

FRAGMENTED PRESENTATION OF AMERICAN DREAM IN EDWARD ALBEE'S *THE AMERICAN DREAM* & *THE SANDBOX*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to explore the failure of American Dream that has turned into nightmare. The researcher critically analyzes Edward Albee's The American Dream and The Sandbox and explores different aspects and dimensions of American Dream as envisaged by the older generation as well as the new American Dream based on materialism, greed and utilitarianism and indifference to filial and human bonds. Albee's world of drama presents post war and postmodern American society which is shattered and disintegrated socially, politically and psychologically. This research focuses on the American society portrayed by Albee and attempts to investigate the disparity, insensitivity and the spiritual death among different classes in American society. The dream of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness have been turned into a dreadful reality that has forced American people escapists. In this research, the comprehensive study of Albee's The American Dream and The Sandbox is an attempt to explore the degeneration and collapse of family life and its impact on American society. American Dream is being analyzed from Marxist and postmodernist perspectives and the researcher tries to explore how American social and family life have been disintegrated, alienated and shattered by the lust for wealth and insensitivity to human relationships. This paper puts special emphasis on the failure of language to communicate meaningfully and significantly. Language has been taken as a character and its impact on the "human" characters in the selected plays of Edward Albee. This paper highlights on how Albee uses the language to deconstruct the idea of American Dream and how he portrays the deterioration, disintegration and bleakness of postmodern American society.*

Key terms: American Dream, Disintegration, Degeneration, meaninglessness, materialism, self

INTRODUCTON

Edward Albee's (1928) world of Drama is different from those of other American Playwrights in exposing the contradictions within individuals not only through their action but through simple language. Language in Albee's plays is not tricky to understand yet the meaning and message related to American Dream and denigrated American Society is quite confusing and complicated. This usage of language leads to the understanding of American mentality during 1960's. Albee wants his readers to think and analyze postmodern American Dream differently. It seems that the simplicity in Albee's usage of language and structure makes his works more complicated. In *The American Dream* (1961) [1] and *The Sandbox* (1960) [2] language and structure of the plays turn the course of events bitter, complex and tricky. Dialogues spoken by Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, and Youngman in both plays expound the stagnancy and degeneration within the American society. One can find in Albee's plays that social, moral and conventional losers who are unable to do anything in their life and whatever they have done that is quite opposite to what they pretend to do. Mommy and Daddy in *The American Dream* have brutally murdered the twin and both want to get their payment back from where they purchased *it* (my italics). As in *The American Dream* (1961) Grandma narrates that incident to Mrs. Barker, "What did they do? Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; you can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. So, they called up the lady who sold the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over

to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted." (p.61) [3]. Language in this excerpt is symbolic as well as sarcastic; Grandma explains to Mrs. Barker that Mommy and Daddy were cruel, heartless and indifferent to the twin they adopted. When the twin had been murdered they wanted to get their money back from the lady who sold twin to them. According to Grandma, money is more important to Mommy and Daddy than that twin who has been killed by them. Grandma tries to prove that materialism has eradicated all the feelings, emotions, sincerity and earnestness. Sarcasm and irony in Grandma's dialogue expose the insensitivity of postmodern America where everything even human beings can be easily bought and sold just as this used to be done before the dawn of civilization or during slavery. This era of civilization still has the traces of savagery and butchery enveloped in so called modernism and humanity. Controversy which Grandma indicates is that post war and postmodern American society tend to be civilized and cultured yet it behaves worse than animals. Mommy and Daddy disfigure and castrate the twin and even after doing this heinous crime they want their money back. In *The Sandbox* (1960) characters with the same filial identities (Mommy and Daddy) dump Grandma in the sandbox and assume that she is dead, whereas Grandma exposes the bitter truth of society, "Grandma (to audience again) I'm smart that way. Anyhow, I had to raisethat over there all by my lonesome; and what next to here there that's why she married. Rich? I tell youmoney, money, money. They took me off the farmwhich was real decent of

them... and they moved me into the big town house with them.. fixed a nice place for me under the stovegave me an army blanket.... And my own dish.....my very own dish! So what have I got to complain about? Nothing, of course! I am not complaining.”(p.68) [4].

Grandma depicts the general temperament of American Society during post war era as money and materialism are far more important.

CHARACTERS IN ALBEE'S PLAYS

Characters in Albee's plays were confused and bewildered as they have a nameless existence in a senseless, absurd and irrational world. Confusion and bewilderment are quite prevalent in modern American society. If youth of any society is bewildered it means that its present and future both are uncertain. American social condition seems to be a big question mark as that existence seems to be without identity. This nameless existence is quite closer to the Existentialism of Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994). Ionesco states in one of his essays, Notes and Counter notes [5] “I see myself torn apart by blind forces rising from my innermost self and clashing in some desperate unresolved conflict ...it is clear that I never know who I am, or why I am” (p.65) [6]. Ionesco here elucidates the contradiction within the individuals and also a controversial relationship with the universe. Both human existence and his presence in universe are incomprehensible and inexplicable. Individual himself is unknown to his “Self” as why has he been sent to this world and what is the purpose universe has in transferring him from one world of confusion to another form of perplexity and bewilderment. Ionesco further says in the same essay, “I try to project onto the stage an inner dramaI want only to render my own strange and improbable universe” (p.69) [7]. Albee projects the same belief and demonstrates this in his plays where he depicts the confused individuals who know nothing about themselves and are unaware of the purpose of their life as Mommies and Daddies in both *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox*. These characters do not even have proper names and are unable to hide their incongruity and self-denial, while new generation of that time also faces the same predicament but with different perspectives and that their perception about life has been disfigured by the people like Mommies and Daddies. Though the young people are physically strong yet are mentally and spiritually shallow.

In both plays of Albee, characters' names are repeated, they repeat each other's dialogues and whatever they are saying that is senseless, and without any appropriate meaning. In *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream*, Mommies' and daddies' conversations are so contradictory and are void of any appropriate meaning.

Both Albee and Ionesco expose the linguistic narrowness of the characters as they demonstrate the enigma of modern man's pretension of being sensible, logical and rational. The characters of *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* represent this paradox and absurdity of life harshly and sarcastically yet clearly as Mommies and daddies are busy in their irrational life and desperate to abandon Grandma; the only character in both plays whose comments on the dead life of other characters are meaningful. Grandma's apparent death in *The Sandbox* and boxes she is carrying in *The American Dream* symbolize the decrepitude of modern life which has embraced or is going to embrace metaphorical death. The existence of modern man is just like separate *EMPTY* (my italics) boxes which are quite indifferent to and detached from each other.

ESCAPE FROM SELF, REALITY & HAUNTING PAST

American Dream for the postmodern American Society has been a source of inspiration, motivation and stimulation. American people believed this, loved this, adorned this yet they were unable to realize, comprehend and attain this. This misjudgment of *Dream* (my italics) turned American people towards a blind alley where their spiritual blindness made them miserable and wretched. American people were themselves not sure about their existence and reality. Dream itself was enchanting and captivating and no doubt was based on reality and truth. But with the passage of time Dream started losing its significance and implication as people took it to fulfill their materialistic and money oriented goals and objectives. American Dream had been firstly celebrated and appreciated and then depreciated and downgraded in American Literature. Dream once was the source of inspiration but after losing its grace meaning it was reduced to materialism.

One can find escape from self, reality and past in the characters of *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox*. In both plays, Mommy, Daddy and Young Man tend to get away from self, reality and past as Mommy and Daddy want to get rid of Grandma who mirrors their true self and reveal their disgusting past. It seems that Grandma carries a mirror in her hand and she tries to expose the ugly reality of Mommy and Daddy who pretend to be civilized and cultured. Youngman also exposes the escapist attitude as he does nothing yet he believes that he really does a great job.

Albee in *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* also tries to expose the self-deception within the characters that makes their life pungent and difficult. Mommy and

Daddy in *The American Dream* are entwined in self-deception when they converse with each other purposelessly and meaninglessly: Mommy: *I said, I went to buy a new hat Yesterday. Daddy: Oh! Yes...yes. Mommy: Pay attention. Daddy: I am paying attention. Mommy: Well, be sure you do Daddy: Oh, I am. Mommy: All right, Daddy; now listen. Daddy: I'm listening, Mommy. Mommy: You're sure!. Daddy: Yes....yes, I'm sure, I'm all ears.* (p.59) [8].

The conversation of Mommy and Daddy is meaningless as they call each other Mommy and Daddy (despite the fact they are issueless) instead of their real names and it seems they pretend to pay attention to each other's meaningless conversation. This so called attention might be taken as an excuse and escape from the reality and from their illusory *self* (my italics). In *The Sandbox* Mommy and Daddy also escape from the past by leaving Grandma in a sandbox which is showing their insensitivity and inconsiderateness and their dehumanizing behavior as they just disappear after this incident. Dr. R. Kannan points out, "A complete absence of human dimension together with a thought of this want of human element is Albee's primary concern" (1971, 44) [9]. If we apply this concern of Albee to *The American Dream* this seems quite true as characters have lost dimension, belief in values and belief within themselves. Their conversation is without any dimension and direction. They are just like people lost in the labyrinth as they aimlessly and blindly run after some mumble which they don't know where that is. The only character in this play which has certain direction and thoughtfulness towards life that is Grandma who realizes the bitterness of life in both plays *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* and in *The American Dream* where she reveals the bitterness in form of Mommies' and Daddies' insensitivity and purposelessness of life in telling the story of "bumble of joy" in the former one and dumping her in a sandbox by leaving her at the mercy of others. Another important character in both plays *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* is the Young Man who faces existentialist's component *angst* which means perturbed, disturbed and agitated and he is unable to decide what to do in his life. Contradictions, conflicts and self-negation in modern American society indicate the failure of concept of self-reliance and self-exploration, the society is divided between the materialism and the faded concept of American Dream. Common man's belief is quite shaken and traumatized as circumstances are quite opposite to what has been preached. History has become histrionic and melodramatic; the twin discussed by Grandma and

grieved by Young Man in *The American Dream*, mourn over the death of a never born son by George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and search of lost infant by two couples both Young and old in *The play about a Baby* depict the bereavement and the loss of glory which had never flourished. Other American playwrights like Eugene O'Neil and Arthur Miller delineates the same histrionic and contradictory attitude towards history in their plays. Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* behaves like Lady Macbeth while acting like a somnambulist to avoid both her past and present while Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is observed carrying two heavy bags all the time which could be taken as a lumber of his past and he is unable to get rid of them of as well as accept them. This is the confusion and anxiety and insecurity which middle class face in post war era and they are unable to communicate them properly.

RESISTANCE & ALBEE'S THE AMERICAN DREAM

While exploring Albee's plays one can understand that there is a strong resistance against acceptance and admittance of whatever happens in their life. Though American dream is taken as richer, better and happier representation of life yet this expression is deceiving for a common American and dragging him into depression and disillusionment which leads him towards contradiction and internal conflict. Whether this is Albee's and has no idea about his standing and position *The American Dream*, or *The Sandbox*, characters of these plays are in a futile and pointless search of a *lost paradise* (my italics). In *The American Dream*, Youngman is confused in this world as he admits before Grandma, "YOUNGMAN: NO, NO. It's part of the interviews. I will be happy to tell you. It's that I have no talents at all, except what you see...my person; my body, my face. In every other way I am incomplete, and I must thereforecompensate" (p.53) [10]. What Young Man tries to prove here is that he has physical existence but not spiritual and moral. He is incomplete though he has face, body, structure and shadow yet he has to compensate himself. Moreover, he does not know how to recompense and maintain balance within himself. This disparity in American Dream is Albee's major concern in his Plays. Young generation of 1960's is unable to explore what they want to do and they are unable to determine their own path and purpose. Grandma tries to make him understand that he is the *American Dream* (my italics): GRANDMA: *Yup. Boy, you know what you are, don't you? You're the*

American Dream, that's why you are. All those other people, they don't know what they are talking about. Youyou are the American Dream" (p.55) [11].

This seems to be a sarcastic, sardonic and mordant statement made by Grandma as she wants to make Youngman realize that he is *The American Dream* which Youngman is quite unable to understand and he believes that his masculinity lies in his physical appearance rather than in his decisiveness, determination and will power. Albee exhibits belief and credence in the character of Grandma and disbelief and incredulity in form of Youngman. Grandma's confidence and trust in Youngman becomes ineffective and useless as Youngman himself is not sure of his strength, courage, and fortitude rather he is a disintegrated, fragmented and collapsed soul.

Grandma demonstrates the bitter, astringent yet a real fact of American society which does not want to give American Dream a proper status rather it is taken as old messed up generation who should not be listened. American Dream in post war and postmodern American society is a burden and "bumble" (Albee, 1961, p.39) [12]. According to Grandma American people believe in artificial and fake life and values are of no importance to them and they dump them just like purity, values and morality. New civilization kills the old civilization and silences the old generation as they pave the way of insensitivity, materialism and segregation. Sending Grandma to Old home is a symbolic killing of American Dream in Albee's *The American Dream*, American people have accepted a life which has nothing to with the ambition, aspiration and self-awareness of American Dream.

AMERICAN DREAM & THE SUGGESTIVE LANGUAGE OF EDWARD ALBEE

Albee shows his belief that his play American Dream is an examination of American Dream, "*This play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.*" (p.11) [13].

He uses the rich suggestive language which shows contradiction and bleakness within the individuals. This is quite ironical that during the same decade when Albee wrote *The American Dream* or *Sandbox*, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) personified American dream in a more idealistic tone, "[.....]I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American Dream" (p. 12) [14]. American Dream has been taken and understood yet this has been distorted in the same era not by the writers but by the people who understood

it in terms of acquisitiveness and materialism. Edward This is the conflict between the old and new concepts of *Dream* which is quite contrary to the concept of purity and sanctity of American Dream that has been propounded, accepted and celebrated by the old American generation. The conflict between the new and old American Dreams makes reader realize that this dream has been split into two different approaches; one focuses on sanctity, purity and love while other's sole purpose is to be successful without keeping in view the respect of moral, ethical and social values. Values which have been propounded by James Truslow Adams (1889-1949) and his American Dream is,*{the} dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position"* (p.112) [15].

Adams believes in equality, justice, fair play and egalitarianism. He wants to make American richer socially morally and economically. New American Dream is coupled with inequality, injustice, restlessness, agitation, loneliness, seclusion, agony, distress and deformity of self and this is the factual presentation of new America where things are deceivingly clear and where dream has become an illusion. Grandma in both plays make some efforts to propound positive thinking and values or if not this they at least miss good old days. Though they were not sure what happened to American Dream yet they believe in one thing that the Dream they watched was entirely different from the dream they and the young American generation experience; the dream which seems to be the misapprehension of the real one. **MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY & MATERIALISM**

Youngman from Albee's *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream* are emotionally, psychologically and mentally impotent and incapable. Despite the fact that they are young, they are directionless, lost and oscillate between duties and escape from duties. These are young males who are usually taken as hope, better future, and prosperity for their families but they have brought despair, dejection, burden, restlessness, irrationality and artificiality to American society in general and their families in

particular. This artificiality and hypocrisy has become the permanent feature of postmodern American society.

In *The Sandbox*, Mommy and Daddy dump grandma in sand and wait for her death and Daddy brings orchestra there to play somber music. In these plays, Family life exists without all familial warmth, affection and sincerity. Grandma is a burden for Mommy and Daddy because American Dream has become a burden for them. Grandma does not remember lot of things yet she still remembers the "Bumble of joy" (p.32) [16] who has been got rid of by Mommy and Daddy. There is another point which is quite important and that is Mommy's and Daddy's fear of taking responsibilities. This is also another predicament of American society where responsibilities are taken as burden. They also want to dump Granma because they believe that she is no more than a burden. This might be taken as a typical He likes his muscular body yet his body exists without brain and spine. They face a certain conflict within themselves; they represent the American male stratum of postmodern era in which they are unable to perform their duties and to take responsibilities. In *The Sandbox*, Albee shows the insensitivity of both Mommy and Daddy when they dump Grandma into sand and assume that she is dead. Mommy and Daddy are not the only characters who treat old people, values and morality in such a heartless manner; they mirror the whole American society who takes American Dream and values in this manner. American society talks about American Dream and its holy spirit but as far as practicality is concerned they don't seem to follow any component of American Dream. Here comes the question and that What is American Dream and how it works? American Dream is showing belief, confidence and reliance in oneself and to struggle hard to bring positive changes in society which can bring equality, prosperity and success in society irrespective of class, race and ethnicity. American Dream believes in people and their hard work and struggle but American people have lost that self-reliance and spirit rather they are trying to find easy way out. America is considered a land of opportunity but it can only offer opportunities who really want to get. In twentieth century American Dream has lost its meaning because people have forgotten to struggle and if they struggle that is only to satisfy their selfishness and greediness and in doing so they don't show any consideration and care for those who are quite sincere towards their struggle, hard work

Albee, in one of his interviews to New York Times, states, "..... I write play about how people waste *their lives*. *People.....have not lived their*

life; that's why they are screaming and crying out" (Albee, 1967, p.67). This is what American dream is; people cry and scream and get nothing from this. Albee's *The Sandbox* shows the same structure of emptiness, bleakness and insensitivity which had been showed and demonstrated in *The American Dream*. Same characters have appeared in *The Sandbox* and the same behavior they show this to old people and American Dream. In *The American Dream* and in *The Sandbox*, Mommies and Daddies want to get rid of Grandma which is a symbolic and metaphorical presentation of American Dream. Grandma believes that American society has American Dream within itself what it needs to explore it and realize its existence.

This is the conflict and perplexity which American people experience or in a more rudimentary sense they tolerate as they don't want to change their situation. As twin in *American Dream* has been physically mutilated by Mommy and Daddy (two perverted presentations of modern degenerated beings) and still these two beings are unable to understand what they have really done. This seems that they have certain resemblance with Peter of *The Zoo Story* (1958) [17], another play of Edward Albee, in which a degenerated being Peter is not sure whether he has human or animal existence, Jerry, *Now I'll let you in on what happened at the zoo; but first, I should tell you why I went to the zoo. I went to the zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other and with people too. It probably wasn't a fair test, what with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals. But, if it's a zoo, that's the way it is.* (p.34) [18]

What Jerry tries to say is that human being and animals both share the same personality traits and this is only the zoo that separates them from each other otherwise modern human beings are more furious, wild, untamed and livid than animals. Here modern human beings are in fact modern Americans and America is a "Zoo." According to Peter, Americans just pretend that they are humans but they are not in the true sense of the word. Jerry is quite sarcastic when he mentions human existence and animal existence in his dialogue because according to him people are living at the animalistic level. This kind of pretension can be related to the John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) [19] where its protagonist Jimmy Porter wants to play a game, "Why don't we play a little game? Let's pretend that we are

humans and we're actually alive" (p.13) [20]. Though this statement is not related to American Dream yet to the modern world where human beings can only pretend to be humans. This is what Jerry believes that American people can only pretend to be humans but in reality they are animals. Jerry is quite ironic when he talks about Zoo as it seems that he wants people inside and animals outside the zoo. Whenever he mentions his landlady and her dog, he believes that both are the same as landlady only knows the basic instincts and same is the case with dog so human beings are at animal level. This statement can also be understood in the perspective of Mommy's and Daddy's treatment with the twin who has been disfigured, deformed and ultimately put to death in *The American Dream*. Foundation of American Dream is based on purity, limpidness, sincerity, honesty, equality and fairness but the misapprehension of American dream is full of contamination and corruption and that is the reason American Dream and American society has lost its pursuit of happiness.

LANGUAGE AS A CHARACTER IN THE AMERICAN DREAM

In *The American Dream*, Language is itself a character; a character who works both unreceptively yet aggressively. Language acts both with other characters and on its own; exposes the degeneration and erosion of characters and expression itself. The repetitious expression in the play is self-deceptive and characters' meaningless bumbling represents a hollow humming noise which exposes characters' shallowness and superficiality..

. This misjudgment of *Dream* (my italics) turned American people towards a blind alley where their spiritual blindness made them miserable and wretched. American people were themselves not sure about their existence and reality. Dream itself was enchanting and captivating and no doubt was based on reality and truth. But with the passage of time Dream started losing its significance and implication as people took it to fulfill their materialistic and money oriented goals and objectives. American Dream had been firstly celebrated and appreciated and then depreciated and downgraded in American Literature. Dream once was the source of inspiration but after losing its grace meaning it was reduced to materialism. Albee's language is quite simple in both *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream* and this also points out of having no direction as Daddy at the end is unable to find Grandma and Mrs. Barker. Empty Boxes denote the meaninglessness and purposelessness of human relationships and sand represents lack of balance, instability, shiftlessness, unreliability and sense of loss. The apartment in which Mommy and Daddy are living is a cubicle and they are

unable to find their way. It seems that characters in *Sandbox* and *American Dream* (except Grandma) are fragmented and scrappy as they have been reduced to meaningless geometrical shapes. Characters do not have any identity and their sole purpose is to get rid of past whether this is in the form of the mutilation and death of an adopted child by Mommy and Daddy or in the form of Grandma, who in *The American Dream*, has boxes as her possession and in *The Sandbox*, sand which she is buried in. In both plays Grandma's ownership is different yet one point is quite similar that she shows and demonstrates the old people's nostalgia and wistfulness as well as the instability, unreliability and capriciousness of American Dream. Boxes and sand in both plays also represent the worthlessness and nothingness of language. In both plays, language used by Albee is quite easy yet this exposes the complicated relationship between the human beings and circumstances in which they are breathing. Linguistic and syntactic structures of both plays are quite easy yet the meaning they are communicating is quite complicated as meaning itself has become meaningless and purposeless. Daddy, a spineless person in both plays, agrees with Mommy of both plays, whereas mommies are exposing a shallow control and authority over Daddy. Simple language of Albee reveals the bitter and horrific truths and realities of American society and culture which is quite aimless except in pursuit of money. This statement could easily be verified by words of Grandma when she reveals the blood tragedy of adopted twin in *The American Dream* and her transportation from home to sandbox in *The Sandbox*. One more important thing in these plays is female dominance over male and that dominance is quite shallow as well. In *The American Dream* Mommy calls daddy 'jelly' (Albee, 1961, p.44) [22] as she thinks she is better than Daddy.

INDIFFERENCE IN POST MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Characters are outsiders and they are incapable in expressing and revealing themselves and their true self. They are indifferent, apathetic, insensitive, callous and inconsiderate towards each other. As Jerry mentions in *The Zoo Story*, "animals are indifferent to me like people" (Albee, 1958, p.17). Jerry first wants to kill his Landlady's dog and then falls in love with it, and he wants it to love him: Jerry : Now' here is what I wanted to happen; I loved the dog now. And I wanted him to love me. I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves. I hoped....and I don't really know why I expected

the dog to understand anything, much less my motivations.... I hoped that the dog would understand (p.67). This is the failure of communication which has been propounded by Jerry; he exposes the sad and pathetic human behavior which is in search of communication, association and companionship. It seems that Deconstructive term, Erasure can be applied to Jerry's dialogue as it projects the absence of meaning in American society as American are confused and are unable to find the purpose of their life. They are unable to develop understanding neither with human being nor with animals. Yet the meaningless American society does contain a meaning but that meaning is not absolute. Erasure focuses on the absence of meaning to draw and explore new meanings. Jerry has a strong urge to have friendship with dog reveals his status of social outcast. Jerry is an outcast and he finds the existence meaningless, however that meaningless seems to be filled with lot of meanings. He has been socially denounced and deprecated in such a busy country of America. He is living in a "laughably small room" along with other people as he does not know their names. In a big city like New York, communication has been collapsed and people are living with each other as strangers. Communication has lost its meaning, and purpose and that is why American society has lost the significance of American Dream. Americans are leading the life like lost souls as their shallowness are quite evident from their indifferent and absurd life. People are failed to make contacts with each other as Jerry has failed in making contact first with landlady's dog and then Peter, and at the end he dies pathetically and his death reveals the bitter reality of existence that existence is no more than a burden for modern man. Norman Berlin asserts in his article reaches the similar conclusion that "*we are ludicrous victims of a cosmic comedy.....andexistence is unsupportable without sustaining illusions*" (1980, p.3). Modern man is not only facing the urban alienation and isolation, disillusionment, and disenchantment. Space and time for oneself and for others both have ended in the lives of American people. There is no space as modern man's life has been divided into cubicles and their time has been taken by materialism,

anxiety, and fretfulness. They are just like animals, keeping in the zoo, alienated, secluded and disassociated from each other. In Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Albee shows an illusionary and alienated life where missing child is in fact the missing American Dream and where young ones are unable to recognize themselves and they are ridiculed and mocked by the old people. "It's one of those things a person has to do; sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly" (Albee, 1961, p.12).

Relationships and families are taken as burdens; babies who should have been a binding force, are murdered or stolen. These tragedies and gloomy occurrences generate pandemonium, chaos, disintegration and mortification within the individuals and the society. Albee's another Play *The Play about a Baby* (1998) [23] where two couples both young and old are in search of a Baby. Names of these couples are Man, Woman, Girl and Boy. Though this play of Albee is quite famous for its profanity yet it hits the same issues which Albee has revealed in *The American Dream* almost four decades before. Old Couple has stolen the baby and young couple is in search of it. Boy keeps on asserting to Old couple, "I am hard all the time" (p.22) [24], this kind of fake claim can be related to the bogus assertion of Youngman of his strength and body in *The American Dream* and the artificial exposition of calisthenics in *The Sandbox*. This is what Albee investigates and reveals that American Dream is just like a stolen or a dead baby who will never be found and will never come to life. Characters in his plays have false and bogus beliefs that they are *American Dream* (my italics) but in reality they mirror their own rottenness, emptiness and purposelessness. Repetitious, boring and droning dialogues of characters, their clumsy, awkward and maladroit gesticulations and their aimless movement on stage depict their directionless and pointless life.

Characters in *The American Dream* are indecisive, uncertain and vacillating. They are not sure of their weaknesses and strengths. Mommy and Daddy don't have names rather they have been given the identity of relationship which represents family, love, care and affection. Regrettably, they are void of all these feeling, emotions, sentiments and devotion. They are divulging their shallowness, superficiality and triviality by calling each other "Mommy" and "Daddy", by forgetting what they want to do, by asking for money return for the dead twin

In *The American Dream*, sense of belonging is quite illogical, ill-defined and meaningless. Grandma's stumbling speech and Mrs. Barker's absent minded nodding intensifies the surroundings whereas in the same scene Mommy and Daddy are unable to find the belongings of Grandma which she is supposed to take with her to old home. Intensity of situation gets also evident when grandma tells Mrs. Barker that Man like Daddy and Woman like Mommy wanted to get their money back from that lady who handed over that twin. Mommy and Daddy had no soft corner for that twin; they did not even show any kindheartedness and compassion towards him. Moreover, they took him as "it" not as "him". Both Mommy and Daddy are more interested in money than that child and this act of theirs shows their insensitivity and selfishness. Albee's *American Dream* (my italics) is a missing child who is lost since his infancy and nobody could dare to find him out. Both Young Men in *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* are confused, degenerated and befuddled as they are unable to judge the situation; though they have power in form of their youth and muscular body yet their souls are shallow and petty and they are indecisive and irresolute about their past, present and future. This is quite ironic that American Dream during 2nd world War and post war period has been taken as a nightmare and outlandish. Albee in *The American Dream* presents Mommy, Daddy, Grandma and Young Man who are not fighting with each other but there is certain stress in their behavior towards themselves and each other as well. Mommy and Daddy in both plays are stuffed people; they only talk about money, disposing of Grandma just like a trash, and their dry cellar where they roam just like lost and haunted souls. They have shapeless minds and their gestures are quite meaningless. Mrs. Barker and Young Man both belong to the same class except once when Young Man feels that he is an outcast without his twin which has been first castrated and then murdered by Mommy and Daddy. Not only Young Man's twin was a bumble but all other characters are bumbles as well.

AMERICAN DREAM & THE FAILURE OF SELF (MY ITALICS)

American Dream that once made American people excited, creative, self-reliant, and self-explorative and now the stagnancy of new American dream has turned them into caged animals. It has turned America into a zoo where every human being has been caged within his apartment and suffers from self-assumed individuality. They lead a mechanical and degenerated life as Jerry mentions

this in *The Zoo Story* (1958): We neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other. And was trying to feed the dog an act of love? And, perhaps was the dog's attempt to bite me not an act of love? If we can misunderstand, well then, why have we invented the world love in first place? (Albee, p.33) Here Jerry points out two things; love is obsolete in this universe and human beings are desperate to have communication even with animals as fellow human beings are no more interested in communication. Human beings long for communication and to share something with each other yet they are unable to communicate. That urge for communication is well understood by Peter, "I've put up with you long enough. I've listened to you because you seemed.....well because I thought you wanted to talk to somebody" (Albee, 1958, p.23). Peter's point is very clear that Jerry desperately needs to have conversation with somebody as he uses long and illogical monologues and forces Peter to listen to him. The main objective to discuss different references and textual quotations is to analyze the role of language in understanding the American Dream in mid twentieth century. Language has lost its status and meaning as conversation and communication has been reduced to materialism and avariciousness. Human beings and their thoughts have been compartmentalized. They live with each other but they don't know or they don't want to know each other. Success is enveloped in materialism, insensitivity and disintegration. People are moving on earth like hollow men. They are quite shallow from inside. They are like books without words nothing can be written on them as they are happy with their blankness and emptiness. Language reflects the American society and its precarious situation as far as relationships are concerned. Mommy and Daddy of *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* are unable to manage and maintain relationships and they want to get rid of Grandma and ironically they want to dump all the moral and ethical values along with the American Dream. Family in Shepard's *Buried Child* is scared of each other and of open secret that every member of the house knows. Their language and conversation is full of menace, threat, fear and anguish and their family life has been collapsed. Though they are

living under one roof yet they are unable to understand each other. In *The American Dream*, Mommy and Daddy mutilate and murder the twin not only to show their gothic attitude towards humanity but reveal the bitter truth that American Dream has been murdered. Their communication does not have any logical sequence as structure of language has been collapsed. Contradictions, conflicts and self-negation in modern American society indicate the failure of concept of self-reliance and self-exploration, the society is divided between materialism and the faded concept of American Dream. Common man's belief is quite shaken and traumatized as circumstances are quite opposite to what has been expounded. History has become histrionic and melodramatic; the twin discussed by Grandma and grieved by Young Man in *The American Dream* depicts the bereavement and the loss of glory which had never flourished. Other American playwrights like Eugene O'Neil (1888-1953) and Arthur Miller (1915-2005) delineates the same histrionic and conflicting attitude towards history in their plays. Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) [25] behaves like Lady Macbeth while acting like a somnambulist to avoid both her past and present. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* (1949) [26] is observed carrying two heavy bags all the time which could be taken as a lumber of his past and he is unable to get rid of them as well as accept them. This is the confusion and anxiety and insecurity which middle class face in post war and postmodern era and they are unable to communicate them properly. Ironically both these American playwrights exhibit apparently happy family life where sons and parents try to live together yet their cataleptic insecurity and uncertainty enhances the gaps within the family. Whether they are Biff and Happy in *Death of a Salesman* or Jamie and Edmund in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, sons of both families are unable to strengthen family life as they are either suffering from some physical disease or from some spiritual ones? Sons usually are taken as strength and the continuation of lineage but in these plays they have been presented as degenerated beings and they bring chaos, disorder and conflicts in dismantling the familial bonds. If these themes are observed in the perspective of American Dream; this dream has been distorted and collapsed by its own people as they contaminate it with materialism, insatiability, class system and capitalism. This is what Albee portrays in this plays where not the grownups but the infants in *The American Dream* are being treated as burden, nuisance and trouble and they bring chaos, malaise and uneasiness to the families. These infants

have been taken as ominous and portentous, young ones as useless and worthless and old ones as neurotic, irrational and lunatic.

Male characters in Albee's plays project the real American society which is an escapist, work shirker and self-centered. Usually male members are considered strong, sturdy, and emotionally and psychologically strong. They are assumed to take care of everything regarding inside and outside the house. Nevertheless, male members in postmodern American society are disintegrated, degenerated, helpless, hapless, miserable and wretched. They are incapable of taking any decision in life and they are morally and socially dependent upon others usually on females. This is what American Dream is- broken, busted, shapeless, deformed and collapsed. This hat Youngman states in Albee's *The American Dream*, "In every other way, I am incomplete....." (Albee, 1961, p.37) [27]. Henry Goodman has explored this issue of language in his article (1962):When the film studio of Angel of Death causes Grandma to „pass on“ to the accompaniment of an offstage rumble („you know what that means“) and appropriate soft music, Mommy disposes of her grief bravely: Our long night is over. We must put away our tears; take off our mourning....and face the future. It's our duty" (p.78). What Goodman seems to prove is that naming has become something weird and bizarre and language is failing its meaningfulness and potential rather it has become „bumble“ in the words of Grandma when she reveals the story of an adopted child of Mommy and Daddy. This „bumble“ is American Dream which has been mutilated and castrated by following the gothic tradition of blood bath and disproportion as Albee confirms this in *Tiny Alice*, "Every monster was a man first" (Albee, 1965, p.42) [28]. Sense of loneliness and meaninglessness are quite evident in Albee's *The American Dream* where characters expose essential purposelessness and futility of human existence (1961): *DADDY: Uh.....Mrs. Barker, is it? Won't you sit down????Mrs. Barker: I don't mind if I do. MOMMY: Would you like a cigarette, and a drink, and would you like to cross your legs? Mrs. Barker: You forget yourself, Mommy; I am a professional woman. But I will cross my legs. (p.14)*. This situation is quite ludicrous and absurd as very petty things are under consideration which signifies the meaninglessness and purposelessness of the situation. Albee in this small excerpt focuses on the aimlessness of the society as very minute issues are the focus of conversation. Ironically

Language is playing a different role here as worthlessness of language exposes the multiple interpretation of language. This small conversation projects the hidden meaning of language as language is interpreting experiences of individual in a different way as the conversation of Grandma and Young Man in *The American Dream* where they try to figure out the meaning of life and American Dream in their disintegrated dialogues: *GRANDMA: You don't sound very enthusiastic. YOUNG MAN: Oh, I'm used to it. GRANDMA: Yup..... yup, you know, if I were about hundred and fifty years younger I could go for you. YOUNGMAN: Yes, I imagine so. GRANDMA: Uhn-hun.....will you look at those muscles! YOUNGMAN (Flexing his muscles): Yes, they're quite good, aren't they?.....YOUNGMAN: Thanks GRANDMA: Yup, Boy, you know what you are, don't you? You're the American Dream, that's what you are. All those other people, they don't know what they are talking about. Youyou are the American Dream. MOMMY (Off stage): Who rang the Doorbell? GRANDMA (Shouting off – stage): The American Dream. MOMMY (Off stage): What? What was that, Grandma? GRANDMA(Shouting): The American Dream! The American Dream! Damn it! (Albee, 1961, p.23).* Grandma and Youngman interpret American Dream differently; for Grandma the strength of young man is American Dream, whereas for Young Man he himself is not sure what was his strength or not. Though he is proud of his muscular body yet he does not know how to make use of his strength. This is where language brings certain difference; instead of emphasizing on binary oppositions, there is a combination of meaning in Grandma's and Youngman's conversation. As Grandma herself is the reminiscence of lost American Dream which is of no use for the young ones and this is better that this should be put in to trash or some store room. This is the reason that Mommy and Daddy want to send Grandma to old home whereas youngsters like Youngman is not sure what to do in his life as they are indecisive, and he has the feeling of being lost and for this reason Grandma says this to Young man in above excerpt that he is the American Dream and this is

taken in a larger sense this is a chasm between young and old generation in American society where they are unable to understand and communicate with each other, Grandma wants to keep boxes which contain nothing ,whereas Mommy and Daddy are moving aimlessly on the stage and off stage as their sole purpose is to get rid of Grandma, and Youngman is a symbol of lost generation just like Jerry in *The Zoo Story* who is unable to communicate both with human beings and animals which also expose the paralysis of communication as well as action.

In American society, only money talks everywhere and only this language is understood. These remind us of Mommy's dialogue when she expresses her views about old people and their conversation, "DADDY: May be Grandma has something to say. Mommy: Nonsense. Old people have nothing to say; and old people did have something to say, nobody would listen to them" (Albee, 1961, p.24) [29]. This is what Mommy, Daddy and Youngman believe that old people are just like debris; one should not pay attention to them or to whatever they are saying. The relationship and bond between old and new has been broken. Grandma, Mommy, Daddy, Mrs. Barker and Youngman are aliens in the postmodern American society, they know each other yet they are strangers to each other. They are wandering in the apartment without having a sense of belonging both to each other and to the space. New Generation is lost, confused, perplexed and befuddled and their confusion is making them pathetic as well as useless. They are becoming a bad premonition for the future of American society. Youth has become a bad omen, a threatening sign for the future of American society and a sorry state for the young generation of 1960's who is torn between old and new American Dream as it does not find any reason, justification and rationalization of their very existence and reality

Language for postmodern and post war American playwrights is quite challenging as language has to play many roles because characters are spiritually and morally impotent. Language has to expose truth and artificiality, reality and illusion, and depth and shallowness of characters, setting, environments and circumstances. Characters are in search of language and language is in search of characters as language mirrors the characters, their agony, suffering and their disintegrated souls. This is the reason that language has been analyzed with the help of deconstruction theory in this dissertation. Language used by Albee and other

playwrights has been analyzed with different deconstructive terms to expose the illogical behavior of human beings that have turned them from human beings into beings only.

Language manifests different interpretations and those interpretations reveal characters as well as setting. Albee's use of language projects his characters and their mind. He makes language a character; an alienated character whose presence supports other characters to disclose their true selves no matter how ugly and repulsive they are. Language exposes the absurdity of the characters and setting and it engages the characters and sometimes disengages them in order to divulge their true self. Language is playing its role no matter characters are repeating their dialogues, or they are following proper semantic and syntactic structures yet language makes them realize what they really feel. In Edward Albee's *The American Dream*, language has a vital role in exposing the characters and the futility of their behavior and existence. As these lines of Mommy, Daddy, Grandma and Mrs. Barker expose the breakdown of proper and meaningful communication and also the collapse of relationship: Mrs. Barker: Oh, I think so. There is too much women hatred in this country, and that's a fact. Grandma: Oh, I don't know. Mommy: Oh, I think that's just grand. Don't you think Daddy? Daddy: Yes, just grand. Grandma: In case any body's interested..... Mommy: Be quiet, Grandma..... Mommy: Nonsense. Old people have nothing to say; and if old people did have something to say, nobody would listen to them. (p.19). In these lines, language exposes the breakdown of communication, relationship and spiritual insight. Characters are talking to each other but there is no logical connection in their conversation. There is suppressed feeling of futility, nothingness and uselessness. Grandma has been hushed up by Mommy as she is rural and old and nobody would listen to her. All dialogues except the last one do not have proper logical relevance to each other. Language satirizes the characters and their insensitivity towards old people and old morals and values. In *The American Dream* Language plays two roles; one is that language is exposing the real self of the characters and on the other hand

language projects its own futility as it is not serving any purpose. Language has lost its importance and it has been reduced to mumbling and illogical dialogues. Grotesque situations, illogical dialogues, repetitious expressions, irrational actions and insensitive comments reveal both the futility of language and human existence. Characters have a meaningless life and that meaninglessness is quite evident from their language.

Albee's perception towards American life is full of disillusionment as this is not the life American people were looking for or wishing for; this is just like the *Zoo Story* (1958) by Albee where Jerry is really confused what to do and quite happy after taking revenge from her Landlady's dog as his landlady was making the situation pungent and hellish for him. Jerry feels himself lonely, misunderstood, outsider and depressed. He repeatedly informs Peter, who has a successful professional and family life that he has been to the zoo. What zoo really means; Jerry tries to create analogy between animals and human beings; former ones are alone in their cages and later ones are lonely too though they are not in cages. Jerry's alienation, hostility and estrangement and his search for meaningful communication are basic issues in Modern America. Albee's *American Dream* is also in search of a meaningful and significant communication as well as environment where its true spirit could flourish properly. In *Zoo Story* (1958), *Jerry asserts: JERRY: What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things? Bring order? The old pigeonhole bit? Well, that's easy; I'll tell you. I live in a four-storey brownstone rooming-house on the upper West Side between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West. I live on the top floor; rear; west. It's a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable.* (p.14) [30]

Here Jerry gives the true picture of American Society and its living; this society is leading a degenerated life, alienated from each other and alienated within them. Concept of American Dream regarding equality, self-dependency, justice and cooperation has got completely disappeared. People have lost sense of relationship and concept of family at the cost of privacy, individuality and eccentricity. This is how they take life which makes them insensitive and decentralized. Language spoken by these characters in different plays of Albee depicts their numbness and indifference towards the existing situation. Jerry is living in laughably small room and this small room signifies his insignificant place in

During the course of the play, Mommy does not want to listen to Grandma, "Nonsense, Old people have nothing to say: and if old people did have something to say, nobody would listen to them." (pp.45) [31]. A wish to be heard is an important urge in Albee's *American Dream* and in *The Sandbox* where both young and old generations want to be listened.

CONCLUSION

In *The American Dream*, sense of belongingness is quite illogical, ill-defined and meaningless. Grandma's stumbling speech and Mrs. Barker's absent minded nodding intensifies the circumstances whereas in the same scene Mommy and Daddy are unable to find the belongings of Grandma which she is supposed to take with her. Intensity of situation gets also evident when grandma tells Mrs. Barker that Man like Daddy and Woman like Mommy wanted to get their money back from that lady who handed over that twin. Grandma's statement about Mommy and Daddy depicts the capitalistic and Marxist view of American Dream which is quite opposite what Benjamin Franklin presented in form of honesty, equality, self-reliance and sincerity. Mommy and Daddy had no soft corner for that twin; they did not even show any kindheartedness and compassion towards him. Moreover, they took him as "it" not as "him". Both Mommy and Daddy are more interested in money than that child and this act of theirs shows their insensitivity and selfishness. Albee's *The American Dream* (my italics) is a missing child who is lost since his infancy and nobody bothered to find him out. Both Young Men in *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* are confused, degenerated and befuddled as they are unable to judge the situation; though they have power in form of their youth and muscular body yet their souls are shallow and petty and they are indecisive and irresolute about their past, present and future.

This is the fate of American society and culture which has to be faced and experienced by American people. Desperation, disintegration, bleakness and barrenness which have been delineated by Post war and postmodern American playwrights are the darkest features of American Dream. As Young man realizes his situation in the modern world and he takes his existence meaningless and directionless. He has lost his strength and vigor in form of his twin and he is feeling

himself forlorn and despondent. That's why Grandma points out that she has seen someone just like him, "I was mistaken.....before. I don't know you from somewhere, but I knew once..... someone very much like you.....or, very much as perhaps you were (Albee, 1961, p.60) [32]. This is what Grandma observes in Youngman that she has seen somebody just like him. Youngman's twin has been mutilated by Mommy and Daddy years ago and the memory of this twin comes to Grandma and her feeble memory tries to relate this young man to his twin and that is the lost American Dream which has been mutilated by people like Mommies, Daddies and Mrs. Barker who knowingly and unknowingly destroy the roots of American spirit and strength. This is ironic that Young man makes a point to Grandma whatever he is saying might be fake, "Be careful; be very careful. What I have told you may not be true (Albee, 1961, p.115) [33].

This paper focuses on the nightmarish and fragmented condition within the American society where everybody is free to spend his life according to his/her will yet they are unable to do anything in their life. Old people are sent to old homes or dumped somewhere to die. Young people are unable to take responsibilities and perform duties and they are not sure of their strength and vigor rather they are weak, indecisive and irresolute regarding any aspect of life. They want to bring order, stability and steadiness in their life yet they fail in doing so. Albee in both plays presents a bleak state of postmodern American society where American people have changed the meaning of American Dream and pretend to be happy, contented and free.

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