CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION
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The theatre in America really showed its own growth with the advancement and growth of the youthful nation. The first century of American playwriting consistently affirms that man's problems, his actions and reactions, were the proper business of the stage. It may be clearly noted that American drama, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the Civil War, was obviously on its own with various possibilities for creating a viable native drama. The American playwrights led by Eugene O'Neill began to achieve world stature with a refreshing variety of themes and forms in their plays. The nineteen twenties were a period of great prosperity in the American theatre as the experimentation in form, the range of ideas, and the quality of the plays distinguished the period from its past. The playwrights turned to the continent for greater inspiration and ideas.

The nineteen thirties showed growth and turmoil in the theatrical activity. It continued with the plays of Behrman, Sherwood, Elmer Rice and Clifford Odets. Their plays marked the evidence of social commentary and protest with new seriousness and importance. American drama in the forties marked the dominating force of the results of the war which also reflected the agony and anger of aroused people. In the fifties American drama mainly concentrated more on private issues than on public problems. Since O'Neill only four major
American playwrights stand out clearly – Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. It may however be pointed out that Williams and Miller appeared in the American theatre as the most important playwrights of the post-war years in America. Both the dramatists received continuous attention and international reputation as modern playwrights. American theatre also produced prominent absurd playwrights like Jack Gelber, Edward Albee and Jack Richardson. In its course of development the American theatre has had its dull and active periods – sometimes declining and sometimes emerging in new shapes and varieties. The forces and conflicts, which are reflected in early American drama, are the forces, the issues and the conflicts which shaped American identity as such and which gives it its present-day identity. Obviously the American drama has gradually become a powerful force in world theatre with its leading playwrights like O’Neill, Williams and Miller.

Miller is regarded as a prominent playwright among the great figures of modern American drama. He is often called the forerunner of social drama today. The Depression of the nineteen thirties had really influenced him in his artistic career as a playwright. It played a significant role in shaping his conception of social drama. He had a tendency to dramatise the horrors and absurdities of the Depression catastrophe into an image of human suffering, and also the obsessive preoccupation of the individuals with the thought of preserving their
name, honour and dignity in the sweeping disintegration of social and moral values. The successful plays of his early dramatic career are *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955). Surprisingly enough he remained silent for a period of nine years and *After the Fall* (1964) is his first play after this gap since he wrote *A View from the Bridge*. His other important later plays are — *Incident At Vichy* (1964), *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972) and his most recent play *The American Clock* (1980). He showed his literary talent in a novel, *Focus* (1945), a reportage, *Situation Normal* (1944), and a screen-play, *The Misfits* (1961). His essays and articles also represent a theoretical analysis of the nature and possibilities of modern drama. Most of these essays were published in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, edited by Robert A. Martin.

After the production of *Death of a Salesman*, a masterpiece of his dramatic art, in 1949, Miller was undoubtedly regarded by many as one of the world’s most important living playwrights. There is considerable variety in his dramatic world. In his plays all ideas are parts of one idea which is constantly renewed and enriched. In him the theme of one play becomes the seed of another and each new work has always a link to his other plays. The individuals in his dramas are all the time struggling to realise their individual identities so as to impart a meaning to their existence. Obviously his plays reflect the moral
dilemmas, the inward battles and the mental conflicts of the torn and withered personalities. In his plays the theme of identity recurrently figures as a major problem faced by the individuals in one form or another in different situations. His strength as a successful modern American playwright lies in his ability to dramatise the fundamental assumption concerning the American experience, its values and inflated sense of self-importance. He is modern in the sense that he deals with the psychological aspects of modern issues such as defeat, despair, frustration, neuroses, obsessive feelings, perversions of mind, etc. He enlarges the concept of social drama by focusing on the psychological and social needs and obligations of the individual which compel him to accept his responsibility and establish his own identity. It may be argued that Miller's plays constitute an attempt to define the dignity of man in terms of his social ambitions and commitments and also in terms of recognising his guilt and innocence. Indeed the underlying struggle in his dramas is that of the individual attempting to know himself and to gain a respectable place in his own society. His plays are therefore a continual search for an inviolable truth about human character and behaviour, and a sense of identity. Obviously, the question of identity figures in almost all his plays and is treated and worked out in dramatic terms in different ways.

The protagonists in his plays are ordinary human beings, yet they distinguish themselves by their untiring continuous struggle to preserve
their dignity and honour — two distinguished features of identity. The central conflict in his plays grows out of a crisis of identity. Each of the protagonists is suddenly confronted with a situation which he is incapable of facing and which eventually puts his "name" or dignity in jeopardy. In the ensuing struggle it becomes clear that the hero is bewildered and desperate because of having lost his 'name' which implies the loss of his prestige and his social-image. Though varying in degree the protagonists of his plays face internal struggle before they arrive at a final decision to preserve their individual values — their dignity and identity in particular — in the face of immense social pressures. Their struggles, their desperate and vague search for their identity acquire a tragic dimension.

Miller skillfully takes up the theme of identity at different levels and in different situations. He firmly believes that the problem of identity proves to be a matter of serious concern to all sensitive and thinking individuals in society. As a matter of fact, the question of identity recurrently figures as a major issue in his important plays — *All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall, Incident At Vichy, The Price* and *The American Clock.* The protagonists of these plays display a rare sensitivity to the problem of maintaining their identity by adhering to the larger values and norms of the society. For they feel that by upholding such values and norms
there is hope for survival of the human race. As such they carry a special responsibility on their shoulders to confront with this problem.

Miller's first successful play *All My Sons* is a play about social relationships and about the myopic vision of a selfish businessman who failed to see his identity as a responsible citizen and recognise his moral and social responsibility. The play may be seen as an important milestone in the growth of the playwright's tragic art. The action of the play proceeds from the guilt of Joe Keller, the protagonist who has been directly responsible for his anti-social crime of supplying defective cylinder heads in wartime leading to the death of twenty one young American pilots. He adopts a cheap business man's method of amassing money in wartime and becoming a successful businessman. But in the process he becomes estranged from both family and society because of his uncompromising greed and selfishness. He does not show any awareness of the safety of other people. He isolates himself from others and does not see beyond his sons and family. His myopic vision is the consequence of his lack of awareness of his social identity. In the play the private guilt of the individual is matched against the larger social evil. He is no doubt a product of that society ruled by the ethics of success. His mind and psychology are shaped and distorted by the capitalistic economic system. Miller raises larger social issues and significant questions of man's problem of identity, choice, responsibility, justice and morality within the structure of the family.
drama. The protagonist Joe does not have his sense of self-awareness and ultimately meets with his tragic end.

The psychological need of the protagonist to uphold his image in the society to which he belongs is reinforced and the same need re-emerges with a new vigour and seriousness in Miller's most important and acclaimed dramatic work, *Death of a Salesman*. The play embodies the dramatist's idea of the individual's identity as a person of integrity responsible to society. It reveals the private inner world of the protagonist and the world of external reality. The past portrayed in the play is bounded on all sides by the mind and imagination of Willy Loman. It really marks an advance on the dramatist's earlier works in terms of its technical sophistication. *The Death of a Salesman* is a criticism of the moral and social standards of contemporary America. Willy dreams of material success through being "well-liked". His sense of identity is dependent upon his strong devotion to his family. Once the family feeling is disturbed the father looks like a lost man, a man without identity. He wants to impart the success ideals of Ben and the old Singleman to his sons to make the name 'Loman' live forever. His ceaseless effort is toward projecting an inflated image of himself to impress upon his sons. But as a father he fails to enact the moral authority reposed in him by the family members, particularly his sons. His sense of loss of respect in the son's eyes continues to haunt him and keep the conflict with his son alive in his mind. He is completely
oblivious of the real sense of identity and is lost in his self-delusion. He ineptly thinks that his identity meant being "well-liked". But he is never on the road of conscious quest for self-knowledge because he lacks the vision of self-awareness and his awareness of reality.

Willy seeks his identity in things which do not constitute the real and complete identity of an individual. For him, the identity of a successful salesman means fulfilling one's aspirations, ambition and dream. It is also making a place in the heart of men and being remembered, loved and helped. Yet he had "wrong dreams" and his belief in such superficial values and commitments to the success dream of becoming a "well-liked" salesman is the cause of his tragic end. Like Joe in All My Sons, Willy also commits suicide in his frantic struggle to regain his lost social image — his honour and dignity, that is, his social identity. Thus the protagonist's bewilderment caused by the conflicting values and his determined attempt to assert his personal ideals and image in his society — the quest for identity theme — takes a central figure in Death of a Salesman.

The dramatist's essential concern with the question of identity persists in his next dramatic composition The Crucible in a different situation. He is preoccupied with the individual's problem of identity in this as in other plays. Despite his confession of committing the sin of adultery with. Abigail Williams, Proctor is not exonerated by the judges.
The justices of the law refuse to accept the truth of his statement and accuse him of lying about it. They are simply confused over the issue of whether Proctor or his wife is a liar, and are hence unable to decide who is a truthful, honest person of integrity between the two. Though Proctor tells the truth to save his wife from being imprisoned, he is unwilling to sign the confession which will defame him socially and so affect the future of his family and children. Given the chance to decide his own fate — that is, "whether to sign the confession or to die"—Proctor gladly chooses the latter. So his desire to save his family so that his children's respectful image in society may be safe, can be respected, and fulfilled only by his consenting to die. Through that death ignobly but certainly tragic, Proctor defends his image as a man of integrity.

Proctor is a prototype of Miller's contemporary hero who is willing to lay down his life if need be to preserve his honour and dignity. For him, a name is a man's public self and to bring dishonour to his name is to bring social death to himself and his sons. Obviously, as The Crucible indicates, there is an extreme need to preserve one's honour and dignity which one's name implies. The name itself symbolises one's identity. Till the last minute, Proctor is in search of saving his public or social image. His act of tearing the false confession at a crucial moment of his life has a vital significance as it relates to the question of his identity. Because he knows that if he puts his name to it he will never find himself again. To him preserving one's identity is
more precious than survival without one's good "name". He makes a strong proclamation of his total integrity when his "name"—his identity—is sullied. He cries out, "How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (CP., p.328.) That is why he ultimately goes to death making no compromises whatsoever. His decision to die for the sake of his unsullied "name" is unquestionable to a noble hero like him. Thus, it may be assessed that the play on the whole is concerned with individual values and moral integrity, specially with his quest for personal identity against the temptation of easy compromise which his conscience never allows him to do. Proctor keeps his commitments to his conscience and his friends, and bravely mounts the gallows in the hope of maintaining his "name" for being truthful and honest and also preserving the dignity and future of his family.

*A View from the Bridge* is another tragic drama by Miller which marks a turning point in his dramatic career in that it was his last tragic play after which he did not do any dramatic composition for a period of nine years. The emphasis on the protagonist's intense desire to save his "name" even at the expense of losing his life finds a yet stronger reflection in this play. It is a drama of the immigrant seeking to establish his identity in the new world of the uneducated and to assert his national identity in the midst of confusion between moral law and federal law. Eddie Carbone, the protagonist of the play acts in a specific
social milieu that awakens his sense of guilt and personal dignity. One of the important aspects of the play is the study of the protagonist's attempt to use the identity issue as a cover for an intriguing psychological phenomenon of guilt and jealousy which is also related to the formation and development of Eddie's character and his behaviour. His extreme possessiveness suggests his unrevealed passionate desire for his niece Katie. Miller takes interest in the dramatic exploration of the disastrous consequences of this invisible and irresistible passion. Eddie's guilt is that he becomes irrational and even breaks the code of social-ethics which is sure to earn him social discredit and even jeopardise his existence. Of course the "name" theme in the play certainly reminds one of Miller's earlier dramas the protagonists of which struggle for preserving their good name even at the cost their lives. Marco, the symbol of justice, spits publicly into Eddie's face and that besmirches the protagonist's self-esteem as well as his social-image. Thus when his honour is hurt, Eddie with an 'enraged cry' lunges for Marco and dies in the fight. Yet the fight is a determined attempt by the protagonist to recover his lost social-image — his dignity. In fact Eddie's emotional outburst during his climactic scuffle with Marco underlines the moral concern of all Miller's social plays. As Eddie cries, "Wipin' the neighbourhood with my name like a dirty rag! I want my name, Marco ... Now gimme my name ..." (CP., p.438).
It may thus be observed that all of Miller’s protagonists of his earlier plays Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor and Eddie Carbone are ready to stake even their lives to protect their name, their honour, and ultimately their identity. Each of them whether sinning, sinful or aware of his past sin is yet fully prepared to vindicate his honour and dignity in the society. All these protagonists experience a sense of alienation from the families or society because they play a role in which they find themselves alone. They fight their own battles to establish their image of honour and dignity in their society. Hence they are alone in their struggles to achieve a goal which is honoured by the society. They fight to the last and wilfully die to achieve that place of honour. The treatment of this problem of identity imparts to Miller’s plays a great significance because of the ubiquitous nature of the problem each modern man confronts. In one form or another the dramatist takes up the identity theme in his subsequent plays belonging to his later dramatic career. He has thus advanced his treatment and discussion of the quintessential problem of identity in his next play, After the Fall in which he presents the issue of identity from a new angle.

After the Fall is the first dramatic composition of Miller’s later artistic career. It makes a turning point in the trend of thought of the playwright. One can easily point to the shift in the dramatist’s point of view. Obviously, there is a gradual change in his outlook regarding the treatment of his concept of evil. This is particularly true of his later
plays beginning with *After the Fall*. It is evident that his early plays only hint at the inherent evil in the individual but lay a major responsibility for the presence of evil in the individual on the society itself. Yet in his later play, *After the Fall* he puts the blame elsewhere. Primarily it is a way of looking at man and his human nature as the only source of the tendency to violence which destroys the human race. It is a view which does not look toward social or political ideas as the creators of violence, but into the nature of human being himself. In the play, Miller, for the first time, unveils a viewpoint which implies that man is the origin of all evils. He also notes that all human beings are born after the "Fall". As a matter of fact, he places a character, Quentin on the stage and gives him the opportunity of dispassionately examining his identity and motives, and also explaining him to a listener. The protagonist Quentin struggles for self-understanding and self-awareness, two new and important variations on the essential theme of the problem of identity that the protagonists of Miller's plays are concerned with in their (dramatic) careers.

The whole play enacts a continuous revelation of the past events. After each of these episodes from his past Quentin becomes conscious of a certain aspect of his life and also of the nature of humanity. The dramatist, particularly in *After the Fall*, moves on to a higher plane of reality, which in fact gives a new twist to his point of view. The protagonist reaches out to attain a higher understanding of the nature of
his identity through self-awareness. Instead of simply trying to protect his social identity as a dignified or honourable member of the society the protagonist now tries to acquire a deeper understanding of himself as man and of his nature in terms of universal human nature. He views the problem of guilt in himself in terms of the problem of sin and guilt in man's mind right from the time of his Fall from paradise. He arrives at a new understanding of his identity which consists in his recognition of himself as a sinful human being, his nature having been corrupted by the original sin.

By identity Miller does not only seem to imply a (protagonist's) desire to seek a place of honour and dignity in the society and the world but, as is revealed by After the Fall, he also tries to emphasise that knowing one's true identity is possible only through knowing one's innate sinfulness as a human being. To have an awareness of this, "the wish to kill" as mentioned in the play, in man is a recognition of the doctrine of the original sin and innate sinfulness. Therefore Miller's concept of identity is both social and moral. The protagonist's desire "to know who I am" is fundamentally a recognition that the question of knowing one's self or of one's identity is dealt with by the dramatist on both the social and the moral plane. After the Fall bears testimony to it. The play thus marks a real progression in Miller's attitude toward the problem of identity in his plays.
His next one-Act play, *Incident At Vichy*, shows further treatment of the subject matter of identity. The play was not as successful as Miller's other plays. Yet from the point of view of this thesis, the play is important as it deals primarily with the paramount theme of the problem of identity -- the Jewish identity in particular. The whole action of the play takes place at 'a place of detention' at Vichy in France in 1942, where the interrogation and identity-check of the detained persons is done to identify the Jews suspected of being anti-Nazi subversives. The play in fact deals with the problems arising from the Jewish identity when seen in anti-Jewish environment. The dramatist gives a new twist to his treatment of the problem of identity as it is now pursued not at the individual level but at the level of a whole race (the Jews) which struggles to preserve its distinctive identity and not become extinct. Prince Von Berg, a central figure in the play, realises that man's complicity with evil is universal and that he is not an exception to it. Hence, he boldly prepares to face danger not for any crime of his own but for the crimes of his fellow-beings. His final decision to sacrifice himself to save Leduc, a Jewish captive, is a protest against the injustices and the inhumanity of his fellow-Nazis that has largely affected their personal integrity and identity. In a sense the group identity is smashed by external forces. Thus the playwright has treated the question of identity more on a larger racial than individual scale.
After the composition and staging of the *Incident At Vichy* in 1964 Miller took nearly four years to embark on his next dramatic composition, *The Price* in 1968. The central problem of identity with which he had been concerned in the earlier plays was still uppermost in his mind but then it did not find appropriate reflection or exposition in the later play. The development of this theme therefore apparently somewhat receded into the background in the major body of the play. However the problem seems to have re-emerged and occupied his attention at the advanced stage of the action of the play. Here the dramatist places a brother against his brother who meet after sixteen long years of their separation. The crisis in the play emerges from a meeting between the brothers. Both Victor and Walter, the two central figures of the play, have been characterised as individuals having separate identities of their own. Victor is presented to be a conventional type of man who adopts traditional life-style and hence adheres to his father and even sacrifices his career as a police patrolman. But his brother Walter is a selfish and egocentric man who drives out of home for success. He wants to establish his true identity as an eminent surgeon and by so doing achieve recognition in his society as a successful person. The play focuses on the confrontation between these brothers who try to defend and justify themselves through their different approaches to life. It may be seen that the question of choice and responsibility also emerges in the play and significantly acts in defining the distinct identities of the individuals. The play clearly shows
a conflict of the psychologies of the two brothers who cannot come to a mutually acceptable compromise on the basic premise. Once the mutual trust between them is lost, each would like to hold on to his identity and affirm it till the end of his life or till the attainment of his objective.

It is true that the problem of identity does not receive an adequate attention of the dramatist in respect of its development and analysis in *The Price*. Yet it may be said that the problem has been somewhat marginalised but it is more strongly and vigorously reaffirmed. That the issue of identity still haunts the dramatist's mind and commands his attention in one way or another may be seen in the attention he gives it in his most recent dramatic work *The American Clock*, wherein the problem of identity is presented from a new angle. In the play the dramatist is mainly concerned to highlight the shattering impact of the Depression on various strata of American society in respect of their personal honour, psychology and identity. What is most important here is not the death or suicide of an individual but the hard struggle of the people towards the fulfilment of an ideal society that will enable them to exhibit their true identity at the social and political level. All the people are collectively responsible in the whole process of the play. Every individual contributes his or her might to the development and progress of the nation. The perpetual movement of the clock is appropriately in tune with the progressive struggle of the people in the play. The play might as well serve as a warning to the American people to be on guard
not only against the forces that caused the economic depression but also against such forces as militate against its distinctive identity as a nation which gives its citizens a place of pride, honour and dignity in the eyes of the world. Thus in The American Clock Miller has examined and analysed the problem of identity on a large intensive scale and makes the play to unfold the idea of American national identity. It is obvious that the question of identity here is neither the identity of an individual nor the identity of a particular race but the identity of a whole nation — the United States of America.

To sum up, it may be observed that when Miller began to work on his early plays namely, All My Sons (1947), Death of a Salesman (1949), The Crucible (1953) and A View from the Bridge (1955), he was more often concerned with the exposition and treatment of the problem of identity from a very limited angle of an individual. Identity as stressed in the plays is more an issue concerning an individual’s honour, dignity and aspirations in his life and in society. But, as one can see, Miller advances further in his dramatic career and the horizon of his dramatic imagination becomes larger and larger as he probes the question of identity from a racial angle as in the play Incident at Vichy. Identity here becomes markedly an issue concerning an individual as a member of a particular (Jewish) race. The Jewish race — all the members of it — are distinctly identified and persecuted and tormented by the Gestapo. In fact as specific stage directions within the play are
given, "identity check" are carried out by examining the documents and physically measuring the size of noses, eyes and ears of those individual members of the Jewish race. And yet the whole race has been struggling to preserve and maintain its distinct identity.

Continuing his dramatic career Miller is once again interested to explore the various possible dimensions of the problem of identity and variations on his theme. In his most recent play *The American Clock* (1980) he chooses a still larger canvas or background for the setting which encompasses the whole of the American nation, the American land and space, and makes the scene of the action indefinitely moving from one place to another. The dramatist does it with a definite purpose in his mind by involving and referring to the generality of the American citizens. Thus he tries to broaden his view of identity and makes the drama unfold the idea of American national identity. Thus it may be observed that the question of identity here is placed and analysed on a higher national level. In fact the ceaseless struggle of the whole American people, as presented in the play, is in a sense a struggle for the preservation of their true national identity.

In conclusion it is possible to argue that throughout his dramatic career Miller has been concerned with the problem of identity and its treatment in various forms in nearly all his plays except perhaps in *The Price* where due to the other concerns or interests the problem of
identity is treated on a less intensive scale. Obviously, Miller's recurring preoccupation with this problem had its roots not only in Miller's mind but also in the two cardinal national disasters which affected the United States — the Civil War and the Depression. Perhaps a more intensive and detailed psychological probe into the impact of these disastrous events on the psychology of the American citizens whose sense of identity was shaken by these very events might reveal more interesting truths about American life and society as portrayed in American literary works and in Miller's plays.