CHAPTER II

ARTHUR MILLER: THE MAN AND THE ARTIST

Arthur Miller is considered as one of the most remarkable dramatists in the 20th century American drama. Nissim Ezekiel in his introduction to *Arthur Miller: All My Sons* has remarked:

“Miller is usually regarded as an intellectual dramatist, that is, one whose plays express moral, social and political ideas. The nature and quality of these ideas have been discussed by his critics. Though there is considerable disagreement among them, they acknowledge as a rule that Miller is a strong critic of contemporary American society and its values. They also grant that Miller’s views, both explicit as well as implied, are clear and coherent.” (91)

Drama as a genre has a long tradition. There are two tragic traditions in drama in the western world—the austere and the experimental. Aristotle discussed the austere tradition in the plot-structure of *Oedipus Rex*. If we take into our consideration structure alone, we may easily see that Euripides, Shakespeare, O’Casey and Tennessee Williams belong to one tradition and Sophocles, Racine, Ibsen and Arthur Miller belong to another tradition. In this context, Robert Hogan has pointed out in his book, *Arthur Miller*:

“Yet the plays of Miller have more than merely a structural similarity to those of Sophocles, Racine and Ibsen. Like the plays of those earlier men,
Miller’s also vitally embody the austere tragic spirit. That embodiment, in a time which is overwhelmingly eclectic and experimental, gives the real meaning and the real importance to the work of Arthur Miller.”(6)

Arthur Asher Miller saw the light of day on October 17, 1915 in the Harlem Section of Manhattan in New York City. His father, Isidore Miller, an illiterate Jewish immigrant from Poland, was a successful ladies-wear manufacturer and shopkeeper and his mother, Augusta Barnett, born in New York, was also the daughter of a manufacture. She was a teacher in the public school that Miller attended in Harlem. His family was of Austrian (Poland) Jewish origin, but the Jewish element does not appear to have been significant in his upbringing and environment. Miller was only an average student. He was fond of playing sports than doing his schoolwork. Miller was also not so familiar with the teachers. Robert Hogan has mentioned in his book on Miller: “…although his teachers looked him up in their records after he had become a notable playwright, none of them could actually remember him.”(6) He could not get pass marks in many subjects, including Algebra three times. As a matter of fact, he was more interested in sports than school. Miller remarked about his early education:

“Until the age of Seventeen I can safely say that I never read a book weightier than Tom Swift and Rover Boys, and only verged on literature with some of Dickens.” (Varshney 16)
Miller’s family lost everything in the economic collapse of the 1930s. Living through young adulthood during the Great Depression, Miller was shaped by the poverty that surrounded him. The Depression demonstrated to the playwright the fragility and vulnerability of human existence in the modern era. The family was forced to move to a smaller home in Brooklyn. Only after graduating from high school in 1932 Miller thought of becoming a writer, when he read Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s (1821–1881) *The Brothers Karamazov*. The book made such a tremendous impact upon him that he made up his mind to be writer and went on saving some money for two and half years from his salary to finance a year in college. Miller attended City College in New York for two weeks, and then worked briefly with his father and in an auto parts warehouse to earn money to attend the University of Michigan. He enrolled there two years later as a student of journalism, continuing to work as a dishwasher and as a night editor at the newspaper ‘Michigan Daily’ to manage his expenses. He started writing plays and twice won Michigan’s Avery Hopwood Award in 1936. His play *The Grass Still Grows* also won the Theatre Guild National Award in 1938. The same year he did his B. A.

Miller returned to New York City to a variety of jobs, including writing for the Federal Theater Project, a government-sponsored program that ended before any of his work could be produced. He wrote comedy but plans for its production were abandoned when the theatre closed for wants of funds. In this way, Miller was thrown out of job but decided to write for radio and also to work in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and in a box
factory. He had contracted friendship with Mary Grace Slattery in college. He married her in 1940 and subsequently they had two children; Jane Ellen and Robert Arthur.

Many critics have pointed out his skills for writing radio plays. But Miller did not enjoy it. He wrote the radio plays to earn money so that he can survive. Robert Hogan has given his thought in this regard: “Miller did not relish writing for radio. The medium had too many taboos and restrictions, and its scripts had to be short and almost banally simple.”(7) Miller himself also remarked to an interview of New York Times: “I despise radio. Every emotion of a radio script has to have a tag. It’s like playing a scene in a dark closet.”(1947) However, Miller found more freedom in radio than many other writers. A good deal of his work was done for ‘The Cavalcade of America’ and ‘The Columbia Workshop’, two series which offered some opportunities for variety and originality. Many of these scripts written by him must have served as a kind of artistic discipline because Miller became skillful enough to turn out a completed half-hour script in eight hours.

A few of Miller’s radio scripts have been published. Their intrinsic merit is not enormous, but they help to refute the notion of Miller as radio-plays writer. Two of his speeches of his light fantasy The Pussycat and The Expert Plumber Who Was a Man, bring out the central preoccupations of Miller’s mature work. The speeches are about the man’s understanding about self. Miller focuses that a man fears most next to death is the
loss of his good name. Man is evil in his own eyes and the only way he can find respect for himself is by getting other people to say, he is a nice fellow. This precisely is the main concern of John Proctor at the end of *The Crucible* and Eddie Carbone at the end of *A View from the Bridge*. In this context, Hogan has pointed out in his book, *Arthur Miller*:

“This premise— that the most valid and fertile subject for the drama is the attempt to show man struggling to be at one with society—is basic to all of Miller’s work upto *The Misfits*. (8)

Miller discusses this individual struggle in society again and again. For instance, in his essay “On Social Plays” that forms the preface to the 1955 edition of *A View from the Bridge* he writes that this social concern is the primary one of the Greek tragedy writers and the attempts of modern dramatists to show man striving for his individuality could end only in meaningless case histories. Miller wrote about this in his essay “On Social Plays”:

“The social drama, as I see it, is the main stream and the antisocial drama a bypass, I can no longer take with ultimate seriousness a drama of individual psychology written for its own sake, however full it maybe of insight and precise observation. Time is moving; there is a world to make, a civilization to create that will move toward the only goal the humanistic, democratic mind can ever accept with honor. It is a world in which the human being can live as a naturally private, naturally engaged person, a
world in which once again a true tragic victory may be scored”. (Martin 57)

Without such a social basis, drama according to Miller would turn to its true opposite, the antisocial and ultimately anti-dramatic drama. This is what he wrote in 1950. Miller’s insistence on man’s inherited will to survive, his emphasis on the solidarity of human ties and the perpetual wonder of experience lift his work from ideology and sensationalism alike.

Miller grew up during the years of Depression in America, and this was the most important single factor which determined his work. During this period, he withdrew all the twelve dollars he had in the bank to buy a racing bicycle which a friend of his wanted to sell. On the very next day the bank closed down, and Miller saw crowds of people standing at its gate helplessly “Their money was inside! And they couldn’t get it, and they could never get it” (Timebends: A Life 5), Miller writes. He was glad that he had withdrawn his own money just in time. But, as the ill luck would have it, his cycle was stolen. It was the ‘Depression’ that gave him his compassionate understanding of the insecurity of man in modern industrial civilization, his deep-rooted belief in social responsibility and his moral earnestness.
Miller became a very successful playwright, but he had held such tiring jobs as truck-driver, crewman on a tanker and so on, not only do his plays suggest an author with a vast first hand acquaintance with a variety of ordinary employments, but they also show that he acquired acquaintance the hard way. Before writing his well known plays, he had already written eight or nine of what he calls ‘desk-drawer plays’, only one of which had been produced in the professional theatre. Because of an old football injury, he was rejected for military service, but he was hired to tour army camps to collect material for a movie, The Story of G. I. Joe. His notes from these tours were published as Situation Normal (1944). That same year the Broadway production of his play The Man Who Had All the Luck opened, closing after four performances. In 1945, his novel Focus, an attack on anti-Semitism (the hatred of Jewish people), appeared.

In March, 1954, the State Department refused to issue a passport to him to attend the opening of The Crucible in Brussels, on the ground that he was supporting the communist movement. He appeared before a Congressional Investigating Committee in 1956 and his categorical denial of support to the communist movement was accepted by the committee and in July his passport was renewed for a period of six months. The story did not end here and a year later, in May, 1957 he was declared guilty of contempt of Congress for his refusal to name the persons whom he had met ten years before at communist sponsored meetings of writers. Miller took a firm stand on this issue with a quiet dignity that earned him respectful applause. In his testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, he declared that he would not support any cause dominated by the communists but at the same time he would not create any trouble for any of his former
friends or associates by mentioning their names. He was never a card-holding member of the communist party but he was a communist till at least 1950 and supported communist inspired causes during one phase of his life.

No punishment was given to him in respect of the contempt charge and in August 1958, his conviction was unanimously reversed by the Appeals Court. A few months earlier he had been elected to the National Arts and Letters Institute by a hold decision which recognized not only his merits but also his significance as a liberal in American Society of the time. His marriage with Mary Slattery Grace ended in a divorce in June, 1956. On June 29, 1956 Miller married Marilyn Monroe, the well-known and glamorous film actress. The marriage of an intellectual to a film star who had just divorced a baseball champion created a lot of sensation. Just four days after this civil ceremony they were remarried in the Jewish faith. People were naturally surprised because there had been very little in his writings to suggest that Miller had been born and brought up in the Jewish faith. Perhaps the lack of emphasis on Jewish elements in his writings was a logical consequence of his liberalism rather than on attempt at concealment. His second marriage lasted only for four years. For the four years of its duration the marriage seemed to have achieved a stability that made its breakup even more unexpected than was its beginning. Miller then went abroad for a time, and met Miss Ingeborg Morath, a photographer of Austrian birth, whom he married in 1962. He has a daughter Rebecca and a son, Daniel by her.
The first great influence on Miller was that of his age, the age of Depression. Recalling the disturbing effects of Depression, Miller observes:

“I did not read many books in those days. The Depression was my book, years later I could put together what in those days were only feelings, sensations, impressions. There was the sense that everything had dried….Lawyers were selling ties. Everybody was trying to see something to everybody else….A reality had been secretly accumulating its climax according to its hidden laws to explode illusion at the proper time. In that sense 1929 was our Greek year. The gods had spoken the gods whose wisdom had been set aside or distorted by a civilization that was to go onward and upward on speculation, gambling, graft, and the dog eating dog. Before the crash I thought Society meant the rich people in the Social Register.” (Varshney 18)

Speaking about another impact of the Depression on himself Miller writes in his autobiography:

“… you can’t understand anything unless you understand its relations to its context. It was necessary to feel beyond the edges of things. That much, for good or ill, the great Depression taught me. It made me impatient with anything, including art, which pretends that it can exist for its own sake and still be of any prophetic instance….The structure of a play is always the story of how the birds came home to rest. The hidden will be unveiled,
the inner laws of reality will announce themselves I was defining my impression of 1929 as well as dramatic structure.” (Ibid 19)

As it has been already noted Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* influenced Arthur Miller tremendously. He writes that this book said to him, there is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature. The good are those who do this. This evil says that there is nothing beyond the face of the world, the surface of reality. Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly, in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature.

Ibsen, Chekov and O’Neill are the playwrights who have exercised significant influence on Miller. About Ibsen’s influence he writes:

“Nothing in his plays exists for itself, not a smart line, not a gesture that can be isolated. It was breath taking…With the greatest of presumption I convinced that great writer was the destroyer of Chaos, a man privy to the councils of the hidden gods who administer the hidden laws that bind us all and destroy us if we do not know them. And Chaos, for one thing, was life lived oblivious of history.” (Ibid 20)

Miller recalls O’Neill’s words ‘I am not interested in the relations of man to man, but of man to God’, and says:

“I too had a religion, however unwilling I was to be so backward. A religion with no gods but with godlike powers. The powers of economic
crisis and political imperatives which had twisted, torn, eroded and marked everything and everyone I laid eyes on.” (Ibid 20)

Miller was influenced by Chekhov also. He was always full of admiration for Chekhov. He made the following statement about him:

“‘It is hard to imagine any playwright reading Chekhov without envying one quality of his plays. It is his balance. In this I think, he is closer to Shakespeare than any other dramatist I know. There is less distortion by the exigencies of the telescoping of time in the theatre, there is less stacking of the cards, there is less fear of the ridiculous, there is fear of the heroic. His touch is tender; his eye is warm, so warm that the Chekhovian legend in our theatre has become that of an almost sentimental man and writer whose plays are elegies, postscripts to a dying age.” (Ibid 21)

Miller owes a lot to expressionism too. He studied the Greek and German expressionists who exercised their influence on him to a considerable extent. He remarks that he was struck by the similarity of their dramatic means in one respect. They are designed to present their hidden forces, not the characteristics of the human beings playing out those forces on the state. Miller also rejects the possibility of impact on problem plays upon him.

It is true that Miller was greatly influenced by the contemporary American drama. In a speech he said:
“The best of our theatre is standing tiptoe, striving to see over shoulders of father and mother. The worst is exploiting and wallowing in the self-pity of adolescence and obsessive key-hole sexuality. The way out, as the poet has said, is always through.” (Ibid 22)

According to him merely by developing more and more naturalism and by acting that ‘slice of life’ reportage which is to life what an overhead rumour is to truth, American drama will not reach the pinnacle if its glory. Miller believes that a great drama is a great jurisprudence. Balance is all and it will evade us until we can once again see man as whole.

Because of his early experience as a clerical and manual worker, and his direct knowledge of the lower middle class through his relations and friends, Miller’s characters are never aristocratic. They make money but they remain culturally under privileged. In Miller’s plays, a wide range of human social types may be found. Miller’s people inhabit a kind of subculture that is banal. Their speeches are colloquial and slang and character stoically American.

Miller, in his writings, tries to show the vulnerability of human existence in modern era. In most of his plays, Arthur Miller deals with the local themes of faith and problems of the confused national and personal life of America. Erik Mottram in his book, Development of Political Drama, has rightly remarked:
“His plays are written for and largely from the point of view of a man whose attitudes are not radical and innovatory but puzzled, confused and absolutely resolved not to break with his fellow men.” (23)

Miller once remarked: “I can’t live apart the world.” (Varshney 29) Yet his plays represent the alienation of man from his society and his fight to get back into it. *The Man Who Had All the Luck* is an exposure of a struggle for success. The question posed in this drama is: do men control their fate at all or are they no better than Jelly fish moving with the tide. The play deals with a story about an incredibly successful man who is unhappy with that success. *All My Sons* is based on a true story. It is a tragedy about a manufacturer who sells faulty parts to the military to save his business and to get his family establishment. For making his ‘family dream’ true he does the wrong things against the society. The play, concerned with morality and the conflict between family responsibility and social responsibility, appealed to a nation having recently gone through both a war and depression. *Death of a Salesman* depicts the battle of father and sons, in which Willy Loman destroys him for business and family. He tries to get success in any way. *Death of a Salesman* became one of the most famous American plays of its period. It is the tragedy of Willy Loman, a salesman destroyed by false values that are in large part the values of his society. It is an expressionistic play where Miller leaves the conflict between man and the society hanging fire between suicide and intolerably unchanging world.
Miller’s next play *The Crucible* is concerned with pure evil. The play is about with the contemporary McCarthy hysteria and it reconstructs the Salem witch trials of 1692 and so it naturally requires a lengthy exposition to establish the community ethics, law and attitudes toward non-conformity and truth telling before the moral climaxes of the end of the play. It may truly be said to be a reworking of *The Crucible* in contemporary terms. “The play is also a comment on how sexuality had become a convention in the theatre…..” (Ibid 47) Another important play of Miller is *A View from the Bridge* shows the desire of a man, the protagonist, Edie Carbone who is unable to control his family illusion. The play is just an example of how someone’s life can be instantly changed simply by the arrival of another human being. From a caring, loving, protective uncle, the character of Eddie Carbone changes into a monster of incestuous lust and violent anger. *After the fall* is not only Miller’s self-revelation but also it is a reasonable comment on the nature of profit, necessity and American moral behaviour in Mid-century.

Arthur Miller’s contribution to the development of the American drama is of considerable importance. Equally important is his role of an engaged public figure. He has delivered a series of lectures, written many articles on the theatre and its relation to world affairs. He has also played a significant role in liberal movements of the day. He acted as the international president of P. E. N., the world-wide society of poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, novelists and non-fiction writers. His presidency was responsible for promoting causes of international understanding through literature and of freedom for writers everywhere. On account of this successful career he was unanimously elected to a second term.
Arthur Miller has respect for his producers and directors and is usually glad to abide by his theatre collaborators’ final choice. He reads his plays to the acting company. He was very familiar and cooperative to different producers. He has a rapport with them. Erik Mottram has rightly commented on Miller in his book, *Development of Political Drama*:

“He leaves the actual staging, placement and movement of characters, or what in theatre parlance is called ‘Business’ almost entirely to the director. His reflections on the acting and direction are in the main judiciously helpful.” (47)

There have also been other powerful, often mind-altering plays: *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955), *Incident at Vichy* (1964), *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the Word and Other Business* (1972) and *The American Clock* (1979). There were the film *The Misfits* and the dramatic special *Playing for Time*. In addition, Miller has written two books of reportage: *In Russia* and *Chinese Encounters*, both accompanied by photographs by his wife Inge Morath, a professional photographer. His book *Salesman in Beijing* is based on his experience in China, where he directed *Death of a Salesman*.

Miller got recognition in his early days of writing with many prizes. The play *All My Sons* (1947) was awarded for the Tony Award for Best Authored Play in 1947 and also won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award. Miller was awarded the Pulitzer Prize
in 1949 for *Death of a Salesman*. The play also won New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and the Donaldson Award (voted upon by Billboard subscribers).

In 1987, Miller published his autobiography *Timebends: A Life*, in which he recalls his childhood in Brooklyn, the political turmoil of the 1950s, and the later half of the century. Miller continued to write until his death, winning the 1995 Olivier for his play *Broken Glass* –in total a career that spanned six decades. He died of heart failure in February, 2005 at his Roxbury, Connecticut home.

Miller occupies a place of high position in the world of the theatre of modern time. Europeans attach more importance to him than to any other American dramatist. His plays are staged not only in almost all capitals of Europe, but also everywhere else. Arthur Miller is considered as one of this century’s three great American dramatists, along with Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams.

Arthur Miller’s plays are remarkable for expressing moral, social, political and economic ideas of the contemporary American Society. Miller argues strongly in favour of positive relationship between the individual and society, against injustice, exploitation, competition, and vested private interests. He also exposes the human tendency to put one’s self above all which causes confusion and suffering. Miller has tried to portray the
American society where the people are bound to see the dream and the dream was to get the success. That dreams are shattered in different ways because the basic principles of the economic system (capitalism) in which Miller’s characters are enacted their part directly or indirectly blamed for the psychological distortions which they exhibit. After the economic depression of 1930’s, the success myth took a vital place. People were ready to get the success anyhow. They had an aspiration to earn a lot of money. They were eager to acquire wealth. They tried hard to keep the family united. The aims and objectives of this research are to find out whether the American dreams created by the American society are based on illusion and reality or not.

The term ‘American Dream’ needs to be clarified. The ‘American Dream’ encapsulates the dreams and ideals of generations of Americans. There is much debate over exactly which dreams and ideals these are, and the term is often used ironically. The term was first used by historian James Truslow Adams in his book The Epic of America which was written in 1931. Adams States:

“… there has been also the American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for
what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” (404)

James Truslow Adams first coined the phrase ‘The American Dream’, remarks again about the dream:

“The American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of material plenty, though that has doubtlessly counted heavily. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as a man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.” (405)

The foundation of ‘American Dream’ is rooted with the United States’ Declaration of Independence—“….held certain truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” (Jefferson 1776) The term ‘American Dream’ is used in a number of ways, but essentially the ‘American Dream’ is an idea which suggests that all people can succeed through hard work, and that all people have the potential to live happy, successful lives. Many people have expanded upon or refined
the definition of the ‘American Dream’, and this concept has also been subject to a fair amount of criticism. Many people believe that the structure of American society belies the idealistic goal of the ‘American Dream’, pointing to examples of inequality rooted in class, race, and ethnic origin which suggest that the ‘American Dream’ is not attainable for all.

The idea of an American dream is older than the United States, dating back to the 1600s, when people began to come up with all sorts of hopes and aspirations for the new and largely unexplored continent. Many of these dreams focused on owning land and establishing prosperous businesses which would theoretically generate happiness, and some people also incorporated ideals of religious freedom into their American dreams. Atma Ram in introduction of his book *Perspectives on Arthur Miller* has pointed out:

“The history of American civilization is based on the rise and collapse of the Great American Dream. Christopher Columbus left Palos on 3 August, 1492 with Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria hoping to discover a new sea-route to China and Japan. But he reached to the fabulous sands of San Salvador in the Bahamas. Exploring this archipelago and other neighbouring islands he visited Cuba and Hispaniola and saw natives whom he called Indians, examined the flora and the fauna, heard stories of fabulous gold-mines, picked up golden sands and thought that he had reached the mythical Eldorado, the ‘deliciousness of nowhere’. A great “dream” had taken birth. To the pilgrim Fathers, running away from the persecution and the
tyranny of the decaying structure of the old world, the American shores promised a new heaven on earth, a new Jerusalem with possibilities of an ideal democratic life, a potential of human creativity; indeed, the vision of the perfectibility of man. The Frontier Man, crossing the great natural barriers of the formidable Appalachian mountain ranges and unfordable rivers—the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri—and extending the American horizon westward, recognized no barriers to his unlimitable ambitions. The Founding Fathers of the Republic summed the American aspirations in the declaration.” (1)

During the ‘Great Depression’, several people wrote about ‘American Dream’, codifying the concept and entrenching it in American society. For people who believe in the American dream, anything is attainable through hard work. The concept plays on the idea that American is a classless society, although it is obviously not, as any honest examination of the United States will reveal. The idealistic vision of the ‘American Dream’ also assumes that people are not discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, gender, and national origin, another thing which is unfortunately not true in the United States.

Critics of the American dream also point out that many versions of the dream equate prosperity with happiness, and that happiness may not always be that simple. These
critics suggest that the American dream may always remain tantalizingly out of reach for some Americans, making it more like a cruel joke than a genuine dream.

People with a more skeptical view of the ‘American Dream’ sometimes say that the ‘American Dream’ represents the possibility of living better than your parents did, and a desire among parents for their children to lead happy lives. This is especially true in the immigrant community, as many immigrants have come from extremely difficult circumstances.

This idea enshrined in the Declaration – the “chosen few” of the “new Jerusalem” had the inalienable right to pursue the goal of unimpeded happiness—has been of central importance to the American Psyche for long ages and has been instrumental to its achievements as well as its nightmares. Up to the end of the nineteenth century and even in the first decades of the twentieth, faith in the unlimited progress an illimitable happiness remained viable for the average American. For writers like Fennimore Cooker, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Mark Twain, the ideals of a harmonious human community were largely operative and the dreams and possibilities of great human experiment were unassailable. Poverty, stagnation, pessimism, and imperfection were considered un-American words. During the closing years of the nineteenth century, the United States emerged as the leading industrial and agriculture producer of the world. The gross national product (GNP) more than doubled between 1885 and 1890. In spite of serious depression in the mid-nineties, the years from 1897 to 1920 created new landmarks in the
history of American development which historians like Oscar Handlin call ‘The Progressive Era’. In the post-World War I era, the prosperity, boom and affluence that the American businessman enjoyed, perhaps at the cost of his European counterpart, were greater than ever before. Harvey Wish points out in this context: “The prestige of the businessman, buttressed by the greatest prosperity in history, soared to new heights” (Contemporary American, New York: 1961, p.349).

The rapid transformation of the economy during that age generated widespread social disorder. The farmer and the working man did not receive their share of the profits from the good times. The purchasing power of the middle classes, not keeping with the expansion of business, could no longer support the fat profits big business was getting. Oscar Hadlin laments in his book, The History of the United States: “The disparity of incomes, the callous disregard of the welfare of the helpless, and the corruption of politics cried out for reform” (3). With the early years of the twentieth century the original impetus that invigorated the ‘Great American Dream’ was lost. The social dynamics had to take into cognizance several unprecedented forces at work in society. Americans were rapidly changing from a predominantly rural to semi-agrarian and finally to a predominantly urban, industrialized people. This brought into sharp focus, what O’Neill was to call, ‘the sickness of today’ and the horrors of soul-destroying technological advancement. The technological progress, by its very nature, as it widens the horizons of wealth, simultaneously impoverishes to the soul. Saul Bellow warns the American people, albeit a trifle late in 1959 when the industrial civilization had already gathered a non-reversible pace. Tony Tanner quotes in Saul Bellow: “As technology
extends the promise of an increase of wealth we had better beware of a poverty of the soul as terrible as that of the body.” (3)

Along with the phenomenal expansion of industry, the dimensions of opportunity started shrinking due to several economic factors. The highly technological civilization inspired unlimited expectations of material success, but such success remained, to a large extent, unrealized for much of society; for many average Americans the dream of money-success had been reduced to either an inglorious fantasy or a horrible nightmare. As the possibilities of realizing dreams appeared to be remote, for millions the dreams were reduced to nightmares.

Atma Ram has pointed out about the influence of Depression:

“The “depression” of the thirties shook the “Greatest Society on Earth” out of its complacency and suddenly the favoured “chosen few” of the “new Jerusalem” realized that poverty, stagnation, pessimism, and imperfection, far from being un-American, were, in fact, inbuilt in its structure. The structural weakness in the system that had developed in American Capitalism by 1929 contributed significantly to the “depression”. The stock market crash in October 1929 left the structurally weak system staggering. President Hoover’s government was not competent to deal with the crisis situation. The “depression” meant the loss of savings, investments, business, and homes as well as jobs. The
most obvious result was massive unemployment, as high as 15 million or 25 percent of the total available labor force, in the winter of 1932-33. It also meant adequate food, clothing, and even shelter, for millions of Americans. On top of this, for many more, the “depression” was a time of troubles, psychological as well as economic, as it weakened or shattered their confidence in all American traditional moorings—the business system, the family system, the political system (including Herbert Hoover) and the Great American Dream.” (3)

The above-mentioned socio-political milieu of the depression decade is the backdrop of the plays of George Kelley, Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams and above all, Arthur Miller. This is the socio-political mire in which their protagonists found themselves enmeshed. Some of the most popular plays of this period dramatized the collapse of the American dream of money-success. George Kelley’s The Show Off, Clifford Odets’ Awake and Sing, Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie and Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman are all condemnations of the American impulses of ambition and success. The protagonists of these plays find themselves surrounded by the ugly demons of society and retreat conveniently into their particular kinds of aberrations.

Andrew Carnegie has pointed out that ‘many have tried and few have achieved’— is the ‘American Dream’. According to Webster the ‘American Dream’ is the ideal according to which equality of opportunity permits any American to aspire to high attainment and
material success. Andrew Carnegie is the epitome of the ‘American Dream’ because he is a classic example of rags to riches success story. He seemed to be touched by an angel. No matter what was wrong with the world, Andrew Carnegie was to consistently capitalize on success. Andrew Carnegie’s formal education ended after elementary school, the family’s respect for books and learning ensured that Carnegie’s education would continue throughout his life. Born the son of a weaver, Carnegie’s family suffered the effects of the industrial revolution. The mass production of the new steam looms left countless families out of work. To escape the depression of their hometown his family immigrated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1848. At the age of thirteen, Carnegie began his new life in America as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory. Through a connection from his uncle, Carnegie was offered a job as a messenger boy and operator for the Telegraph Office and finally was able to get success in life.

The American dream is the idea (often associated with the Protestant work ethic) held by many in the United States of America that through hard work, courage and determination one can achieve prosperity. These were values held by many early European settlers, and have been passed on to subsequent generations. The American dream has become is a question under constant discussion. In the 20th century, the American dream had its challenges. The Depression caused widespread hardship during the Twenties and Thirties, and was almost a reverse of the dream for those directly affected.