

## “Depiction Of Social Morality and Family Dynamics in the Plays of Arthur Miller”

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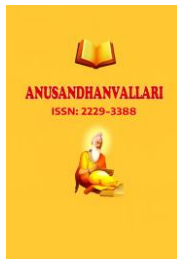
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### Abstract

This paper investigates the interrelated themes of social morality and family dynamics in Arthur Miller's plays. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate what Miller wants to impress upon our minds through his plays, that a man should subordinate his personal interests and even the interest of his family to the interests of society at large. In his plays, Miller shows his deep concern with social issues. Arthur Miller has focused upon a single subject, “the struggle of the individual attempting to gain his „rightful” position in his society” and his family. In simple words, his dramas deal with man's relationship with society and family. He has brought back into the theatre the drama of social questions. Each of his four chief plays is built on a family situation. “*All My Sons*” and “*Death of a Salesman*” on the father - son conflict. “*The Crucible*” and “*A View from the Bridge*” on the triangle of sex. Dealing with some vital family problems, they criticize or comment upon the structure of society. So they must be considered as conventional social plays. His plays are obviously family concerned. But his heroes are more than failed husband and fathers because he has recognized that the most impressive family plays, from Oedipus through Hamlet to Ghosts, have modified the concept of the family and of the individual under the pressure of society. Each of his heroes is involved in one way or another in a struggle that results from his acceptance or rejection of an image that is the product of his society's values and prejudices. Miller's plays masterfully depict social morality and family dynamics as intertwined forces shaping human tragedy, critiquing the erosion of ethical responsibility under conformity. Miller's plays explore the emotional and social impact of family dynamics on individuals and their choices. His greatest works like “*Death of a Salesman*” and “*All My Sons*”, predominantly explore American theme and themes they also resonate with universal human experiences, focusing on family dynamics and societal expectations.

**Keywords:** Society, family, individual, tragedy conflict.

Arthur Miller is one of the top-most American playwright of today. He is always bracketed with O'Neil and Tennessee Williams and is one of the five internationally well-known dramatists of America (Eugene O'Neil, Thorsten Wildes, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee). In the last two decades of a parade of playwright has marched, strutted, danced and crawled to oblivion whilst the plays of Miller continued to allure. Arthur Miller, stepping firmly and boldly, has remained on the high road of American drama. Miller believes that the serious playwright must write social drama. For his, however social drama is not simply an arraignment of the evils of society. The true social drama, which he calls the “whole Drama”, must recognize that man has both a subjective and an objective existence, that he belongs not to himself and his family but to the world beyond. This definition fits the four plays that made him famous- “*All My Sons*” (1947), “*Death of a Salesman*”(1949), “*The Crucible*”(1953) and “*A View from the Bridge*” (1955) , with a shift in emphasis, it also

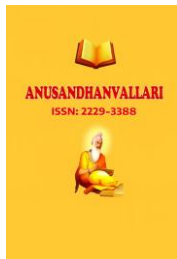


fits the two plays. After the Fall, and Incident at Vichy produced in 1964. Arthur Miller's writing style is often characterized as a mixture of realism and expressionism. He is known for writing plays that explore social and political issues, often through the lens of the individual experience. His dialogue is often naturalistic, with characters speaking in a vernacular that reflects their backgrounds and social status. Miller's writing also features elements of symbolism, as he uses objects and actions to represent larger ideas and themes. Miller's writing style is marked by a deep interest in the human experience and a commitment to exploring the ways in which social and political structures impact individual lives. His work is often characterized by a sense of urgency, and a belief in the transformative power of storytelling. If a dramatist must concern himself with both the psychological man and the social man, he has inevitably to deal with the problem of identity. It is what Miller has always written about and it is clearly the subject of "Incident at Vichy" as it is of "*All My Sons*". A staunch patriot and humanist, Miller's work conveys a deeply moral outlook whereby all individuals have a responsibility both to themselves and to the society in which they must live.

In Miller's results from either his acceptance or his rejection of image of himself. Being a playwright of that era of crisis Miller depicted it with utmost artistry and represented it in such a way that it no more remained an anxiety of a single family but the anxiety in general. This image grows out of the values and the prejudices of society. That society may be as narrow as Eddie Carbone's neighborhood in "A View from the Bridge" or as wide as the contemporary American that formed the Willy Loman whom we meet in "*Death of a Salesman*". No doubt Miller criticizes society, a business – oriented society in which corruption, selfishness, indifference a system that tenses men into a machines or submarines, yet it is increasingly clear that his primary concern is with personal morality, the individual's relation to a society in which the various goods are almost as suspect as the vicious methods. So "the theme that recurs in all his plays the relationship between a man's identity and the image that society demands of him is a major one; in one way or the other it has been the concern of most serious playwrights. A big theme is not enough, of course; Miller has the ability to invest it with emotion. He is sometimes emotional sometimes romantic about both his characters and their situations, but sentiment and romance if they can command an audience without drawing it, are necessarily vices. It is quite understand that Miller should be regarded as a writer with a message whether affirmative or negative, humane or socialistic. It is a known fact that he has been accused for his early socialistic association. He has affirmed his belief that tragedy bring us knowledge pertaining to the right way of living in the world. His plays suggest to men to understand themselves and their limitations, not to be over ambitions and over- Grady to achieve dignity to develop their talents and to avoid self-defeat; individuals must acknowledge and adjust to their limitations rather than obsessively pursue egoistic ambitions. His work is often characterized by a sense of urgency, and a belief in the transformative power of storytelling. Let's discuss three of the main themes in Arthur Miller's works: society versus the individual, guilt and blame, and the American dream. Arthur Miller explores the complex relationship between individuals and the rest of society.

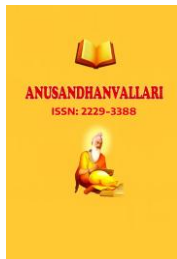
Arthur Miller's characters often confront profound dilemmas rooted in conflicts between personal loyalty, societal expectations and individual integrity. Those choices drive the tragedies forcing protagonist to weigh self-preservation against ethical responsibility. Protagonist like Willy Loman and Joe Keller embody the tension between family duty and broader justice. Joe Keller faces the dilemma of confessing his wartime profiteering which shipped faulty plane parts killing pilots, or maintaining his façade for his family's sake. His son Chris grapples with filial love versus outrage at his father's moral blindness torn between forgiveness and demanding accountability. This clash exposes the cost of prioritizing narrow self-interest over communal welfare.

Arthur Miller's plays often critique social morality through characters who grapple with ethical dilemmas amid capitalist pressures and societal expectation family dynamics serve as a microcosm for broader communal responsibilities revealing tensions between personal ambition and collective duty. His works highlight



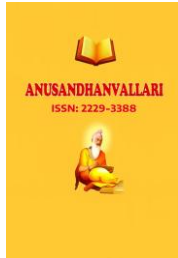
how moral failing ripple from individuals to families and society. In "*All My Sons*". Miller exposes the evils of the economic basis of social mischief. The play is a story of Joe Keller, a successful businessman who had earned a lot of money during the war by manufacturing defective cylinders for aero plane engines. In the course of the play, the discovery is made that his pilot son Larry, believed to have died in an air-crash, had deliberately smashed his plane to „pay“ for his father“s evil which had taken the lives of several other pilots. It is left to the other son, Chris to bring home the truth to his father. At the end, Joe his penance to his son and he society Miller strongly argues in favour of a certain positive relationship between the individual and society. He exposes human tendency to put one“s self above the society. for him there is a continuing inter-relationship a possibility of development. The dramatist as Miller insists must not conceive of man as a private entity and his social relation as something thrown at him but rather he must come to see that “society is inside of man and man is inside of society and you cannot even create a truth fully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not “*All My Sons*” may be considered as a drawn of family relationships. Though Miller appears to be arguing strongly in favour of a certain positive relationship between the individual and society, but in “*All My Sons*” family relations are predominant. The play deals with relations between the mother and the son, the father and the brother and the sister and so on. In this play, Joe Keller“s wartime profiteering exemplifies moral compromise for family, security, shattering his son“s ideals and underscoring collective guilt. Chris Keller confronts his father, exposing the conflict between paternal loyalty and societal accountability which destroys family unites. The play critiques the American Dream“s ethical voids, prioritizing profit over human lives. The prominent aspect of the plays of Arthur Miller is that he has brought back into the theatre, the drama of social questions. All the plays of Arthur Miller have an essence of realism in it. The realistic dramatist is one who seeks truth to observe facts (facts about to outer world or his own feelings), while an idealist dramatist wants to create an ideal picture, whether true or not. Arthur Miller as a dramatist tries to include within the limits of drama almost everything and not just merely presenting one-sided view of it. In his drama, he deals with all the facts of contemporary American life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful as well as the ugly. Life, in his dramas, is presented with detached accurate, regardless of morals or ideological conventions. The drama of social questions in England were rejected on the grounds of being superficial because the dramatic forms in which social questions were ordinarily raised had become inadequate; declined low-pressure naturalism. Arthur Miller, one of the greatest American dramatists, acts as a catalyst to break out from this deadlock through his reinvigorating passion of revival and effective range of experiment in dramatic forms.

“*Death of a Salesman*” is not so much concerned about with the life of an individual, but the life of a community that Willy represents. In other words it is not only Willy“s alone tragedy but the tragedy that the entire community is facing. He, as we find in the play, is a sincere hardworking salesman, who aspires to lad an honourable, successful life and wishes to earn respect for him as well as for his family n the society. His aim in life is to earn comfort in order to provide his family a decent living. But the adverse circumstances compel him to benefit in the society and gradually crush him along with his „Dream“. With his suicide Willy intended to refute the accusation that he was in reality a failure in every sphere of life. “*Death of a Salesman*” portrays Willy Loman“s delusions of success straining father-son bonds with Biff, critiquing hollow individualism. Willy“s suicide reflects failed paternal responsibility, mirroring societal pressure on mascots and provision. Biff“s rebellion highlights generational clashes over integrity versus illusion. “*Death of a Salesman*” according to Miller, is a tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiers mess who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. So “*Death of a Salesman*” is not merely a drama of domestic quarrels between a father and his sons, a drama of conflict between psyche and conscience between religiosity and ir religiosity between a salesman and a manufactures, but of a conflict between the individual and society, a conflict between man“s values and his environment. The playwright was trying in “*Salesman*” to set forth what happens when a man does not have a



grip on the forces of life and has no sense of values which sell lead him to that and of grip". "*Death of a Salesman*" is the most poignant statement of man as he must face himself. "Its basic themes is man's loss of conscience loyalty to family also is its theme. It is an anatomy of failure. Nevertheless, in *Death of a Salesman*" Miller not only placed on trial moral values of his central character –Willy Loman, the salesman, but a society that by competitions compels its individuals to forsake native talents in favour of achieving material success at the price of human dignity. Rightly says Miller "I think Willy Loman is seeking for a kind of ecstasy in life which the machine civilizations deprives people of. He is looking for his self-hood, for his immortal soul, so to speak and people who don't know the intensity of the guest think he is odd, but a lot of salesman in a line of work where intensity and individualism are acquired by the nature of the work have a very intimate understanding of his problem more, so, I think, than literary critics who probably need strive less after a certain point.....Willy is a bob....Willy is a victim". Willy Loman struggles between clinging to the illusory American Dream of success through charisma and confronting his failures, contemplating suicide to secure his family's future. His son Biff must choose between emulating Willy delusions or pursuing honest self-reliance, rejecting inherited materialism. These decisions highlight integrity's battle against capitalist myth's. The irony of Willy's tragedy is that the material goal is a mirage. Not only does he fail as the father, the head of the family, but he never comes anywhere his goal of immense wealth. The implication is that if he had succeeded he would not even the have been happy, but he cannot achieve. He achieves even the philistine satisfaction of money. He is in moral and financial ruin by the end of the play, and can only think of taking his life so his son Biff, can at least have the benefit of his insurance policy. In condemning Willy Loman to due by his own hand. Miller is actually condemning the economic system that fashioned his fate. Miller's own plays live up to his definition. They are both social dramas and tragedies. *All My Sons* is clearly in tradition, of Ibsen, show and Galsworthy. The tragedies arises out of an inner conflict between the hero's affection and the loyalty he had for his father and is concept of justice and universal brotherhood which the father offended. In "*Death of a Salesman*" also there is the same emphasis on social forces as the source of tragedy. By this play Miller tries to justify the use of the common as the tragic hero. In the conflict the hero gains "size" that tragic stature them is spuriously attached to the high born in our minds. In "*The Crucible*" there is a focus both on the social problem and the social conditions, both on the tragic hero and the social context in which he is. It is the evil in the society that crushes the protagonist Gills Corey, Rebecca Nurse, and others. "*The Crucible* theme is the conflict between man's raw deeds and his conception of himself". In "*A View from the Bridge*" fate is seen to some extent as external to a man a condition of environment. But here it is expressed largely through individual persons rather than conceptions and institutions through a coming together of persons whose presence takes on dramatic significance only in relation to the protagonist. Eddie Carbone contends with his incestuous feelings or niece Catherine versus familial and community codes, betrayed by reporting illegal immigrants. His choice between suppressed desire and honor leads to downfall, underscoring immigrant loyalty's tragic demands. "*All My Sons*" depicts stronger loyalty to family over society compared to "*Death of a Salesman*". Joe Keller's unwavering prioritization of his family's security justifies his criminal actions, farming societal victims as outsiders. Joe rationalizes shipping faulty parts by claiming "they were all my sons," elevating nuclear family above communal welfare which ultimately destroys both.

Unlike Shakespeare Miller understands the fact that tragedy cannot be generated from social drama. Certainly in this respect he can be well compared with Galsworthy who also fuses social drama with tragedy. Undoubtedly Miller presents all his characters in the light of social problems. Arthur Miller's plays deeply explore social morality and family dynamics, portraying characters torn between personal ambitions and ethical responsibilities within flawed American society. His works critique capitalism, conformity and the American Dream often through tragic family conflicts that reveal broadest societal ills. Miller's plays have multiple themes and ideas. But the central theme is the relationship between a man's identity and the image that society demands of him. Here is the struggle of the individuals attempting to gain his rightful position in his society and



in his family. Miller's plays depict an intricate web of secrets, betrayals and denial that fractures familial bonds. The characters inability to communicate openly and confront painful truths prevents healing and often act as a catalyst for tragedy. It is therefore concluded that Miller uses the family as a powerful lens to examine the ethical responsibilities of individuals within a complex and often morally compromised society, suggests that personal and social morality are inextricably linked.

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