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Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* "The disintegration of American Dream"

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The thesis entitled Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* "*The disintegration of American Dream*" by Mr. Hotri Raj Dhungana has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Thesis Committee.

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Abstract

Disintegration of American dream prevails among people in American societies during twentieth century. Concept of American Dream led society to flourish in every field. American Dream contains elements of family and financial success. Contemporary American society is delved into paucity of spirituality and morality. Family members also cannot co-operate among themselves and family norms and values have been crushed.

The past ideal of innocence and simplicity as well as predictability of life was replaced by the prevailing complexity, disillusionment and disorder. Similarly the catastrophic world war was another dominant factor that brought about change in American society. American farmers experienced a serious crisis due to the sudden change of price drop of major crops. Farm life is very hard due to weather. Cultural faith and ideas are failed to cope with the problem of modern American society.

This study mostly seeks the comical and insightful presentation of the disintegrating American Dream in '*Buried child*'. Dramatist tries to show situation of disintegration of the American Dream by showing the characters' failure to perform their perspective roles and dark secrets of family. It is a vision of a dysfunctional family that is transformed into a symbol of loss of innocence.

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Chapter I

Introduction: family Relations and American Dream

This research focuses on Sam Shepard's drama, *Buried Child*. It intends to analyze Shepard's theme of bizarre family problems that destroys the ideal family. It also tries to examine the moral deviation and spiritual starvation that results from the complexity of disillusioned modern existence when traditional innocence was completely dismantled. Sam Shepard reflects the grotesque picture of American society to reveal the disintegration of American Dream. American Dream contains elements of adventure on the open road, the exploration of far frontiers and family and financial success.

Modern theatre represents the complexity of life. Prior to Shepard, there was the theatrical tradition of the romantic 'happy ending' and sentimental melodrama. Life itself was comfortable and consistent, innocent and integrative, and so was the drama among the public as a means of entertainment. But Shepard came to the American theatre to reflect cultural upheaval, complexity of modern life, disorganization of family. In *Buried Child*, Shepard criticizes contemporary American society. This dark vision of American society in *Buried Child* suggests that richness as well as paucity of spirituality and morality. Shepard fairly and squarely attacks the ideals of progress, optimism and faiths in the national mission and pours scorn on the sentimental ideals of family life, togetherness and physical fitness; the euphemistic language and unwillingness to face the ultimate facts of the human condition that is in America. *Buried child* is serene and calm on the surface but Shepard is a master at probing beneath apparently ordinary surfaces and finding both surprises and shock in what people take for granted. The family is Shepard's true subject and his portrait of

the family with its various psychic disfigurements provides us with surprising insights into contemporary life.

Shepard gave expression to the problem of an individual in relation to family and society. Similarly, he explores family disruption. Shepard illustrates the widespread view of modern humanism that truth lies within the individual and within society but individual cannot understand its importance in society. Shepard sketches the character of Halie and her attempts to attain ideal happiness through deviation from the ground of reality. Shepard creates an allegory of the farmland to represent the present modality of American society. The barren and unproductive farmland reminds of the hopes and expectation from the Virgin Land. Eternal conflict in the family spoils the sense of the ideal dream. The family conflict expands the gorge of discontentment and results in suspicion and fear among family members. It is also because in the ideal realm of the deeply rooted American dream lies that which cannot be actualized due to shortcomings of the present reality.

Shepard's plays are not easy to categorize, but in general, they blend images of the old west, fascination with pop culture, rock and roll, drugs and television. Shepard takes up new themes blends them with past, making a purposeful stab at American commercialism and the ingrained need to acquire things as a means for securing existence.

The contextual background of the drama refers to the Second World War, the Vietnam and American war. So the contents of realism, social protest, complex relation and scarcity in the family showed the American people's distinct life style. The catastrophic world war was one of the most dominant factors that brought about change in American theatre. The American innocence, Ideal Dream of happiness and integration turned to traumatic nightmare when America got involved in the war to

end all wars. The past ideal of innocence and simplicity as well as predictability of life was replaced by the prevailing complexity, disillusionment and disorder. Thus the war proved to be a catalyst to change the spirit of drama. The cultural and social upheavals so extensively launched during wartime prompted the departure of the drama from the past.

Beginning in the mid 1970s and continuing through the 1970s, American farmers experienced a serious crisis due mainly to the sudden price drop of major crops, corn and soybeans. Farm life is hard. The farmer's livelihood and his life style are entwined with the natural world. Success depends on the weather, and farmers work the year round either harvesting or planting. Shepard depicts crisis in the American farm and farm life in his *Buried child*.

Shepard's main inspiration for *Buried Child* was his own family. His father and grandfather were alcoholics. At times, Shepard would visit his grandfather in southern Illinois, who would not remember his own grandson. The play is mainly derived from Shepard's recollections of the events and people on his father's side of the family. His female characters are often strong women who did not know what they were getting into when they followed their men into farm life. It is said that the character of Halie is modeled after Shepard's own grandmother.

In many ways, *Buried Child* exists outside of time and apart from history. The plot of the play is the age-old, familiar story of youth overthrowing age, entwined with murder and incest, death and resurrection-terrible human impulses that have shocked and fascinated audiences for thousands of years. The play's characters are mainly archetypal figures, recognizable from centuries of stories and myths scattered across cultures and around the globe. Still, Shepard's family drama is anchored in a

particular period- 1970 America- and this environment, if not directly obvious in the play, certainly influenced the playwright and his work.

Shepard sets this play against the background of family where the family norms and values have been crushed and the family is beyond the system. No attempts are made to reform the family but members of the family do not co-operate among themselves. All efforts prove futile as family members fail to play their desired roles, and the family becomes dispersed in futility. This is all due to the failure of cultural faith and ideas to cope with the problem of the modern individual. Because of the self-erasing and self-contradictory existence of the modern individual caused by the innocent past and at the same time the limitations of reality which make happiness unattainable, individual existence is itself always fragmented between the two. So all attempts to establish harmony and integration in family endeavored by the characters in this play leads to inevitable disintegration. All the characters drop their responsibilities because they fail to provide the reliable support.

Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Buried Child* is a play with seven characters that probes into family dynamics in the American tradition of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.

Besides the innovative genius and creative originality of Shepard, there are estrangements, both volatile and cool throughout Shepard's chronicle of family dysfunction, deceit and decay. "We are just this incredible race of strangers," the playwright once remarked, and it is this hard telling insight, which can be seen to constantly drive his explorations of family identity and independence. On the other hand, there was a vast theatrical tradition of romantic and sentimental melodrama of the nineteenth century, which Shepard had to change. Similarly, the powerful intellectual period in European and American history helped to prepare a fertile

ground for experimental modernism in American theatre. American literary movement was especially determined by three major factors: the American literary revolution of Theodore Dreiser, H.L. Mencken, and Sherwood Anderson and so on, the influence of Ibsen and Post Ibsen European playwrights; and finally the revolutionary momentum of the La Mama Experimental Theatre with which Shepard was associated in the beginning.

Buried Child explores the inner tensions of rural existence, father-son relationship, and the place women hold in an increasingly ambiguous domestic atmosphere. Starkly poetic, humorous, and mysterious, *Buried Child* is a vision of a dysfunctional family. Richard Gilman writes, in his *Introduction to seven Plays of Sam Shepard*, that Shepard probes the middle class family and the crisis hovering within the home. Gilman admits:

It seems that Shepard's plays, particularly a family drama like *Buried Child*, can be placed on a categorical timeline. One point in the evolution of a form, Shepard updates the family drama, situation amidst the cultural upheaval of the late 70s America. (Introduction, III)

Buried Child takes place on an Illinois farm in the American heartland. Before it's over, it has migrated in tone closer to the emotional state of Appalachian West Virginia, not so far away geographically, but a world away sociologically. Under the façade of wholesome, hardworking, God fearing family values, lie the dark secrets, forbidden desires and emotional turmoil. The very meaning of family comes into question as these characters threaten, disparage, repudiate, and snipe at one and another, yet somehow remain locked in their family unit, trapped in long term patterns of mutual destructiveness.

It's a very dark vision, indeed, but Shepard then clothes this bleak portrait in a unique combination of genuinely funny dialogue, puzzling and unresolved contradictions, and an atmosphere charged with foreboding, menace and the threat of violence.

The play is a macabre look at an American Midwestern family with a dark, terrible secret: Years ago, Tilden, the eldest of three sons belonging to Dodge and Halie, committed an act of incest with his mother. She bore his child, a baby boy, which Dodge drowned and buried in the field behind their farmhouse. The act destroyed the family. Dodge stopped planting crops in his fields and took to smoking, drinking, and watching television from a lumpy old sofa. Halie, apparently seeking salvation, turned to religion with fervor. She spouts Christian platitudes and cavorts with the hypocritical Father Dewis. Tilden went insane with guilt and grief, spent time in jail in New Mexico, and has only recently returned to the farmstead, perhaps to set everything right. The secret is drawn out into the light of day, and the family curse apparently lifted, with the arrival of Vince, Tilden's estranged son, and his girlfriend, Shelly.

Certainly during the course of the play we begin to see that a change is at hand. The rains have come. Halie who doubted the existence of the corn, calls down at the end of the play: "it's like a Paradise out there, Dodge. You oughta' take a look. A miracle." But the "old king" Dodge is dead. Vince has come to take his place.

Buried Child is set to resemble not only family problems but also mid-century American realism and the grotesque. However, its roots in ritual and its approach to monumental, timeless themes of human suffering – incest, murder, deceit, and rebirth – resemble the destruction wreaked by the heroes of Greek tragedy.

New York Times critic Mel Gussow said, "The tone of the play is almost surrealistic. Like a figure out of Ionesco, the father brings in armloads of fresh vegetables from a garden that has been barren for years." In commenting on the New York and Yale Productions of the play, he said they ended with "a dirge for the decline of traditional values, a work for American Dream."

The drama presents the post-world war scenario. The tradition has been discarded and new tradition had not set. People have been running to own material possession. Family is beyond a successful bond. Six years out of home, son finds none of his family recognizing him; his feeling of exclusion and resulting frustration become the turning point and the drama turns to the absurd.

The drama is eventually unsuccessful in romanticizing the rural farmer's dream. It follows the tradition of Sophocles's 'Oedipus Rex' but he portrays the ordinary and deprived family. Shepard tries to blend the past with the present, fate of human beings. To some extent, *Buried Child* follows the agricultural myth similar to that of Oedipus Rex, which begins with a curse on the land. Due to the illicit relation, the crops have failed to grow and there has been no rain. Yet Tilden walks in with an armful of corn, which Halie thinks he must have stolen. Critics have compared Tilden with the corn god, a symbol of renewal. Shepard adds to that the sense of doom visited upon the family as if its genes carried destruction. Those who are strong breed do not escape their fate. It is not clear at first how responsibility is transmitted in Shepard's family until we begin to see that Vince assumes the role of Tilden and Halie's offspring, the child who is buried on the arid land. Vince can be thought of as a "carrier" willing, or unwilling. When Vince inherits the house from Dodge, Vince's fate is sealed.

Buried Child is loosely related to the *Curse of the Staving Class* (1977) and *True West* (1980), forming a "family" trilogy. These plays are very different in style, but they all offer a glimpse of the American family that is painfully removed from idealism. Shepard emphasizes the rootlessness of the family, its emotional chills, and its capacity for violence.

In the surface, *Buried Child* is beguilingly ordinary. The simple interior is dominated by a television set, an old frayed carpet. Shelly, Vince's girlfriend, who is visiting for the first time, had imagined that the house would resemble a Norman-Rockwell painting- that is a stereotypical American home. But she found the living room beyond the recognizable, low-key and ordinary found anywhere in America. By the ordinary beginning of the setting, Tilden's walking with an armful of corn and Dodge's hacking cough; Shepard builds a portrait of an extraordinary family. In the family, each member treats the other in a degenerating way. Even the father and grandfather are unwilling to recognize their son. Eventually, Shepard explores family relationships with the surface ordinariness that hides a deeper structure.

After the publication of *Buried Child* in 1978, reviews of the play were mainly complimentary and congratulatory. *Buried Child* got its dazzling criticism after it's first premiered. The New York Times wrote, "Shepard as one of the most prolific of our playwrights, as for that matter, certainly one of the most brilliant". It has been universally acclaimed as a work of extraordinary vision and force. Kevin Kelly of The Boston Globe spoke in 1980 of the play as "full dazzling almost blinding glare". Ben Brantley, reviewing Steppenwolf Theatre Company's production for The New York Times, affirmed *Buried Child's* status as "a bona fide classic: a work that conveys the mystical cannibalistic pull of family ties even as they unravel." Mainstream critics who were unfamiliar with the playwright were pleased with the new discovery. Some

of the critics found him a traditional playwright having no theme of the present modality. Even critics who were not quite sure what it was they had found in *Buried Child* assured their readers that they liked the play. In the Nation, Harold Clurman wrote,

"What strikes the ear and eye is comic, occasionally hilarious behavior and speech at which one laughs while remaining slightly puzzled and dismayed (if not resentful), and perhaps indefinably saddened. Yet there is a swing to it all, a vagrant freedom, and a tattered song. Something is coming to an end, yet on the other side of disaster there is hope. From the bottom there is nowhere to go but up."

Robert Cohen writes that Shepard has established himself as an American avant-garde playwright of the 1960s. Shepard includes various forms of menace, obscurity, mythic symbolism and steadily seeks patterns beneath everyday surfaces and meanings in the silences.

The drama has been read and interpreted from various perspectives. However, the approach of the present study is different. It is the study of a family that destroys norms and values, and fails to achieve the financial success. Culture, as the root of identification, should be reared properly. But in this drama, culture beguiles, family has no more enthusiasm and the farmland turns barren and unproductive. As a consequence, the American Dream could not flourish and it turns into a nightmare. The study mostly seeks the comical and insightful presentation of the disintegrating American Dream in *'Buried Child'*. This problem that Shepard puts in this play is the central focus of this study.

Shepard's keen perspective on the culture, convention of American family and American Dream is a subject worthy to study with proper justice. To find out the

reasons behind the character's failure and natural catastrophe to establish a sense of American Dream is the central motif of this dissertation. This research adopts the hypothesis that Shepard depicts the situation of the disintegration of the American Dream by showing the characters failure to perform their perspective roles and dark secrets of a family. To prove the hypothesis, the research has been pursued with focus on cultural studies, cultural upheaval of America, especially the Puritan culture as the source of the ideal American Dream and the self-contradictory values inherent in puritan culture itself as the cause of its failure. The failure of cultural spiritualism left the desire of order and family harmony of Dodge always unfulfilled despite his avant-garde tendency of searching for new order by Vince and Shelly and integration resorting to the new ethics taught by Father Dewis in the state of disillusionment after dismantling the spiritual values.

This dissertation consists of altogether four chapters. Chapter- Two establishes, first, the general concept of family, culture and American Dream; and then the study focuses on the survey of American cultural genealogy leading to the ultimate decadence of culture. This study also includes the concept of American Dream and its disintegration. Chapter- Three which is the central part of this dissertation is the textual analysis of the play from the perspective of disintegration of American dream in reference to the views of Critics. The failure of American idealism and spiritual past in the life of Dodge as the causes of the disintegration of family values has been foregrounded in this chapter. Chapter- Four ultimately sums up what is elaborated in all first three chapters.

Chapter II

Family, Culture and American Dream

Integrative concept of family

A family consisting of a husband, wife, and children is a primary social unit. It is instituted because of the need for affection of husband and wife. Generally, it begins with love between two persons of opposite sex with the ideal expectation of a happy life. The cultural importance of the family is emphasized in the Old Testament. In Christianity the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is regarded as the sacred model for domestic life. The followers of Christianity assume that God instituted the family and that it has certain spiritual functions to perform. The biological basis of the family has been accepted by thinkers as a fundamental force. Aristotle focuses the relationship of family of wife, husband and their offspring. Aristotle hints at the cultural and co-operative value of marriage and family. Thus, the family is an integral part of culture. It is a cultural unit with which biological force encounters. Ernest W. Burgess and Paul Wallin emphasize the role of culture encountering the biological force in a family.

"The most obvious needs are the sexual impulses and the sustenance and the sublimation of the offspring. The needs both of the parents and of the offspring are modified by cultural forces and their account for the variations of the family in different societies. (Burgess and Wallin 13)

The conventionally accepted notion is that 'happiness' in family relationship can be attained only if there is strong sentimental and spiritual affection and sentiment, which create culture. Culture constitutes the codes for perpetual integration and order in the family. About the inseparable relationship between the family and

culture, Mabell A. Elliot and Francis E. Merrill affirm, "norms connected with family are so firmly embedded in the culture that their violation is very disorganizing to the family" (Elliot and Merrill, 341). The desire for a good and harmonious family has been upheld by obligations. Family can obtain happiness and prosperity if everyone behaves "correctly" as family members, and if one doesn't lag behind in filial obligations.

As we go through Freudian psycho analysis, of fundamental disintegrative force present in family relationship, Freud shows that there is always "the horror of incest" in family relationship. When a child cannot sublimate his/ her unconscious sexual desire with the parent of opposite sex due to social morality, s/he unconsciously intends to demolish the entire family norms. He further remarks about family relationship, which nourishes utopian dreams.

"The mother can transfer to her son all the ambition which she had to suppress in herself and she hopes to get from him the satisfaction of all. Even marriage is not firmly assured until the woman has succeeded in making her husband into her child and in acting the art of mother towards him. (Adler and Doren, 172)

From a family, every member coins the vision of utopian desire. Utopian desire includes the underlying desire for integration and harmony to achieve optimum happiness. Arlene Skolnick views "the family as a little social system that also fits the model of utopian harmony and consensus. There is basic agreement on values and how these values are to be achieved in practice in the happy family when all these norms are met and members of family agree, integration of family becomes possible" (Skolnick, 44).

Integration of the family is a source of happiness to an individual as a member of the family. The integrated family can be viable if there is complete faith and intimacy among members. Then each type of family shares a commitment to care, a unique sense of belonging, and a degree of intimacy. When the family fails to retain these values, it ceases to function as a family. When the family lacks inclusiveness, forgiveness, mercy, affectionate care and intimacy, independence, and mutual obligations as prerequisite conditions, then it fails to make an integrated family and family disintegration comes to the fore.

The integrated family is a 'unified' group consisting of members having a sense of duty and responsibility. But when a family is disorganized because of conflicting interests, it naturally fails to perform its function as a unified family. The developments of the concept of individualism and generation conflict are other bases of the disintegration of family values. At the transitional phase of life when an individual gets biological as well as social maturity s/he deliberately breaks conventional norms and cultural values when they obstruct his/her desire for happiness and freedom. At this time, the existing relationship between two generations ceases to function harmoniously. Robin H. Williams, Jr. in this connection says:

"In a complex society the authority of the parents is continually challenged by youth. This clash of authorities is a specific manifestation of the broader problem of cultural conflicts and lack of integration". (William, Jr. 67).

Thus the family always brings the disintegrative force within itself. Family disintegration is the consequence of failure among members to achieve expected 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' of any kind in the relationship between wife and husband,

parent and children. It leads to family discord, divorce, and deviation from duties, which set forth a norm for eroding family values ensuing in family disintegration.

Concept of Culture

The concept of culture has always had utility to those with a sense for the patterns in the work people do in organizing their lives together. This phrase displays an insistence that culture is not a property of individuals – as conditional; rather culture is an account of the world built over centuries for people to inhabit, to employ, to celebrate, and to contest. In the beginning, culture is considered an intricate historical development, but it is now used for important concepts in several different intellectual disciplines. Raymond Williams separates the study of culture into three interrelated modern uses. These patterns are:

'First, a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; second particular way of life, of other people, a period, or a group; third the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (1976, 80).

Culture is not so much a product of sharing as product of people hammering each other into shape with the well-structured tools already available. Nowadays, the term 'culture' is vaguely defined so literary-critical discussion has used the term 'culture' to set literature in a socio-historical context. The important branch of culture is family tree: literary criticism that is anti-formalist and that seeks to establish connections with History and with theories of society. Referring to 'the culture and society debate' Hoggart argues:

'Culture' there means the whole way of life of a society its belief, attitudes and temper as expressed in all kinds of structures, rituals and gestures, as well as in the traditional defined terms of art' (1970, 156).

Shepard has broken down traditional notions of dramaturgy in combining both modernist notions of the absurd and familiar icons from the American cultural landscape with an energy tinged by anarchy and violence in his plays. His self-styled rock and roll aesthetics has informed not just his writing, but body of written work also, in Shepard's comings and goings in films, television, and in the pages of people magazine, one sees written and staged work. In Shepard's view, every one of us contains Whimanasque multitudes and the capacity to take a wide variety of roles. "the narrative convention that called for consistent, motivated characters to move along an 'arc' dictated by a dark secret or a tragic flaw was to Shepard at odds with the human condition", asserts one critic. (Schific, 85)

But for Shepard, there are many highly personal issues associated with identity, and he seems to have replaced the traditional theatrical notion of arc with his own. The particular human condition with which Shepard is most familiar – his own – seems to be the model for his characters arc of enactment, assessment and disillusionment fueled by an anxiety that the exercise might prove fruitless and false as well as the hope that it might somehow ring true.

Shepard's identity quest pits the individual against a forest of unstable signs and symbols, the influence of the medical driven society. Shepard's dramatic universe is a complicated and largely unhappy place where characters suffer extraordinary anxiety due to the instability and inauthenticity of the world. In short, they are on guard against lies fed to them by themselves against the weight of the past and the anxiety of the present by searching out a deeper, more essential and viable identity.

However having grown up in the post-war boom of the entertainment industry, and as he admits, read little. Shepard frequently incorporates signs, symbols and models from popular culture in his work. The movies, especially westerns were an

early passion of his and his later exploration of their meaning seems to stem logically from the formative influence that screen icons like Gregory Peck, Gary Cooper, and James Dean must have had on the young Shepard. Similarly pop music icons appear throughout Shepard's writing as genuinely heroic figures. In this, Shepard seems to admit a deeply held and sincere belief in the value of such influences as movie westerns and rock stars like Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger. Far from iconic statement on the commodification of culture, Shepard's use of pop icons and models can be seen as a toy and terms of his youth might still hold some power.

Shepard uses theatre as a tool to expose and reform the mythology of a culture is perilous enterprise, but the task becomes more dangerous when an artist challenges the mythology of his own culture. Playwright Sam Shepard has built his career around such an endeavor. In his play, Shepard seeks to illustrate the downfall of accepted American mythology by revealing characters born out of western myth. Their existence within myth often leads to utter destruction. Their struggle is the basis of Shepard's criticism. Shepard's plays challenge the accepted and deeply rooted notions of the American family, iconography, and religion.

Author Joseph Campbell in 'The Power of myth' defines mythology as that which sets boundaries for a culture. These boundaries determine what is acceptable and what is not. The demythologized culture is forced to constantly set up boundaries. The myths of the American dream, protestant work ethic, and western expansionism have now reached their limits. People are growing increasingly cynical towards established more and norms. Modern American culture is struggling to reinvent its mythology. Critic John Orr writes:

"Shepard is part of this search for new mythology in the American theatre. He seeks to distort American myth in an attempt to discover a new mythology" (John Orr, 109).

Icons permeate American cultures so much that popular culture and 'true' American culture are inseparable. While devoting many of his plays to the investigation of American popular iconography, Shepard remains critical. In an interview, Shepard emphasized on the power of commercial aspects. So the imagery of his plays shows his preoccupation with American iconography and Shepard attempts to redefine modern religious myths.

In western mythology, man and God are at odds. Campbell writes "where two such contradictory final terms as God and man stand against each other, the individual cannot attach his allegiance wholly to both" (4). Shepard's characters seek a new connection to a higher power from within popular culture and within themselves. In their search, Slim and Cavale role play as crow and coyote, echoing Native American folklore and question their positions and functions in nature. Shepard's plays are difficult to pin down precisely. He purposely allows a certain amount of ambiguity to cloud even the most assured scholar. As John Orr puts it, "Shepard's technique is to stun, to overturn convention" (110). He is preoccupied with the designation of a new American mythology. Shepard merely points out where the established cultural boundaries have begun to wear thin.

Critic Bonnie Marranca says of Shepard "he substitutes myth for history, experience for theory" (13). This constant for transformation of what is real (history, family, personal life) into art, or often simply the vaguely unreal. This is constant throughout Shepard's career, through his various other pursuits, Shepard has shown

himself to be a romantic and master revisionist, mythologizing and reinventing himself and his characters.

Shepard tackles the accepted image of the American family in his play, *Curse of the Starving Class*. With one son and one daughter, Wesley and Emma, born to married parents, Weston and Ella, the playwright draws on the audience's preconceived notions of family. To further develop normal domestic images, the bulk of the play's action takes place in the family's kitchen. Throughout the play, the anticipated unity between family members dissolves into self-reliance and self-indulgence.

The playwright continues his criticism of the iconic American family in *Buried Child*. Here again, a family appears at first glance to be a picture of American normalcy. The beginning of the play uses clichés from American pop cultures to instill the initial image. The opening sequence between Halie and Dodge is like something out of the *Honeymooners*. Shepard uses these popular references as a way of connecting the audience with his characters. Similarly, the final image of the play with Tilden staring down at the baby's corpse secures this play as one of Shepard's darkest.

Culture and American Value in Twentieth Century

The collision of history and reality, past and present nostalgia and novelty has always made civilization. American civilization is also the outcome of these tensions. From the early puritan period of American civilization, the new settlers had to synthesize these opposite values. On the one hand, they had the Biblical history, which they took as Puritanical history where the new Promised Land had already existed, but on the other, there was a vast wilderness in the Promised Land and it was

their ordeal to establish a new settlement, harmony and morality to make the dream of the Promised Land viable on earth.

Americans were nonconformists from the very beginning. So they have the tendency towards alienation. They wanted to change the existing trend and substitute it with the new trend that would be more liberal than the existing one. America had become the Promised Land not only for the Puritans but also for other immigrants of different ages. With industrial advancement, material affluence and urbanization, the rate of immigration from other countries to America became intense at the end of the nineteenth century. Their settlement in America was always marked by the tension between past and present, nostalgia and novelty. The ethnic communities of Asian and Africans existing culture and other diverse new cultures of other ethnic immigrants intersected. So, they had the dream of new progress and happiness, but on the other hand the problem of cultural assimilation created the sense of nostalgia in the alien society, there is the underlying sense of alienation in them. About the problem of assimilation Neil Campbell and Alasdeir Kean remark:

American society is the melting pot of diverse cultural and ethnic assimilation, indigenous and immigrants. They tried to forget the past diversity through harmonious assimilation, stressed the denial of ethnic difference and the forgetting of cultural practices in favor of Americanization. (Campbell and Kean, 44)

The trend of cultural assimilation obliterated the cultural purity and value of any culture. Conventional purity, social system and family values could not exist with cultural hybridity. Immigrant ethnic groups could neither go back to their own cultural past nor could accept the American Puritan culture. Their cultural pluralism created a

situation of 'deterritorialization' in the world of Gilles Deleuze. Summarizing the idea of Deleuze, Niell Campbell and Alasdair Kean write:

America is concerned with ' deterritorialization' or the moment across lines and boundaries, unafraid to flee to new land as leave old ones behind. Deleuze writes of the American passion for 'departure, becoming, passage' in its creation of a new Earth. (Campbell and Kean, 33)

Deleuze points at the American tendency towards innovation and new creation in uncertain euphoria dismantling the old cultural foundation that he calls deterritorilization. This very American tendency brought forth cultural chaos in the opening decade of the twentieth century marked by cultural radicalism and social anarchy, which challenged convention, values and social order. The alienated new generation lost all faith in the convention and started a completely new avenue of culture and society.

Contemporary American society was receptive of this radical movement of decadence. As the new avant-garde movement affected, the certainties faded, a new explosive attitude came to the reigning position and American society moved the new freedom at the expense of moral institutions and conventions.

Freudian influence too played a vital role in the avant-garde movement. As a result, old conventional notions shattered and new concept developed. Warren I. Susman puts forth the Freudian influence as:

With the introduction of Freudian thought into American intellectual life, the theme of liberation, self expression, the need for art and beauty and the denunciation of Puritanism as repressive and hostile to expression, beauty and even to nature itself emerged. (Susman, 45)

Susman shows the Freudian psychoanalytical concept of individual desire to gratify the unconscious self-expression by destroying conventional norms, which are responsible for the cultural change in America.

Single factor is not dominant for the shift in American culture but the failed of Victorian genteel tradition of the middle class taught American new things. As a result, American innocence collapsed. About the avant-garde direction towards new creation Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury remark, "As the nineteenth century synthesis shattered, as the tradition collapsed and the underlying value systems that had shaped centuries of art were challenged or dissolved, the whole basis of artistic enterprise had to be related" (Ruland and Bradbury, 240).

Even in the conventional form of theatrical tradition, Shepard has altered the conventions of theatre. His work is based on the spontaneous outpouring of feeling, on the refusal to be confined by inherited cultural or intellectual forms. In this sense, James D. Hart remarks:

Shepard's lineage includes Jackson Pollock as well as the Rolling Stones and Walt Whitman. What better way to convey the on-the-go restlessness, the raw vitality of his frontier-jukebox, vision of American life than through process, energy, son? (James D. Hart).

After this turning from social relations, family integration, material prosperity and spiritual values Americans in fact, met with the failure of the American dream. Sam Shepard reflects similar type of characteristic like disintegration of family, cultural decadence, dilemma and dissatisfaction with existence. Shepard in his drama '*Buried Child*' yearns to express what the present catastrophic world is. All the conventional values, social order, and family integrity faded in the hope of new liberation society. The enthusiastic youth circle enjoyed this liberty. But still the

American Dream of order, social harmony, and family integration and happiness was undercurrent in the American psyche. People were restless and dissatisfied with the prevailing social anarchy, cultural chaos, deterritorialization and derangement. With the dream of restoring central consistency, they had the nostalgic longing for the lost past. But their effort to restore the past again in the present proved futile, first, with the American entrance into world War I and then with the industrial, technological and material advancement of America in the post-war decade. The apocalypse of the war further destroyed the repository cultural and social values. The integral family was shattered when most of the young people went to fight in the disaster of the war. American society was constrained to accept the situation of cultural decay. F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays the 1920's as an era of decayed social and moral values, evidenced in its embracing of cynicism, greed and empty pursuit of pleasure. Fitzgerald positions the characters of the Great Gatsby as a symbol of the 1920's social trends. When world wars I and II ended, the generation of young Americans who had fought in the war became more disillusioned as brutal carnage that they had just faced, made the Victorian social morality of early 20th century Americans seemed bored, stuffy and empty and full of hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market which was the consequence of the war, led to a sudden, sustained increase in national wealth and a new found materialism as people began to spend and consume at dangerous levels. A person from any social group or background could eventually make a fortune, but the American aristocracy disliked the newly rich industrialists and spectators.

The material affluence in the war hit American society after the world wars further degraded the sentimental, spiritual and cultural values of family and society. The American society, which was once dreamed of as God's covenanted community, moved towards the opposite pole to worship material prosperity instead of spiritual

happiness. The family which was once taken as the school of faith and institution of righteousness broke down, and was fragmented into individual separation, deviation from family morality, and from the same token towards disintegration caused by the Puritan cultural loss, and the growing material affluence and social radicalism.

What is American Dream?

What is American Dream? Is it an aspiration and imaging of deserts with nothing unrewarded? In general sense, a dream is termed as a result of unfulfilled wishes and fear; this term is derived from psychoanalysis. But American dream is not an outcome of unfulfilled wishes. It is shaped by the eidetic Promises of American land, as the scriptures present before and exploration of infinite wealth, unrestrained freedom and unchallenging fresh beginning of life in the new found Land, is called the American Dream. In this sense American Dream retains something of the joy and music that belongs to its past. Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the first person to dream of a better America. The Puritans too had the euphoric vision of wish fulfillment, soon after landing in the new found land.

The Americans, in the colonial period struggled a lot in trying to liberate themselves from British dominance. They, then, once again aspired for a new fortune as it had been aspired by Puritans on their arrival to this land.

First of all the American Dream was seen as a logo for Puritans, for whites and finally for all Americans regardless of color, creed or ethnic group. Both the newcomers (in the new land) and Native Americans thought that they would begin a new and prosperous life as well as emancipate themselves from the usual tensions, when America was declared independent from British colony. No doubt, their expectations became stronger along with the advancement of Americans in various

sectors of life. American experiment has produced positive as well as negative results affecting American lives in various ways.

At the earlier phase of American literature, people, dramatists, novelists and politicians began to think that America was the land of opportunity. Because of that concept, many people from Europe, Asia and Africa migrated to America in pursuit of this dream. Even the revolutionary groups that never aspired to migrate to America and which neglected the traditional values of life began to believe in the American Dream. They also believed in concept that America was the land of blessings.

David Madden in the "Introduction of American Dream" argues;

"The eidenic promises of American Land helped, shaped aspects of the American romantic vision and idealistic elements in that situation as it experienced the land, helped produce the American Dream". (XVII)

American dream in this sense is more romantic in its nature because of ideal vision. The difficulties all seem to disappear easily in such a vision. But the inexperienced Puritans could not imagine what would be the result in the new land. That is why they followed the eidenic concept of American land.

American Dream is unique in comparison to other nation's dreams. The settlers fleeing the nightmare of European experience made a new beginning in the Garden of Eden. "Thus Americans became the heirs of all civilizations because their dream was and is unique". (Madden xvii). The existence of an area of free land and the continuous progression of technology explain the development of American Dream and its fulfillment. The unrivalled production of computer software by Bill Gates itself shows that some Americans have got success. But still a large population denies the fulfillment of former hopes. According to the advocates of American Dream, America's gradual development and power imposed upon other lesser-

developed countries shows the fulfillment of American Dream. T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Walt Whitman, Fitzgerald added to the form of American Dream and argued that dream cancels dream in the new realm of fact. They argue that the advocates make another sequence of dream, which cancels the former dream because the former problem of Americans is overlapped by another new one. Edward Albee, in his preface to the 'American Dream'" characterized that play as an examination of and an attack on social values a condemnation of complacency, cruelty emasculation and vacuity. Shepard's plays have, we can find, such features his plays conventionally naturalistic (even the characters and settings of the lower class) have pursued the attack in a more subtle way.

It is a matter of fact that Americans achieved prominent success in technological progress, economic targets and media networks. But the striking point is whether the material success has been able to reduce conflict among races, ethnic groups, and white oriented society. In the beginning, American Dream was based on facts- the factual results of exploration of the frontier experience of invention of the steam engine after the introduction of cotton weaving machines, of the building of railway and bridges, the advancement of rockets and of the invention of the motion-picture camera and projector and of radio, television and many other high technological instruments like surgical instruments, computer and robots as well as anatomical study of human(genetic progress). Due to these achievements, America's power and control over these things has enabled it to control the world to the some extent, people felt these comprised fulfillment of their dream.

The above information doesn't show the leadership of America but Americans have been living in horror which is beyond the vision of American dream. The result of such condition creates mental disorder. Madden has quoted Janes Truslow Adam's

statement that says, " America has been the great adventure for millions of immigrants, not all them understanding the meaning of American Dream" (XXXIX). That is why America is still in want of fulfilling the dream. In modern time, serious fiction has been an indictment of American society for its failure to translate the dream into reality, popular culture, which is not so serious and deep in meaning, has been the multifaceted medium of American daydreams.

The sources of American Dream

What is the source of American Dream? What has been helping the American Dream for more than four centuries? Media is the first source, which presents America as essentially a land of opportunity. Besides these, other sources are travel books, America's ideological concept of their superiority over people of Africa and Asia, especially, after Second World War, America emerged as a world power by dropping bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The scripture is the root of American Dream because Christians who were thinking of a sacred place believed that god had preserved a land for them. Like the Christians who are supposed to be pardoned by god even if they commit sins hoped for their salvation in the new found land. The development of new technology has prolonged the hope. In the modern time, America tried to maintain the lead in each sectors either by dominating or through cultural hegemony or economic influence. But all Americans don't have the same sense of pride because they are not white, nor are they economically and culturally powerful.

Dramatists Arthur Miller, O'Neill, and Shepard present characters within the conceptual framework of the American Dream in their dramas: *Death of Salesman*, *Strange Interlude* and *Buried Child* respectively.

What is the psychological basis for development of dreams and nightmares? How does a dream fail and turn out to be a nightmare? Is it only that nightmare

eclipses the dreams or can the Dream also eclipse a dream? To get the answer, one should observe American history which is thoroughly dynamic:

One of the most powerful psychological sources of energy generating pursuit of both Dream and nightmare is 'guilt'. Pursuing their own dreams, white men exterminated the Vietnamese in the wilderness, enslaved the black Americans to cultivate Eden and mistreated the Jews who had been driven to refuge in American metropolises by European nightmares. Private guilt can be the mainspring for an individual's pursuit of one's particular American Dream. (Madden XXXIX-XL)

How the dreams are generated can be understood through the reference to Madden i.e. guilt. White Americans deprived the black and other groups from opportunities, and enslaved the blacks. In order to get salvation from their private guilt, white men watered their dream so that they could be forgiven if not by God, at least in their own imagination. American Dream doesn't affect only the black and ethnic groups. It also affects white men because they are not far from ill intention. The feelings of utopia have changed into stimulating utopias in both the technological and cultural worlds.

Playwright Sam Shepard expresses characters who are victims of time. Americans have been cherishing the so-called dream on the one hand but the public is fated to face the lack, scarcity and deprivation. American Dream, as accepted by all, is something agreeable, there is that something positive can happen in it. Dramatists apparently depict the fate not only of characters but the land which is beyond the promise land. Productive land is the next source of the American Dream. The fertility of land boosted to make it prosperous. Shepard represents a world that is no more

productive since 1935. The crisis in the farmland is the source of destruction of the vision of the American Dream.

Factors Leading to Disintegrating of the American Dream

Nightmare is the shattering of hopes, which shapes the American Dream. American Dream can be like a still unfulfilled Adam from the Garden of Eden whereas nightmare is the condition where he has lost his chance to regain the Garden. In the latter, there is no redemption and resurrection. The true observer of American Dream should see it in its depth, not of the innocent state of experience but of bitter reality. The still undiscovered America was different from what was explored America because in the former state there was no such assumption about possible conflict but after discovery, the land proved not to be the Garden of Eden. David Madden states that America "has undergone a drastic change from the time explorers explored to the time of tourists' snapshots" (XXX). The explorer found Virginia Land very beautiful but it was not an uninhabited Garden. The New Englanders became more lustful and did not at all hold Puritan values and dreams after arriving in Virginia. Gradually, machines were brought from England. They substituted resources in the Paradise. Laissez fair policy challenged the hope for Utopian equality. This policy helped the 'haves' but those 'have-not's were deprived from equal utilization of things.

The catastrophic World Wars were one of the most dominant factors that shattered the concept of American Dream. When America got involved in the World Wars, American sense of ideal 'Dream' of happiness and integration turned to nightmare. The past ideal puritan innocence and simplicity of life was replaced by prevailing complexity, disillusionment and chaos. Not only America but Europe was haunted by the traumatic nightmare in the massacre of the whole generation of its

male youth. Thus the War proved to be a catalyst that changed the ideal Dream into Nightmare. While growing up, young Americans, especially women faced particular hardships as they started to refuse this predestined life of self-sacrifice and dependence and searched for alternative concepts of self fulfillment. Traditional concepts of 'The American Dream' which promised people a life of happiness, wealth, and independence in an American society where everything appeared to be possible. However, for many hopeful suffering Americans the "American Dream" has remained an unfulfilled Promise or even turned into an "American Nightmare".

Shepard quests for lost identity in American society. He has presented the condition of the deprived sections of society in this drama. Shepard remarked on the present catastrophic situation in an interview:

"Something has been coming to me lately about this whole question of being lost".

Shepard wrote to Joseph Chaiken in 1983 from Iowa, where he was shooting the film *Country* with Jessica Lange.

"It only makes sense to me in relation to an idea of one's identity being shattered under severe circumstances..... in a state of crisis where everything that I've previously identified with in myself suddenly falls away. A shock states you might call it. I do not think it makes much difference what the shock itself is..... whether it's a trauma to do with a loved one or a physical accident or whateverthe resulting emptiness or a loneliness is what interests me. Particularly to do with question like home? Family? The identification of others over time? People I've known who are now lost to me even though still alive?"

In particular the disintegration of the American Dream is an era of lack in prosperity and material success. However, the torn love between a man and a woman, the relation between husband and wife, son as the form of doubt shows the evidence of failure of American value, cruelty and condemnation of complacency and vacuity.

Shepard reflects the same kind of dilemma and dissatisfaction in the character of Dodge of 'Buried Child' who was beguiled by his wife and deceived by his sons. Dodge's wife, Halie seeks to alter her and quests for gratification but natural catastrophe occurs due to her illicit relation. Consequently, the ideal past innocence and happiness cannot exist. The family turns to a situation where complete disintegration of the American Dream happens.

Chapter III

Study of American dream in *Buried Child*

Synopsis: - *Buried Child* occurs in a single setting- the large downstairs living room of a dilapidated midwestern farmhouse. The creaky old estate is occupied by an eccentric and often frightening family who are removed from any trace of civilization outside. At the beginning of the play, Dodge, the clan's leader, is lying on a dingy old sofa, half asleep, watching television with no sound. As he listens to the rainfall outside, he begins to cough which he tries to stifle. His wife, Halie calls him to remind him to take his pills; Dodge takes a slug of whiskey. Dodge tells Tilden, the eldest son, not to reveal anything. Halie reveals that because she used to wander the Newland with a horse breeder, her tilt towards money represents the world of materialism. Tilden enters the stage, his arms loaded with fresh ears of corn. Halie and Dodge are quite unaware of the corn. It is apparent that land is no more fertile since 1935. The old farmhouse and the disintegrated family simultaneously goes ahead, what they do not have, they consider that as great. Ansel is their youngest son, he is sincere and popular. The family seeks the way but fails to be a family with norms and values. Bradley is selected to cut Dodge's hair but is rejected, and similarly Tilden who is hurt himself but gets the responsibility of looking after his father.

Act II unveils the more compassionate situation. Vince, Tilden's son appears with his girlfriend, Shelly. They are traveling across the country from New Jersey to see Vince's father, who they think is still in New Mexico. They are expecting a joyful family. Shelly, the young wife of Vince is not recognized; she is bewildered and experiences anguish. Vince and Shelly try to remind the family that Vince is the grandson and Shelly is the wife of Vince. Each family member neglect the other's existence and relationship.

Act III shows Shelly and Dodge drifting. It is the next morning and a change has come over the household. The rain has stopped, the sun is shining outside, and birds are singing. Bradley has fallen asleep on the sofa; his artificial leg nearby, while Dodge leans against the television, using Shelly's coat as a blanket. Shelly, meanwhile has suddenly become a nurturing motherly figure to the ailing Dodge. She emerges from the kitchen bright and happy with a bowl of warm soup broth for the man she now calls her 'grandpa'. Something still has not changed however; Dodge is as irascible as ever. He refuses to eat the soup. Bradley, the amputated son of Dodge attempts to have illegal relation with Shelly. He keeps his hands on her mouth. She resists. Bradley charges her as a prostitute. In the family, each member has a negative view toward Shelly. Meanwhile, Dodge recalls his past, full of happiness, success and prosperity. The story of the family begins when Dodge discloses the reality of their past that led them onto the tragic path. The incestuous relations of Tilden (son) and Halie (mother) is apparent and their relation gives birth to a baby. The illegal baby was killed and buried in the garden. Halie is shocked and shunned by these words of Dodge. The Oedipal relationship, illicit relation between mother and son destroys family bonds and kills the father, Dodge. As the story proceeds, there is no hindrance in further activities by her husband, Dodge. The submissive character, Dodge neither can walk nor protect his wife from her frequent meeting with Father Dewis. Ansel as the form of nostalgia comes to be erected as statue but it is only a mirage to the family. In the end, the head of the house, Dodge passes the family property to his sons and grandson for the happiness, material success and Puritan concepts of holy vision.

Breakdown of family values in Buried Child

Shepard was keenly attentive to the contemporary American culture and social scenario and reflected it very clearly in his play. He is aware of the fundamental

American dreams of happiness and harmony. Again he is equally aware of American society's failure to actualize the dreams due to its existential deviation toward material affluence through which it hopes to achieve spiritual happiness; Shepard sees modern American society as tense and tragic. In such society, there are ceaseless efforts to establish a harmonious and integral family entity but they end tragically every time such efforts explore the inner tensions of a family and the place women hold in an increasingly ambiguous and domestic atmosphere.

Since its first appearance in 1978, *Buried Child* has been universally acclaimed as a work of extraordinary vision and force. In 1979, the play won the first Pulitzer Prize ever awarded to a work premiering Off-Broadway. *Buried Child* elaborates the allegory of American society from the perspective of failure of the culture, and the fundamental dream of happiness.

The very beginning scene, the decoration of room the environment or climate outside- the rain, emphasizes the material world and mythical representation. Shepard's characters seem whimsical and they represent the lonely and their attempts are futile. The continuous spasmodic coughing, the setting of the stage, old fashioned house, frayed carpet, outdated T.V. match each other. The description of the scene brings the picture of the uncivilized house which is beyond progress. Nevertheless, the stout watcher of Television is seeking enjoyment. Furthermore, Bradley's severe treatment of his father while he is shaving, it is an attempt to take revenge on his own father. Similarly, the rain outside make the boundaries for the characters in single setting, a room which is beyond the facilities.

In the very opening scene, we can see the out stage voice of Halie and in stage Dodge where Halie has been insisting on the pills. The persistence of Halie for pills, the refusal of Dodge to take pills washes away the ideal dream of establishing a 'Good

society' so Halie's ethics of life, society and family is imprinted with the values of honor, morality and harmony in the subordination of individual happiness for institutional integration of the family and society. Thus the very opening scene offers a glimpse of the disintegration of family values so long nourished culturally by Dodge. Even structurally, his family is not a perfect natural entity of wife-husband-child because his wife continuously slips from the ideal family. It is thus a disintegrated family keeping perpetual nostalgic awareness of the lack of dead ones. Halie's nostalgia comes out of the untimely death of her son whereas Dodge's nostalgia comes out of the unexpected death of Ansel. Halie remembers the dead as precious as the loss of the value of an integrating force.

Halie's Voice: Then when Tilden turned out to be so much trouble, I put all my hopes on Ansel. Of course, Ansel wasn't as handsome, but he was smart ... He could've earned lots of money. Lot's and lot's money. (Shepard, 17)

Halie's son is already dead and she meets Father Dewis most of the time. It indicates that she seeks the course of attaining salvation, observing the idea of puritanical values in the illusion of romantic dreams inculcated upon her by erecting the statue of her son, Ansel the submissive character. Dodge could neither walk nor protect his wife from her frequent meeting with Father Dewis. The drama is full of sorrow. The quest for happiness in Halie's life becomes a mirage which she always chases like a dog chases its own tail without actually knowing her object of happiness is. She is disillusioned after the death of her son, while her husband Dodge is isolated in a manner same as death. As Tilden says in Act I, "I was alone. I thought that I was dead"..... The family members all say how separated they feel from each other. Halie feels that there is no one left to take care of her, while her husband Dodge has

isolated himself through his illness and cruel attitude. Their son Tilden comes back to the house so that he can relate to people again but soon finds that he is just as alone as before. Their son Bradley uses his anger and hatred to repel himself from everyone. The family as a whole has also isolated itself from the outside world. As Dodge exclaims to Tilden,

"I have not had trouble with neighbors here for 57 years I do not even know who the neighbors are" (Shepard, 14).

Similarly, Halie's promiscuity and immorality are discerned by the child who is buried in the garden. The Oedipus relation of mother and son creates a scene too vulgar to handle in the tragic scene. The presentation of the anti-hero role of Halie can catch the powerful event. In reality, she is obstructed, stunned and struck by the condition of society, her family and her own husband. She struggles to overcome the situation and offers an integrated family by herself, she dedicates her life to the struggle against her family's fate of selfishness, but each attempt only tightens the coil around her. The promiscuity which she thought of as "giving" turns out to be a sordid masochistic attempt at oblivion and only brings further guilt and self-hatred.

Halie questions not only the magic play of Ansel but she wishes to erect the statue. A fantasy is elaborated while the dream is not accomplished. Halie continuously recalls imagining his activities. He dies doing nothing, his life raises no expectation. Her illusive self-imagination of integration is completely disintegrated by the end of play. Her desire to establish a sort of harmonious family, symbolizing a cosmic integration is dismantled as her son dies, and her farm produce less. The death of Ansel is symbolically the breakdown of the bond of family and conventions of dream, culture and family morality as the integrating force but when it failed to

provide expected ideal happiness to her family, it crumbled down. Halie's search for happiness throughout the play and her inability to retain it as:

"A competent of the atmosphere futility, disillusionment, exhaustion and importance which pervades the last act" (Engel, 223).

Her desire for happiness is self-motivated. She pretends desperately to be a woman without an environment because it is the only condition under which she can exist. Halie remembers to her son as:

Halie: Ansel could've been a great man. One of the greatest. I only regret that he did not die in action...

Tilden: Ansel was a hero? (Shepard, 18)

From these above references, it is evident the family members Halie and Tilden are juxtaposed in their concept. Their concepts lead to conflicts. As a result the family shares no happiness, no sorrow, but it only creates disputes among family members.

Once again, Halie makes a vain effort to repair the disintegrated and almost ruined family by making everyone aware of their family duty and morality, but she herself is unaware for her duty and morality. She tries to manage the family. In the beginning, she forced her husband Dodge to take pills. Instead of taking pills, Dodge insistently took swigs from the wine bottle. Another and much stronger cause of tension between Halie and Dodge is their debate over whether or not their son, Bradley, should be allowed to cut his father's hair. It is a scene like this that Gilman calls "spill over" and "leak" complicating any simple reading. Dodge does not want to have his hair cut by Bradley. Halie insists but Dodge responds;

Dodge: My hair? I do not need my hair cut. I have not hardly got any hair left. (Shepard, 11)

This illustrates the family conflict and reflects the oedipal complex. Dodge as the dominating figure, could not reform his morality. His wife insists he cut his hair and he bellows that he has no need for a haircut. Gilman describes the scene as:

I can freely admit my difficulty with the scene, and with the one in which Bradley does in fact, shave Dodge's head, cutting him and drawing blood. It seems ripe for Freudian analysis, an Oedipal conflict realized in the threatening actions of a powerless son. It also reinforces the corporeal nature of Dodge's body. (Gilman, 15)

Once again we see the family conflict which disrupts the American dream. Bradley, instead of looking after his father, shaves off Dodge's head and makes it bleed. Dodge could not deny in the end and Halie often mentions and in the last time she allowed Bradley to cut his hair, saying:

Dodge: "Time to dress up the corpse for company! Lower the ears a little! Put up a little front!..... My appearance is out of his domain! It's even out of mine! In fact, it's disappeared! I am invisible!

(Shepard, 12)

The arrival of the grandson does not lead to the happiness of the family. Instead, they could not recognize their grandson and daughter-in-law. Vince repeatedly introduces himself, but his grandfather twists it and demands some whiskey and sometimes talks in a bizarre way as if he did not have any grandson. Gilman mentions the situations as "the search for roots" as another central motif in Shepard's work. This search is characterized in this play by Tilden and Vincent, a father and son who both return to the family in the hope of creating meaning in their lives. But the arrival of Vince does not make them happy. Vincent as a loyal son tries to convince the family but the family treats him as an unknown and unrelated person.

The attempt at integration fails when Vince is not recognized. Vince repeatedly introduces himself as:

Vince: Grandpa, it's me, Vince. I'm Vince. Tilden's son. You remember. (Dodge stares at him) (Shepard, 30)

Instead of expressing the courteous relationship, the grandfather demands whiskey for his personal relaxation, to calm the pain and grief. Meantime, Dodge responds as Dodge: Did you bring the whiskey? (Shepard, 30)

Vince, as a newcomer, addresses and introduces himself to his grandpa but grandfather modifies the matter and repeatedly reminds that he does not have a living grandson.

Vince: I don't know (takes off his shades). Look, grandpa, don't remember me? Vince. Your grandson. I know it's been a while. My hairs longer may be. Dodges stares at him then takes off his baseball cap. (Shepard, 31)

Shepard always puts forth characters that have left the house for any reasons and depicts the complex relationship and adjustment in the family, from where he had escaped; he comes to integrate the family, similarly quest for family roots becomes fragmented when he is not recognized. James D. Hart apparently points out Shepard's way of delineating the character in complex relationship.

"Shepard's play, the hero, after his visionary quest returns home to the place from which his originality escaped to confront the desolating paradox at the heart of the family, the fact that is it simultaneously defines our being denies our existence". (James D. Hart, IV)

Here comes a serious crisis of family relationship. Family affection and responsibility have a sentimental and spiritual value in a good and integrated family;

such values are not delegable to any other person. As the father, there is no trace of such sentimental attachment as he talks and unexpectedly responds to the situation and consequently realizes the bitter existence. This supports the statement 'Shepard depicts the complex relationships in a family with certain degree of failure'.

Still it is not the end of the complexity of family relationship. The presence of Bradley on the stage increases the complexity. Bradley, a sadistic amputee, enters the room where Shelly, Dodge and Tilden are discussing; Bradley mistreats his brother, Tilden and compels him to leave the room:

Bradley: (Turning to Tilden) Tilden! She with you? (Tilden does not answer, stares at floor). Tilden suddenly bolts and runs off U.L.

Bradley scared of his own shadow. (Shepard, 49)

Tilden innocently comes out from the house which further proceeds to raise the failure of family relationship. Bradley thinks Shelly is a prostitute and is led by Tilden to ill-treat her. Shelly reflects the real motif of Bradley and his intention too.

Bradley thinks of her as a form of entertainment when she comes there to spend her vacation. He also inquires why she has been giving importance to Tilden instead of Bradley. These show the disintegrating family. The character of Bradley is mischievous, vicious and sadistic.

At the end of first act, Bradley cuts his father's hair until Dodge's scalp bleeds and at the close of Act two, Bradley thrust his fingers into Shelly's mouth in a gesture tantamount to rape. When Vince finally returns to the family six years after having taken off nobody recognizes him so Vince does what comes natural, he takes off again, this time in rage leaving Shelly to defend for her in a house of neurotic fools.

Shelly is astonished when she sees the strange house and abnormal activities. She could not adjust in the family. She is scared by the ill-treatment of Bradley,

misbehavior of Dodge, Halie and Tilden. So she rejects staying in the house even in the short span of time. Vince tries to convince her to stay but she responds:

Shelly: But I can't stay here by myself.

Dodge: Don't let her talk you out of it she's a bad influence. I could see it the minute, she stepped in here.

Vince: Shelly, I gotta go out for a while. I just gotta get outta here.

Think things through by myself. I'll get a bottle (Shepard, 41).

If each member of the family can not protect the norms, behavior, morality and culture then what can we hope in this family. The family can not construct the constituents of integration. Shelly has the hope of pure and intimate family to respect but she finds a spoilt and deviated family. Once Shelly remarked on the condition and deliberately expressed.

Shelly: Vince may be oughta go. I don't like this I mean this not my idea of a good time. (Shepard, 42)

To pile up the failure of happiness, Bradley treats Shelly as if she were a prostitute. He puts his finger into her mouth forcibly. She resists, but he forces himself. Due to such behavior, Shelly shouts in a loud voice. The house beyond the ideal family represents the family of dispute. Bradley could not control himself and does not remember the family code, norms and values. He's guided by passion.

Bradley: open your mouth.

Shelly: What!

Bradley: Open up (she opens her mouth wider). Keep it like that (she does stare at Bradley with his free hand he puts his fingers into her mouth. Stares at her. Pause. He pulls his hand out. She closes her eyes on him. (Shepard, 49)

Bradley, a whimsical son of Dodge, engages himself in immoral and complex relation with each member of the family till the end of the play. The atmosphere of suffocation and contempt caused by the ambiguous relationship, infidelity, suspicion and counter suspicion pervades the whole family. Finally, the family bursts into different fragments. Shelly's ideal dream of being the wife and daughter-in-law and establishing a harmonious family with the collaboration of "good husband" fails as she could not maintain such an ideal family. Instead, she is victimized and corrupted by the family. Each member of the family hates each other because of their ill treatment. Similarly, Dodge claims that he is an invisible man for his domain. Nothing matches between them. Dodge supposes that they have shaved his head because he is a corpse and a corpse of his body decorated by the clothes. He expresses deep sorrow for the past event. What is the shortcoming of Halie? Reader or spectators are very curious to know the cause. Halie escorted by a gentleman, a breeder man. So how can Dodge be dumb here? Dodge wants confirmation whether the gentleman and Halie had any physical relationship.

Dodge: He never laid a finger on you suppose? Are we still in the land of the livings? (Shepard, 10)

Dodge suspects Halie's past behavior by connecting her with various young and old men.

In the beginning of Act III, Shelly appears with a big smile; slowly she crosses toward Dodge to serve him a steaming broth in a saucer. Shelly's entire attempt to establish a harmonious family fails because the underlying foundation of this family has already disintegrated. Despite having a baby by Dodge from his wife, Halie refuses to disillusion the family so she frequently requests her grandfather in law to include them in family relationship.

Shelly: (As she crosses). This is going to make all the difference in the world. You do not mind me calling you grandpa, do you? I mean I know you minded when Vince called you that you don't even know him. (Shepard, 51)

Here Shelly makes effort to seek her relation, but her grandfather escapes from true relation. He accepts that Vince had taken his money when he was small. Shelly serves Dodge the beef bouillon, but Shelly's ideal dream of a good family shatters. Dodge does not get honesty, morality from his wife. Dodge unwillingly accepts everything what is happening in front of him but he refutes the relation to his past. He thinks that he suffers a sort of ambivalent feeling of love and hatred towards Halie. He realizes that Halie, as a wife is a failure. Shelly tries to fulfill the vacant space by cooperating but it is not evaluated properly and approval does not come. This precludes the idea of a happy family. In order to be an integrated, happy family, Halie should serve and look after her husband; similarly Dodge also should approve the serving without any question.

The contradictory assumption of Dodge's image makes him not an integrative force of the family but a disintegrative and disruptive element. When a baby is born, he or she becomes the perfect idol of happiness. But the complex idea toward the new baby is very frightening: 'Mother is very sincere toward the baby'. Shelly tries to convince this but Dodge answers:

Dodge: that's about enough outta you! You got some funny ideas sister. Some damn funny idea. You think just because people propagate they have to love their offspring? You never seen a bitch eat her puppies? Where are you from anyway? (Shepard, 55)

Shepard's feeling of isolation is combined in this drama. Shepard creates a terrific situation where the characters struggle to exist miserably. Characters even don't seem to be established. The pitiable and miserable situations range from unity to isolation, peace to strife, integration to disintegration. Dodge is disgusted by the shadow of son. Dodge, as the head of family is isolated so he expresses the feeling of desertification. So, when he sees Bradley sleeping on the sofa he snarls:

Dodge: (Looking at Bradley asleep) Bradley? Why is he on my sofa?
(Shepard, 55)

Bradley is a vicious character remarkably drawn because he never leaves the stage. He is an amputee but he creates conflict in the drama. Physically he is vulnerable and mentally he is a hysterical person who cannot control himself. So Bradley chased him out. Dodge's contempt of Bradley as a family member poisons the family. Richard Gilman puts forth his view towards Bradley and others as: "Much stranger causes of tension between Halie and Dodge is their debate over whether or not their son, Bradley should cut his father's hair".

American Repertory Theatre views the character of Bradley as: There Bradley, Tilden's youngest brother, a vicious bully who lost a leg in an accident with a power saw and enjoys tormenting his ailing father.

In a family which is beguiled by false activities, Bradley gets room for such guilty actions. Bradley wanted to drag Shelly into his dark work. He blamed Shelly as a prostitute without any cause or evidence. In the family not only Bradley but Halie is convinced and she deliberately replies to support the wrongdoing.

Halie: Bradley! Did you put your hand in this girl's mouth? You have no idea of what kind of diseases she might be carrying. (Shepard, 62)

Shepard has developed characters who can successfully poison a good family. They don't fall themselves only but they scrape the innocent ones. It seems that the characters have been preparing for hell, a world where happiness, love and success are beyond reach. Each character hates the other and their efforts are to destroy the good characteristics of one another. The play is taken by the critic Kevin Kelly of the Boston Globe as "full dazzling almost binding glare". Ben Brantley remarked about the drama in 1980 in New York Times:

I reviewed Steppenwolf Theatre company's production '*Buried Child*', I affirmed *Buried Child*'s status as "a bona fide classic: a work that converts the mystical, cannibalistic pull of family ties even as they unravel".

Bradley's mysterious behavior and wonderful activities shatter the feeling of harmonious, integration of family. Lizze Loveridge comments on the character of Bradley as:

Shelly is an outsider, like us, a sane member of society thrown into this strange house. In a horribly unforgettable scene Bradley makes Shelly stand with her mouth open while he puts his finger in her mouth. This is a moment of full of innuendo as scary any rape scene. (Lizze Loveridge, 8)

Halie's ideal dream of being the mother and establishing a harmonious family in the collaboration with 'good husband' is entirely shattered with Dodge's information about the child who was buried. Halie's family's false attempt to keep secret of the mystery results in the revelation that she conceived a child. From now onwards, Dodge suffers a sort of failure. He cannot satisfy her desire. So Dodge's failure as a husband to satisfy Halie drives her toward, frequent disruption of the marital relation by resorting to adultery through her frequent visit to father Dewis. Halie commits

adultery for breeding a child and from the same token in the image of healthy child to make the family happy and be herself happy. Instead of achieving the happiness, the family is afflicted with dire problems, complexities and scarcity. The main cause spoiling the family is the adultery of Halie. Family is the source of help, love, and co-operation but here a family is shattered by the incestuous relation. Dodge remembers his past and compares it to the present catastrophe.

Dodge: I don't remember my past. See, we were a well established family once. Well established as the boys were grown. The farm was producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over. Me and Halie here were pointed toward what looked like the middle part of life.

(Shepard, 66)

Dodge is living in a state of confusing, disturbing complexities. He begins his dialogue:

Dodge: (to himself) catastrophic.

Halies's Voice: What do you say, Dodge?

Dodge: (louder) it looks like rain to me! Plain old rain. (Shepard, 67)

Shepard draws the past and present to reveal the degeneration of the family. It cannot remain happy if it discards the norms, values and culture; the family cannot sustain the happiness and integration. Halie nurtures the immorality in the family, it creates dire problems and the family falls into separated ways. Shepard shows the situation of disrupted value of marriage in this play. Conventional marital values have been overtly violated, and the institutional significance of marriage has been reduced to a child's play.

Dodge's family: Victim of Cultural Decadence

When the family could not rear morality, faith and cultural values, the central code and morality cease to function. When Dodge knows that the conventional values cannot change his family and cannot resolve his crisis, he deliberately disregards the role of each member in the family. The lost happiness of Dodge struck his family. In the quest for the revival of lost happiness; he further deviates towards decadence. When the secret of his family is revealed and the image of happiness passes away, Dodge is torn apart between nostalgia and regret on the one hand, and euphoric expectation of establishing a new harmony with happiness, on the other. Dodge's problem is physical as well as emotional, so he deviates towards the physical compensation through alcoholism, drinking the whiskey. Similarly Halie's problem is a spiritual crisis, but she deviates towards promiscuity; as a result, she wanders with father Dewis instead of looking after her feeble husband. A baby murdered by Dodge makes barren the land and symbolically shows the break down of the family bond and conventions of the American Dream. Culture and family values are integral. The culture observed by Halie had determined the family morality as the integrating force but when it failed to provide expected ideal happiness to the family, it crumbles.

The disillusioned generation wants to get relief from the diseased culture, people could take their stand if they were culturally grown up and culture had civilized them. Culture is beyond the barbaric, uncivilized and the rude, it is also not sudden revolution. It is a process. The individual hates not only cultural values but also the god they had worshiped ever before. After old values crumble, life itself becomes problematic due to perplexity over what the proper way to happiness is. This leads towards the direction of decadence from normal life values. She engages herself in promiscuity and immorality. In the play, the family does not attempt to struggle to

establish the meaning of life, happiness and the family ends in discord. Even the struggle of Shelly to establish happiness turns futile. The promiscuity of Halie leads the family into a hell and the consequence is further guilt and hatred in the family.

Puritanical concept of God is not accepted. The existence of god is questioned; Dodge has lost faith in the conventional puritan God who could not heal his integral agony of the loss of happiness. Father Dewis, as the bridge between humanity and God is involved in illegal relation with Halie. Father Dewis defines God according to his requirement as God only does and hears what he wants. Their beguiling activities, father Dewis discloses that they (Dewis and Halie) are as wicked as Catholics. Once Shepard remarked that God cannot soothe the misery of life and he represents God in his drama as a mystery and considers God as non-productive and sterile. According to him, god is not the creative or constructive force of the universe. Shepard describes god in his own way. James D. Hart writes about the Shepard's concept of God:

"God not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex. He puts all these things in his dramas because he wants to break the tradition of myth and direction". (James D. Hart, Introduction, iv)

Dodge is a representative figure of the American society which was culturally 'deterritorialized' after the traumatic disillusionment of World War II when all cultural ideals and romantic faith in a conventional God and morality observed so long were all dissolved in the devastation. In the eyes of Halie, Ansel, the centre of hope and happiness, dies early.

Halie: He would've taken care of us, too. He would have seen to it that we were He was like that. He was a hero. Don't forget that. A genuine hero. Brave. Strong. And very intelligent.

Tilden :Ansel was a hero?

Halie: Ansel could've been a great man. One of the greatest. I only regret that he die in action. It is not fitting for a man like that to die in a motel room. (Shepard, 18)

Halie wants to show the ideal family but loss of her son begins the disintegration of the family. Halie tries to unite, but the family gradually splits and disrupts. As a result, the vision of family integration fails. Cultural codes and values are avoided in the family. If family dissects, the conventions of codes and conduct snap and faith and belief disappear. Dodge, as the key of the family finds himself in the midst of contempt of the family. His wife who is superb, but her schizophrenic existence is epitomized in the shallow customs. Halie, apparently seeking salvation, turns to religion with fervor. She spouts Christian platitudes and cavorts with the hypocritical father Dewis. God is the very crucible to the dreamland, for long period there was no rain, but after dementing the decayed child, then symbolically it was disclosed so every events became important. Shepard's critical tradition began with Ibsen and Strindberg and he culminates in the assertion that no ultimate solution and settlement in the struggle of life is possible. Equally difficult is integration and harmony of the family. There is only struggle and conflict, and the solution is only temporary. He believes in evolution as change, which will bring new social cultures and new ethical problems. The world of Sam Shepard depicted in *Buried Child* as well as in other plays is not static, and it is not easy to grasp for the one who looks at it through the eyes of life lives in continuous struggle. Since nothing is settled and all

actions lead to new complication, no absolute and conventionally standardized ethics and value can tally with the problem of modern life. So the notions of good and evil, morality and hypocrisy all evolve relatively with new situations. In this respect, Shepard speaks of the avant-garde culture of modern America.

Shelly and Vince in *Buried Child* are the symbolic characters of family happiness. They enter into the disillusioned world and their attempts to reveal the internal conflict does not resolve the family problems. Dodge is characterized as a symbol from the cultural avant-garde in America's degenerated family. He entirely displays the American cultural society and its pretension to happiness. Dodge could either bring no happiness or get rid of the family. He is a form of culture, norms of culture but this culture is derived from the sense of general codes of culture. Dodge talks to his wife in a peculiar way to illustrate that she is not a conventional wife. Haile instead of looking after her husband instigates him by her past. Halie's paradoxical and self-erasing effort makes it obvious that she is following marital sanctions to establish family integration. Halie recalls her past to give agony to her husband. She apparently discloses her present life and her pain as:

Halie's Voice: Everything was dancing with life colors. There will all kinds of people from everywhere. Everyone was dressed to the times. Not like today. Not like they dress today. People had a sense of style.
(Shepard, 10)

Halie distinguishes the past with the present predicament. Past is full of happiness and success but the present is lacking and infirm. The nostalgic feeling of Halie reveals the present crisis. Halie refers to her life after marriage as full of burdens and sorrows. Dodge interferes in Halie's the past and tries to remind her:

Dodge: And he never laid a finger on you I suppose? These gentlemen, breeder man. (Long silence) Halie? Are we still in the land of living? (No answer. Long pause). (Shepard, 10)

Shepard evolves into his real world, which is illusion, and the characters are trapped. Shepard's characters are not coherent but they are spontaneous and their particular influence on their culture that is described in the Oxford Companion to American Literature as, 'Shepard's theatre character is spontaneous rather than coherent. Shepard has this personality and somehow feels locked into it failed by all of your cultural influences and his psychological biography in favor of a more existential view of character.'

In the family, biological relations bind them but emotional love does not tie them. Dodge's problem is emotional. The crisis of happiness emerged from the impossibility of finding a proper substitute for Halie. Halie develops to be a myth an archetypal image as the myth of the American Dream. Shepard criticizes the iconic American family in *Buried Child*. In this play, we see a family that appears at first glance to be a picture of normalcy. The beginning of the play uses clichés from American pop culture to initiate the image. The opening sequence between Halie and Dodge is like something out of the Honeymooners. Shepard uses popular reference as a way of connecting the audience with his character. The audience recognizes them and is therefore able to enter into the play immediately. Once he has the audience's attention, the playwright is able to toy with their expectations. The image of the family begins to quickly spiral downward into a darker form. Dodge's grandson, Vince returns home to a family who does not recognize him. The minister enters with Halie and their adulterous relationship becomes obvious. Dodge has no concept of the past. He has no memory of the child he killed and buried in the backyard. The final

image of the play with Tilden staring down at the baby's corpse secures this play as one of Shepard's darkest. John Orr writes that Shepard's play exists in " a paranoid world where the self fears the other, the inner soul fears the outer person, and where, amidst total chaos, the unseen hand is at the back of everything (John Orr, 110).

Clearly, this family is an unholy mess. A tragedy of Oedipal proportions that led those to this state is not a complete mystery; it's the title of the play. The details are revealed gradually but with little dramatized tension or fanfare. What in most plays would be the major pay off- the physical revelation of the buried child's decomposing skeleton- is understated and, by the play's end, almost faint. I think that's Shepard's point- that you already know what's going to happen; what happens along the way of unraveling is more beneficent.

Shepard, not only in theme, but also through plot and characters, evokes the sense of cultural breakdown, but in the setting, reveals an overwhelming part of cultural upheaval. At the beginning, there is the setting of a room, and the scene of excavating the buried child from the ground. The last scene is where we see the tomb or an excavated site in which faded icons and vestiges of American popular culture line the ordinary, shabby hearth.

The old conventional codes, cultural values and images of all the absolute codes and virtues fail in Shepard's plays. *Buried Child* is an example of a play which illustrates the failure of absolute ethics based upon a fixed standard accepted as universal. This play is a critical voice which subverts basic Christian values of god, family piety, marital chastity and individual morality. It is a play which speaks the name of god according to their wishes. It is the story of frequent disobedience of father and sons. Not only has these, the play subverted marital sanction and chastity by the flirting of Halie with Father Dewis. In this drama, Shepard shows family,

which is full of disrespect and lost morality. The Oedipal relation does not only destroy the family but also spoils the fertility of the land. So Shepard shows that any institutional value like family in integration and harmony is not possible and the ultimate truth is the disintegration of all sorts of family values because of the significance of individual happiness and individual morality, which lacks any common morality and value as the integrating and unifying thread.

Breakdown of American Dream in *Buried Child*

Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize winning *Buried Child* probes the family dynamics in the American tradition of Eugene O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller who prominently seek the failure of American success and prosperity, but Shepard does this to reinvent and reinvigorate the form.

In particular, disintegration of American Dream is an era of lack of prosperity and material success. However, the torn love between a man and a woman, the relation between husband and wife, son as the form of doubt shows a much larger, less romantic scope. Sam Shepard portrays the 1960s as an era of decayed social and moral values, evident in its embracing of cynicism, greed and empty pursuit for pleasure. The reckless feeling of Halie, the early discussion of Halie and Dodge, shows the consequence of the destruction of noble goals. When World War I ended in 1918, the generation of young Americans who had fought in the war became more disillusioned, as the brutal carnage, that they had just faced, made Victorian social morality of the early 20th century American seem boring, stuffy, empty and full of hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market which was the consequence of the war, led to a sudden sustained increase in the national wealth and a new found materialism, as people began to open and consume at dangerous levels. A person from any social group or background could eventually make a fortune, but the American

Aristocracy disliked the new rich industrialist. Additionally the passage of 18th Amendment, which banned the sale of Alcohol, created a thriving under world, which satisfied the massive demand for bootleg liquor among both the rich and poor.

These ideas permeate nearly all of Shepard's plays and are used affectively as criticism of contemporary American society in *Buried Child*. The play takes place on an Illinois farm- American heartland. Before it's over, it has migrated in tone closer to the emotional state of Appalachian West-Virginia, not so far away geographically, but a world away sociologically, under the façade of wholesome, hardworking, God fearing family values there are dark secrets, forbidden desires, and emotional turmoil. The very meaning of family comes into question as these characters threaten, disparage, repudiate and snipe at one another, yet somehow remain locked in their family unit, trapped in long term patterns of mutual destructiveness.

The very first setting in the first Act reflects a poor and destitute family. The setting is of an old-fashioned house of Mr. Dodge in central Illinois. In the very opening scene, we find a glimpse of ragged, frayed and old fashioned home. The description of the scene brings out the picture of failure of material success. Shepard has described the setting as:

"Old wooden staircase down left with pale, frayed carpet laid down on the steps. The stairs lead offstage left up into the wings with no landing. Up right is an old, dark green sofa with the stuffing coming out in spots.... (Shepard, 7)

The setting offers the reality of American society. Robert Cohen describes the setting of *Buried Child* of first Act in the Theatre Today as:

Buried Child is set in a decaying in the farmhouse in the American Middle West; the degenerate condition of the house is echoed by that of the family who inhabit it. The setting is realized in wholly realistic

detail down to the "pale, frayed carpet" the upright lamp with a faded yellow shade and the "large, old fashioned brown TV" which is left on during much of the play. (Cohen, Robert, Chapter7, 203)

It's a dark vision, indeed, but Shepard then clothes this bleak portrait in a unique combination of genuinely funny comedic dialogue, puzzling and unresolved contradictions, and an atmosphere charged with foreboding, menace and the threat of violence. Drawing out these seemingly contradictory tones and keeping them in just the right balance knit the whole together on stage.

Shepard shows each character engaged in fulfilling their demands. Family members are not concerned with what is happening in the family. Actually the ethics of life, society and family are embedded with the values of honor, morality and harmony and individual happiness is subordinated to for institutional integration of the family and the society.

Dodge the patriarch, is parked for the most part on the sofa, coughing, drinking, smoking, complaining and spewing forth the funniest, sardonic and cutting lines. As an old man, he is powerless and dependent but he has not lost his voice. He complains to his wife:

Dodge: My appearance is out of his domain; it's even out of mine! In fact, it's disappeared! I am invisible man! (Shepard, 12)

The voice of Dodge is quite ridiculous. In his relation to the family and home, it seems he belongs in that room and in that family. His wife Halie talks incessantly, mostly from her upstairs bedroom. She insists that Dodge take the pills. But Dodge is slowly slipping into senility on a battered couch where he dozes and watches television in a self-administered haze of whiskey and pills. Actually Dodge has several reasons to be miserable and self-destructive. One of them is his abrasive wife,

Halie, who berates him incessantly from the sanctuary of her bedroom and slips off into town for interludes with the unctuous minister, Father Dewis. Halie never gets the necessary hard edge in her early monologue of nagging in her bigotry or her insincere religious morality. So when early later on she is shown drinking and carrying on with the preacher, the turnabout does not have the dramatic impact it should.

Richard Gilman, in his introduction to seven plays admits "the travail of the family" as the central motif. He further describes as:

As the curtain rises, we find Dodge, the family patriarch, staring blankly at a television, his face illuminated by only the blue flickering of the picture tube, when Halie questions from upstairs, he just continues staring sitting silently in morose resignation and isolation.

(Gilman, 15)

Shepard does complicate interaction among characters with strange moments of tension. The first occurs when Halie mentions the man who took her to the new years Days races. It is the first statement that elicits an emotional response from Dodge. "I bet, he taught you a thing or two huh?" he says bitterly.

Next cause of tension between Halie and Dodge is their debate over whether or not their son, Bradley, should be allowed to cut his father's hair. Bradley, the sadistic amputee cuts his father's hair until Dodge's scalp bleeds, and at the close of act two, Bradley thrust his fingers into Shelly's mouth in a gesture tantamount to rape. The half-wit Tilden brings an armful of vegetables. Dodge claims nothing has grown on the field behind the house since 1935. There was another son, Ansel who was a basketball star and a soldier but was killed in a motel room under unspecified circumstances. Halie incessantly wants to erect the statue of Ansel with a basketball in

one hand and rifle in the other. Halie tries to convince others that Ansel is a good basketball player. The grandson Vince enters into his grandparent's house with his girlfriend Shelly but the grandfather refuses to recognize them. His feelings of exclusion from the family, is shown this: "Vince: Am I being punished? And the resulting frustration becomes the catalyst for the ultimate revelation of secrets.

Thus, it's a family of shattered hopes and undone dreams. How can an ideal dream be inculcated in such a family? It is thus a disintegrated and shipwrecked family keeping with tension among the members. Shepard shows the failure of American idealism and the romantic dream nourished by conventional values and culture as the cause of family discord as well as complete frustration with modern existence. Shepard sees the destructive power of such romantic ideas nurtured by the American dream. Ultimately, the vision good and ideal family is considered as the American life and hope of all. But modern American life is a torn apart by conflicts, deceptions and doubts. As a result, American dream cannot be nourished.

When a family cannot rear the sense of the convergent, one seeks an alternative dreamlike world but that is already shattered. Actually this world is the one, which the dreamer wishes for with all the powers of his being. And in her reminiscences, she wished to establish a statue of Ansel. Halie is a kind of romantic dreamer who seeks happiness. She is upset because she thought Ansel was the ideal, but he dies mysteriously.

Halie: Ansel would've stopped him! Ansel would've stopped him from telling these lies! He was a hero! A man! A whole man! What's happened to the men of this family! Where are the men?
(Shepard, 67)

Tilden, the eldest son of Halie and Dodge wanders so that he can improve the economic condition. But he has returned home after getting into trouble. Tilden could not achieve success. He had the hope that he could make improve his economic status but his hope turns into despair. He returns and spends his time harvesting corn. Tilden expresses his anguish when he is kicked out from the house:

Tilden: I didn't steal it. I don't want to get kicked out of Illinois. I was kicked out of New Mexico and I don't want to get kicked out of Illinois. (Shepard, 20)

Like his father, Vince has also returned to Halie's and Dodge's home in the hope of uncovering his roots. The family enjoys in the illusive world, the reality is their failure. What Vince finds instead is a family who has forgotten him. Dodge says, "it's much better not to know anything". Even his own father is unable to remember Vince, "I had a son once" Tilden says, "But we buried him". Vince actually spends little time on stage; his trip to fetch Dodge a bottle of whiskey becomes a nightlong drive and drinking binge; Shelly is the only character with "some kind of future". She is a creature made of faith and hope, Shelly endeavors to bring the happiness to torn family. But the family is affected by the outside natural catastrophe i. e. the land is productless and inside the family there is a sense of disrespect one to other. How can the American Dream flourish in such a family?

Shepard did not follow the Greek tradition and choose a great figure of noble birth about whom the fate would unsafe their mystery. Rather, he was deliberately American in choosing a New England farmer and his family as protagonists of his drama. Shepard chooses to a place his play on a farmland of Illinois. The unyielding toughness of life on that land contrasts with the easy life. Dodge has decided to stay on the farm while his son and grandson go to New Mexico and New York. But nature

plays the role of oracle, and as a result we see the sense of having been dispossessed of his farm but he could not cultivate any grain. The farm itself is a powerful presence in the play. Even amid mundane scenes, Shepard weaves in a mysterious dimension of the imaginary/real garden outside the decaying door- a garden of good and evil from which Dodge 's son Tilden enters the stage hands full of corn as a metaphorical fertilizer. He further connects the decaying farmland with the buried child as:

There was a baby that was killed many years ago and buried by Dodge out in back: metaphorical fertilizer for Tilden's corn and a symbolic seminalization for mid-America, which the play gives us to understand, was established by acts of murder and built by successive cover-ups. (Robert Cohen, chapter 7, 205)

Nature is against Dodge's family. Dodge as the dual victim in the family could not see the evil game played in his house. The complex relation between mother and son causes the destruction of nature and family relations. Oedipal relation is the key to heighten the drama causing degeneration of the American dream. We see a family, which veiled the mystery until the arrival of the grandson, Vince, it seems is ripe for Freudian analysis, an Oedipal conflict realized in the threatening actions of a powerless son, it also reinforces the corporeal nature of Dodge's body. Halie often mentions the stench of his decaying frame and in their discussion; Dodge describes the last time she allowed Bradley to cut his hair saying. "Time to dress up the corpse for company! Put up a "little front" once we learn the story of *Buried Child*, Bradley's violence against his father also becomes strangely justifiable, an act of outward conscious and subconscious revenge becomes the catalyst for the ultimate revelation of secrets.

Dodge: See, we were a well established. All the boys grown. The farm was producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice ... Then Halie got pregnant again. Out the middle, a nowhere, she got pregnant we weren't planning on having any more boys... In fact, we hadn't been sleeping in the same bed for about since years..... (Shepard, 66)

The mysterious secret was buried inside the house. The exhausted family could not generate anything positive. So the family is trapped in disaster and complexities. Robert Cohen questions:

Where did the corn come from? Why Tilden does bring it in? Why does he drop it on Dodge's lap? What was the "trouble" in New Mexico? We will never receive over answers to these questions.

Buried Child is a play that radiates implication and never becomes explicit. It creates the impression of a theme not by rational a lot development or logical moral positioning but by a pattern of seeming no requests, abrupt transitions and bizarre enigmatic actions. (Cohen, Robert 205)

The traditional concept of the "American Dream" promises people a life of happiness, wealth and independence in an American society where everything appears to be possible. This seems to offer the solution here at first glance. However, for many hopeful farmers suffering from economic depression and crisis, the "American Dream" has remained an unfulfilled promise or even turned into a Nightmare. But in spite of such failures and frustrations, the Dream endures and it might still come true if aspiring people manage to adapt it to the personal needs of this situation. The integrating factors of American Dream don't assert individual 'happiness' at the expense of family obligation and morality because of the mismatch between one's

happiness and family norms. But in Halie's quest for happiness is only tragic irony and suffering result. The illicit relation with her son destroys a logo of Puritans. As a result the American Dream shifts into American Nightmare and the father- son conflict reminds of the reality of the condition of poverty and depravity. Faith, hope and help are dominated by despair and deception in the family progress. Thus a family could not rear the responsibility, family obligation, morality, and value of integration, the American Dream could not survive at all. The death of Dodge at the end of drama follows a tragic death of lone and suffering. The family can't retain its cultural meaning as the form of oneness, security and help rather self and loneliness prevails there.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Culture, family and material success are integral to each other. In the society, culture yields family codes and values, for the integration of family is the core force and provides certain codes as operative values and dynamics for American Dream. If family members are honest and responsible towards cultural codes, the integrity of family values becomes viable. When cultural codes deviate and dwindle from the normal track, family disorganization begins. Family disorganization and cultural deterritorialization invite the disintegration of American Dream.

Almost all cultures in human society highly value basic family norms like mutual trust, co-operation, and unambiguous family relation and love, respect and happiness. Once society is uprooted from cultural codes and values, the spiritual faith begins to dismantle. New efforts are implemented to the concepts of euphoria of novelty for the re-establishment of new order from a fresh avenue, but it is not easy. At this time, conventional family values and system becomes dominant. These dilute institutional values and thus the family, as an integrative entity, ceases to function.

American society is typically the bearer of self-contradiction from the very root of its civilization. The new settlers came to Newfoundland with the hope of carrying on freer practice to their religion and hopes of getting rich quickly and easily by exploiting the rich, natural resources of the Newfoundland. Speculation in lands not yet settled decreased as a result, but the level of American annoyance and frustration increased. The first Puritan settlers had arrived either to escape religious persecution at home or to practice their religion in a freer atmosphere. Due to the idea of the promised land of the Bible, they could establish integrity in the new society as well as consistent family system based on spiritual faith full of domestic piety,

performing the role of the church. So, in the family, all cultural norms were observed. As family integration and the self remained unfulfilled, American society contradictorily left the spiritual track in the euphoria of material prosperity, the Lutheran "Dream of equality gave rise to class distinction amidst the illusive American society". The remnants of cultural values were further lost after the traumatic experience and anxiety of world war II and the Vietnam.

Even in the disorder, chaos, and anxiety, the dreams of happiness and integrity are still undercurrent in the nostalgic American psyche. So frequent efforts to harmonize the class discrimination, regain the cultural loss and family integration could not achieve its goals. As a result, the foundation of American dream could not be further sustained. Thus, the desire to integrate cultural family norms by achieving spiritual salvation and material prosperity remained in the nostalgic realm with the breakdown of codes, norms, values of the American Dream.

Shepard as a modern playwright seeks the modern American complexity and problems of an individual in relation to the family and society. Shepard's dramatic universe is a complicated and largely unhappy place where characters suffer extraordinary anxiety due to instability and inauthenticity of the world, which surrounds them. Shepard and many of his characters endeavor to defend themselves against the weight of the past and the anxiety of the present by searching out a deeper more essential origin through which to establish a viable identity. Shepard's work is further complicated by the radical approach he takes to characterization in many of his plays. Traditionally, playwrights attempt to create an illusion of reality on stage and characters with conventional needs and desires. However, Shepard quickly abandoned such artifice. In *Buried Child* characters enter carrying armful of carrots and shave each other's hair at whim. Their actions cannot be explained simply as

products of their character but rather as belonging to a greater, ritualistic pattern of behavior. Ben Brantley writes of Shepard as an experimental dramatist who portrays the modern crisis with the combination of symbol:

In the late 1970's Mr. Shepard was deeply fashionable, everyone's favorite crossover from the avant-garde. But like all golden boys, he eventually began to tarnish in his public's mind, there was a backlash of feeling that identified him as a relic of a chapter in experimental theatre, saturated in symbolism, willfully obscure and given to bashing the American Dream with two heavy hands". (Arnold, 486)

Shepard stands in opposition to the symbol of ideal convention. Instead, he shows very frankly that despite being a system of harmonious ideas, the practical sides of the past was contradictorily a failure, a paradox between ideal and practice which is the problematic of modern life. Vince, to some extent, followed ethics and wanted to harmonize in comparison to other members of the family. But he is a child of cultural modernism and follows the distinctly new way of the disillusioned generation. Shepard, as an experimental dramatist, depicts character through the lens of biological variations. His characters live and die in problems. He experiments with the new avant-garde culture and ultimately he comes to the conclusion that modernism cannot ensure happiness and integration among modern individuals as well as in family relations. After being completely detached from family happiness and integration, Halie adopts the puritanical ethics of Father Dewis to be emancipated from her sin. Similarly the buried mystery of a family is disclosed when Vince returns home. But these experiments do not bring happiness or integrate the family. Rather it further disintegrated and brings more wretchedness.

It is a far cry from the apple pie, turkey, and kindly old relatives that Shelly the girl has been told to expect. By the time the visit is over, she has been insulted, assaulted, and set to peel Tilden's supernatural carrots and is generally abused. Vince, who had thought of the visit as a voyage through memory, fears even worse. His memories do not serve him. His relatives ignore him or send him out to buy whisky. Dodge, the fierce, dying grandfather who is the shattered heart of this American household, has no use for progeny or any future. "You are all alike, you hopers, he tells Shelly, and clings to his whiskey, his television and a battered base ball cap. The future is meaningless to him and the past is even more meaningless. Dodge says, "I'm descended from a long line of corpses and there's not a living soul behind me". Shepard's America has poisoned its roots and destroyed its life. Shepard depicts this perspective to locate a chilling paradox:

Even as the characters in *Buried Child* are inextricably bound to each other by shared histories and dark secrets, they are also irretrievably alone. The long married Halie and Dodge, the decrepit matriarch and patriarch, beg in the play with a hilariously weary quarrel they seem to have been having forever. (Arnold, 487)

Dodge, as modern experimental character is not a victor, rather a victim of his existence. Shepard draws his character as a pessimist who sees futility of modern existence in his continuous struggle in the quest for family integration at the complete expense of cultural values, but inevitably fails to do so. He does not intend to ridicule the pathetic situation of Dodge but displays the modern man's complex existence. Even Shelly's effort to harmonize the family proves a failure. But still her failure does not completely diminish the human dignity of struggle and suffering.

American Dream is one among many other themes that Shepard discusses in his several plays. Critics and students of Shepard, in the plays have seen that he deals

with the family and cultural as well as the American experience against popular American mythology. This study has looked into the cultural landscape of America from the Puritan settlement to the contemporary modern cultural crisis. Shepard's efforts are to depict the universal and eternal themes of enduring human problem of loneliness and existential struggle for establishing some order. This study has explored the modern American Dream, cultural and family crisis. Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* reflects the inner tension of a family. It is a vision of a dysfunctional family that is transformed into a symbol of loss of innocence. This study proves the hypothesis of cultural upheaval, breakdown of family relations and that have led society toward the disintegration of American Dream.

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