Chapter III

Economic Relationships

Arthur Miller’s four major plays – All My Sons (1947), Death of a Salesman (1949), The Price (1968) and The American Clock (1980) have been taken up to examine, analyse and evaluate economic relationships.

The decade of Thirties in America brought the Depression which was instrumental in the collapse of share market – backbone of American economy. The Depression was so acute that it unsettled the base of both the rich and the poor. It caused several social problems. The most prominent among these was the problem of hunger and want. The “wholesale unemployment, illness and invalidity and the unrest of youth were the results of the Depression. The relief of distress was an imminent public duty” (Nevins, The United States and Its Place in the World Affairs 353). The unemployment was so severe that it could be easily seen “in all walks of life” (Schlesinger, Paths to the Present 22). President Roosevelt was so much distressed due to the Economic Depression and its consequences that in his inaugural address on January 20, 1937 he described the state of America as “one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished” (Beard, The Open Door at Home 217).

The rise of Marxist ideology in America may also be treated as the result of Great Depression. During the years of Depression the cadre of communist party increased immensely, and “the Communists . . . exploited the Depression with energy and zeal, recruiting among the unemployed, the hungry, the homeless; among members of the middle class who felt a sense of guilt or confusion over the economic mess; and among intellectuals who feared the world-wide rise of fascism” (Schlesinger, Jr. 102).
Capitalism seemed to be in danger of losing its impact on society as communist party was busy in increasing its base by influencing and winning “writers, artists, teachers and other intellectuals” and also “dominated the critical and colored political columns of some radical weeklies, and made a special appeal to underpaid working men, Negroes and to devotees of change for change’s sake” (Nevins, *The New Deal and World Affairs* 141).

The tide of unemployment aggravated the labour tensions in America. Thus, “a mounting wave of industrial unrest swept over the country” (Schlesinger, *Political and Social Growth of the American People* 539), and “when the army of the unemployed and the unskilled swelled in size to mammoth proportions, the call to collective bargaining on old lines sounded more or less futile to the masses of the poor” (Beard, *America in Midpassage* 513).

Perhaps the most unfortunate effect or result of Depression throughout the world was that in Germany, Hitler and his Nazi party were able to capture the imagination of the German people. Nazi party started flourishing from leaps to bounds. The threat of growing Nazi regime and its policy to torture Jews gathered momentum as the era progressed. Hitler had become a symbol of absolute power. The rise of Superman in the persona of Hitler threatened not only the existence of Jews but also the concept of democracy in nations of the world and “Hitler, having achieved dictatorial power, had gone far on his career of persecuting Jews, Socialists, Communists and Liberals, had withdrawn from the League of Nations, and was rearming Germany in defiance of the Versailles Treaty” (Beard, *American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940* 170).

The massacre of Jews by Hitler in Germany and a feeling of hatred for Jews in the world in general aggravated due to Depression and Nazism and “it was not until the era of
Depression and Nazism that anti-Semitism took its place, after anti-Negro racism, as the most serious movement of ethnic hatreds in America” (Lerner 507).

It is a matter of common knowledge that workers were badly hit due to Depression. Marx in his celebrated work Das Kapital (1867) asserts that Capitalism acquires the fruits of surplus labour, and in this way, exploits the worker. Moreover, capitalism does irreparable psychological harm to the psyche of the worker. Capitalism causes alienation in the mind of the worker. In wage economy the worker is alienated from the object he produces because he produces objects for the exchange value and not for the use value. Creative potential of the worker suffers incalculable damage because he performs his job in a mechanical manner. A worker in a factory exists as an isolated unit. As an isolated unit, he is alienated from his fellow workers. This sense of alienation breeds despair and frustration in the worker:

Capitalism, Marxism tells us, thrives on exploiting its labourers. Simply put, capitalists grow rich and share holders do well because the labourers that work for them and actually produce goods (including services) get less – and often a good deal less – for their efforts than their labour is actually worth. Labourers have known this for a long time and have organized themselves in labour unions to get fairer deals. What they do not know, however, is how capitalism alienates them from themselves by seeing them in terms of production – as production units, as objects rather than human beings. Capitalism turns people into things, it reifies them. Negotiations about better wages, no matter how successful, do not affect (let alone reverse) that process. Marx saw it clearly at work in his nineteenth century environment in which men whose grandfathers had still worked as cobbler's, cabinet makers, yeoman farmers, and so on – in other words as members of self supporting communities who dealt directly with clients and buyers – performed mechanical tasks in factories where they
were merely one link in a long chain. However, this process of *reification* is not limited to labourers. The capitalist mode of production generates a view of the world – focused on profit – in which ultimately all of us function as objects and become alienated from ourselves. (Bertens 83)

Capitalist mode of economy causes emotional breakdown of the workers because it treats the workers as objects and things like machines. It breeds emotional barrenness among the capitalist class too. In this regard Fredric Jameson aptly observes, “. . . we now all unknowingly suffer from a ‘waning of affect’ – the loss of genuine emotion – because of the complete dominance of the capitalist model in our contemporary world” (qtd. in Bertens 83).

Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* was his first Broadway play which proved a great success for his career as a dramatist. The play revolves round the story of an industrialist, Joe Keller, whose act of supplying defective cylinder heads to the American Army Air Force was instrumental in the deaths of 21 fighter pilots of P-40 fighter planes. In the opening scene Joe’s business oriented approach to life is revealed when he is talking to Frank and simultaneously reading a newspaper:

KELLER. . . . I don’t read the news part any more. It’s more interesting in the want ads.

FRANK. Why, you trying to buy something?

KELLER. No, I’m just interested. To see what people want, y’ know? (Miller, *Collected Plays* 59)

Joe Keller, a representative of capitalist class, betrayed his partner, Steve Deever, pilots, nation, and public sentiment, but Dennis Welland seems to defend him:
Joe himself is perhaps too pleasant for the part he has to play. His betrayal of his partner seems out of key with his simple geniality and warmth of nature. As with most of characters, there is no vice in him, only littleness and his own form of myopia. This is one reason why I emphasise the myopic Lawrence Newman as the symbolic origin of Miller’s dramas. Like Newman, Keller has difficulty in focusing and is genuinely unable to visualise the public consequences of what was for him a private act. To have stopped the production when the flaw was discovered would have endangered the future of the business that meant security for his family: it was as simple as that. Keller is no villainous capitalist egged on by competitive mania in a cut throat world of business, nor is he the cynical profiteer deliberately reducing the margin of safety in order to increase the margin of profit . . . If we come to accept the idea of this man deliberately allowing his partner to take the blame for shipping the faulty engines and thinking to patch up his conscience as easily as the flaws were patched up to delayed detection . . . only later do we realise that it is in character, that it is the reverse of the coin of which the obverse has seemed so attractive, and that the coin is of smaller denomination than we thought but nonetheless still a recognisable part of the currency. (37-38)

It does show that Joe is a petty man with a petty vision of life. He is narrow-minded and cannot think beyond the economic welfare of his family; even if his actions cause disaster to public interests. This is the most irresponsible attitude on the part of a businessman. He earns his profit from the public, but cares little for the welfare of the public. Private and individual gain and profit seems to be the only motto of Joe’s life. He does not realise that his individual economic interest and gain should not play havoc with the welfare of society; individual should not get economic advantage at the cost of public welfare.
Actually, “simple geniality and warmth of nature” cannot absolve Joe of the dereliction of his duty and responsibility towards society. He supplied flawed cylinder heads for the use of Army. Morally it was an extremely sinful act; and legally it was an unpardonable crime. Joe was not a child or an insane person who did not know that he was cheating the nation by shipping defective cylinder heads. On the contrary, he was actually a shrewd, worldly-wise, and a very selfish businessman. He was part and parcel of the cut throat world of business and did not want to be out of the business world; he did not want to be a loser in the game of business:

CHRIS. I want to know what you did, now what did you do? You had a hundred and twenty cracked engine-heads, now what did you do?

KELLER. If you’re going to hang me then I –

CHRIS. I’m listening. God Almighty, I’m listening!

KELLER – *their movements now are those of subtle pursuit and escape.* Keller keeps a step out of Chris’s range as he talks. You’re a boy, what could I do! I’m in business, a man is in business; you got a process, the process don’t work you’re out of business; you don’t know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell’s it to them? You lay forty years and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? *His voice cracking:* I never thought they’d install them. I swear to God. I thought they’d stop ’em before anybody took off.

CHRIS. Then why’d you ship them out? (Miller, Collected Plays 114-115)
Keller’s defence of his deliberate crime shows his tendency to hoodwink others including his son, Chris. He tries to convince Chris that in business one has to take such decisions because one cannot bear the loss after building up one’s business for years. He is not ready to accept that he did anything wrong. In his opinion any other businessman might have taken the same decision to save the business from ruin. The question of moral responsibility has no meaning for a businessman. His sole aim is to get profit. It is also reprehensible on Joe’s part that very cunningly he transfers his guilt or crime to the Army when he says, “I thought they’d stop ’em before anybody took off” (Miller, Collected Plays 115). Thus, he wants to prove himself innocent which he is not.

Joe refuses to accept reality when he tells Chris that Ann Deever is “Larry’s girl” (Miller, Collected Plays 68). Larry has been missing for the last three years. But Joe Keller does not seem to accept the reality of his being missing. He is also the victim of self-induced blindness when he throws the bag of potatoes “in the pail” mistaking them for garbage:

MOTHER, indicating house behind her; to Keller. Did you take a bag from under the sink?

KELLER. Yeah, I put it in the pail.

MOTHER. Well, get it out of the pail. That’s my potatoes.

Chris bursts out laughing – goes up into alley.

KELLER, laughing. I thought it was garbage. (Miller, Collected Plays 70)

Subconsciously he seems to be haunted by his guilt, that is why he treats the vegetables as unclean and garbage in the kitchen. Joe’s hidden guilt is also revealed in the “cops and robbers” game:
KELLER. Now you’re talkin’, Bert. Now you’re on the ball. First thing you know I’m liable to make you a detective.

BERT, *pulling him down by the lapel and whispering in his ear*. Can I see the jail now?

KELLER. Seein’ the jail ain’t allowed, Bert. You know that.

Bert. Aw, I betcha there isn’t even a jail. I don’t see any bars on cellar windows.

KELLER. Bert, on my word of honor there’s a jail in the basement. I showed you my gun, didn’t I?

BERT. But that’s a hunting gun.

KELLER. That’s an arresting gun! (Miller, *Collected Plays* 65)

The relationships in a materialistic society are based on money. Father-son relationship is guided by the “dollars and cents, nickels and dimes” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 125). Joe’s sole desire is that his sons should inherit his business. He wanted to leave a mega business empire for his sons. That is why he tells Chris: “Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I’m sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don’t get another chance, do ya?” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 115). Another factor which is important here is that in capitalist society if you are young you have ample opportunity to earn money but as you grow old this society has no place for you. It appears that the use and throw attitude of the capitalist system is also responsible in conditioning the mind of the people to accumulate more and more riches. It is quite possible that this fear of being discarded in the old age which distracts one to resort to unethical and immoral ways to get and store money in excess.
Paradoxically speaking, Joe justifies his actions because they were in consonance with the code of ethics and code of conduct followed by the business world during war:

KELLER. What should I want to do? Chris is silent. Jail? You want me to go to jail? If you want me to go, say so! Is that where I belong? Then tell me so! Slight pause. What’s the matter, why can’t you tell me? Furiously. You say everything else to me, say that! Slight pause! I’ll tell you why you can’t say it. Because you know I don’t belong there. Because you know! With growing emphasis and passion, and a persistent tone of desperation: Who worked for nothin’, in that war? When they work for nothin’, I’ll work for nothin’. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It’s dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it’s nickels and dimes, what’s clean? Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go! That’s why you can’t tell me. . . . Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go! (Miller, Collected Plays 124-125)

The war highlights the moral bankruptcy of people in a capitalist system. During the World War II, everyone resorted to foul means to earn money. Capitalism preaches earning money without moral restraint. People earned money by hook or crook. Their sole aim was to amass wealth. To amass wealth is the basic tenet of capitalism which thrives on surplus profit. Joe did the same thing during war time. He wanted to collect as much money as he could. For he was also the part and parcel of this system, he did not feel any moral compunction while supplying defective material to the Army Air Force. All this shows that Joe is an active and wily participant of American business world which is the Mecca and Kashi of capitalism. Again, it is the capitalism which stands for private profit, privatism, and least bothers about public consequences of its actions – good or bad. It also shows that capitalist system of economy corrupts not only capitalists but society too. It is Joe’s business
interest and lust for money which is of primary and supreme importance and value for him. He thinks himself above law and society:

Keller’s life is a waste; he forfeits his sons’ love and his own good name for a public business ethic which is strictly unusable in private, family and neighbourhood life. The business ethic puts financial and social self interest first and social responsibility and purpose second. The war exposes the radical moral division: Joe’s horror at his own crime is insignificant beside his larger responsibility to ‘a universe of people’. (Mottram 131)

Joe Keller’s business conduct proves that one’s relation to business is not based on social morality and ethics, but it is based on business ethics. Business ethics are based on both self interest and myth of success in American society. In the light of this myth, individual registers material progress from rags to riches. Joe’s universe also starts and ends within the parameters of his family:

Joe Keller is a product of his society. He not only accepts the American myth of the primacy of the family, but he has adopted as a working instrument the familiar attitude that there is a difference between morality and business ethics. Joe Keller is a self-made man, an image of American success, who is destroyed when he is forced to see that image in another context – through the eyes of his idealist son. (Weales 133)

Thus, All My Sons is a clear example of bitter conflict between ideal, moral approach and opportunistic approach towards life and society in American context in particular, and in universal context in general. Idealism and opportunism cannot exist in harmony with each other. Both these attitudes exist in total and complete conflict with each other. Ideal approach stands for public good and public welfare. Ideal approach does not harm public interest for
the sake of individual interest and gain. On the contrary opportunist approach stands for individual gain and profit at the cost of public interest and public welfare. As far as the concept of “whole man” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 54) is concerned, Joe fails to pass the test of “whole man” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 54). He looks towards his personal and private interest, and does not bother about the public interest. “Whole man” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 54) is supposed to be responsible in his attitude and actions towards the larger interest of society. “Whole man” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 54) does not harm the interest and welfare of society, but Joe did harm the interest and welfare of society.

It is important to note that Joe in All My Sons becomes a successful businessman through hard work, but at the same time, he indulges in legal trickery and false arguments to justify the ethics of self protectiveness in business dealings. Business ethics involve deceit and treachery. It is these unethical business ethics which bring him success. Joe is a good and caring father; he is a good and caring husband, but he is not a good and caring businessman for society. Joe conforms to the requirements of success in business, namely, deceit, treachery and legal trickery. Economic relations based on deceit cause Joe’s suicide. Had Joe refrained from deceit and treachery, he would have earned the name and fame of a morally and ethically upright businessman. The play also reveals the dark and dismal reality that rule of success in business and rule of law of state and society are incompatible with each other. In the light of the play All My Sons, it may also be said that rule of success and rule of law are antithetical to each other and cannot co-exist.

Joe is not intelligent enough to see any responsibility beyond the scope of father-son relationship. He thinks that his son, Chris will inherit his business, and thus, naturally, he will inherit the code of conduct in business affairs too. And this code of conduct in business implies to resort to deceit and treachery, and bribe the government officials to grind one’s own axe. When Kate suggests that Joe should admit his guilt, and thus prove himself a law
abiding citizen, Joe says, “. . . I’m his father and he’s my son, and if there’s something bigger
than that I’ll put a bullet in my head!” (Miller, Collected Plays 120). For Joe, nothing is
bigger than father-son relationship. Son will inherit father’s success in business and his
values and principles too. It can safely be said that it is a small and morally indefensible
vision of Joe which causes his doom.

Man’s relationship with industrial civilisation governed by corporate world is that of
“a man’s becoming a function of production or distribution to the point where his personality
becomes divorced from the actions it propels” (Miller, Collected Plays 19). In All My Sons
Miller seems to refer to capitalist mode of production and distribution which alienates man
from himself and society. And this is what happens to Joe Keller. He, however, tries to come
out of the alienation, though for a few moments when he says, “. . . I think to him [Larry]
they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were . . .” (Miller, Collected Plays
126). Thus, through Keller, Miller points to the relationship of brotherhood between man and
man, “social conception of human brotherhood” (Williams 72).

Money is power. Money is might. And in capitalist society, it is the power and might
of capitalists which turn social existence of man into jungle existence. In All My Sons, Joe
Keller commits social crime of supplying defective machinery to American Army, but he
thinks that he was free to do so as a businessman; he also thinks that he had committed no
social crime as if he were not part and parcel of society. He thinks as if he were unrelated to
society as far as his crime was concerned. To fill his coffers with money seems to be his
motive. It is this attitude of Joe’s which Miller finds unacceptable and reprehensible. Joe
seems least concerned about the harm his actions cause to society. Miller rightly comments:
“It is that the crime is seen as having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to
society, and to ascertain indoctrination he embodies, which, if dominant, can mean a jungle
existence for all of us no matter how high our buildings soar” (Collected Plays 19).
It is through *All My Sons*, Miller seems to suggest that it is neither possible nor desirable to say good bye to moral order in society. Joe committed social crime but Miller did not allow him to hoodwink or trample the moral order under his feet; it was Keller’s son who made him realise his crime:

> The fortress which *All My Sons* lays siege to is the fortress of unrelatedness. It is an assertion not from us of a morality in terms of right and wrong, but of a moral world’s being such because men cannot walk away from certain of their deeds. In this sense Joe Keller is a threat to society and in this sense the play is a social play. (Miller, *Collected Plays* 19)

When Joe finds Ann in a very angry mood because of her father, Steve Deever’s anti-social act in supplying defective cylinder heads, he pleads compassion for him. He fears that Chris’ ethical standards are quite opposite to those of his, and in case he is exposed, Chris might treat him the way Ann is treating her father, Steve. So in a very shrewd manner Joe defends Steve, but the defence of Steve on the part of Joe is his own defence:

> All of a sudden a batch comes out with a crack. That happens, that’s the business. A fine, hairline crack. All right, so – so he’s a little man, your father, always scared of loud voices. What’ll the Major say? – Half a day’s production shot . . . What’ll I say? You know what I mean? Human. *He pauses.* So he takes out his tools and he – covers over the cracks. . . . If I could have gone in that day I’d a told him – junk ’em, Steve, we can afford it. But alone he was afraid. But I know he meant no harm. He believed they’d hold up a hundred per cent. That’s a mistake, but it ain’t murder. You mustn’t feel that way about him. You understand me? It ain’t right. (Miller, *Collected Plays* 82)
Apart from Joe’s fear of being exposed, the above statement also throws ample light on his character. He is a liar. During the action of the play, he admits that he had to deliver the cylinder heads in time and in case, he delayed the delivery of the same, he might have lost the contract; but in the above statement he states, “I’d a told him – junk ’em, Steve, we can afford it” (Miller, Collected Plays 82). Further, in defending Steve Deever, Joe defends himself when he says, “He [Steve Deever] believed they’d hold up a hundred per cent” (Miller, Collected Plays 82). It is a very weak argument that the defective cylinder heads would not “harm” (Miller, Collected Plays 82) the Army and in the course of the play we find that those defective cylinder heads claimed the lives of 21 fighter pilots.

Sue Bayliss, wife of Jim Bayliss, in All My Sons, is yet another character who may be treated as a materialist. She forces her husband to pursue medical practice instead of research which he (Jim) was interested in. Sue finds that Chris is a phony idealist who only knows how to preach idealism. She feels agitated with Chris as she believes he (Chris) is distracting her husband through his phony idealism. She says, “. . . if Chris wants people to put on the hair shirt let him take off his broadcloth. He’s driving my husband crazy with that phony idealism of his, and I’m at the end of my rope on it!” (Miller, Collected Plays 94).

Larry, in All My Sons, is the person who in the true sense of the word may be called an idealist, because when he finds that it was his father who was responsible for the death of his twenty one fellow pilots, to atone for his father’s crime and sin, sacrifices his own life by committing suicide. He proves through his act of suicide that he condemns the unethical business practice of his father in supplying defective cylinder heads to the American Army. It was Larry’s true idealism which ultimately pushes Joe to commit suicide.

To buy peace with Chris, Joe tells him that he would try to convince Kate that she should not stand in his (Chris’) way of marrying Ann Deever. He also declares his intention
that he would change the name of his plant from J. O. Keller to Christopher Keller, Incorporated. In order to win the favour of George who feels that his father Steve Deever was innocent, Joe Keller tells him that as soon as Steve Deever is released from the jail, he (Keller) will give him job in the factory. This shows that he is a very wily and shrewd businessman who is adept in grinding his own axe. In a heated discussion between Kate and Chris over the issue of Chris’s marriage to Ann, the truth of Joe’s guilt comes out of Kate’s mouth unconsciously:

MOTHER. Altogether! *To Chris, but not facing them:* Your brother’s alive, darling, because if he’s dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don’t you? Now you see. *Beyond control, she hurries up and into house.* (Miller, *Collected Plays* 114)

Joe is a cunning businessman. In his conversation with Chris, Joe tries to save the situation by giving false arguments:

KELLER, *insistently.* She’s out of her mind. *He takes a step toward Chris,*

pleadingly.

CHRIS, *unyielding.* Dad . . . you did it?

KELLER. He never flew a P-40, what’s the matter with you?

CHRIS, *still asking, and saying.* Then you did it. To the others. *Both hold their voices down.* (Miller, *Collected Plays* 114)

Joe is so selfish that it does not matter to him what is happening to others through his actions. For him the life of other pilots has no meaning. He is concerned with the life of his
son only. That is why he says, “He [Larry] never flew a P-40, what’s the matter with you [Chris]” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 114).

Ultimately Joe admits that he had ordered the cylinder heads to be welded. But the welding did not work. Actually, the right course was to supply new cylinder heads. Joe tells that he had done so to save his business. He also argues that he did it all for the welfare of Chris. However, this argument does not absolve him of the guilt of supplying defective cylinder heads. Chris rightly denounces his father’s culpability in causing the death of 21 fighter pilots when he says, “For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! – I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world – the business?” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 115-116).

Joe Keller’s factory sent out defective parts to the “Army Air Force” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 80). He tries his best to overcome the suspicion of his neighbours, his son Chris and Steve Deever’s son George. Enormity of Keller’s crime can be gauged from the fact that he found it difficult to show his guilt-ridden face to the society, so he commits suicide. It also shows that if one commits social crime, one cannot evade responsibility and retribution. Miller’s aim in writing *All My Sons* seems to lay “siege to the fortress of unrelatedness” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 19) in which to arraign a particularly heinous anti-social crime committed by a businessman, Joe.

Joe’s crime rests in having no sense of responsibility towards society; however, his sense of responsibility lies in the welfare of his family. His strong sense of commitment to his family and material success cannot absolve him of his lack of commitment to society. However, Gross argues, “If we fail to see Joe Keller in a human way then we relegate him to that dark other-world where only monsters dwell, safely removed from to identify with it or
admit our own compliance with it” (qtd. in Martine 11). Gross’ argument seems to suggest that we may allow the liberty to Joe Keller of playing havoc with the lives of the 21 pilots; this argument does not serve the cause of individual’s responsibility to society; hence, to accept and endorse Gross’ argument amounts to allow the profiteers to play havoc with the welfare of society.

Chris’ pungent criticism of sharks of society is a bitter indictment of those who believe in personal profit: “This is the land of the big dogs, you don’t love a man here, you eat him! That’s the principle; the only one we live by . . .” (Miller, Collected Plays 124).

Kate, Joe’s wife, is also materialistic in her approach. Following conversation between Joe and Kate throws ample light on this aspect:

KELLER. You wanted money, so I made money. What must I be forgiven?
You wanted money, didn’t you?

MOTHER. I didn’t want it that way.

KELLER. I didn’t want it that way, either! (Miller, Collected Plays 120)

The above arguments testify to the fact that both Joe and Kate have the same bent of mind. Both are trying to absolve themselves of the responsibility. On one hand, Joe, in a way, blames Kate for compelling him to accumulate more and more money. Joe tries to justify his crime by arguing that he did not want to commit the crime of supplying defective cylinder heads, but it was Kate who pressurised him to earn money without considering the fact whether it is through ethical manner or unethical. On the other hand, Kate shifts the blame on Joe by arguing that she did not want Joe to commit crime in order to gain money. However, it does not mean that she didn’t want money.
As the perusal of the play shows, during the action of the play Joe, quite for a long
time, remains shut within his shell of privatism, individualism, and narrow confines of
responsibility towards his family only, but towards the end of the play he realises that those
who had lost their lives due to faulty cylinder heads were “all” his “sons” (Miller, *Collected
Plays* 126). However, if at all we treat it as his awareness of his responsibility towards
society, it is a belated realisation. It may also be said that towards the end of the play Joe’s
suicide signifies the suicide of those business ethics which harm society. In other words,
Joe’s suicide may be treated as severe indictment of contemporary industrial civilisation
which harms both the industrialist and the society. It also lays emphasis on the fact that
business ethics need correction in the manner that society does not suffer like P-40 pilots.

Ibsen’s play *An Enemy of the People* (1882) is a realist play, but certain details in the
play carry symbolic significance such as polluted swimming baths refer to the pollution and
corruption in society. Similarly, we notice that Miller in *Death of a Salesman* resorts to
realism but the details carry symbolic meanings too. Willy Loman lays emphasis on manual
work. He teaches his sons how to “simonize” a “car” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 136) in an
efficient manner. He does not hold in high esteem his neighbour Charley and Charley’s son
Bernard because they are deficient in manual skills. Willy’s son Biff was an athlete and a
very popular football player during his school days, and after leaving his school he works at a
ranch. Willy’s father was also of pioneer category who travelled the countryside in a wagon
and earned his living by selling homemade flutes. All these details symbolise Willy’s
contempt of modern industrial civilisation and modern urban life of aspirin and subways,
advertising, mortgages, refrigerators, cars, and time-payments etc. These details symbolise
that Willy craves for pre-industrial age when manual work and athletic body and hardiness
ruled the roost: “Willy’s mystique of physical skill is thus a reflection of the simpler, pioneer
life he craves, a symptom and a symbol of his revolt against the constraints of the modern
city” (Parker 95). Linda also says, “He [Willy] was so wonderful with his hands” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 221).

When Willy bought his house, it stood in a wooded suburb; his yard was flanked by two giant elm trees. It is the effect of urbanisation that trees have been cut down and his house is now surrounded by apartments. His house is overshadowed by apartments and he cannot grow seeds in his backyard. Willy was attuned to the rural way of life and urban surroundings have proved disastrous and shattered his peace of mind. It may also be said that Willy is misfit in urban surroundings – he proves misfit as a salesman, because he cannot adjust himself to the industrial milieu; he proves misfit as a husband and as a father too.

*Death of a Salesman* takes us back to the nineteenth century American ethos of success. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, control of the workers over their workplace started diminishing. More autonomous labour practice was replaced by hierarchal and managerial structures of industrialization. Power became centralized in the hands of a few persons. Labour became mechanized and de-skilled. American industry started looking for cheap labour and foreign markets to sell their products. After World War II major interest groups emerged in American society and they affected and controlled the government policy. In 1950s, aims and objectives of American government were as follows:

Truman identified American interests as contingent upon three connected principles: world stability, expanding markets, and the defense of freedom. In practice, the three principles collapsed into one as stability came to mean security for American business and the measure of freedom, the extent of western-style ‘free’ enterprise in any given country. (Lipsitz 136)

In order to sell their products, industrialists embarked on the mission of consumer consciousness – they advertised through newspaper advertisements, pamphlets, magazines,
hoardings etc. They also tried to convince the people to give up their old cultural habits and imbibe love for new products. This advertising strategy began in late nineteenth century, and started flourishing by leaps and bounds after World War II.

At the time of writing of *Death of a Salesman*, the theme of success was in vogue in American society. Success myth was most popular and perhaps foremost exponent of success myth or success theme was Horatio Alger who wrote a large number of novels and stories to imprint the magic of success theme on the minds of the American society. The plots of Alger’s novels depicted the hero as poor, penniless, and lonely who enters New York and it is through his hard work that he transforms himself into a rich man. He makes best use of the opportunity offered to him by the city. Beginning with the last quarter of nineteenth century to 1929, America registered great industrial growth:

Generations of American children were brought up on Alger; his version of the success myth was the way in which the world was interpreted to them. His stories reached a zenith of their fame and popularity in precisely those three decades – the seventies, eighties and nineties – when the rate of industrialisation and urbanisation, the degree of social mobility, the absence of state control, the power of individuals, reached levels never before attained in American society. (Lynn 9)

Myth of success had a marvellous effect on the mind of the people. It encouraged the people to make wealth and property through sheer hard work and best use of opportunity. But it is also a fact of history that there existed a wide gap between the myth of success and the reality of American social life. Depression of 1929 exposed the cruel face of myth of success and capitalist economy. Businessmen lost their business and workers lost their jobs. Miller
was introduced to the philosophy of Marx at an early age of seventeen. It happened so in 1932 in his life:

One day I found myself straddling the bike and watching a big round-robin handball game against the wall of Mr. Dozick’s drugstore. . . . an older boy, whose name has long since left me, stood beside me explaining that although it might not be evident to the naked eye, there were really two classes of people in society, the workers and the employers. And that all over the world, including Brooklyn, of course, a revolution that would transform every country was inexorably building up steam. Things would then be produced for use rather than for someone’s personal profit, so there would be much more for everyone to share, and justice would reign everywhere. (Miller, Timebends 108-111)

On the one hand, Ben in Death of a Salesman, stands for Frontier days and Frontier psychology – days of adventure and exploration of new territories for diamonds and gold, on the other, Dave Singleman represents the age of industrialisation, age of salesmanship during the inter-war periods. It was during the agrarian age of America that a man who was good with his hands was successful. Willy subscribes to the theory of success but it is the agrarian theory. Industrial age is the age of machine and technology. Machine has substituted the labour of hands. In this age, good education is must which Willy has not been able to provide to his sons. Good education is the key to success. Charley’s son Bernard got good education and became a lawyer. Willy’s son, Biff discontinued his studies and failed to realise the dream of success in the age of industry. It is also important to note that consumerism is the outcome of industrial age. To create and propagate consumer consciousness, capitalist economy resorts to magic formula of pamphleteering and advertising, empty talks and bluffs, salesmanship, high hopes, and dreams of success. Actually, middle class is fed on the myth of
success. Enchanted by the myth of success, nobody wants to “settle for half” (Miller, Collected Plays 34); everybody wants to rise above the average status; everyone wants to become number one in society. In this mad race for success, most of the people meet frustration and failure. Harold Clurman remarks, “When the audience weeps at Death of a Salesman it is not so much over the fate of Willy Loman – Miller’s pathetic hero – but over the millions of such men who are our brothers, uncles, cousins, neighbours” (qtd. in Rutnin 172).

Willy Loman represents each of us in the sense that his complicated and confusing dreams refer to the fate of each of us. Willy represents the cult and ideal of salesmanship which the cultural forces of American society have imposed on him:

This ideal is the matrix from which Willy emerges and by which his destiny is determined. It is peculiarly American in origin and development – seed, flower and fruit. For Arthur Miller salesman is a personification of the success myth; he is committed to its objectives and defined by its characteristics. Salesman deals with the Horatio Alger ideal, the rags-to-riches of the American dream.

... the success myth as Max Weber has demonstrated has roots in seventeenth-century bourgeois England; it came to this continent with the founding fathers and was later popularised with the efforts of Ben Franklin, its outstanding exemplar. The “land of opportunity” offered enough verification of the basic tenets of the doctrine to assure its triumph in the popular mind. Virgin land, undeveloped resources, the possibility of industrial progress, all allowed scope for enterprise and imagination. No man lacked an enterprise to turn his hand to. The successful man became the idol of the public; the road to
success was pointed out from the pulpit, in the market place, by the family fireside. From Franklin through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the success myth, and all the possible variations on it, did not lack prophets and interpreters. (Porter 127-128)

From the very beginning of expansionist Frontier ideology, both religion and business worked jointly to inculcate the myth of success in the psyche of American society. Ben Franklin was presented as an ideal image of self-disciplined, hard-working, enterprising, highly ambitious and bold adventurer. Emerson argued that the “thirst for wealth and drive to power were essential to the growth of civilisation” (95).

Willy seems to ignore the fact that in the age of industrial civilisation, it is also necessary to be well educated like Bernard. It appears that like many other Americans, Willy is also haunted by the frontier heritage:

The anti-intellectualism and materialism which are national traits can also be traced to the frontier experience. . . . In the boisterous western borderlands book learning and intellectual speculation was suspect among those dedicated to the material tasks necessary to subdue a continent. Americans today reflect their background in placing the ‘intellectual’ well below the ‘practical businessman’ in their scale of heroes. (Billington 74-75)

It is also pertinent to note that in the second half of nineteenth century, business got upper hand in the sense that the religion was described in terms of business. There was no clash between acquisition of riches and religion. Baptist preacher Russell H. Conwell’s celebrated lecture Acres of Diamonds was delivered in cities and towns 5124 times from the year 1870 to 1915. He told that an honest, truthful, enterprising and hardworking, and virtuous man can mine diamonds wherever he is – at home or in the city. Conwell preached
that religion and business were not contraries; religion was not against riches; actually the religion encourages man to be rich. Next we come across Bruce Burton. He wrote *The Man Nobody Knows*. He paints the Saviour as the topmost corporate leader. He also portrays the Saviour as the most successful man in the advertising world. He describes the Saviour as gifted with the magnetic qualities and charm of a successful business executive. In Burton’s work Nazarene Carnegie – topmost steel magnet – is Christ. Thus, Christianity is defined in terms of the United States steel and vice-versa. Horatio Alger was another celebrated clergyman who successfully and devotedly popularised the myth of success among the masses of the United States. In his novels people at the lowest rung of social and economic ladder register unprecedented success in life through hard work and virtuous life. They make best use of the opportunities offered to them by society and rise to the top of social and economic ladder:

Like many simple formulations which never the less convey a heavy intellectual and emotional charge to vast numbers of people, the Alger hero represents a triumphant combination – and reduction to the lowest common denominator – of the most widely accepted concepts in nineteenth century American society. The belief in the potential greatness of the common man, the glorification of individual effort and accomplishment, the equation of the pursuit of money with the pursuit of happiness and of business with spiritual grace: simply to mention these concepts is to comprehend the brilliance of Alger’s synthesis. (Lynn 7)

It appears that the myth of success is part and parcel of every American’s psyche. It is ingrained in the racial memory of the Americans or they have internalised the myth of success in their conduct and character. This myth of success holds good for every American of ordinary or extraordinary talent. Thus, they appear to be permanently and perennially
wedded to the myth of success. Their faith in the success myth is irrevocable, unalterable, and integral to their being. This myth is the very basis of their way of life:

Success is a requirement Americans make of life. Because it seems magical, and inexplicable, as it is to Willy, it can be considered the due to every citizen, even those with no notable or measurable talents. . . . The citizen may justly and perhaps even logically ask – if Addison, Goodrich, and Red Grange can make it, why not me, why not Willy Loman. (Popkin 53)

Historical and social forces had paved the way of success even for the poorest and most wretched of American society. Ordinary people could capitalise on the opportunities and become rich, and “never in the history of the world did a poor man without capital have such an opportunity to get rich as honestly as he has now in our city” (Conwell 21). Clergyman Russell Conwell and Horatio Alger laid emphasis on “virtue”, “character”, and “personality.” It was opined and propagated that “no amount of skill could compensate for lack of character or other essential personal traits” (Wyllie 27). As far as market popularity is concerned Dale Carnegie lays emphasis on developing friendship and “influencing people” (Dogra 55). Alger’s impact on the psyche of the American society was so profound and compelling that during the period from 1868 to 1929 ten million copies of Alger’s book were sold. 1920’s marked the high watermark of prosperity and economic boom in the United States. Babson, Bruce Burton, and many other writers popularised the successful formula initiated by Conwell et al:

The ‘miracles’ of Jesus, according to Barton, reside in his personal magnetism. Thus, before the god Opportunity, all are equal. Those mysterious internal qualities of character – ‘virtue’, ‘personality’ – become the charismatic gifts that are prayed for by the true believer and when found, are acknowledged as
the work of the Spirit. This myth, deep-seated in the American consciousness, provides the raw material for *Death of a Salesman*. (Porter 131)

Willy subscribes to the myth of success which embodies “virtue” and “personality.” His sons at school were athletic, handsome, and well-built. During their school education, they were leaders and popular with the boys in the school. As regards “personality” Willy says:

That’s just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, *y’understand*, but when he gets out in the business world, *y’understand*, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That’s why I thank Almighty God you’re both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. “Willy Loman is here!” That’s all they have to know, and I go right through. (Miller, *Collected Plays* 146)

Formula of personality fails to attract the attention of Willy’s present employer, whom Willy had named “Howard” at the time of his birth. Howard does not show any interest in Willy’s reminiscences. He is concerned with the sale of the wire recorder – industry’s newest gadget. Instead of offering Willy an office, Howard fires him because the former is no more able to do the touring job. Conversation between Charley and Willy at this point of time is noteworthy:

CHARLEY. Howard fired you?

CHARLEY. Willy, when’re you gonna realize that them things don’t mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can’t sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you’re a salesman, and you don’t know that. (Miller, *Collected Plays* 192)

Industrial age in America has no place for success formula of personality: “The impersonal business world no longer has any room for personality among the machines” (Porter 141-142). It is also important to note that both Willy and Biff fail to uphold “virtue” (Porter 131) as the hallmark of the success myth. Willy is caught in the company of a woman. This episode of extra-marital relationship is of vital importance because the image of Willy in his elder son Biff’s mind was that of an ideal father. This image of ideal father is shattered to pieces. Biff is also not able to uphold “virtue” – the main requirement of the success myth. He steals Oliver’s fountain pen, and in his school days he had stolen a football. Thus, while accusing the success myth as the root of Willy’s economic failure and Biff’s frustration, we cannot ignore the lack of “virtue” in their character. Willy’s lies that he is a successful salesman and he is well liked emerge through the dialogues of Willy only. Neither Willy’s employer nor his clients pay attention to Willy. As a matter of fact, the action of the play reveals that he is an unsuccessful salesman. However, he resorts to lies and boasts of his being a successful salesman. Further, it may also be said that salesmanship flourishes on account of fraud, deceit and cheating. Harold Clurman makes a significant observation when he says, “Salesmanship implies a certain element of fraud: the ability to put over or sell a commodity regardless of its intrinsic usefulness” (69). However, despite boasts and lies, Willy fails to make a mark in the profession of salesmanship.

It was the economic crisis of 1929 which challenged the success myth in the sense that the success or failure in economic terms was not in the hands of the common man; it was not at the beck and call of “virtue” and “personality” (Porter 131). It was actually in the hands
of the mighty market forces, fluctuations in stock and exchange market, and the impersonal attitude of the executive. Willy’s fate was in the hands of the social and economic forces, and success myth based on “virtue” and “personality” (Porter 131). “Virtue” and “personality” was no match for the social and economic forces of industrial and commercial world. In fact, these social and economic forces were gods of modern industrial world, and common man was a plaything for these modern gods in the manner of the Greek gods.

Disaster in the form of Economic Depression of 1929 was the result of liberal capitalism. During the thirties, radical intellectuals felt that the solution to economic disparities, economic ills, and social injustice lay in communism. Odets, Hellman and Miller gave voice to these radical sentiments of 1930’s in their plays. Richard Crossman observes:

The intellectual attraction of Marxism was that it exploded the liberal fallacies which really were fallacies. It taught the bitter truths that progress is not automatic, that boom and slump are inherent in capitalism, that social injustice and racial discrimination are not cured merely by the passage of time. . . . it has taken two world wars . . . to make it begin to understand that its task is not to allow progress to do its work for it but to provide an alternative to world revolution by planning the cooperation of free people. (5)

Capitalist materialism can be defined as plenty of wealth, wine and women, plenty of worldly pleasure sans any spiritual, ethical, or moral values. Eat, drink, and be merry attitude of Western culture born of material prosperity has eaten up natural bond of respect, regard and solidarity in family relations. It is really unbecoming of a son not to acknowledge his father as father but as ‘guy’. It is really unpardonable to treat your father as ‘guy’, and thus, disown him. In Death of a Salesman the following conversation is really disgusting and shocking:
LETTA. Don’t you want to tell your father –

HAPPY. No, that’s not my father. He’s just a guy. Come on, we’ll catch Biff, and, honey, we’re going to paint this town! Stanley where is the check! Hey, Stanley! (Miller, Collected Plays 205)

Biff is going to meet Oliver for business purposes. Following conversation between Willy and Biff merits our serious attention so as to understand Willy Loman’s idea of success:

WILLY. I see great things for you kids, I think your troubles are over. But remember, start big and you’ll end big. As for fifteen. How much you gonna ask for?

BIFF. Gee, I don’t know –

WILLY. And don’t say “Gee”. “Gee” is a boy’s word. A man walking in for fifteen thousand dollars does not say “Gee”.

BIFF. Ten, I think would be top though.

WILLY. Don’t be so modest. You always started too low. Walk in with a big laugh. Don’t look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. What you say, it’s how you say it – because personality wins the day. (Miller, Collected Plays 168-169)

Thus, it is pleasant presentation of things, and charming personality which counts a lot in the business world. Willy is a wily materialist in the sense that he tells his son Biff not to settle for less money. Willy has implanted high hopes and high dreams and high aims in
the minds of his sons. The following conversation bears testimony to the fact that sons have strong desire to rule the world of success:

HAPPY. We form two basketball teams, see? Two water polo teams we play each other. It’s a million dollar worth of publicity. Two brothers, see? The Loman Brothers. Displays in the Royal Palms – all the hotels. And banners over the ring and the basketball court: “Loman Brothers”. Baby we could sell sporting goods.

WILLY. That is a one million dollar idea . . . lick the world! You guys together could absolutely lick the civilised world. (Miller, Collected Plays 168)

Economic relations in America are based on the exploitation of the workers. These relations are based on the philosophy of contract between unequal parties – capitalist and worker. It is the powerful capitalist who dictates the terms of the contract; it is the powerless and moneyless worker who has to accept these terms for the sake of his survival. In the context of economic relations, it is significant to point out Miller’s wife, Marilyn Monroe’s exploitation by her employers. Miller observes, “Movie stars’ salaries were beginning to take off now, but hers was fixed by an old contract, and she had the resentment of a revolutionary. In her long fight with Fox for the freedom to make her own films, she positioned herself against the studio’s exploitation of her popularity which had been soaring over the past couple of years” (Timebends 366).

It is, perhaps, the result of prevalence of individualism in American society, which treated the collapse of the capitalistic system of economy in 1930’s as the failure of the individual businessman to cope with the economic crisis. In the light of this attitude it was the individual who was at fault, not the system. Miller rightly points out: “It has often been said
that what kept the United States from revolution in the depths of the Great Depression was the readiness of Americans to blame themselves rather than the system for their downfall” (Timebends 113).

About his father Miller admits, “It was not he who angered me, only his failure to cope with his fortune’s collapse. Thus I had two fathers, the real one and the metaphoric, and the latter I resented because he did not know how to win out over the general collapse” (Timebends 112). Miller’s mother also blamed her husband for the collapse of their business. She believed that he lacked intelligence because “with sufficient intelligence a person could outwit the situation. Why couldn’t he do that?” (Miller, Timebends 113). Thus, it is clear that instead of blaming the system which was responsible for the collapse, sons and wives started finding faults with their fathers and husbands respectively. This blame game was the result of denial mode in society. It was to deny the reality. The reality was that the economic system prevalent in America had collapsed, and thus brought misery and penury to the businessmen and the general public alike. As the people were not prepared to admit the failure of system and did not think in terms of replacing it by a new one, they suffered irreparable mental shock and psychological damage:

A fine dusting of guilt fell upon the shoulders of the failed fathers, and for some unknown number of them there would never be a recovery of dignity and self assurance, only an endless death in life down to the end. Already in the early thirties, within a year or two of the collapse, the papers were reporting that in New York City alone there were nearly a hundred thousand people who had been psychologically traumatised to the point where they would probably never be able to work again. Nor was it only a question of insufficient food; it was hope that had gone out of them, the life illusion and the capacity to believe again. America, as Archibald MacLeish would write,
was promises and for some the Crash was in the deepest sense a deepest promise. (Miller, *Timebends* 113-114)

As regards the Great Depression, Miller was quite clear in his thoughts that it was the economic system which had betrayed the people and brought untold misery to the common masses. He says, “Marxism was . . . a way of forgiving my father, for it showed him as a kind of digit in a nearly cosmic catastrophe that was beyond his powers to avoid. But the poor man had to be radicalised, had to concede that it was not his fault that he had failed” (Timebends 114). Miller exposes the weakness of the economic system of America and it may be said that the thematic concern of the *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* implies reform or change in the system:

It is necessary to know that the values of commerce, values which were despised as necessary but less than noble in the long past are not merely perversely dominant everywhere but claimed as positive moral goodness itself. . . . Thus, it is these false pecuniary values which Willy Loman and Joe Keller revered. These values are incompatible with freedom and moral principles governing social conduct. True freedom demanded sacrifice at the war front and moral principles demanded not to act against the welfare of society.

(Miller, “On Social Plays,” 63)

Willy Loman belongs to a society which uses the terms of spiritual and ideal nature, that is, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but these words are simply to camouflage the capitalist concept of material success. Socio-economic propaganda of the welfare of individual and society and Willy Loman’s concept of success are in tandem. It is this propaganda which marks the undoing and failure of Willy Loman. This propaganda is simply ensnaring the naives like Willy. Actually, contemporary business world is shorn of any
spiritual, metaphysical, moral and ideal sense of life and society. Clinton Trowbridge rightly remarks, “How can a person keep his sense of right and wrong while grappling for a living in a business world which recognizes only the principle of the survival of the fittest?” (127).

For Willy in Death of a Salesman success involves good looks, handsome personality, and the ability to be well liked by others. Neither Willy nor his sons Biff and Happy are able to register success in their lives despite Biff and Happy’s charming looks and attractive personality. Willy and his sons’ failure to achieve success warns that something more is needed than good looks and personal attraction to attain success. And this something more is the talent to achieve success. Charley’s son Bernard completed his college education and became a successful lawyer whereas Biff fails to complete his college education, and failed to make a successful career. Thus, it may safely be assumed that in industrial society, myth of success demands hard work and personal attractiveness, but at the same time it requires talent and faith in moral and ethical values of society failing which success in business remains a far cry.

In Death of a Salesman, Miller gives powerful expression to Marxist attitude towards Capitalism. According to Marxism, Capitalism is responsible for the woe and misery of the common man. In America, leftist attitudes had penetrated the field of drama since 1930’s. In these plays common man puts up a brave fight against capitalist system and refuses to accept defeat. In Clifford Odets’ Awake and Sing, it is the grandfather who commits suicide so that with the insurance money his grandson may realize the dream which he himself could not succeed in translating into reality. We come across similar situation in Death of a Salesman. Willy commits suicide so that his insurance money will make his son, Biff, a winner in life. These protagonists do not accept defeat in capitalist system of society. They are determined to achieve success, even if the prize of success is suicide. If they have not been able to register success, let their progeny fulfil the unfinished tasks. About social question of
disparity and exploitation brought into focus by Miller, Raymond Williams rightly remarks, “Arthur Miller has brought back into the theatre, in an important way, the drama of social question” (69). Willy in Death of a Salesman can rightly be interpreted as a worker who was exploited by his capitalist employer. He grows old, and as during his old age he is of no use to the company he works in, he is “cold-bloodedly” (Tyson 63) fired by the employer.

Death of a Salesman may be treated as a critique of American dream or “American spirit” (Horton 3). American dream is rooted in the history of American people. In nutshell, it consists of competition in society, individual freedom, unity of the family, and success in terms of wealth and money. As a matter of fact, when healthy competition vitiates into corrupt practice of business trickery and deceit and treachery; unity of the family gets disrupted due to socio-economic pressures and deterioration in filial bonds; and success in terms of social status and wealth deludes the majority of Americans; phenomena of such nature and magnitude forebodes ill-health of the American dream, and this is what we notice happening in All My Sons and Death of a Salesman.

It may be safely elicited from the perusal of the history of American nation that idealism and opportunity are the two constant factors which have continued to shape their destiny as a nation. It has advocated the ideal of individual liberty and championed the cause of success in terms of wealth and prosperity, earned through individual enterprise and endeavour:

The two interpretations of American history... have been those of Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles A. Beard. According to the former, the greatest single factor in determining the character of American life has been the democratising effect of a continually expanding frontier. the greatest single factor in determining the character of American life has been the
democratising effect of a continually expanding frontier. The prospects of opportunity for all . . . had a levelling effect which tended to erase distinctions of birth, social status and education. Charles A. Beard stresses the almost inexorable pressure of economic self-interest in determining the course of history from its very inception. (Horton 3)

Thus, democratic principle of individual liberty which forms the core of idealism of American society, and materialistic principle of individual enterprise and endeavour which forms the core of opportunity are the very basis of American civilisation. It is the complementary nature of idealism and materialism embedded in American psyche which lends pride and dignity to their way of life:

American genius (if we may be permitted this easy abstraction) has listened constantly to two voices. Idealism and opportunity . . . our destiny as a nation has been shaped through the instrumentality of both.

Just as the Spanish explorers of the sixteenth century took as their motto *Fey Oro* (Faith and Gold), so did the builders of the United States implicitly concentrated their efforts on the divergent altars God and Mammon.

Today we pride ourselves on being the most idealistic nation in the world, but we take equal – or even greater – pride in our astounding material success. . . . the interaction of idealism and opportunity constitute an almost sure formula for wealth and power is easily understood . . . through the course of our intellectual, political, and social development. (Horton 4-5)

It is interesting to note that quite a large number of Americans “have identified themselves, or their relatives with Willy” (Couchman 207). In the context of economic aspect
of American society, Henry Popkin also rightly evaluates Willy as “the most representative member of our commercial society” (49). Willy Loman is a tragic protagonist, lonely and tormented, and a heart-breaking human and pathetic figure, but a man with a rare heroic quality “who is actually, a very brave spirit who cannot settle for half but must pursue his dream of himself to the end. Finally, I thought it must be clear even obvious, that this man was no dumb brute heading mindlessly through his catastrophe” (Miller, Collected Plays 34).

In *Death of a Salesman*, pre-industrial and pre-commercial country life has been replaced by city life. In city life, individual finds himself alone in the sea of commercial sharks, who are bent upon annihilating his name, dignity, identity, and existence as a human being. There is no place for compassion and sympathy and piety in city life governed by commercial and industrial norms – these norms are based on selfishness, privatism and self-centeredness; these norms do not care for social responsibility:

The confusions and dreams of single individual on the verge of psychological collapse were made to embody the collapse of national myths of personal transformation and social possibility . . . in the person of Willy Loman the anxieties of a culture which had exchanged an existential world of physical and moral possibility for the determinisms of modern commercial and industrial life – the country for the city. The dislocation of Willy’s private life – discontinuities which open up spaces in familial relationships no less than in memory and experience – are equally those of a society chasing the chimera of material success as a substitute for spiritual fulfilment. (Bigsby 174)

The play exposes the mythical hollowness and bankruptcy of the American dream of commercial success – Willy Loman is a failure, and he represents the failure of industrial America which promises prosperity to individual, but fails to keep the promise in commercial
world of America; individual capitalist is criminal like Joe, and the employee is reduced to
the status of a pauper like Willy. All My Sons and Death of a Salesman represent severe
indictment of the capitalist system in America – protagonists in these plays, industrialist and
employee respectively, commit suicide.

It is self interest which is supreme in capitalism. There is no place for human
concerns, human brotherhood, and human solidarity in capitalism and business world. A
salesman has to be adept in selling things. It is the thing of sale, and the competence in selling
things which matters:

. . . the fault does not only lie in the individual; it also patently lies in self-
interest systematised into capitalism. Willy Loman is thrown on the scrap heap
by his employer after thirty-six years, and though Miller has objected that in
the persons of his next door neighbours, Charley and Bernard, he has created
two characters who retain their humanity, it is Charley who advises Willy that
human concerns play no role in business. When Willy objects that he had
actually selected his employer’s first name when he was born Charley replies,
‘When you gonna realise that them things don’t mean anything? You named
him Howard, but you can’t sell that. The only thing you got in this world is
what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you’re a salesman and you don’t
know that.’ (Bigsby 180)

There is no place for emotional and filial bonds in business. Business looks after his
own interests. Charley attributes his success to his lack of interest in anything other than his
business and commercial concerns. It is the commercial concerns and self-interest which
matter in capitalist society. When Charley says, “My salvation is that I never took an interest
in anything . . .” (Miller, Collected Plays 191), he means that he paid no attention to human
concerns, human brotherhood. Charley showed no concern for his son and his son was a great success in business. It means Charley believed in self-interest only. Further, Bernard also learnt the lesson of self-interest from his father. Human relations, emotional concerns and moral values do not matter in the world of business. One’s place in society is determined by the success one achieves in business. Willy’s relation with the business world is that of a misfit. He is an emotional man who is concerned with the welfare of his family, that is, the welfare of his children and wife. He does not think in terms of his self-interest like Charley. Therefore, he proves a failure and misfit in capitalist society. However, it goes to Willy’s credit that he lived and died for the betterment of his sons and wife. He was a rare salesman who sacrificed his life at the altar of success myth.

Miller’s play *The Price* is a fine presentation of conflict in relations between middle-aged brothers – Victor and Walter Franz, who after sixteen years, meet to settle their father’s estate and other disputes. The discussion between the two brothers reveals their approach towards life. Great Depression of 1930’s is the stark symbol of economic forces which play very vital, very significant and very decisive role in family relations and social relations. Actually, family relations, social relations and economic relations are intertwined with each other. They can’t be discussed or evaluated in isolation. They are inclusive of each other. Money is a so dominant factor in American society that even in *The Price*, Victor – who sacrificed his career to support his father for the sake of love and fidelity – cannot ignore the importance of money when he asks Solomon to pay high price for the old furniture: “if you got that [money], you got it all. You’re even loveable! [He laughs.] Well, what do you say? Give me the price” (Miller, *The Price* 44). Victor’s wife Esther too highlights the importance of money when she says, “We can never keep our minds on money! We worry about it, we talk about it, but we can’t seem to want it. I do but you don’t. I really do, Vic. I want it. Vic? I want money!” (Miller, *The Price* 21). Thus, *The Price* reveals the hard facts of American
society which is governed by economic factors; the play also lays emphasis on the fact that
economic considerations play vital, decisive and powerful role in human relations. Mad
pursuit of money and drive for success are the dominant factors in All My Sons, Death of a
Salesman, and The Price.

   Economic factors play crucial and vital role in family relations. Thus, economic and
family relations are complementary to each other. Victor in The Price is on the verge of
retirement. He had sacrificed his career and education to help his father during Economic
Depression of 1930s. Thus, father-son relations are marked by economic angle – Victor felt it
his filial and moral duty to come to the rescue of his father during Economic Depression.
Victor joined police department, but his brother Walter does not care for his father’s
economic problems and worries and anxieties. He shows preference for his own education
and career. Now, Victor is on the verge of retirement. The action begins at their family house
in New York. There is a museum like room. Stage direction throws ample light on the fact
that Mr. Franz was a prosperous and successful businessman before Great Depression:

   *The light from above first strikes an overstuffed armchair in centre stage. It
has a faded rose slipcover. Beside it on its right, a small table with a filigreed
radio of the twenties on it and old newspapers; behind it a bridge lamp. At its
left an old wind-up Victrola and pile of records on a low table. A white
cleaning cloth and a mop and pail are near by.*

   *The room is progressively seen. The area around the armchair alone appears
to be lived-in, with other chairs and a couch related to it. Outside this area, to
the sides and back limits of the room and up the walls, is the chaos of ten
rooms of furniture squeezed into this one.* (Miller, The Price 9)
The antiquated atmosphere of the family house also stresses the point that that Franz family was once prosperous one. The stage direction mentions: “There is rich heaviness, something almost Germanic about the furniture; a weight of time upon the bulging fronts and carving chests crowded and dense and it is difficult to decide if the stuff is impressive or merely heavy and ugly” (Miller, The Price 9).

Conversation takes place between Victor and his wife Esther about disposing of the antiquated second hand furniture. Esther asks Victor that he should utilise his brother’s share too because it was Victor who had sacrificed his career and education for the welfare of family. Thus, in Esther’s opinion, Victor’s brother owed moral debt to Victor to help him financially. Esther feels that Victor should retire from the job and start a new career. The discussion between Esther and Victor about Walter throws ample light on their contradictory behaviour and approach:

VICTOR. The man [Walter] hasn’t called me in sixteen years.

ESTHER. But neither have you called him!

[He looks at her in surprise.]

Well, you haven’t. That’s also a fact.

VICTOR [as though the idea were new and incredible]. What would I call him for?

ESTHER. Because, he’s your brother, he’s influential, and he could help – Yes, that’s how people do, Vic! Those articles he wrote had a real idealism, there was a genuine human quality. I mean people do change, you know.

VICTOR. I’m sorry, I don’t need Walter. (Miller, The Price 19-20)
Esther does not want to spend her married life in poverty. Economically good career and comfortable rich married life becomes a deep rooted obsession with her. Relations between Victor and his wife are marred because he is not able to provide her rich comforts of life due to his petty job of a sergeant in police department. As a result of petty economic position of Victor, his wife Esther gets frustrated to the extent that she becomes alcoholic. She is fed up with poverty, and prompts Victor to accept Walter’s offer of a new career, and thus, compels him to forego his moral stance in life simply for the sake of money. Again, there is conflict between Victor and Esther as far as their approach to money is concerned.

In *The Price*, there is conflict in the relations between two economic attitudes. Victor represents selfless economic attitude, that is, he is altruistic in his approach towards money. He sacrifices his education and career for the sake of his father and family. He wants to live an ideal life of a selfless man. He wants to live for the benefit and welfare of others. His father does not tell him that he had adequate financial resources to cope with the agony of Economic Depression. The role of father is that of a money-minded, selfish and self-centred person who prefers money to education and career of his son, Victor. Victor’s brother Walter also thinks of his own education, and financial benefit and excellent career in life. Walter earns a lot of money from his patients. He has a lot of bank balance, and nursing homes. Walter tells Victor, “the difference is that you have not hurt other people to defend yourself . . . You simply tried to make yourself useful” (Miller, *The Price* 71). Actually, Victor’s philosophy of life is to live for others – for family and society. As a son, he helps his father financially, and as a sergeant he serves the society honestly. He rejects Walter’s offer to start his career afresh because he does not have faith in the philosophy of cheating others and thus grow rich.

Following conversation between Walter and Victor throws ample light on two attitudes in man’s life. Victor stands for ideal, humanitarian, altruistic attitude towards others;
Walter and his father stand for materialistic and selfish attitude devoid of concern for others in family and society:

VICTOR. . . . you’re brought up to believe in one another, you’re filled full of that crap – you can’t help trying to keep it going, that’s all. I thought if I stuck with him, if he could see that somebody was still . . . [He breaks off; the reason strangely has fallen loose. He sits.] I can’t explain it; I wanted to . . . stop it from falling apart. I . . . [He breaks off again, staring.] [Pause].

WALTER [quietly]. It won’t work, Vic.

[VICTOR looks at him, then ESTHER does.]

You see it yourself, don’t you? It’s not that at all. You see that, don’t you?

VICTOR [quietly, avidly]. What?

WALTER [with his driving need]. Is it really that something fell apart? Were we really brought up to believe in one another? We were brought up to succeed, weren’t we? Why else would he respect me so and not you? What fell apart? What was here to fall apart? (Miller, The Price 89)

Thus, it is amply clear that the factor of money played a decisive and dominant role in the relations between the members of family in The Price. It is true that Victor is an ideal figure in the family, and he shows a lot of love for the family through his altruistic attitude, but his father, Franz and brother, Walter love money. Franz’s wife is also guided by financial considerations. Walter argues, “Was there ever any love here? When he needed her, she vomited. And when you needed him, he laughed. What was unbearable is not that it all fell apart, it was that there was never anything here” (Miller, The Price 89-90).
As regards love and loyalty in the family Walter argues that nothing of that sort existed in their family: “It’s that there was no love in this house. There was no loyalty. There was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement. That’s what was unbearable. And you proceeded to wipe out what you saw” (Miller, The Price 90).

Walter argues that the relationship in their family was based on money only. As regards the marriage of their parents, there was no love in their married life. Their marriage was simply a financial arrangement. Walter’s mother was not happy with her married life. Walter says, “They [Walter’s parents] were never lovers – she [Walter’s mother] said a hundred times that her marriage destroyed her musical career. I saw that nothing fell here” (Miller, The Price 90).

It is the economic decisions which affect the course of one’s life. It is the economic forces which make or mar one’s career. Again it is the economic forces which shape a man’s attitude, that is, to face economic crisis in the manner of a selfless or selfish person. Janet N. Balakian rightly remarks:

Miller has said that in The Price he was interested in “the structuring of experience,” or paradox, what happens when our actions create results that we never intended. Here financial demands have dictated the course of Victor’s life. Once again, Miller is fascinated by how the economy shapes a character’s fate, just as he was in All My Sons, Death of a Salesman and The American Clock. The Depression left a permanent scar on his imagination. Walter chooses to deal with economic imperatives differently from his brother. (134)

In Death of a Salesman, Willy’s financial failure or his financial troubles are partly due to the unfair, unsympathetic, non-caring attitude of his employer; Victor’s financial failure in The Price is due to his sacrificing nature for the welfare of his family. In Willy’s
case it is capitalist employer, and in Victor’s case it is economic Depression caused by capitalist and market economy which are to blame.

Attitude of Esther is antithetical to Victor. Esther like Victor’s mother is of materialistic bent of mind. She also seems to be of practical nature like Walter. Following conversation between the two shows that Victor is idealist and Esther is materialist:

ESTHER. . . . he’s your brother, he’s influential, and he could help – Yes, that’s how people do, Vic! Those articles he wrote had a real idealism, there was a genuine human quality. I mean people do change, you know.

VICTOR, turning away. I’ sorry, I don’t need Walter.

ESTHER. I’m not saying you have to approve of him; he’s a selfish bastard, but he just might be able to put you on the track of something. I don’t see the humiliation. (Miller, The Price 17-18)

The above conversation reveals that family relations are affected by economic exigencies. For a materialist and opportunist like Esther there is no humiliation in getting financial benefits from others. It appears that Victor does not want to get financial help from Walter, who is selfish, opportunist and materialist. It is also pertinent to point out that neither material attitude of Walter nor altruistic attitude of Victor bring happiness in their married life. Walter is the victim of divorce and Victor’s wife remains unhappy due to Victor’s ideal approach.

Miller, in his plays, finds that familial, social and moral values have lost their permanence and utility. It is market values of use and throw away attitude which have established their firm hold on modern American society’s thinking. In The Price, Soloman says, “What is the key world today? Disposable. The more you can throw it away the more it
is beautiful. The car, the furniture, the wife, the children – everybody have to be disposable. Because you see the main thing today – is shopping” (Miller, The Price 38).

The Price may also be evaluated in terms of tension-ridden relationship between deterministic forces of society and existential drives of human nature. Victor observes, “I figured I’d go on the Force temporarily, just to get us through the Depression, then go back to school. But the war came, we had the kid, and you turn around and you’ve racked up fifteen years on the pension” (Miller, The Price 43).

He who goes against the deterministic forces remains at disadvantage like Victor. Market forces do not care for human emotions and human drives. They dictate to grind one’s own axe. Market forces dictate one to live for oneself only; they don’t dictate one to live for others. However, guided by moral and ethical values, Victor decided to swim against the tide of Great Depression. He decided to live for family. Though he could not register financial success, his concern for his father and family grants him a respectable place in the eyes of the readers and audience. Actually, the play highlights the price which one has to pay to uphold the banner of concern for others in society.

The American Clock is the play in which Miller again deals with the historical fact of Depression of 1929. The action in The American Clock takes place in the memory regions of the protagonist, Lee Baum, whose early life experiences still haunt him. It is a fact of history that Depression of 1929 was a devastating experience for Americans – rich or poor. In this play, Miller depicts the harrowing experience of a family, and of many other people, thus encompassing the whole American society in its vast epical range. Like many other plays of Miller, The American Clock is also marked by autobiographical and personal experience of his life. Depression of 1929 which had destroyed the flourishing cloth business of Miller’s father left deep impression on the adolescent mind of Arthur Miller. As a matter of fact, this
terrible experience continued to haunt Miller throughout his life. As Jack Kroll remarks, “The American Clock never finds an effective dramatic shape, it’s part play, part chronicle, but mostly it’s Miller’s last evocations of the images and people that have haunted him more than any other’s in his life” (Schlueter158).

The American Clock produced at Broadway in the 1970s proved a flop in the sense that the producer had to abandon its show just after a few days of its opening “because the producer had no money left to advertise” (Griffin 104). Prior to it, A Memory of Two Mondays had met the similar fate “on Broadway in 1955” (Griffin 103) simply because at that point of time nobody seemed to be interested in being reminded of Depression and the sad plight of the workers in particular and the people in general; actually, dollar had been accepted as world currency and stock market had regained vigour and vitality. Flourishing share and stock market represented the mood of American society; nobody was interested in the play about workers; nobody seemed to welcome or remember the sad plight of workers during Depression. However, the play received attention in “Latin America, Italy, Czechoslovakia and the less affluent countries of Europe which still had such workers and conditions of work or could remember them” (Miller, Timebends 220). Like A Memory of Two Mondays, The American Clock too got welcome attention in foreign lands. In 1986, The American Clock was produced by London’s National Theatre. It was a grand success in London.

It was Studs Terkel who interviewed the survivors of Depression and produced their experiences in book form Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in 1971. Miller based his play on the real life experiences of men and women of this very book. Theodore K. Quinn in this play is based on a real neighbour of Miller’s. He reminds of rags to riches reality of American society. From a poor law graduate to President of General Electric was a grand and extraordinary success registered by an ordinary fellow like Quinn.
Strangely enough, Quinn did not remain on the post of the President of General Electric more than a day because he feared that monopolies like General Electric were a danger to the “free, competitive economy and the political liberties” (Miller, Introduction, The American Clock xviii-xix) so dear to the American society. Miller remarks that the play “managed to convey the seriousness of the disaster that the Great Depression was, and at the same time its human heart” (Introduction, The American Clock xix).

There is autobiographical element in The American Clock. In this play, Moe Baum represents Miller’s father, Rose, Miller’s mother, and Lee, is Miller himself. It is like the Millers that Moe Baum’s family had to leave their luxurious living in New York. Like the Millers, Moe Baum’s family moved to a modest accommodation in Brooklyn. Moe Baum’s manufacturing business could not withstand the onslaught of Depression of 1929. Rose has to pawn her jewellery to cope with the financial crisis. Lee who longed for entering the college had to do many types of jobs before he finally managed to save money to pursue his university education. Lee says:

   After a lot of jobs and saving, I did get to the university, and it was a quiet island in the stream. Two pairs of socks and a shirt, plus a good shirt and a mackinaw, and may be a part-time job in the library, and you could live like a king and never see cash. So there was a distinct reluctance to graduate into that world out there . . . where you knew nobody wanted you. (Miller, The American Clock 158)

Economic disaster of 1929 was certainly a great calamity which tested the will and courage of Americans to overcome it. Family in American context is a place for security and solidarity. Women in Miller’s plays perform significant role in keeping high the morale of the members of family. Moe is a salesman and gets commission on the lady’s lingerie he sells.
Rose endeavours to keep her husband in high spirits when she says, “Goodbye, darling. This is going to be a good day – I know it!” (Miller, The American Clock 154). She also cheers up her wage earning son when she tells him in a confident tone, “And listen – it does not mean you can never go to college” (Miller, The American Clock 154). Rose’s behaviour provides hope and strength to her husband and son to face the economic crisis boldly. Depression caused untold miseries to the graduates. One’s heart is filled with sympathy and compassion when one learns through Rose, “Who would believe it? You look out the window in the middle of a fine October day, and there’s a dozen college graduates with advanced degrees playing ball in the street like children. And it gets harder and harder to remember when life seemed to have so much purpose, when you couldn’t wait for the morning!” (Miller, The American Clock 149). Thus, it shows that there was acute unemployment. People invented strange methods to earn money. For instance, as Rose says, “The crazy ideas the people get. Mr. Warsaw started on our block, to make a little money he started a racetrack in his kitchen, with cockroaches. Keeps them in matchboxes with their names written on – Alvin, Murray, Irving . . . they bet nickels, dimes” (Miller, The American Clock 157).

Miller’s mother was fond of music and books. Similarly, Rose in The American Clock is interested in piano, songs and books. She pawned her jewellery to face the onslaught of Depression but she declares, “this piano is not leaving this house” (Miller, The American Clock 157). She was also compassionate to others, to the needy in particular. She was in the habit of feeding the homeless. It is through The American Clock that Miller revisits the dreadful past of Depression, and the radical point of view gaining ascendancy because of free market economy which had brought untold woe and misery to all and sundry. Nobody could afford to remain unaffected due to the collapse of stock and share market in 1929. Miller says:
The crash forced us all to enter history willy-nilly and everyone soon understood that other ways of conducting the nation’s business – there simply had to be, because the one we had was so persistently not working. It was not only the radicals who were looking at the historical clock and asking how long our system could last, but people of every viewpoint (Miller, Introduction, The American Clock xiii).

Thus, it is amply clear that the road roller effect of the collapse of the capitalist economy had played havoc with the lives of the businessmen, bankers and common masses alike. Quite a large number of sketches depicting the tales of woe and misery are authentic and real testimony of the threatening aspect of the times. It appeared as if American system and American civilisation were on the verge of extinction. However, the period songs such as “Sunny Side of the Street” (Miller, The American Clock 109) and Rose’s prayer to God, “Oh, my God, help our dear country . . . and the people” (Miller, The American Clock 200) point to the fact that even during terribly adverse circumstances Americans never lose hope of finding some way to overcome the hard times. This is what Miller tells the director Peter Woods of the British Production, “. . . along with the textures of a massive social and human tragedy, a renewed awareness of the American’s improvisational strength, their almost subliminal faith that things can and must be made to work out” (Miller, Timebends 588).

Before the curtain falls, Lee’s tribute to his mother Rose speaks volumes of the optimism ingrained in the psyche of the Americans. Rose represents the robust optimism of American society. She had firm faith in life:

LEE. But then she’d warn me, “Watch out for women – when they’re not stupid, they’re full of deceit.” I’d come home and give her a real bath of radical idealism, and she was ready to storm the barricades; by evening she’d
fallen in love again with the Prince of Wales. She was so like the country; money obsessed her, but what she really longed for was some kind of height where she could stand and see out and around and breathe in the air of her own free life. With all her defeats she believed to the end that the world was meant to be better. . . . I don’t know; all I know for sure is that whenever I think of her, I always end up — with this headful of life! (Miller, The American Clock 203)

It is through The American Clock that Miller seems to remind the Americans of the dangers inherent in the free market economy of the United States. It is a sad and sorrowful saga of unprecedented woe and misery caused by market forces. Miller points out in this play that all of a sudden America’s share and stock market crashed — moment by moment stock situation started deteriorating, in no time the crisis deepened and worsened and was beyond control. Depression (1929) caused irreparable damage to financial system not only in America but also throughout the world. Depression was a bolt from the blue for American society. All and sundry were badly affected. Financiers, speculators and investors in stock market lost their business; one of them “Jesse Livermore” (Miller, The American Clock 122) committed suicide. Moe Baum suffers serious set back in his business. He relieves his chauffeur, Frank of his job. Irene comments on Frank’s fate: “You got fired, you walked away to nothing; no unemployment insurance, no Social Security — just the in-laws and fresh air” (Miller, The American Clock 126). Utter chaos and extreme panic has engulfed the American social scene. A financier Arthur A. Robertson reveals the heartrending agony and acute suffering of the people when he says, “Nobody knows how many people are leaving their hometowns, their farms and cities and hitting the road. Hundreds of thousands, may be millions of internal refugees, Americans transformed into strangers” (Miller, The American Clock 135).
It is quite a large number of people whose horrible experience Lee recounts through his memory lane. There is young Sidney whose mother urges him to pledge himself to the landlady’s thirteen-year-old daughter because they don’t have rent to pay. In the Mid-West, a sheriff is in search of a job. He thinks that his cousin might get a job for him; so he barters his radio to a black man in exchange for chicken dinner to entertain and impress his cousin. Lee also meets a man in New York with a Gramercy Park address who was begging for food. People were jobless and in the grip of widespread starvation. Life was not a bed of roses; it was rather a bed full of thorns for Americans. Apart from the traumatic experience of a large number of people, the play also depicts the story of the Baum family. Lee Baum narrates the experiences of his father Moe and mother Rose and a host of other people, who underwent traumatic experiences due to unprecedented debacle in the economic history of America. Lee recollects with poignancy the moment when his mother gave him her diamond bracelet to pawn. Lee’s mother was accustomed to Park Avenue living, but due to economic debacle the Baums had to move to Brooklyn, she also had to sell her piano which was her beloved possession. Thus, this play is a valuable document which depicts the woe and misery of upper middle class caused by 1929’s Depression. The play also portrays the sense of solidarity and courage to face and overcome the financial crisis caused by Depression. Miller’s aimed at recounting and recreating the impact of economic disaster at personal and national level, at the level of individual, and society. Miller wanted to “give some sense of life as we lived it when the clock was ticking everyday” (Introduction, The American Clock xiv). The play makes us aware of the weaknesses inherent in the capitalist economy.

In short, economic relationships in capitalist economy are based on the exploitation of the workers. Impersonal nature of capitalist and industrial economy does not care for human emotions and personal relationships. This system treats the employees or workers simply as a part of the production process. When the employee grows old, he is fired from the job like
Willy in *Death of a Salesman*. Willy is fired from the job because he is no more useful for the company. As one notice in *All My Sons*, businessman cares for his profit at the cost of public interest. Economic relationship between the members of family, as we notice in *The Price*, is based on the sacrifice of one’s career for the welfare and well-being of one’s family. In *The American Clock*, we come across the financial crisis caused by Economic Depression of 1929. Both the rich and the poor were badly affected. It is important to note that protagonists in these plays exhibit concern for the members of their family. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Victor in *The Price* and Rose in *The American Clock* are all concerned with the economic welfare of their families. However, this concern for the economic welfare of the family is sometimes at the cost of public welfare, as we notice in *All My Sons*; sometimes at the cost of one’s life, as we notice in *Death of a Salesman*; sometimes at the cost of one’s career, as we notice in *The Price*; and sometimes at the cost of one’s precious possessions as we notice in *The American Clock*. 
Works Cited


