mansion. He has his family with him. Fanny Farelly is an old, wealthy widow and she is the mother-in-law of Kurt. These two characters play the important role in the play.

Kurt is carrying \$ 23,000 in a briefcase, money to be used



to help rescue political prisoners from the Nazis. When Brancovis, another refugee of Fanny, comes to know about it. He discovers Kurt's purpose. And there is blackmail by Teck. And when Kurt comes to know real nature of Teck, he kills him. And Kurt, must leave for Germany. Mrs. Farrelly pays him because now she realises the impact of Nazi threat.

The theme of the play shows Hellman's political thoughts. She wants to show, tyranny of Fascism and how it disturbed the whole world. She is concerned with an American family which represents the suffering of common people, affected by Fascism. As critics point out, she wants to show, contrast in two ways of life; unawakened innocence and tragic necessities of Europe. Critics praised her for her attempt to show anti-Fascist play of the war years. They call it as vital, eloquent and compassionate play about an American family.

The characterization in the play is interesting. Muller is the protagonist of the play. She wants to show two families. There is a group of characters. She develops her characters novelistically and there is a thorough development. Kurt Muller's character becomes an important one in her career because he is the first hero of her plays. Fanny Farrelly also gives pleasure because of her firm nature as well as nobility. Eventhough she is old fashioned, she realises necessity of the time and gives helping hand to Kurt Muller. Other characters are created with fine touch.

In the play, sometimes, she uses irony. The title is ironic. The action is a slow one. In the first act, we feel as if we are reading a well made drama, with wits and broad humours but in the second and the third act, the treatment given is different. There is still logical development. There is a series of incidents and we get acts followed, one by one. Hellman uses the technique of suspense. The climax of the play is unexpected. As there is good and evil in The Little Foxes, here, too, we see the same, but she does not allow evil to get the upperhand over good and here good becomes dominant.

Through this play, Hellman's anti-fascist activities came to light. But Hellman suffered much because of criticism of Watch on the Rhine. As a humanist, she gives freedom to her character. The characters behave according to their wish and there is choice for them. We see that they choose moral values in the end. They are not licentious but they are free to take decision. Through this play, again Hellman proved to be a successful playwright. She puts forth characters, plot and theme very nicely. Hellman uses peculiar dialogues for the characters. Their emotions are expressed through their dialogues. There is connection between her experiences and expression. Once again we see Hellman's realism. Her characters and theme are based upon her experience of the Europe tour.

The Searching Wind was published in 1944. The plot of the play describes the life of an American diplomat. The diplomat is following isolationist policy. When there is rise of Hitler

and Musolini he wanted to escape from the ugly truth.

This is an intelligently written play. It is an extension of Watch on the Rhine. Her The Searching wind reviewed as an expression of her political views. The play was noted for 'Critics' Circle Award, as the best play of the year but it could not receive any award. But generally hailed it as the best drama of the season.

The play is about the relationship between two friends. Emily and Cas are friends but have not met for years. Emily knows that her husband Alexander, and Cas have immoral relation. Cas loves Alex but cannot marry him because they have quarreled about his lack of political conviction. In the end, Cas confesses everything on asking. Sam accuses them, in the end and they face truth about their action.

Critics point out that The Searching Wind lacks in characterization, subject matter, title, plot and theme. Sometimes, it seems that the play is about the friends and sometimes it tends to tell the story of Sam.

The characterization in the play has flaws. The story revolves around the character of Cassie. But her character is not revealed thoroughly. Hellman does not tell about her past or future. Only a few memories are recalled by the friends. Even Emily's character is ambiguous because she is not exposed by Hellman. Hazen and Sam have confrontations. Sam is wounded, his war experiences have made him ashamed of his family members of their passiveness.

So some critics feel that it is a quarrel between the old and new generations.

Hellman creates curiosity in audiences' mind. Emily invites Cassie but what will be the result is suspense and so audience see the play with curiosity. It had 318 performances almost as long as Watch on the Rhine. Audience liked the play. But critics were somewhat unhappy with the play. Because they had reason. i.e. she lacks in every aspect. According to some critics love triangle is silly one, and both the women are not portrayed clearly. There remain doubts about them and therefore, the characters become pale. The dialogues, in the play, are crispy and very witty which amuse audience. Hellman uses here irony. As she was accused for the theme she declared that she did not like thematic plays and she wanted to write only. She was not interested in political message, she wanted to create people, if they were understood by the audience then there was no problem. Characters are important according to her.

She uses flashback technique and the time span is of more than twenty years. The flashback does not focus light upon their actions. It only shows their past. So, sometimes it seems unnecessary in the play. The same incident could have been narrated by the characters. It neither tells us about the meetings of Alex and Cas. Even though it is called an intelligently written play but it is ambiguous in many respects.

Another part of the Forest was published in 1946. Hellman wanted to write trilogy about the Hubbards. But she wrote only two plays. She said that she was bored of the Hubbards and so she did not write third play about them. In the play, Hellman takes the family history back only by one generation to 1880. The theme of the play is the same as of The Little Foxes. She wants to show conningness of the Hubbards.

The father and mother, Marcus and Lavinia, are still alive. The children are not married yet. Two boys are working on lower wages in Hubbard business and Regina is spoilt by her father. She spends money on the dresses from Chicago. The family is ruthless and penny-pinching. The family has made its money during the civil war at the expenses of its own neighbours. Bagtrys are in contrast to Hubbards.

Lavinia is a weak character and she is dominated by her husband and son, Ben. Oscar and Regina have selected their own life partners but Ben does not allow them to do so and very cunningly makes Oscar marry Birdie Bagtry, a wealthy but weakly creature. Lavinia wants to teach black pupil and always she asks permission for that to Marcus. Marcus has no time to give her. In the end Ben promises her to send away on one condition and that is, she must tell Marcus' past. When she tells everything to Ben, he becomes powerful man, because, now he knows the past of Marcus and he overthrows his father's authority. He blackmails his father and wins the chief position in the family. The play ends when Ben is on Marcus' chair and Marcus is sitting in front of him.

Hellman shows their greed for money and the tricks played for it. Marcus' reputation is not good. The people know the Hubbards as nasty people for their behaviour. The play is remarkable for its characterization. Marcus always neglects Lavinia, as Oscar, in The Little Foxes, to Birdie. He loves his daughter and gives her money. Even though, the characterization of the play is the same like The Little Foxes, she makes slight changes in it. There are some more characters. She has created Marcus' and Lavinia's character.

The title of the play is ironic. The dialogues are very important because Marcus and Ben speak alike. There is a sort of pride and they are ironic in their speech. But the intelligent Hubbards are defeated afterwards. There is difference in their dreams and reality. It is not a melodrama or tragedy but it is an ironic detached comedy. The play focuses upon social condition of contemporary South. Once again we find Hellman's realistic touch in the play.

Some critics praised the play and some disliked it. As some critics point out, <sup>the title</sup> ~~it~~ is borrowed from Shakespeare's play. As you like it. The play is called as Hellman's best satire. Hellman criticises so called rich people of contemporary period. Their wealthiness is based on immorality. Perhaps there is misunderstanding of the critics in taking two plays together and, therefore, they disliked it. But audience took the play with the same enthusiasm as they took The Little Foxes.

In the play, there are tricks and suspense. There is Jealousy, contempt and revenge. There is crisis in the play and the play is

not lengthened like The Searching Wind, it lasts about two days only. Everyone knows that Hellman was a social critic and the play represents her social criticism, critics point out that it is the criticism of capitalists. It is a study of the rise of capitalism, as well as rise of lovelessness.

In 1951, her The Autumn Garden was published, which is called as Chekhovian play because of its characterization. The drama set in a summer boarding house where many people have gathered to spend their summer vacation. In the drama there is a tough - minded young girl. The girl knows what she wants and gets when she sees opportunity. In The Autumn Garden, Hellman is more concerned with individuals. There is not war or politics. The drama is about middle class people. In the play there is a villainous character, Nick. He is troublesome character. There are other guests, General Griggs and his wife, Carrie Ellis and her homosexual son Frederick, Carrie's old mother-in law, Crossman, admirer of Constance, the owner of the house, and Sophie, Constance's French niece and maid of all work. Nick is disturbing everyone. But Sophie conquers over him. Sophie is engaged with Frederick, she is more concerned with Frederick's problem. But Nick destroys the affair. Sophie gets chance to revenge upon Nick. Once Nick drunkenly falls asleep in Sophie's porch bed, Sophie blackmails his wife Nina for \$ 5000 even though Sophie is undaunted, She threatens her that she will tell that Nick seduced her. Finally she gets money and prepares to return to France.

In the play, we see Chekhovian qualities. She read and praised Chekhov for his skill. She adopts some Chekhovian skills for her play. The plot construction of the play is very impact. There is fun, wit, cheating and shock treatment. Because of all these things, the plot becomes impressive. There is Mrs. Griggs, Carrie Ellise, who is misguided by Nick and after that frustration of Nina and Rose is followed. Carrie Ellis is also frustrated because of Nick's information. He tells Constance that she has been loved by crossman from his young age. He gets drunken and without knowing falls in the bed of Sophie. Undaunted, Sophie, wants to go back her home, she sees opportunity and blackmails him for her pseudo seduction. The plot develops in logical manner. We do not see looseness in it.

She is compared with Chekhov for the characterization & said that she is almost cruel. The characterization is real and it gives the realistic tone to the play. These characters are common people. Hellman wants to respect ourselves. Hellman wants to make these characters as ordinary as possible and, therefore, she notices yearning in them. But while expecting something we are not serious. Her 'evil dominant' view is somewhat changed and she gives different treatment to her characters. The evil seems here irritant and now evil is dominated by other force. In this way, she makes her weak character a strong one. There is optimism in the play and many critics felt the same thing in the play. Hellman said in a newspaper



interview that the play is meant to say that these people can do a great deal with their lives.

Hellman uses irony in the play. Nick is the ironic who affects everyone but himself remains unaffected. Outwardly he is guiding everyone but actually he is misguiding everyone. There is difference between dreams of the characters and reality. Some critics took it as tragedy and some felt it comedy.

Hellman is a humanist and she gives freedom to her characters she wants to tell that we must do our best. even though there is limitation she makes them perfect. She takes social occasions to portray her character. The characters are great many in number and so we feel that it is novelistic drama. But the characters do not create ambiguity and fuss. Everyone has its destined role and according to it, the character is performing its role.

Some critics say that The Autumn Garden is a comedy of anti-climax, it is denial of expectation. We do not see any protagonist in the play but the group of people becomes a character.

Hellman's The Autumn Garden was discussed much. There are many controversies about it. Some feel it muddled play with overcrowded people and some feel well-structured, well-made play. The play is praised and appreciated by audience.

Toys in the Attic is Hellman's last original play. The play won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. The idea for the play had been suggested to Hellman by Dashiell Hammett. The play is about relationship between two sisters and their brother. They have sacrificed their dreams for their brother, Jullian. They have dreamt of the tour to Europe and have gathered money. When they are about to go, their brother needs the money because of the loss in his business.

Jullian comes back with his wife Lily and now he has some money with him because he has bought land for a money making project with the help of his ex-lover, Mrs. Warkins whose husband is a wealthy but dangerous man. Lily's rich mother Albertine, lives with her negro chauffer, Henry Simpson whom Lily hates. Carrie overhears that Mrs. Warkins is cousin of Henry and she makes Lily phone Mr. Warkins when ~~Jullian~~ Julian has gone to see Mrs. Warkins. The confused girl phones Mr. Warkins and the result is pathetic. Mr. Warkins sends his men and they beat Jullian and the money is in their hand, which Julian wants to give to Mrs. Warkins as her business share. When Jullian is returned ~~Carrie~~ Carrie is happy. Albertine realises Carrie's nature. Anna realises the truth and she decides to go to Europe without Carrie and remains the mother of these two.

The characterization in the play is peculiar. Hellman takes here references to her father's family. Her father was a business-man and he was unsuccessful in his business. His two sisters helped

him. Her aunt Lily was like Albertine and the characterization gives autobiographic element in the play. These characters are real and lively because of their weakness. Their identity is lost as if they are toys in attic. They yearn and dream but their dreams are shattered.

Hellman uses irony in the play. And the title is symbolic. There are many expressions about its frame. Some critics find it an accurate play. Hellman wants to show perfect destiny of man. One's actions, sometimes, become self-deception. Hellman wants to show love in the play but the love is destructive.

Many questions are raised in the two acts. And viewers are eager to know the answers. In the third act, all questions are answered. The characters are ambiguous but still interesting. The plot is constructed in nice manner. There are puzzles and some revelations which are destructive. According to some critics, the plot is both troubling and fascinating to read but first two acts are over plotted and some thought they are dragged and nothing happens until act-three. There is guilt, dishonesty, immorality and tricks played by the sister. These characters yearn for something for long time and when they reach their aims they feel empty.

After her last original play, Hellman started writing about her family and herself. She goes in the past and writes about her favourite characters. She wrote two memoirs, "An unfinished Woman" and "Pentimento". Her memoirs tell us little about her development

as a dramatist. But after reading these memoirs we see resemblance between her characters and the family members and friends. She expresses her views about her characters and comments on them.

Before writing her last original play, Hellman adapted some dramas and themes. 1951 to 1960, these ten years were difficult years for her. In 1954, she edited the collection of Chekhov's letters, and wrote introductory essay. In this introduction, she warmly admired Chekhov. In 1955, her adaptation "The Lark" was presented. It is a play about Joan of Arc by the French playwright. Jean Anouilh. Christopher Fry, British Poet playwright, translated it. Hellman is always compared with him, for the play. But Hellman simplified the language and the play became exciting. According to her, Joan is a modern career woman than saint or peasant.

Montserrat is an adaptation of the French play by Emmanuel Robles. The play appealed to Hellman because of its characters. After these two adaptations, she worked hard for Candide subtitled "a comic operatta based upon Voltair's Satire". She was working for a year. But her efforts were in vain because of it's failure. Her next adaptation My Mother My Father and Me is based on the novel "How Much" by Burt Blechman. It is a satirical comedy about middle-class Jews. Hellman showed her talent in the construction of the play but again she had to face failure.

In her other works, she wrote two short stories which are published in the American Spectator in September 1933 and January 1934. Her "The deer Queen" was a collaboration with Louis

Kronenberger which copyrighted in 1932. She also collaborated on Dark Angel. Later on she translated some of her plays for screen. Her the most successful play The Children's Hour was written by her for screen, which was titled These Three. She also wrote film script for Sidney Kingsley.

The National Institute of Arts and Letters elected her as Vice President. Then, The academy Institute awarded her its gold medal. Later on, she acquired many honorary degrees from reputed universities. In 1984, very determined tough - minded and uncompromising, America's number one playwright, Lillian Hellman, died.