



THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF ARTHUR MILLER'S CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY IN REFERENCE TO 'DEATH OF A SALESMAN'

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ABSTRACT

War forms social and economic progression by destroying the existing ideologies of the society. It always reshapes the social infra-structure. The amalgamation of the ambition and realization leads the civilization to its extreme frustration to fulfill the dream of the capitalists. Therefore, social representation paves the way to its understanding of the humane mannerisms in the context of economic progression. A death is not a periphery, more than that to point out the social follies and mal-practices of the capital society where human life is very less emphasized than profit. The philosophy of existential crisis becomes acute when the society searches for the meaning of life. Perhaps, 'American dream' made life much more critical and mechanical what was experienced by Arthur Miller and spread throughout the globe and caused not only the dream of representative but the death of a dream. It has often been said that *Death of a Salesman* is a harsh criticism of the American Dream.

KEY WORDS: Economic-progression, ideologies, infra-structure, American dream, capitalists, existential crisis

INTRODUCTION

After the World War I, the world economy went through depression in the world market. In the long run, American social structure collapsed. Following this, the World War-II created huge insecurity in the job market; thousands of Americans lost their way of living. The so called profiteers tried their best to make profit out of the employees sweat and blood without recognizing their contributions to the rapid growth of the economy. That business orientation caused the death of the 'American dream' which is focused on this play by Arthur Miller.

"He (Arthur Miller) is a popular playwright because he has the touch of common speech mingled with democratic idealism, poetic expression, and an ancient people's capacity for understanding the anguish of the soul" - Dennis Welland.

Well, though Arthur Miller is one the greatest dramatists of the world literature, he is not a prolific writer. The reason perhaps is that he wrote only when he had something fresh to say and he refused to cash in on an easy popularity by repeating himself. He had shown through his own methods of working that he was not easily satisfied with what he wrote. It was not lack of

invention, dearth of ideas that limited him, but an excess of self-criticism combined with a restlessness of intellect.

With Arthur Miller, post-war American drama acquired new dignity and imports Miller's insistence on man's inherited will to survive, on the solidarity of human ties and the perpetual wonder of experience, lifted his work from ideology and sensationalism alike. Miller once said, "*I am tired of seeing man as merely a bundle of nerves. That way lies pathology.*"

Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in a well off American family during the devastating World War I. But after few years his family had to undergo '*the great economic depression*' of late 1920s and early 1930s which caused a change in the family circumstances and made a great impression on Arthur Miller himself. His father had to leave his clothing business and consequently Miller started working for livelihood. The life was changed and he started leading a cursed life because of the '*American dream*'. His works show us the negative impacts of American motto '*business is business*'.

Now, we will discuss the term '*business is business*.'

America has always been a success-oriented society. It took its origins from man and woman who had the courage to sail across a thousand miles of unfriendly ocean to an unknown land and carve out a future for them by their own efforts. The pioneering spirit – the ability of early settlers to fight and conquer an often hostile environment – has always been a quality admired and emulated by succeeding generations of Americans. Inevitably this implies competitiveness, an eagerness to go ahead of other people- and if there are to be winners, then there must also be losers. This is certainly true in the world of business in which Willy Loman placed himself.

The success of American industry depends on a number of factors- natural resources, inventiveness, organization and enterprises- but none of these would matter if the final product could not be sold. This is where the salesman becomes important and admired. Men who can go '*riding on a smile and a shoeshine*' into the blue and bring back a book full of orders for their firms are the life blood of the organizations. They need powers of persuasion, the ability to get on with people, self confidence and persistence and of course they have to be '*well liked*'. Everything depends on personality and so each encounter with a customer is a challenge in which, in a sense, the salesman has to sell himself as well as the product. For those who succeed here are high rewards in salary and commission, promotion within the firm and, for some, even a seat on the board of directors. But if a salesman loses his touch and the buyers fail to smile back at him, then (Charley's remarks) '*that's an earthquake*'. Because in the materialistic world of '*business is business*', a failed salesman is of no use to any organization whether it is in America or other business oriented country.

The aim as well as success of American business methods in creating wealth is undoubted, but it has brought with it a hard-faced materialism that has created '*concrete jungles*' of cities and large number army of under-privileged people loving alongside those to whom success has brought affluence and comfort. The contrast between wealth and poverty in American society was dramatically illustrated in '*the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s*'- a time when Arthur Miller was a young man and when his father lost all fortune with businesses he had spent his life labouriously building up. Miller never forgot the terrible shock of those days and what

could happen to people, both rich and poor, caught in the financial collapse of the world markets as it was the result of the World War-I. Arthur Miller tried to emphasize on this devastating issues of human society which eventually converted the feudal society into a capitalistic society that resulted in the hollowness of human mind. Thus '*Death of A Salesman*' is heart-cry against a society which, for all material changes, appears to neglect the human element, the man thrown away like banana peel when he is no more of use to the authority, 'little boat looking for a harbour' and never reaches the destination because '*the only thing you've got in this world is what you can sell.*'

To unearth the real picture of the American social structure of Miller's contemporary age, the dissection of the title of '*Death of A Salesman*' is a must. Because the hidden truth lies in the meaningful title of the play is significant. The connection between the title of the play and the fate of Willy Loman is sufficiently obvious. The loss identity is evident in Willy Loman's recalling of Dave Singleman, all his life he tries to imitate, even after death, he expects honourable treatment as Dave is still being treated. The materialistic society leads to existential crisis. But an ironic dimension is added to it when we learn that Willy talking about Dave Singleman, his model of all salesmen should be. '*This man who could earn his livelihood at the age of eighty four simply picking up the phone in twenty or thirty different cities and obtains orders from buyers who knew and loved him, died on a train when he was on his business trip: - and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford, going into Boston....*', Says Willy with admiration. What is more, his funeral was attended by hundreds of sales men and buyers, living in the past he does, Willy imagines that he will have a similar funeral and Beef will be amazed when he will see so many people from so many states coming to pay a last tribute to his father. "*Ben that funeral will be massive*'...*He will see what I am, Ben! He is in for a shock, that boy!* The contradiction is between reality and appearance: '*Why didn't anybody come?*'-Linda's pathetic question. The last of Willy's dream comes to nothing. There is recognition of his passing by the world of business, not even from Howard Wagner, to whose firm Willy devoted his life. The sacrifice for a company gives nothing remarkable to him, just non-event. Only his family, one or two of his friends care and then they also move on '*the way of the world*' (*Ben Johnson*) to do what they can of the rest of their lives.

In an autobiography, Arthur Miller says that the title came from his laughter at Willy's self-contradictions. Again the remarks that the word 'death' in titles always suggested something austere and elevated. Now it would be claimed by a joker, a bleeding mass of contradictions, a clown...'

We can have further discussion that the title that has nothing to the imagination of this play ends, indeed, this is a story about the noble, cowardly death of Willy Loman, a travelling salesman. Miller, here, uses the time scheme of a few days, not a range of years, through which shows the rapid action of time as the world is moving very fast.

Willy Loman who is literally a '*lowman*' has so many personality traits accurate to real life. He was defiantly in a struggle to convince the world, he was, in real sense, unable to convince ownself. He could do better if he could cope with the materialistic American social structure.

This history of American economy of 1930s, Arthur Miller focuses, leads Willy to embrace the 'death'. He uses the term to expose the preoccupation with materialism after 'the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s' in accordance with two world wars. This is the main cause of Willy's mental agony. He is not willing to be the burden to the competitive world, nor is he willing to accept other's mercy. By the passage of time, he becomes a victim of 'loss of identity'. 'American dreams' is one of the essential elements for people to know American culture and American views of life. Before the state was founded, it was the dream of freedom, equality and the democratic system. During the 18th and 19th century, when America was mainly an agricultural society, the dream was transformed into self-reliance and self-confidence. As the human society develops into the 20th century, the dream of material development is prominently increased.

In this drama, (in flashback) Willy goes back to his happier past as a way to escape from the unsuccessful and unsatisfied reality. The happy time is set in 1928, one year before 'the Great Economic Depression' had occurred.

America experienced economic prosperity during and after the 1st world war but the vibrant ended with a bang – the great stock market crash of 1929. The collapse of Wall Street means terrible times; business failed, factories closed down and millions of Americans got themselves out of work and abandoned.

As 'the Great Economic Depression' deepened, the American dream had become a nightmare. The world of prosperity and opportunity turned into 'concrete jungles' of American dreams. The land of hope and optimism had become the land of despair. The Americans started to question all maxims on which they had leased their lives – democracy, capitalism, individualism.

As a modern drama, 'Death of a Salesman' possesses all present day characteristics – meaninglessness of relationship, nihilism, materialism, industrialism, individualism, lack of religious, modern stagecraft, expressionistic and impressionistic presentation of dramatic plot. The American dream has been centrally built around the idea of a commercialized family. This is the spiritual side, Biff sums it up: "*We've never told the truth for ten minutes in this house. The man doesn't know who we are. The man is gonna know*" It is Willy's fault that Biff feels that way, Willy's loneliness, unfaithfulness to Linda and insecurity leads to his affair in Boston with another woman. Willy buys stocking for woman in Boston and makes Linda mend her own, old ones. But Linda cares for Willy old, and constantly covers up for him and understands him. Willy feels for Biff, as he knows about Willy's affair, which would have had an inevitably traumatic effect on Biff's life. It would be devastating. Unluckily, Happy is doomed to repeat his father's American dream with his attitude to woman. He maintains casual relationships.

There is a huge gap in relationship among Willy and his sons. The relationship between Willy and Linda is also one way road. Though Linda loves and cares for Willy, Willy remains indifferent to her his whole life, even before committing suicide, he does not think of his aged wife. He goes with unjustified life without thinking of his life partner. This is why, we can say, Willy is a selfish person. This shows the hollowness of American social and family relationship.

Now we are going to discuss *'Death of a Salesman'* how Arthur Miller dissect his contemporary American imperfect society. Culture is the total view of a nation. Today's America is the result of long struggle for economic stability for about four hundred years.

But immense progress in science throughout the last few centuries has led to tremendous advancement in industry. But these advancements in industry, however, have not always brought advancements in our living. For some societies, this progress had added mass wealth and provided a high standard of living unparalleled throughout the society. For Willy Loman, American society has created only keen grief and sorrow and hardship, dream of good times to come. This is not only the protagonist's tragedy but also the tragedy of commercialized society. Willy's tragedy is due more to his society's flaw than to the uncountable flaws in his own character.

The most mentionable flaw in society is greed, the desire for getting ahead of the next guy. This malady is given preference in national level in a large scale in this play. However, this has become a buzzword in American society and it comprises the dreams of a man. Sometimes 'business is business' policy leads a man to great achievement, but sometimes this can force a man to tremendous ruin. Willy Loman is driven by the next one. But he is not high ambitious enough to nourish this dream. So he has no greed which can be the principal cause because he is a man of simplicity of with simple dreams. Willy Loman, here, is the victim of other's greed which leads him to his destruction. The developers take away the sun and give birth to shadows, his boss who reduces him to commission and his sons who reduce him to failure.

The other largest flaw in society is a lack of compassion. This could be as a result of overwhelming greed, the main culprit being great business.

"I am always in a race with the junk guard! I just finished paying for car and it's on last legs. The refrigerator consumes debts like a goddam mimic," Willy says.

Willy Loman's belief in this statement draws him to believe that great business lacks compassion. It is because of this that he is abandoned by Biff and disowned by Happy, left drabbling in toilet. It is this flaw that allows him to die a slow death and plays the greatest role in his eventual downfall.

The next greatest flaw in society is the lack of social security, a net which identifies people in trouble and seeks to remedy their situation. This system identifies people who are danger to themselves and treat or sedate them. Couple of these with pension plan and medical care and Willy Loman may not have met his premature death. He could receive mental support and any kind of treatment from the society.

CONCLUSION

In fine, we can say the 'business is business' policy which is the ultimate result of *'American dreams'* structured by American society leads the death of millions of salesman in the guise of *'Death of a Salesman'* Arthur Miller tried to pasteurize his contemporary society as it was because of American capitalistic point of view which, sometime, acts as evil for a particular class relying on whom the economy of America is run.

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