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DYSFUNCTIONAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN EDWARD ALBEE'S PLAYS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS

ARAFAT ABDALI RAKHEES



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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

2020



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate dysfunctional marital relationships in Edward Albee's plays using psychoanalytic analysis. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of The Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia?* were Albee's plays that were selected for this study. A Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality was used to examine the psyches of the couples' characters in order to reveal the psychological reasons behind their dysfunctional marital relationships. The findings of the study exposed that each one of married couples has undergone traumatic experiences in the past, a matter which affected their personalities. The spouses suffered from turbulent childhood, intrapsychic conflicts, unresolved complexes, and sexual deviations. Consequently, most of them were dominated by the id and have weak superegos. Besides, the study uncovered the connection between Albee's personal life and the selected plays, and showed his attitudes towards the lifestyle of the American society. The study revealed that the selected plays were flashbacks that revisit Albee's own pains, wounds and traumas. The playwright sublimated his distress into writing where he expressed his sad memories, repressed desires, wishes and disclosed his psyche. Further, the study displayed that Albee was discontent with the American civilized society where the very concept of love has been distorted and corrupted. In conclusion, the Freudian psychoanalytic reading of husband/wife characters in Albee's selected plays can help to understand the psychological dimensions of human personality and make the reader aware of the unconscious psychological forces which control people's psyches, leading to their perverse behaviours and unacceptable actions. The study implicates that introducing Albee's plays as case studies would assist therapists and psychoanalysts in diagnosing and treating married couples who are emotionally disturbed or psychologically troubled.





HUBUNGAN PERKAHWINAN YANG TIDAK BERFUNGSI DI DALAM DRAMA EDWARD ALBEE: SATU ANALISIS PSIKOANALISIS

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini ialah menyiasat hubungan perkahwinan yang tidak berfungsi di dalam drama Edward Albee dengan menggunakan analisis psikoanalisis. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of The Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* dan *The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia?* ialah drama Albee yang dipilih untuk kajian ini. Teori Psikoanalisis personaliti Freud telah digunakan untuk menganalisa jiwa watak pasangan perkahwinan bagi mendedahkan sebab-sebab psikologi di sebalik hubungan perkahwinan yang tidak berfungsi itu. Dapatan kajian ini mendedahkan setiap pasangan perkahwinan tersebut menderita oleh trauma pengalaman lampau yang telah memberi kesan kepada personaliti mereka. Pasangan tersebut menderita akibat pengalaman zaman kanak-kanak mereka yang bergolak, konflik intrapsikik, masalah yang tidak terurai, dan sex tidak normal. Akibatnya, kebanyakan mereka didominasi oleh id di samping mempunyai superego yang lemah. Tambahan lagi, kajian ini mendapati perkaitan antara kehidupan peribadi Albee dan drama pilihan tersebut dan juga sikap beliau terhadap gaya hidup masyarakat Amerika. Kajian ini menyerlahkan bahawa drama pilihan tersebut merupakan satu imbasan kembali keperitan, luka dan trauma yang dialami oleh Albee sendiri. Dramatis tersebut telah menyelitkan kepayahan hidupnya kepada penulisan di mana beliau meluahkan memori kesedihan, keinginan terpendam, harapan dan mendedahkan dalaman jiwanya yang sebenar. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan Albee merasa tidak senang dengan tamadun masyarakat Amerika yang telah memutarbelitkan dan menkorupsi makna cinta yang sebenar. Sebagai kesimpulan, pembacaan psikoanalisis Freud tentang hubungan suami isteri di dalam drama pilihan tersebut membolehkan kita memahami dimensi psikologi personaliti manusia dan membuatkan pembaca menyedari adanya kuasa psikologi bawah sedar yang mengawal jiwa manusia, yang seterusnya membawa kepada sikap yang jahat dan tidak normal. Kajian ini memberi implikasi bahawa dengan mengetengahkan drama Albee sebagai kajian kes dapat membantu ahli terapi dan psikoanalisa mendiagnosis dan merawat pesakit yang mempunyai masalah emosi dan keclaruan psikologi.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	A Delicate Balance
BSC	The Ballad of the Sad Café
DMs	Defence Mechanisms
TGWS	The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia
WAVW	Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the study, including an exposition of the American notion of marriage and family, changes in their structures, reasons behind the breakdown of marriage in American society and definition of relevant terms such as dysfunctional, unhappy marriage. It also discusses the statement of the problem, objectives and questions of the study, theoretical/ conceptual framework as well as the significance and limitations of the study.





1.2 Background of the Study

Due to its vital role in the formation of society, marriage has been a topic of interest for many researchers not only within the field of sociology but also in anthropology, psychology and literature. According to Cott (2000), “no modern nation-state can ignore marriage forms, because of their direct impact on reproducing and composing the population” (p. 5). Marriage and family institutions are sanctified and form the basic structures in most societies. They are interdependent and closely linked with each other because marriage entails family, and together, they create the social entities from which society is built (Whitehead, 1992). Americans conceptualize marriage as a sacred institution that is more important than the individual interests of each partner. They consider it a meaningful event in their lives and the source of inspiration which provides them with happiness (Coontz, 2007). In the 1950s, establishing a family was an ideal lifestyle for all adults in America (Balakrishnan, 1988). There was a social stability in the family where men and women achieved harmonious relationships as a father/provider and a mother/housewife, respectively. The government supported the newlyweds who entered into the institution of marriage, and most of the legal and economic rights were in favour of husbands rather than wives (Coontz, 2007). Moreover, the standard marriage-based family was the only socially acceptable relationship. American society has witnessed high marriage rates, recording about ninety-five per cent of young people who got married because sexual relations out of wedlock were unacceptable in society (Cherlin, 2004).





Marriage is a valued sacramental and family-focused institution within society. It is one of the consequential life experiences in human civilization and a collective relationship that has existed for thousands of years. It is a socio-cultural phenomenon into which the husband and wife embed their personal lifestyle, traditions and habits to set up their own new family culture. All over the world, marriage has a moral significance, possesses a sacred character and plays a focal role in human relationships. It gives a society structure and stability, enhances productivity and satisfies natural, intrinsic human needs. It exerts a civilizing influence on men and affords them the opportunity to be formally tied to women and children and bear responsibility for them (Whitehead, 1992). The marital relationship is regarded as “the most important of civil relationships in families rooted in the community” and it is endorsed not only in Christianity but also in Islam and Judaism (The Witherspoon Institute, 2008, p. 5). Hence, the institution of marriage is seen as a religious, social and universal association. It is fundamental for the elevation of society and for the rearing of its children (Clifton, 2013).

Anderson (2013) claims that defining what true marriage is and what advantages it presents for society is very important for the American nation, which hangs its future on the wall of marriage. American society perceives marriage as a legal, social and religious institution and an essential element of the social system. It is a multifaceted organization wherein the needs and desires of individuals are unified and achieved and wherein children are born, brought up and socialized (The National Marriage Project, 2012). Ambert (2005) describes marriage as “a sexual, economic, and emotional partnership between a man and a woman that is socially and legally sanctioned” (p. 5). According to Ivereigh (2013), it is “the main and most effective





means of rearing healthy, happy and well-integrated children” (p. 3). Gallagher (2003) defines marriage as “the fundamental, cross-cultural institution for bridging the male-female divide so that children have loving, committed mothers and fathers” (p. 378). In view of these definitions, marriage is seen as a natural, socio-economic institution and a shared norm based on a legal union, intimate relationship and mutual understanding between two people. It contributes to family formation and the welfare of society. Arguably, marriage should not be looked upon as only a heterosexual relationship and a means to produce children and satisfy physical and sexual needs. Rather, it is a divine institution intended to provide human beings with spiritual welfare, psychological stability and a sense of security. Marriage is an essential bond that should be born out of love more than commerce or convenience in order to build a well-functioning and well-ordered society.



In all societies, marriage is the crucial human institution of family reproduction. In America, marriage has undergone significant changes that have altered its cultural characteristics, and regulations have been instituted that distort its meaning, matters which have had detrimental effects on society. People experience different kinds of marital relations such as homosexuality—a relationship between people of the same sex; civil union—a legal-like marriage between people of similar or different genders; cohabitation—a free union where two or more unwed people live together in one place; mixed-race marriage, which allows for people of different races and religions to marry; and polyandry, which is a kind of marriage where one woman is married to several men. All these sorts of marriages are now enacted and endorsed under the umbrella of law, although they were formerly outlawed, a matter that





deinstitutionalizes marriage and changes its meaning as well as its social and cultural nature (Whitehead, 1992).

At present, the institution of marriage no longer occupies a central position in the individual lives of Americans or their society. There is no need of having a certified marriage to have the civil rights, benefits or obligations of parenting. Moreover, marital commitment is not fully valued by American society wherein other alternatives to legal marriage have emerged and made it possible for people to choose from any available lifestyle. Coontz (2007) avows that:

Marriage is no longer the main mechanism for regulating sexual behavior . . . , or organizing interpersonal rights and obligations. . . . The state stopped insisting that everyone needed a government-sanctioned marriage license to enjoy the privileges and duties of parenthood [and] other forms of intimate relationships and child-rearing arrangements came out from underground. (p. 15)

Additionally, divorce has become tolerable and its rates have soared and peaked since the time when it was forbidden, illegitimate and infrequent (Luxton, 2011). Homosexuality and cohabitation before and after marriage have become legitimate, less denounced and socially acceptable. Although it had been considered conformity, marriage has become a luxury. American people today get married for different reasons: to find a companion, to get a career, or to be financially secure. In the past, marriage's place in the course of life was first, while now it comes next (Cherlin, 2004).





1.3 Changes in Marriage and Family Structures of American Society

Marriage is the backbone of the nation because it is the foundation stone and the power of a society in which success or failure is determined by good and healthy marriages. So, the Americans' withdrawal from marriage would produce frail communities (The Witherspoon Institute, 2008). In the late twentieth century, marriage became deinstitutionalized and lost its role in organizing familial life and human relationships. It has become a customary activity of late and a throwaway to people who enjoy different out-of-wedlock affairs. Also, the nuclear family has lost its social function and symbolic status associated with the production and socialisation of children (O'Neill, 2013). Consistent with this view, Luxton (2011) discusses how marriage, which has been the locus of family formation and central in the lives of most American communities, is being brought to an end. Social values and concepts of marriage are changing with time, and the conventional family has become a vanishing archetype. Moore and Asay (2013) ascribe the changes in marriage to the absence of familial obligation and to the avoidance of marriage on the part of people for fear of failure. The American scene of marriage is best described by Teachman, Tedrow and Crowder (2000):

The declining prevalence of early marriage, increasing level of marital dissolution, and growing tendency to never marry . . . reflect changes in the relative economic prospects of men and women and support the conclusion that marriage is becoming less valued as a source of economic stability. (p. 1234)





Indeed, the institution of marriage in America has suffered a profound process of change. Marriage as a religious and societal institution is becoming weaker, smaller and less intense. Most young Americans opt for different sexual relationships instead of marriage. So, the number of parentless children and the rates of cohabitation and divorce increase compared with the decreasing rates of marriage (Moore & Asay, 2013). Ambert (2005) opines that the rise in the rates of divorce and cohabitation has left its effect on marriage, which dwindles to an easily terminable lifestyle. Lately, husbands and wives have become free from the parental roles and marital responsibilities assigned by society (Whitehead, 1992). Knox and Schacht (1991) argue that American society could disintegrate because people no longer concern themselves with traditional marriage and substitute it with casual sexual relationships. They think that such alternatives to marriage lead individuals to “eventually stop thinking of marriage ... and develop a view of sexually-based primary relationships that are expressed in a variety of forms” (p. 124). Hence, marriage is losing its privileged position as a legally regulated institution which brings stability and cultivates community virtues. It is devoid of intrinsic meaning and has become less valued than it was during the halcyon days in the fifties when marriage was an integral part of the social and cultural system (Cherlin, 2004). As a result, the stereotype of the American family photo of “an intact, two-parent home with two children, a dog, and grey-haired grandparents” has been shattered (Moore & Asay, 2013, p. 28).

Generally, a family refers to a unit which consists of parents and children who are related to each other and live in one place. Teachman et al. (2000) declare that American society comprises different kinds of family structure, including “two-parent





families, one-parent families, cohabitating couples, gay and lesbian families, and extended-family” (p. 1234). Gibbs and Campbell (as cited in Moore & Asay, 2013) mention that polygamy has been a popular kind of marriage in native American cultures. They define it as a form of marriage in which a man marries more than one woman so as to enlarge the number of household members who provide for the family’s daily needs and support it financially. That is, the American family before the Industrial Revolution was regarded as a socio-economic entity in which most of the family members worked to earn their living. With the emergence of industrialization and capitalism, the nuclear family has become a financially viable social unit and there is a transition from the traditional extended family to elementary family structure. To meet the needs of its members and keep abreast of developments taking place in an industrial-urban society, the traditional forms and functions of the American family have been transformed since its social relationship with the society has definitely become different (Moore & Asay, 2013).

The era of peace and prosperity resulting from economic growth and technological developments has impressed itself upon the lives of American families, which deviate from their social roles to adjust to these trends. After the Industrial Revolution, middle class families flourished and people began to leave not only the countryside, moving to towns, but they also left behind their high moral values (Anand, 2015). The traditional American family has undergone radical changes that have come together with the reversal of ethical codes. Women have stopped looking after their homes, children and husbands, while men have become passive in their relationships and in leading their homes. The husband’s role as the patriarch of the house is occupied by a woman. Furthermore, the conflicts between couples bring





instability to the family and engender marital dissatisfaction where there is no affection or sympathy between the spouses. Agafitei (2014) elaborates that women “have become the leader[s], taking the place of the head of the family.... They stop acting like loving mothers and wives,” whereas men “are emasculated, [and] deprived of any kind of power” (p. 12). Accordingly, “the relationships’ dynamics have suffered enormous changes . . . that in the end, have ruined the myth of the typical, ideal family” (p. 18).

Parsons and Bales (1955) attribute the changes in family structure to “the loss of function of the family, changes in the older sex morality and instability of marriage” (pp. 3–4). Added to this, there is a decline in fertility and birth rates because of the use of contraception (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). Furthermore, Sabouri (2005) states that individualism projects into the surface, causing the breakdown of family structure and the breach of its very strict rules and disciplines. Besides, there have been pervasive “cases of sex-violence” (p. 7), and drug-addiction. Bigsby (1984) argues that the modern American family is devoid of love and affection and the evaluation of people is based on their wealth and not their emotions or moral behaviours. He says that “love threatens to become simply a form of currency” (p. 296). As expressed by Hoorvash (2012), the image of the woman as a happy homemaker and the man as a breadwinner and father of many children stereotyped in a lot of mainstream films no longer exists.





1.3.1 Reasons behind the Breakdown of Marriage in American Society

The breakdown of marriage in American society is attributed to different reasons. Most researchers think that the social, economic and cultural changes which have happened in post-industrial American society and the prevalence of materialism and individualism-oriented attitudes affect interpersonal relationships and lead to the dissolution of marriage. Gaffal (2010) indicates that economic changes and women's participation in the labour force take a heavy toll on the husband/wife relationship and "the power dynamics that exist between them" (p. 14). Fraher (2006) maintains that as women support themselves and achieve financial security, this facilitates divorce and promotes the culture of individualism, personal choice and self-satisfaction. He expounds that "expressive individualism" (p. 27) and hedonism predominate contemporary American society and have priority over familial commitments.

Prosperous economies encourage people to think of their personal happiness, self-expression and self-gratification. Thereupon, Americans assume new ideas concerning marriage, family and society and such concepts as social bonds, marital commitment, familial ties and social obligations are swept aside. People shift towards "an ethic of obligation to the self" and "the richness of emotional lives" (p. 28) away from marriage for it no longer satisfies or fulfils their emotional needs.

Teachman et al. (2000) claim that the collapse of marriage increases in industrialized societies, where individualization impacts people's ethical values and marital relationships cease to be a source of security and stability. Likewise, Gillies (2003) refers to the negative effect of modern life on human relationships, stating that individualization, which is the product of modernity, turns people into self-absorbed





individuals who concern themselves only with their own desires and interests. In a similar vein, Harper (2010) imputes the failure of marriage in American society to the growth of individualistic attitudes. She explains that individualism influences people's attitudes to married life and encourages them to think of other unacceptable forms of intimate relationships. Harper remarks that this new ethic fails marriage, which becomes obsolete and a restriction on individual liberty. Individualism also weakens American society for it releases individuals from any matrimonial or societal obligations and places a higher value on personal choice instead of public interests. Thus, marriage turns into an option among multiple choices of sexual relationships and Americans begin to view it less satisfactorily and as a needless bond which cannot achieve a purpose or fulfil a need. Further, the ethos of expressive individualism drifts marital couples into a conflict of interests because each one of them strives to satisfy his/her own individual desires regardless of the other. As such, marriage falls into decline and the family unit is damaged.

Another central factor which contributes to the deterioration of marital relationships is the rising of materialism in American society. Materialism is one of the major causes of strife in many marriages in avariciously orientated societies. This growing trend predominates the lives of the middle-class families, and it is built into the institution of marriage, a matter which results in a broken and fallen quality of humanity. Because of materialism, married couples are devoid of emotions and become interested only in their self-aggrandizement. Gassner (as cited in Sabouri, 2005) claims that "materialism and pursuit of the worldly pleasures brought about a general deterioration in the moral and spiritual values" (p. 7). In Yankelovich's (1994) view, material comfort alters the deep-rooted conservative norms of people who "find





themselves experimenting with new forms of self expression and individuality that were unthinkable or impractical in earlier periods” (p. 16). According to Ghosh (2013), a man is corrupted by a desire for sex, money and power and stops caring about ethical standards of the society. He mentions that “the lust for sex and power has become the only motivation to continue with the remaining years of his life” (p. 2). Shifts in values along with the strains of modern life lead people to indulge in sexual pleasures and other diversions that serve as a shortcut and escape from harsh reality (Dogra, 1987). This, in effect, leads to the disintegration of the ideals of family life, loss of domestic harmony and breakdown of the marital and familial relationships.

Cherlin (2004) ascribes the failure of marriage to the process of deinstitutionalization. He defines deinstitutionalization of marriage as “the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behaviour” (p. 848). He clarifies that deinstitutionalization has occurred as a result of the changes in the meaning, shape and function of marriage during the twentieth century, when the traditional values which focus on the collective, economic and social benefits of marriage were abandoned and replaced by invented forms that are purely motivated by self-interest. Cherlin stresses that the emergence of the “individualized marriage” (p. 852), the changing in the familial functions of the husband and wife and the financial independence of women emasculate the social system of marriage. Hence, other illegal relationships override heterosexual marriage, marital functions become negotiable and adaptable, and the gender-differentiated roles of marriage disappear. In addition, the purposes behind marriage become personal and the benefits of marriage are evaluated on the basis of self-satisfaction and self-development of the married





couples. In view of that, marriage transforms from a companionate relationship into an individualized one with no love, care or support.

On the other hand, Anderson (2013) thinks that the cause of the break-up of marriage is the revisionist view, which redefines marriage to suit individual needs and modern social changes. He affirms that “marriage has been weakened by a revisionist view that is more about adults’ desires than children’s needs” (p. 2). According to Anderson, this new view of marriage denies the fact that it is a biological and anthropological phenomenon which relies on the ‘complementarity’ relationship between man and woman. In sum, contemporary American society has manifested dramatic changes in family and marriage structure. The occurrence of the new forms of sexual relationships like cohabitation and same-sex marriage and throwing off the shackles of traditional marriage together with the relatively high rates of divorce and decline in marriage shake family stability and set in motion the results that precipitate dysfunctional marital relationships.

1.4 Dysfunctional and Unhappy Marriage

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2011), *dysfunction* is generally defined as the deviation from what are considered to be acceptable and normal manners in social relationships. In psychology, *dysfunction* means abnormal and destructive patterns of behaviours of a group of people, acting outside social norms (The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2009).





There are a multitude of reasons that underlie dysfunctional marital relationships. Todd and Milliken (2006), state that dysfunction takes place in a family as a result of disruptive and atypical behaviours, such as long addiction to “drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, work, or food” (p. 52). In their study of the marital conflict, Gottman and Levenson (1999) found that dysfunctional marriage is caused by marital disharmony and negative emotions, which increase in unstable relationships more than stable ones. Liu and Chen (2006) explore the influence of marital conflicts on couples and declared that conflicts are detrimental to the psychological health of spouses and they often lead to depression. Gottman and Driver (2005) believe that marital conflicts arise because of a couple’s failure to give emotional support to each other, or to have intimate interaction in everyday communications, let alone the lack of attention to each other’s interests and rights. Gottman (1998) claims that dysfunctional marriage may result from a sudden escalation of arguments between couples about trifling matters, the failure of one spouse to change the undesirable behaviour of the other partner, poor communication, shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour, and the dominance of wives over husbands in the marital relationship.

Edmundson (2005) views that frequent marital conflicts generate dysfunctional behaviours, evoke feelings of worthlessness and resentment as well as fear of abandonment, which have a negative bearing on the security of marital relationships. Further, Edmundson declares that disappointment is another factor that causes dysfunctional marriage. He says that spouses become disappointed when they fail to weather their distress and deal with relationship sorrows or keep them under wraps. Garba (as cited in Obiageli, 2009) explains that before marriage, couples have





highly romantic notions and expectations about love and the husband/wife relationship. But when they enter into the institution of marriage, they feel badly let down when they do not find what they expect in the real-life marriage relationship. So, the relationship fizzles out and converts into continuing bitter conflicts brimming with hate, fear and misunderstanding. Coontz (2007) points out that most married couples of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had strong hopes that they would have happy and satisfactory marital relationships; however, the hoped-for marriage did not fulfil their ambitions as promised.

Using the psychodynamic theory of marital dysfunction in his study of the relationship between personal factors and marital conflict, Obigeli (2009) contends that marital problems and struggles originate from the incongruity between marriage partners' personalities and attitudes. They have their deep roots in the unconscious mind of the couples and are reflected in their personalities, behaviours and actions. They are a result of the unfulfilled desires and forbidden wishes which are repressed in the unconscious because they are socially unacceptable. Faulkner (2002) expounds that there is a relationship between the personality traits of spouses and the stability of their marriage. He says that such traits as "neuroticism, anxiety and emotional instability" (p. 16) bring about unsatisfactory relationships and failed marriages. Subsequently, this will have a psychological impact on couples, especially if they suffer from emotional insecurity.

In their meta-analytic review of empirical articles which studied the relationship between marital quality and health, Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, and McGinn (2014) connect dysfunctional marriage with couples' negative attitudes





towards each other. Based on the findings of social-cognitive theorists, Robles et al. (2014) declare that unhappy couples establish a causal link between negative behaviours and their partners and think that such conduct is deliberate and inspired by selfish motives. Nakonezny and Denton (2008, p. 408) cite Gottman's and Levenson's findings that the ratio of positivity to negativity in failed marriages is very low, nearly (1:1), compared to the percentage of positivity in successful relations, which is about (5:1). In his study, "Psychology and Marital Processes", Gottman (1998) also finds that the amount of sentimentality in unhappy marital relationships is less than in happy ones and that negative attitudes and feelings of blame as well as hatred prevail in dysfunctional marriages. Gottman interviewed couples with dysfunctional marital relationships and found that husbands in such marriages "tend to see their lives as chaotic, out of control . . . pointless and empty" (p. 191).



Additionally, Robles et al. (2014) mention that unhappy couples with little marital fulfilment exhibit aggressive behaviour and respond negatively to their partners in social interactions, thereby they lack psychological and physical well-being. According to Kamp-Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger (2008), psychological happiness is necessary for the stability and continuity of marriage, and losing it causes tension and marital conflict between couples. They affirm that spouses who suffer from psychological stress have more strain in the marital relationship in contrast to those with higher levels of happiness. Lu (2010) mentions that most research on marital happiness has shown that marriages with low levels of happiness often fall apart.





On the other hand, Zee and Hembrecht (2009) state that the avoidance of intimacy on the part of couples results in dysfunctional marital relationships and ascribes that to “anxious relationship beliefs” (p. 3). That is, some spouses do not lay their inner feelings bare because they think that showing affection would entail rejection, abandonment or losing of “their own individuality” (p. 3). Zee and Hembrecht (2009) hold that women externalize their emotions and feelings more openly than men who only express their feelings of disappointment and irritation. Moreover, women are assumed to have the ability to read their husbands’ feelings, a matter that makes men afraid of being exposed or misinterpreted by them, thus engendering an unsatisfactory relationship.



1.5 Statement of the Problem

Throughout the twentieth century, American society witnessed important influences represented by tremendous technological advances and the emergence of the capitalistic society, which have had an impact on the cultural and social structure of America. These influences print their marks on life, impinge on people’s feelings and behaviours, and form the current attitudes of the modern era. Esslin (1965) paints a heightened picture of the societal climate of the post-war Western world. He says that “man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical. . . . All assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning have suddenly been unmasked as nonsensical illusions, empty chatter” (p. 4).





Subsequently, there is a demolition of universally accepted beliefs, loss of love and compassion, a rise of materialism and a corrosion in human relationships. As a result, life becomes more difficult and unbearable, producing individuals who suffer from psychological complexes and mental problems. This atmosphere prepares the ground for sexual deviations, social isolation and abnormal behaviours to permeate society (Anand, 2015). The cultural shift in the American society is emphasised by Yankelovich (1994), who states that this entails the decay of traditional values and disruption of marital and familial ties, which are seen as redundant and unnecessary restraints. So, there is an increase in the number of divorces, parentless children, single-parent families, drop-outs and illicit relationships.

One of the most devastating manifestations of this value-shifted and disjointed society is the disintegration of marriage and the weakening of the family, which turns from a socially beneficial institution into a personal commercial contract. In a study conducted by Harper (2010), it is shown that “50% of marriages in America end in divorce.” In congruence, marriage rates dropped to “50% since 1970” (p. 4). Owing to the higher divorce rates, American people lack confidence in the institution of marriage and resort to other alternatives in order to have children or to satisfy their sexual desires. So, pre-marital affairs, same-sex marriage and cohabitation are on the rise, while matrimony is rapidly declining (Harper, 2010). Likewise, Daugherty and Copen (2016) reveal that non-marriage relationships have come to the fore in the United States, and the number of Americans who adhere to the ideas of “premarital cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, same-sex sexual relations” is standardized (p. 1). Further, “the attitude toward sex had changed, those involved in non-marital and





extramarital sex felt less guilty about their behaviour than in the past. The American family as a result has failed to maintain its harmony” (Balakrishnan, 1988, p. 41).

According to a Pew Research Center (2010) survey, about 60% of American people thought that sexual relationships out of wedlock are harmless and tolerable. Accordingly, the United States, compared with other Western countries, has the lion's share of divorce rates. This fact is illustrated by Bumpass (1990), who indicates that a “high level of marital instability dominates core aspects of family life for the majority of the population and challenges family norms” (p. 485). Therefore, the sharp decline in marriage rates, the increase in divorce proportions, cohabitation and homosexuality in the American society have been seen as signs of social and moral shift, a change in family landscape and lack of trust in the marriage institution. The disturbing image of



American family is best sketched by American playwright Sam Shepard (1996) who remarks:

The family was no longer viable, no longer valid somehow in everybody's mind. The nuclear family and all these coined phrases suddenly became meaningless. We were all independent, we were all free of that, we were somehow spinning out there in the world without any connection whatsoever ... which is ridiculous. (p. 143)

Thus, the American concept of marriage is redefined, losing its place as a valued institution. It is no longer built on mutual fulfilment or emotional intimacy (Küçük, 2008). Against this situation, Edward Albee's drama emerges as a protest against the materialistic society which promotes the fervent pursuit of material gains, the annihilation of ethics and tolerance of sexual promiscuity (Dogra, 1987). As such, “patched into a realistic play,” Albee “turns the whole into a crazy mixture of the obvious and the incredible” (McCarthy, 1987, p. 18). Through his theatre, Albee





depicts the incongruities and dysfunction of husband/wife relationships and negotiates the very habits that he seeks to change. He uncovers the sham of an ideal American society and exposes the delusions of its emblematic family ideal (Suneetha, 2008). The married couples in his plays experience sick marriages riddled with cheating, conflicts and extramarital affairs, where love is supplanted by hatred and violence (Kaur, 2013). Pendse (2009) argues that by exposing familial frictions, Albee debunks the legend of the happy American marriage. By holding the mirror up to life, Albee discloses the reality of the American family of his age, “showing its values to be incoherent and inhuman” (McCarthy, 1987, p. 8). He exhibits the destructive consequences of the social ferment and touches on the psychosomatic problems and tribulations of the married couples who fail to conform to their traditional gender roles.



Applying psychoanalytically oriented criticism, the study hopes to examine Albee’s portrayal of married couples in the selected plays and reveal the unconscious psychological motivations for their deviant behaviours and unstable personalities in order to determine the sources of the dysfunctionality of the marital relationships and onto what it is projected. Though some critics have recognized the presence of psychological aspects in some of the selected plays, a few have done little more than mentioning them in passing or concentrating on some psychoanalytic concepts like sexuality and fantasy neglecting many others. For instance, Gilchrist (2011) applies Julia Kristeva’s psycho-linguistic theories together with Freudian psychoanalytic theory to discuss only the concepts of sexuality and fantasy in his article “Right at the Meat of Things: Virginia Woolf in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” Similarly, Blum (1969) focuses on the concepts of sexuality and fantasy of adoption in his “A





Psychoanalytic View of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” Some researchers use other psychological theories rather than Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality to deal with the problem of a marital break-up in Albee's selected drama such as Falsafi, Khorashad and Abedin (2011) who use Jungian analytic theory of Archetypes to analyse characters' personality aspects in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?*, and Machalická (2002) who applies Skynner's psychological theory to examine philosophical and psychological aspects in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance*. On the other hand, Kaibr and Jingjing (2018) implement a blend of psychological theories to analyse the state of anxiety and sense of loss in *The Zoo Story*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance*. Additionally, most studies, which have been carried out on Albee's theatre, tackle the theme of unsatisfactory marital relationships in the chosen plays from a social viewpoint and attribute the failure of these marriages to societal factors only. Thus, scant attention has been paid to the study of the psychological causes of dysfunctional marriages in the selected Albee plays. To the knowledge of the researcher, no work has thoroughly psychoanalysed the characters of married couples in the plays under study or has addressed the unconscious psychological reasons behind their dysfunctional marital relationships in terms of the Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, namely the unconscious, the tripartite psyche, sexuality and defence mechanisms.





1.6 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are threefold:

- 1- To investigate dysfunctional marital relationships of the American family as depicted in Edward Albee's plays: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), *The Ballad of The Sad Café* (1963), *A Delicate Balance* (1966) and *The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia?* (2002).
- 2- To psychoanalyse the married couples' characters in terms of Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality so as to reveal the underlying psychological reasons behind their dysfunctional marital relationships.
- 3- To analyse the connection between Albee's personal life and the selected plays besides showing his attitudes towards the American lifestyle.



1.7 Questions of the Study

- 1- How are dysfunctional marital relationships portrayed in Edward Albee's plays *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*
- 2- What are the psychological reasons behind dysfunctional marital relationships in the selected Albee plays?
- 3- What is the connection between Albee's personal life and the selected plays, and what are his attitudes towards the American lifestyle?





1.8 Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

In the present study, the Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality is employed to probe into dysfunctionality of marital relationships in selected plays by Edward Albee because it is the most relevant approach to psychological literary criticism. This theory views literature through the lens of psychology, using the language and methods of psychoanalysis. It explores the psychology of the author as well as characters of a particular literary work, treating them as case studies. Freudian psychoanalytic theory proposes a relationship between dreams and literature. Freud argued that while the dreamer finds an outlet for his repressed desires, libidinous and aggressive drives in dreams, the author expresses his/her unconscious in literature, creating narratives or images and using disguised symbolic forms. In *Creative Writers and Daydreaming* (2013a), Freud postulates that works of art and literature are merely reflections of the urges, instinctual impulses, sufferings, tortured mind and personality of the artist or author. He sees literary writings as wish-fulfilling daydreams and a channel for the unfulfilled wishes, suppressed feelings, or stored tensions. He finds links between the unconscious mind of the author and dreams and uncovers the motivating subconscious forces behind his/her creative writing. Freud believed that what a writer cannot do or communicate because of social rules is articulated via his/her literary work.

In addition, the psychoanalytic theory exhibits the impacts of troubled childhoods, dysfunctional families, traumatic events and curbed sexuality on people's psyches, which leads to unbalanced personalities that suffer from different psychological ills. Psychoanalysis reveals the pains, fears, traumas, inner conflicts and





unresolved complexes people experience during their early life. It provides a background to childhood development and illustrates how repression of and not gratification of infantile sexuality could result in a fixation of the libido on a certain psychosexual stage. Moreover, Freudian theory demonstrates the conflict between the structures of personality—the id, ego, and superego—and refers to the defence mechanisms the ego adopts to protect itself against illicit desires of the id and feelings of anxiety or guilt. It further identifies the underlying psychological drives which govern people's behaviours and actions, affect their social lives and precipitate the emergence of sexual deviances.

The Freudian theory basically concerns itself with the workings of the unconscious mind and the interplay between it and the conscious mind. Hence, the unconscious is the central concept of psychoanalytic theory. It is “dynamic” or motivational and in conflict with consciousness” (Cloninger, 2004, p. 23). Freud (1963a) maintained that the unconscious is the storehouse of thoughts, drives, instincts, fears, unpleasant memories and sad events. He postulated that human actions and behaviours are motivated and determined by unconscious psychological forces. Furthermore, Freud (1963c) said that “the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must ... exist for very considerable period of time in a condition of ... unconsciousness” (p. 117). Freud (1960) classified personality into three layers: the conscious, which denotes everything people are aware of; the preconscious, which is the repository of thoughts and memories that people are unaware of at the moment, but they can recall; and the unconscious, which contains all things people are unconscious of. Furthermore, Freud (1960) posited that the human mind consists of three basic structures. The id, which is the unconscious, is the amoral and instinctual





part of the psyche that operates to gain pleasure and reduce tension. The ego is the logical part of the mind that regulates the libidinal desires of the id and delays them until they are released in an acceptable way. Finally, the superego is the internal censor of the mind that represents the ethics and moral restrictions of society and works to achieve perfection. Another essential component of Freud's theory (1993; 2013b) is the defence mechanisms, which are techniques employed unconsciously by the ego to defend itself against feelings of pain and anxiety and to deal with the forbidden impulses of the id and avoid conflict with the superego.

Another key idea of psychoanalytic theory is sexuality. Freud thought that sexuality is the motor force which underlies all human conduct and acts. In his view, sexuality is a wide term that extends beyond intercourse and reproduction to include all behaviours or experiences which bring pleasure and avoid displeasure (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). Freud (1960) conceded that sexuality comprises two instincts: 'Eros', the sexual instinct, which directs people towards life; and 'Thanatos', the death instinct, which drives them to destruction. Freud (2016) theorised that sexuality begins in infancy and claimed that childhood is a period of intense sexual experience. In this respect, children progress through three major psychosexual stages of development, the oral, anal, and phallic, where a child derives his/her pleasure from certain erogenous zones. According to Freud, the successful resolution of the conflicts occurring at each psychosexual stage produces a normal and healthy personality; otherwise, harmful fixations emerge. Furthermore, Freud (2016) stressed the significance of childhood years because the roots of adult personality traits and sexuality are planted during childhood. Freud (2012) also referred to the influence of the parent-child relationship on the social life of an individual and his/her selection of





a marriage partner as an adult. He averred that while men choose wives who are similar to their mothers, women select husbands who are akin to their fathers because both have a repressed sexual attraction to their parents of the opposite sex, but they have kept it in their unconscious.

Thus, Freudian psychoanalytic theory is deemed appropriate to investigate the psychological roots of dysfunctional marital relationships in the plays under study. Implementing this theory, the researcher will conduct a psychoanalytic study to examine the husband/wife characters of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* respectively. Chapter 4 of the research offers an account of dysfunctional marital relationships portrayed by the playwright and uncovers the psychological reasons which bring about the break-up of marriage and its dysfunction. In Chapter 5, the study psychoanalyses the married couples' personalities in accordance with the Freudian concepts, the unconscious, the tripartite psyche, sexuality and defence mechanisms, in order to explore the unconscious psychological motives behind their aberrant behaviours and actions and the mechanisms they use to guard their egos against pain. To provide insights into the psychology of the playwright, his latent desires and anxieties, Chapter 6 discloses the connection between Edward Albee's own personal life and the selected plays and shows how the playwright conveyed his painful experience as an adopted child through his fictional characters, using writing as a mechanism to sublimate his sufferings into a creative literary work. Additionally, Chapter 6 discusses Albee's personal attitudes towards the lifestyle of the American society. Chapter 7 summarises the conclusions the study arrives at and gives recommendations for future research.



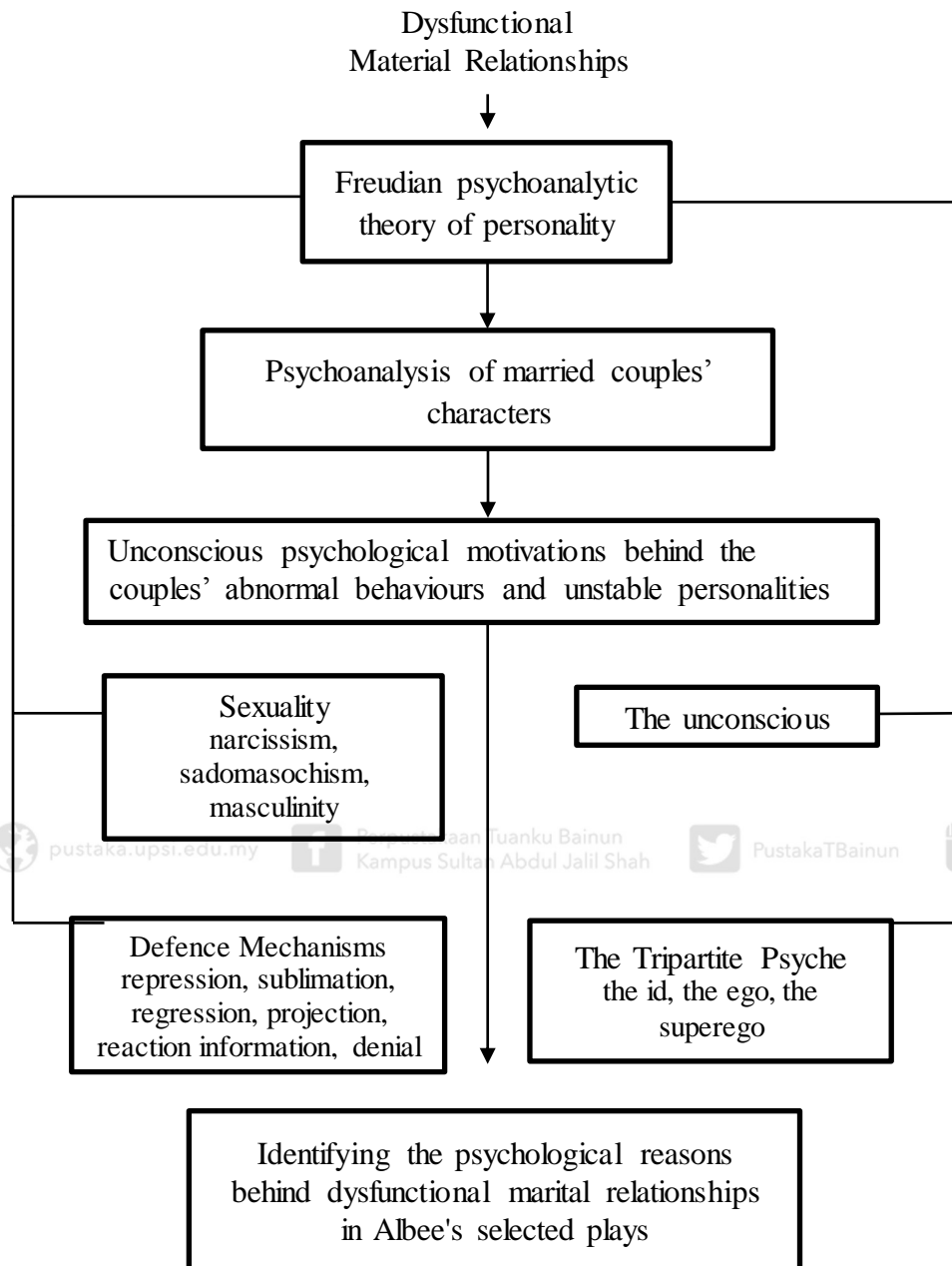


Figure 1.1. Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework



1.9 Methodology

The researcher implements the findings of Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality to conduct a textual analysis on the selected dramatic texts by Edward Albee. The choice falls on four plays which are *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of The Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia*. The plays under study are examined and evaluated psychoanalytically, using the language and methods offered by psychology, which will bring into focus the husband/wife characters. Delving deep into married life, the playwright depicts dysfunctional relationships in the American society and creates disturbing images of married couples who seem to grapple with feelings of dissatisfaction. The married people in Albee's plays selected for this study struggle to attain a cohesive sense of selfhood and gain psychological balance as well as social welfare.

The textual study starts with investigating the family background of the spouses, their personality traits, behavioural attitudes, physical qualities, traumatic experiences in the past, their roles within the family structure and the social as well as psychological factors which underlie the couples' abnormal personalities and deviant behaviours. Employing Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, i.e., sexuality, the unconscious, the tripartite psyche, and defence mechanisms, the study explores the psychology of husband/wife characters to show how do married couples' characters express their repressed desires?, how do they manifest the contents of the unconscious?, what are the unconscious psychological forces that motivate them to behave in a particular way? what mechanisms do they adopt to cope with their pain and anxiety?, and are they controlled by the id or the superego? Through the lenses of Freudian psychology, the study also probes into the personality of Edward Albee himself to unveil the correlation between his own personal life and the themes and motifs in the selected literary works.

In the first section of the analysis, Chapter 4, the study gives a summary of the marital life of characters in each selected play, their psychological traumas, and the main psychological causes of their dysfunctional marital relationships. The second section of the study, Chapter 5, provides an adequate account of the husband/wife personalities as portrayed in the selected Albee plays: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of The Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who IS Sylvia?* respectively. In so doing, the married couples are psychoanalysed according to the aforementioned Freudian psychoanalytic concepts so as to reveal the reasons behind their unconventional behaviours, inner conflicts, agony, and what drives them to be psychologically unwell. The first concept, sexuality, is employed to demonstrate





the sexual deviations of married characters, their fixations and unresolved complexes afflicted on them throughout the psychosexual stages of childhood. The individual inner ego is the focus of psychoanalytic theory. It views the unconscious as an unstable structure of human mind that constantly changes due to the interaction between psyche energies, libido and desires. Thus, the unconscious concept is applied to expose what intrapsychic conflicts that the couples suffer from and how they reveal the invisible dark side of their minds. On the other hand, the tripartite psyche concept is used to show whether or not the husband/wife characters are well-balanced individuals and have healthy personalities where and if there is a balance between the id, ego and superego, or they are dominated by the id and have weak superegos. As far as defence mechanisms are concerned, the study explains the devices these married couples assume unconsciously to fend off stress and safeguard themselves from bitter realities of their lives. Examining the marital couples' psyches in the light of Freudian psychoanalytic concepts will identify the underlying psychological reasons that lie behind marital dysfunction in the selected plays.

In the last section of the analysis, Chapter 6, the researcher considers the connection between Albee's personal life and the selected plays. It displays how the author sketches his fictional characters to express his unconscious mind, bruised ego and troubled childhood. Further, the analysis exposes the defence mechanism the playwright takes up to legitimize his suppressed wishes and undesirable impulses. Besides, the analysis clarifies how Albee exploits his drama to voice his attitudes towards the contemporary American society.

1.10 Significance of the Study

The study of marital relationships in American society and the psychological causes of their dysfunction in the selected plays by Edward Albee is important to explore because it will advance our understanding of the psychological problems leading to dysfunctional marriages, in general. Further, the psychoanalysis and interpretation of literary discourse as drama serve to illustrate the methods whereby one can read literature with a psychoanalytic eye and how psychoanalysis operates in literature. Furthermore, this research will add a new dimension to literary criticism and develop





the ideas and themes discussed by other studies which contend only with the social reasons for the breakdown of marriage in Albee's plays. As such, the study could be of benefit to students of literature and psychology as it will be an accessible explanation of Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

What is more, the analysis of the married couples' characters in terms of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory can help a reader to understand the psychological side of human personality and make him/her aware of the unconscious psychological forces underlying people's perverted behaviours and unacceptable actions. This also elucidates how the mind, instincts and sexuality work and what fears, traumas and conflicts spouses suffer from, a matter that brings about their marital troubles. Additionally, introducing the husband/wife characters as case studies, this research illuminates the way for therapists and psychoanalysts and aids them in diagnosing and treating people who are emotionally disturbed or psychologically damaged. The value of this study as well lies in giving readers a deep insight into the psychology of human beings, helping them to gain profound knowledge about other people and themselves which would sustain their personal psychological health.

1.11 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to investigating dysfunctional marital relationships in the American society as depicted in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, *A Delicate Balance* and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* The researcher selects the aforementioned plays, among other Albee plays, because they





comprise the dysfunctional marriages she seeks to explore and analyse in the light of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality in order to find the psychological reasons behind their dysfunction, not to mention that the four selected plays have not been previously researched in accordance with Freud's psychoanalytic concepts, viz., the unconscious, the tripartite psyche, sexuality and defence mechanisms. Additionally, those plays are well-known and fall in the field of family drama that shows the psychological factors which have a bearing on the marital relationships in contemporary American society. Further, those plays are selected because they are autobiographical and self-referential in that they highlight significant aspects of Albee's own personal life and expose the psychological effects of past experiences, stored in the mind of the playwright since childhood, on his personality as an adult.



As an adopted child who lived a troubled childhood in an intensely dysfunctional family, Edward Albee drew a stark portrait of the marital relationships and familial life of the American society between the 1960s and 2000s. His drama is a satirical sketch of the fragile stability of the middle-class family. It presents a bitter photo of married couples who resemble his adoptive parents, whose spousal relationship was strained. In the plays selected for the study, Albee focussed on the problems of marital relationships in the contemporary American society and highlighted the psychological reasons for their dysfunction. He delved deep into the psyche of his characters to disclose their inner conflicts, traumatic experiences, psychotic anxieties, repressed desires and neurotic fixations which have impeded their psychological development as fully functioning cohesive selves. Further, he demonstrated the mechanisms husband/wife characters adopt to defend their egos against anxiety and bitter realities. So, examining these plays provides a deep





understanding of the psychology of Albee's married couples besides revealing the unconscious psychological forces which control their psyches and determine their behaviours.

1.12 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter concerns itself with the background of the study, where it gives an account of the American conception of marriage and family, changes in their structures and the reasons behind the breakdown of marriage in American society. It also provides the definition of the dysfunctional, unhappy marriage. The second part of this chapter involves the statement of the problem, objectives and questions of the study, theoretical/ conceptual framework of the research, the methodology used by the researcher to carry out the study in addition to the significance and limitations of the study.

