Chapter V

Conclusion

Arthur Miller wrote his celebrated essay “On Social Plays” in 1955. At that time, Tennessee Williams and William Inge held sway over the American theatre. The prime concern of their plays was the psychological analysis of the individual. These plays were divorced from the social context. Brenda Murphy rightly remarks, “In a theatre where the works of Tennessee Williams and William Inge held sway Miller was trying to define a tradition that would encompass both the psychological and the social. He found this in the classical Greek drama” (11). Arthur Miller himself says, “Drama gains its weight as it deals with more and more of the whole man, not either his subjective or social life alone, and the Greek was unable to conceive of man or anything else except as a whole” (“On Social Plays,” 54).

Arthur Miller’s literary output is mainly influenced by three factors – Depression, Holocaust, and McCarthyism. For the purpose of the present study, nine major plays of Miller have been taken up – All My Sons (1947), Death of a Salesman (1949), The Crucible (1953) A View from the Bridge (1955), After the Fall (1964), Incident at Vichy (1964), The Price (1968), The Archbishop’s Ceiling (1977), and The American Clock (1980). Family and social relationships have been discussed in All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall, and The Price; economic relationships have been taken up in All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Price, and The American Clock; and political relationships have been examined in The Crucible, After the Fall, Incident at Vichy, and The Archbishop’s Ceiling.
Family and social relationships have been examined and evaluated in Miller’s five major plays – All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall, and The Price. Miller, throughout his life, remained influenced by the Greek tradition of Social Drama. As far as family and social life is concerned, he felt that the relationship between man and society is the primary concern of man. Like the Greek dramatists, Miller tried to highlight the importance of “whole man” which is the ideal model for human civilisation. He tries to build “a world in which the human being can live as a naturally political, naturally private, naturally engaged person” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 57).

Major concern of Miller’s plays is industrial and commercial society on the one hand, and family on the other; and he reveals tension between private and public postures of modern man. In All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, and The Price one of the characters is shown as committed to family – Joe Keller, Willy Loman and Victor respectively. However, drive for success and material prosperity in a competitive society causes disintegration of family setup, and family relations suffer severe jolt and shock. From the perusal of the plays, it becomes crystal clear that only genuine love, loyalty, compassion and piety, and moral responsibility in social relations can stop the erosion of cordial family relationships. Material success is achieved for the welfare of the family. But the material success is attained at the cost of moral responsibility towards society.

Father-son relationship has been examined in Death of a Salesman, All My Sons, and The Price; relationship between uncle and niece has been discussed in A View from the Bridge; relationship between wife and husband has been taken up in All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall, and The Price; and relationship between brothers has also been examined in these plays.
In brief, we come across the theme of guilt and betrayal, and drive for success in *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Price*, and *After the Fall*. These thematic concerns affect the relations among the members of family; and we can safely conclude that family concerns and societal concerns are intertwined to the extent that they cannot be treated as isolated from each other. Family relations affect the societal relations, and vice versa. Welland rightly remarks that “the frictions of family life” are related “to those of the macrocosm outside: his families live in a recognisably real world” (2-3). Miller has used the analogy of interrelationship between fish and water to describe interrelationship between individual and society. This analogy means “a serious treatment of a human being must encompass the society that surrounds him or her as the force that has conditioned thoughts, culture, attitudes and values” (Griffin 5-6).

As far as the concept of the “whole man” (Miller, “On Social Plays,” 54) is concerned, the protagonist has to be judged both in relation to family and in relation to society. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is no doubt devoted to his family, but fails to achieve the goal of success in society. However, he sacrifices his life for the benefit of his son, Biff and proves himself a selfless person. In *All My Sons*, Joe Keller is concerned with the welfare of his family, but violates the law of the land by supplying defective cylinder heads to the American Army Air Force. However, towards the end of the play he realises his social responsibility when he says that the pilots who lost their lives due to defective cylinder heads supplied by his factory were also “all” his “sons” (Miller, *Collected Plays* 126). In *A View from the Bridge*, Eddie is deeply concerned with the welfare of his niece but violates the norms of his Italian community by getting Rodolpho and Marco arrested. In *The Price*, Victor comes to his father’s help by getting a job in police department. He performs this act of helping his father at the cost of his career so that the latter may be able to cope with financial stress of economic depression. He served the police department, and thus, served the
state and society, too, in a very honest manner. It is significant to note that he is loyal and sincere towards the welfare of the family, and at the same time, he performs the duties as an honest officer, and thus, proves himself loyal and sincere towards society too.

Arthur Miller’s four major plays – *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Price* and *The American Clock* have been taken up to examine, analyse and evaluate economic relationships. Marx in his celebrated work *Das Kapital* (1867) asserts that Capitalism acquires surplus labour, and in this way, exploits the worker. Moreover, capitalism does irreversible psychological harm to the psyche of the worker. It 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 is based on the exploitation of the masses.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, control of the workers over their work place started diminishing. More autonomous labour practice was replaced by hierarchical and managerial structures of industrialization. Power became centralized in the hands of a few persons. Labour became mechanized and de-skilled. Now 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 1950’s 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)

Disaster in the form of Economic Depression of 1929 was the result of 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 rightly observes:

The intellectual attraction of Marxism was that it exploited 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)

Death of a Salesman exposes the mythical hollowness and bankruptcy of the American dream of success – Willy Loman is a failure, and he represents the failure of industrial America which promises prosperity to individual, but fails to grant the same. 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.

Great Depression of 1930s is the stark symbol of economic forces which play vital, significant, and decisive role in family 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 dominant factor in
American society. In *The Price* even 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 heavy 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 and decisive and powerful role in human relations. Mad pursuit of money and drive for success is the dominant factor in *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Price*.

In short, economic relationships in capitalist economy are based on the exploitation of the workers and masses. Impersonal nature of capitalist and industrial economy does not care for personal emotions and personal relationships. This system treats the employees and workers simply as a part of the production process and as we notice in *Death of a Salesman*, when the employee grows old; he is fired from the job. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman has grown old; he is fired from the job because he is no more useful for the company. In *All My Sons*, businessman cares for his private profit at the cost of public interest. Economic relationship between the members of family, as we notice in *The Price*, is based on sacrifice of one’s career for the welfare of the 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 the 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*.

American writers in the 1930s appear to be greatly enchanted by Marxist interpretation of society. The era of 1930s may be termed as the golden period of Marxist influence in American literature. However, this unprecedented influence of Marxism in American literature started decreasing with the severe implementation of the draconian laws such as the Espionage Act (1917), the Sedition Act (1918), the Un-American Activities Act (1938), the Smith Act (1940), the Taft-Hartley Act (1947), and the McCarron Internal Security Act (1950). For the purpose of political relationships, Miller’s four major plays have been taken up – *The Crucible* (1953), *After the Fall* (1964), *Incident at Vichy* (1964), and *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* (1977).

Miller’s play *The Crucible* (1953) is deeply rooted in the history of (colonial) America. The play refers to the actual incidents, and the trial which took place in the second half of the sixteenth century in Salem. But the play reminds us of the dictum – history repeats itself, in the sense, that it has clear parallels with the contemporary America – post Second World War America. It was in February 1950 that senator Joe McCarthy addressed the Ohio County Women’s Republican Club and claimed that he had a list of “two hundred and five” (Nannes 182) communists in the State Department. McCarthy’s revelation switched on the panic button. Conservatives rallied behind McCarthy. Investigation started. By 1953 the hurricane of the witch-hunt of communists engulfed the entire nation. Political elements of far Right started baying for the blood of communists. Their propaganda against communists paralysed the mind of the people. Mass hysteria was created against communists who were charged with subversive activities – they were publicised as agent provocateurs, wreckers of constitution, grave threat to American democracy and American interests. It was, indeed, to crush the voice of the communists. About McCarthy terror, Miller writes:
It was the fact that a political objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. The wonder of it all struck me that . . . such manifestly ridiculous man, should be capable of paralysing thought itself, and worse, causing to billow up such persuasive clouds of “mysterious” feelings within people . . . Astounded, I watched men pass me without a nod whom I had known rather well for years! And again . . . that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered . . . that so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in The Crucible. (Collected Plays 39-40)

Hitler and his Nazis represented the loss of liberal human values such as spirit of tolerance, broad-mindedness, love of humanity, and brotherhood. There is no place for racial discrimination and hatred in liberal humanism. Nazis were a slur on the part of liberal tradition of Western culture:

Unfortunately, there is nothing else into which we can fit our experience – traditions are broken and culture is unavailable. Our culture is an empty form, standing for a continuity of experience which is now discontinued, for the reality and inviolability of human values that are everywhere violated and denied . . . Today the cultured man is isolated . . . the cultural form that conveyed humanity and assured the transaction from one man to the next has been destroyed. (Rosenfeld 33)

In brief, Proctor in The Crucible preserves his conscience in the face of brutal assault on the part of state machinery; Von Berg in Incident at Vichy is the epitome of challenge to
barbaric state power of the Nazis; in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, Sigmund represents dissidence against the communist state power, Quentin in *After the Fall* exhibits signs of weakness when he tells that he won’t defend Lou if he (Quentin) is labelled as “Red lawyer” (Miller, *After the Fall* 58). It may be said that John Proctor, Von Berg, and Sigmund act in a morally appreciable way towards others in society, but Quentin shies away from his moral and social obligation towards others; more so, being a lawyer, it does not behove Quentin to be afraid of being labelled as “Red lawyer” if he defends Lou against the charges levelled against him (Lou) and other people of communist leanings.

It is towards the end of the play, *All My Sons*, that Joe Keller feels his moral responsibility towards others when he admits that the pilots who died due to faulty cylinder heads sent by him were all his sons. Though it is a belated awareness of social responsibility, it testifies to the fact that the dormant traits of whole man in Joe Keller explode like a volcano, and shamed by his moral conscience, he commits suicide. However, it cannot be denied that like Willy Loman Joe Keller, too, is wholly devoted to the welfare of his family and in a limited sense he exhibits the traits of whole man throughout the action of the play.

As the central concern of this thesis is to study the relationships in terms of the whole man, it may be said that in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman’s main concern and anxiety has been the welfare of his sons, and ultimately he sacrifices his life for the benefit of his son, Biff. So, a little man like Willy shows concern for others, though these others are his sons. It may be said of Willy that he feels morally bound to be useful for his sons. Thus, though in a limited field of family, he exhibits traits of the whole man.

In *A View from the Bridge*, it is true that Eddie Carbone is concerned with his name in society. He cannot tolerate that Marco should shame his name in the Italian community. He refuses to admit that he himself has tainted his name by betraying the norms of his
community. He is not socially responsible, because he betrays his relatives – Marco and Rodolfo, and gets them imprisoned by immigration authorities of US Social awareness of his responsibility towards his community does not dawn on him and he pitifully dies a socially irresponsible person. It seems that Eddie lacks the traits of the whole man, that is, of a socially responsible man. However, it may also be argued that Eddie’s behaviour proves him a responsible law abiding citizen because he informs the immigration authorities of U.S. about the illegal entry of his wife’s relatives in U. S., and this act of Eddie exhibits his duty and loyalty towards state. But at the same time, in performing his duty towards the state, he is violating the social norms of the Italian community to which he belongs. According to the social norms of the Italian community, he was not supposed to disclose the information regarding the illegal presence of his wife’s relatives to the U. S. authorities. So, as a law abiding citizen he may be treated as a whole man, but as a member of the Italian community he may be treated as a traitor.

In The Price, Victor is the epitome of moral responsibility towards family because he sacrifices his university career to help his father who is in financial throes due to the Depression of 1929. He is socially responsible because he serves the society as an employee of the police department. He seems to be a better representative of the traits of whole man than Willy Loman and Joe Keller. Willy and Joe live for their families but Victor lives for both family and society. Thus, we may say that Victor represents the traits of the whole man.

John Proctor in The Crucible stands for the conscience of man. He stands for moral responsibility towards others. He refuses to implicate others in the Salem witch trials. It is due to his socially responsible behaviour that he seems to qualify for the status of the whole man.
Von Berg in *Incident at Vichy* deserves our serious attention in the sense that in his fight against political evil of the Nazis, he sacrifices his life to save Leduc (a Jew). His selfless action to live for others in society is a slap on the face of the Nazis who engineered holocaust of the Jews. Thus, Von berg may be labelled as the whole man as he endangers his life for the sake of a Jew who is on the verge of being persecuted by the Nazis.

In *After the Fall*, Quentin poses a question “Is knowing all?” (Miller, *After the Fall* 162-163). And in *Incident at Vichy* Von Berg seems to suggest that knowledge should be supplemented with compassion, piety and responsibility for others in society. Knowledge should be used for realising the ideal of brotherhood of man and selfless service of society. Quentin holds the view that before the biblical fall of Man, there was total and complete innocence in Man, but after the fall evil has polluted the stream of innocence, stream of life of man, and for the sake of survival, man must muster courage to resist the evil. Man must muster courage to survive in this world, despite evil in it. Quentin’s behaviour with his two wives, Louise and Maggie, is unbecoming of a responsible husband. Maggie accuses Quentin of being unloving and cold. His former wife Louise also charged him with the same accusation. He exhibits the signs of weakness when he tells that he would not defend Lou if he is labelled as “Red lawyer” (Miller, *After the Fall* 58). Thus, we may say that Quentin proves a failure on both family and social front. He fails to pass the test of the whole man.

In *Archbishop’s Ceiling*, Sigmund represents dissidence against state power. Thus, he shows moral courage to withstand the repressive nature of state. As totalitarian state power is harmful for society, Sigmund’s role as a dissident writer is for the benefit of society. He shows exemplary courage in deciding to remain in his own country to take up cudgels against the repressive communist regime of his country. Thus, his bold response against state terrorism is certainly going to save society from the evil of repression. So he may be treated as the whole man.
Rose in *The American Clock*, may be treated as displaying the traits of the whole man. She sells her dearest possessions – jewellery and piano to overcome the financial difficulties caused by the Economic Depression of 1929. She also helps the needy and feeds the poor. Thus, in respect of family and society she proves to be a responsible human being.

With regard to the future implications of this study, it may be said that social and moral responsibility should not be limited to family only like Willy Loman, Joe Keller, and Eddie Carbone in *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *A View from the Bridge* respectively; on the other hand, it should be broad enough to encompass both family and society as in the case of Victor in *The Price*, *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The American Clock*. *The Price*, *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The American Clock* highlight the fact that capitalist system of economy treats the human beings as commodities and cogs of machine; capitalist system of economy seems to be devoid of human touch and emotions. It is based on the whims and pranks of market forces of impersonal nature. It requires drastic transformation in its form and content so as to focus on the welfare of both individual and society. One should be bold enough to challenge the political tyranny and racial discrimination as we notice in the example of Von Berg in *Incident at Vichy*. Sigmund in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* exhorts the intellectuals and writers to fight for the freedom of expression. State authorities should respect the fundamental human rights of free speech, freedom of thought and expression so that the fascist and authoritarian forces are not able to curb these rights. It is also incumbent on individuals like John Proctor in *The Crucible* to listen to the voice of their conscience and not be terrorised by theological and political authorities.

To maintain one’s dignity and society’s welfare, one should refrain from amassing wealth for the family at the cost of society. Market forces should stop the exploitation of individual and society, and political authorities should adhere to the democratic principles of freedom of expression and conscience, and right to life and equality before law. There should
not be discrimination and victimisation on the basis of race, religion, colour, and gender. Freedom of expression and conscience, and right to life should be treated as the birthright of every individual and ethnic group. When the social, economic, and political welfare of both individual and society is in peril, one should be prepared to defend the same with all one’s might.
Works Cited


