Chapter Two

All My Sons: Conflict Between Self and Society

Arthur Miller was conscious of the simmering contradictions in the American milieu when he composed his play *All My Sons* and from the harsh socio-economic system and his personal experiences popped up the issue of the class and gender in this play. The division between classes is starkly visible in the social structure here, which is torn apart by the ravages of war, increasing economic gaps resulting out of rapid business growth thereby creeping in a loss of values in general.

The question of gender too, does invite our attention here as the wife of the accused suffers silently, being aware of the reality from the beginning. The women depicted here are the traditional ones who are socialized in such a manner that they fail to look beyond the world of their children and family confining themselves to the hearth and not to the field. Though there is no mistaking their invincible will and resolve, they are not so pronounced in the ownership of the world at large and their outrage.

Arthur Miller intended to write plays with which common people could identify themselves. A work of art is aesthetic nullity for him if it has no social relevance to offer as he asserts in *Collected Plays* that “to imagine that a play
can be written disinterestedly is to believe that one can make love disinterestedly.” (13)

In a press interview at the premier of *All My Sons* in 1947, he quite clearly set forth his basic theoretical views on drama that he tried to take all his settings from situations in real life which involve the questions of right and wrong.

The grand success of *All My Sons* marked a major turning point in Miller’s career, for it came at a point when the young writer was struggling to establish his identity as a literary artist. As he writes in *Collected Plays*, “I was turning thirty then, the author of perhaps a dozen plays, none of which I could truly believe were finished.” (19) The play that resulted was *All My Sons*.

About its genesis, he tells that he got the idea from a chat with a pious lady who told of a neighbourhood family which was destroyed when the daughter turned the father in to the authorities on discovering that he had been selling faulty machinery to the Army. As he writes in *Collected Plays* about that neighbourhood: “I knew its middle class ordinariness, and I knew how rarely the great issues penetrate such environments. (17)

Conceived in wartime and begun in wartime, *All My Sons* presents a sharp and heartbreaking spectacle of human sacrifice in contrast with aggrandizement. Miller writes, “At a time when all public voices were announcing the arrival of that great day when industry and labor were one, my personal experience was daily demonstrating that beneath the slogans very little had changed. In this sense the play was a response to what I felt ‘in the air’. It
was an unveiling of what I believed everybody knew and nobody publicly said. At the same time, however, I believed I was bringing news, and it was news which I half expected would be denied as truth.” (22)

*All My Sons* presents Chris Keller, the ex-army officer, rejecting Joe Keller’s criminal irresponsibility, even though the latter is his father. The father shoots himself once the son knows the truth. He accepts his fate, but so does the son. In the war time, Joe has allowed 120 cracked engine heads to go from his factory into P-40 aircrafts, directly causing their pilot’s deaths. He allowed his subordinate and next-door neighbour, Deever, to be imprisoned and disgraced for his own criminality, but at the age of sixty one, he comes to realize that those pilots who died were ‘all my sons’ and commits suicide.

Keller’s life is thus a waste; he forfeits his son’s love and his own good name for a public business ethic which is strictly unusable in private family and good neighbourly life. The business ethics puts financial and self-interest first and social responsibility and purpose second. Joe’s horror at his own crime is insignificant beside his larger irresponsibility to a universe of people. It reminds one of Kurtz’s cry in Conrad’s *Heart Of Darkness*:

> The horror! The horror!

At the centre of each play of Miller is the tension between little people and big issues. Henri Popkin rightly remarks in *The Sewanee Review*:

> Miller’s people inhabit the dead centre of dullness as they sit and wait for the voice of doom. Or, if they don’t sit, they go about the
daily round of their lives - washing cars, eating late snacks, playing football, picking up girls, going to movies, as if destiny would never come calling. (Popkin 36)

Joe Keller is also not an exception who does his best to hide his guilt. He proudly exhibits his business skills - “that’s the only way you lick’em is guts;” (CP 80-81) the businessman father is quite sure that Larry never flew a P -40 while supplying faulty cylinders. But the son thunders - So who flew P -40s, pigs?

The father has his own splendid plans for his son –

I’m going to build you a house, stone, with a driveway from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris, I want you to use what I made for you. (87)

Now a father’s concern for his family is not something culpable but his middle class ordinariness of overlooking the society, his itch to build something for his son which he could not have from his own father, leads him to a blind alley. Joe’s trouble, in a word, is not that he cannot tell right from wrong but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society. As Miller avers:

He is not a partner in society, but an incorporated member, so to speak, and you cannot sue personally the officers of a corporation. (CP 19)
The corporation here means the concept of a man’s becoming a function of production or distribution to the point where his personality becomes divorced from the actions it propels. That’s why perhaps Miller says that “the fortress that *All My Sons* lays seize to is the fortress of unrelatedness”. (*CP* 19)

How can man become so alienated from others? - this is the question that haunts Miller consistently throughout the play.

The play is an assertion of not so much morality as the world being such because men cannot walk away from certain of their deeds. As Miller says, Joe’s crime has “roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society, and to a certain indoctrination he embodies, which if dominant, can mean a jungle existence for all of us no matter how high our buildings soar.” (19)

As the play opens, Joe is shown to be a successful businessman with a beautiful double-storeyed house having seven rooms. This is how the dramatist depicts him:

> A heavy man of stolid mind and build, a businessman these many years, but with the imprint of the machine-shop worker and boss still upon him. When he reads, when he speaks, when he listens, it is with concentration of the uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in many commonly known things, a man whose judgement must be dredged out of experience and a peasant-like common sense. A man among men. (58-59)
Joe surely appears to be any other man representing his class. Like a typical businessman, money is very important for him. He is doubtful of a career as book collector as

In my day, either you were a lawyer, or a doctor, or you worked in a shop. (60)

Having sons is a matter of pride for him, as he recollects:

In my day when you had sons it was an honour. Today a doctor could make a million dollars if he could figure out a way to bring a boy into the world without a trigger finger. (63)

This gender preference puts him again in a particular class which is interestingly perceptible not only in America or in India but all over the world irrespective of time and age. Now the question arises about Miller’s own perspective about gender too, as to why he chooses all sons plot not giving place to daughters in his most popular plays like *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*? He seems to be conservative in taking father-son relationship only, excluding daughters, as he writes in his autobiography of a cathartic kind of experience he feels when he writes about father-son relationship.

Dr Jim, the neighbour practicing medicine, is none too happy as his avocation calls for twenty-four hours duty. He says “I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary.” (61) Jim desires to pursue research in medicine as he puts it –
One year I simply took off, went to New Orleans, for two months. I lived on bananas and milk and studied a certain disease. It was beautiful. And then she came and she cried. And I went back home with her. And now I live in usual darkness . . . it’s even hard sometimes to remember the kind of man I wanted to be.

(118)

The doctor’s wife, Sue, complains that her husband living on her salary is not fair and she wants him to make money. She professes to smell the perfume of indulgent women patients calling at night, and her irritation on interference in her private life is understandable but she wants her husband to pursue private practice only. The advanced medical research is not for him as “you’ve got to give up your life to go into it.” (93) Obviously, she cannot have the cake and eat it too.

The doctor’s discomfort in Chris’s presence seems to reflect his own failure to live up to his beliefs the way Chris has to his. As Jim is sympathetic to Chris’s notions about life, he seems to be sailing in the same boat as he lives in the usual turmoil unable to find himself. He tries to be a good husband as Chris endeavours to be a good son, although their respective hearts don’t conform to it.

The first crack in Chris’s idealistic armour appears when he refuses to let his father change the company’s name to Keller and Son. Although he wants to believe that his father is innocent, Chris knows that Joe is guilty. He also knows
that his conscience will force him to leave the company if he admits his father’s
guilt to himself. Keeping his name off the plant is Chris’s halfhearted way of
dissociating himself from his father’s act.

Kate, the mother, appears to use astrology unrealistically to prove that her son Larry is not dead. She reads the stars to prevent Chris from marrying Larry’s former girlfriend. Her argument is that allowing the marriage would be an admission of Larry’s death. As it turns out, Kate is protecting the fiction of Larry’s survival not for her own sentimental reasons but because she knows that her husband would blame himself for Larry’s death, even though the defective airplane part is not directly responsible. Kate realizes that the hope of Larry’s survival is all that allows Joe to live with his guilt.

Chris’s investigation of the past unearths more truth than anyone can bear. A letter from Larry to Ann, his formal girlfriend and now Chris’s fiancée, proves to be the key to the mystery, conveying more than anyone expects it to. Ann introduces it at first to prove to Kate that Larry is dead so that she will give the young people her blessings to marry.

Chris doesn’t know the contents of the letter except that, according to Ann, it establishes once and for all that Larry is dead. He reads it aloud to his father without having read it himself and then realizes that he has gone too far. In the letter Larry announces that he will commit suicide because he knows his father was responsible for the defective parts and therefore for the death of his brothers-in-arms.
This direct blame for his son’s death is too much for Joe Keller. While Chris, idealistic to the last, is insisting to Kate – “there is a universe of people and you’re responsible to it, and unless you know that you threw away your son because that’s why he died” (126-27) – Joe goes into the house and shoots himself. Chris’s last words recognize the enormity of his error in demanding the whole truth: “Mother, I didn’t mean to –” (127)

Earlier in the play, Chris, a war hero, speaks effusively about dying for one’s fellow men in Europe when honour made a difference. Miller questions whether it is as easy to live for one’s fellowmen as it is to die for them. Also haunting Chris is the fact that he is still alive while others, including his brother who fought in the war, are dead.

Joe has fairly good relations with his neighbours and appears to be innocent but the moment he starts practicing unethical business terms, his sin is not pardonable. Chris retains his capacity to love in spite of capitalist and war experience. So Miller seems to assert that the fault lies not in the system, stars or class but in ourselves.

Miller claims that the good people have no theories, no ideologies, except for their goodness. Their practice and their faith are the same - doing good. Their virtue needs no legal or official sanction, and, in practice, it may defy the official code. For instance, the good society is present in the neighbours in All My Sons. They help out when they are needed – the day when you were born and the water got shut off. People were carrying basins from a block away - a stranger would have
thought the whole neighbourhood was on fire.”

(105)

But they also express their collective disapproval of the corrupt businessman even when the court exonerates him.

What Miller depicts is that we can always walk away when the going gets tough saying to hell with it but no, as Jim says to Kate beautifully:

We all come back, Kate. These private little revolutions always die. The compromise is always made. In a peculiar way... everyman does have a star. The star of one’s honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it’s out it never lights again. (118)

It remains an interesting proposition to see whether Chris is really different from his businessman father in his perspective. As Chris shows the same love for money when he proclaims to Annie:

I want a family, I want some kids, I want to build something I can give myself to. (69)

In fact, Chris represents a different class in the play. Business does not inspire him. If he has to grub for money all day long, at least in the evening, he wants it beautiful. He longs for some meaning in life. His experience in war watching his comrades dying for each other, has taught him to be aware of a kind of responsibility. Man for man.
He knows that if he is alive at all “to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator,” (85) it is because of the love a man can have for a man. One has got to be a little better because of that. Otherwise what one has is really loot, and there’s blood on it. Yet when Chris returns home, he finds “no meaning in it here” (85) because “nobody was changed at all.” (85)

Another conspicuous fact that we find in Miller’s plays is that the fathers seek the highest aim of their life - the affection and approval of their sons. It is the ultimate judgment of the sons, Chris in this play and Biff in Death of a Salesman, which becomes the touchstone of fathers’ lives and experience. Ironically both the fathers Joe and Willy have to make their peace with themselves and their sons through death, to quote N. S. Pradhan, “which is a kind of spiritual and symbolic expulsion from the self-appointed goals of ambition and self-righteousness.” (66)

Miller indicts parents in both All My Sons and Death of A Salesman when sons painfully discover their fathers’ weakness and dishonesty. He frankly reveals that the parents are the “hidden forces” against which the ultimate accusation must be directed. It is the callous business world of the father that repels Chris -

I know you’re no worse than most men but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father.

(125)
Thereby starts the conflict in son to seek “that realm where the father is after all not final authority . . . . When we see beyond parents, who are after all, but the shadows of God” (TE 194). Miller writes in preface to Collected Plays that in writing of the father-son relationship and of the son’s search for his relatedness, there was a fullness of feeling he had never known before.

It is also apparent that Larry was the favoured son, much as Miller in Timebend: A Life portrays his brother Kermit, who served in World War Two. Chris complains that he has always played second fiddle:

I don’t know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer. My whole bloody life, time after time after time. (68)

As the disregarded son who yearns for recognition, Chris might go to the extremes of idealism which neighbour Sue pictures as “living next door to the Holy family.” Joe finds solace in contrasting himself to Larry: Goddam, if Larry was alive he would’t act like this. But this is how the great literature is born. A conscious, living person takes risk to live in extremes out of his passionate state of mind, not a calculated, machine like character who lives a passive existence.

The mother just can’t believe that her son is dead as she tells Chris:

Your brother’s alive, darling, because if he’s dead, your father killed him. . . . God does not let a son be killed by his father. (114)
And when Chris confronts Joe with a direct accusation, his apology merges the business ethic of survival into his love for his son:

You’re a boy, what could I do! I’m in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, and you’re out of business; . . . you lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take my life away.

(115)

The father has his own justification - “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? (115)

And the son turns on him burning with fury:

For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! – I was dying everyday and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? . . . What is that, the world – the business? . . . Don’t you have a country? Don’t you live in the world? . . . You’re not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? (115-16)

But for the father there is nothing bigger than family and if there is, he is ready to put a bullet in his head. He shouts at his son blaming the capitalist system:
In that sense, the man is right when he tells his son that the whole society is corrupt in the capitalist system. But the question is that we are responsible for our own actions only. Doesn’t it behove us that instead of finding loopholes in the system or the other corrupt people, we first peep into ourselves? After all, society is nothing but a collection of individuals and each one of us has to play our role in society honestly and sincerely.

‘Vasudhaiva kutumbkam’ meaning the whole world is our home, has been our ancient Indian philosophy that Miller seems to conform to, in the troubled times. If we expect others to be humane to us, we also have to learn to reciprocate in the same tone. Ronald Hayman rightly claims that “the theme of filial love is blurring the moral focus.” (25)

In fact Joe, like Willy, is fed on the American dream of success which says that success only places you among the friends. The world is friendly so long as you have status, money and power. This is what Joe is fighting for but this rat-race never ends. As Wordsworth says, “The world is too much with us;
late and soon/ Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:"

(Fifteen Poets 239)

This doesn’t mean, however, that there’s no hope. The example of responsibility is the men of Chris’s company dying for each other and this is opposed to the ‘ethics’ of Keller’s business. The problem with Keller is

He is an engaged man but not to man or to men, only to his family, more precisely to his sons, not all the sons of the title but the two sons he has fathered. (Gross 11)

This is how most of us exist in society and that is why, one of us tempts to shout at Chris’s idealism: He wants people to be better than it’s possible to be. We take it for granted to make compromise. Keller believes that he betrayed the pilots for his family and, especially, for his son, “my only accomplishment”. But what about the other son whose father is behind the bars for the criminality of his master?

That victimized father is also prone to the same dictum – a father is a father! – He also had the dreams for his family, for his son. For this lack of consideration, the bitterness comes in our relations hips with others and division among classes becomes sharper.

The guilt-conscious Joe enquires about Deever from the latter’s son George.

JOE. How is he?

GEORGE. He got smaller.
JOE. Smaller?

GEORGE. Yeah, little. . . . He’s a little man. That’s what happens to suckers, you know. It’s good. I went to him in time – another year there’d be nothing left but his smell. (100)

Here the question of class comes up prominently - how the one who has power and money is able to befool the less privileged one. And the irony is that even at this stage too, the businessman Joe shamelessly boasts of his large-heartedness, his innate desire to be at one with his fellowmen, when he offers Deever a seat in his firm. This is what pains Miller the most.

What Miller wants us is to establish a natural relationship with society rather than a fake one. Keller may plead, ‘Chris, a man can’t be a Jesus in this world!’ (125) but Miller wants people to be better and responsible human beings.

The hypocrisy never solves any problem as Joe asks about Deever’s health from his son - Not his health again, is it? And furious George replies – it’s everything Joe. It’s his soul. The hard proletarian never learns through his life how to take the blame. He knew that “the kids were hanging in the air by those heads” but to hell with them for they were not his own kids.

When Chris dashes out of the house after an argument with father, leaving mother worrying and waiting for him all night, Dr. Jim exposes man’s
hollowness: “I don’t think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out.” (118) Jim frankly admits to Kate –

It takes a certain talent – for lying. You have it, and I do. But not him. (118)

Thus the circle ends where it had begun – at the familial point. We are first sons and daughters, husbands and wives. The relationships of colleague, friend, neighbour, etc., come later. In both father and son, there are the roots of guilt, and yet ultimately they stand together as men, the father both a model and a rejected ideal, the son both an idea and a relative failure because the son also raises the question –

Do I raise the dead when I put him behind the bars? . . . This is a zoo, a zoo! (124)

Chris who was a bold fighter in the war, is now afraid of even mice. What has happened to his valour? He labels himself to be more practical like those bums who ran away from the fighting in the war and that is the death-in-life like situation for him.

Raymond Williams writes in his book *Drama From Ibsen To Brecht*:

The model, the rejection, the idea and the failure are all terms of growth, and the balance that can be struck is a very deep understanding of relatedness and brotherhood.

(309)
One way of looking at _All My Sons_, in these universal terms is: the father destroys one of his sons, and that son, in his turn, gives sentence of death on him, while at the same time, to the other son, the father offers a future, and the son, in rejecting it, destroys his father, in pain and love.

So Joe’s tragedy is the result of his class. He succeeds through his ‘smartness’ and ‘guts’ and wants to establish his business because he knows that “prominence, whether gained through wealth, business association or public esteem, appeared to be the major catalyst in turning the world’s indifference into warmth and admiration” (Jacobson 249)

What is right in Keller’s ethos is the familial obligation, the father’s duty to create something for his son but his narrow mindedness in not seeing beyond family is pitiable. In fact, it is a universal truth that there is no more devoted parent than an abandoned child. Like Willy, Joe’s father left him at the age of ten and that’s why perhaps he is obsessed with his family as he mocks at his son:

You got too much money? Is that what bothers you? (124)

But the moment, Joe comes to know that his sons for whom he has lived, consider him an animal and do not want to live in the same world with him, he commits suicide thinking he has shamed them.

Thus one can see that he commits his second anti-social crime in the name of the same love that motivated the first love. Miller remarks in the essay “On Social Plays” that all drama is social which raises the basic question - how man should live in relation to each other? Ronald Hayman feels:
The conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris stems from the difference between their degree of commitment to society. Chris feels towards the whole of humanity the same sort of responsibility that Joe feels only towards his family.

(113)

One may recall here Tennessee William’s words: All my life I have been haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible if not a probable loser of what you most want.

In *All My Sons*, Miller has taken a family as forming the centre of the play but this doesn’t mean that he has written a family drama. Nor is it a social drama also. The play rather depicts the turbulences caused in the close family unit by deeper consciousness of its place in the community.

It is the question of class, divided further into the varied sub-classes depending on one’s alignment to his or her respective star of honesty, despite all socio-economic and political chaos. Joe Keller needs to feel a connection, firm and real, with others. The tension arises when this desire imposes upon one certain restriction. To Miller, this tension is not due to a clash of opposing urges that must necessarily end in the overpowering of one urge by the other. Rather this tension is necessary for our meaningful existence as men have potential to give meaning to their lives.
As far as gender is concerned, one may say that Kate has Joe’s talent for ignoring things. She seeks refuge in astrology believing certain things have to be, and certain things can never be, as the play was entitled earlier *The Sign Of The Archer*. But the conflict between Joe and his son presses astrology to the wall until its mysticism gives way to psychology.

Still one may say that Kate, a woman with overwhelming capacity for love, in fact, appears to be a strong woman though outwardly she seems to be broken at her elder son’s loss. It is she who would never let her husband forget about his guilt. She never turns hostile to him but speaks a lot through her unspoken words. She, like Chris, is never in a direct duel with her husband taking a stand against him because of her conventional personality, but she is not prepared to forgive him either. She is addressed as ‘Mother’ by the husband too, that speaks of her imposing stature in the family.

The husband is shown to be loving to the wife when he says -

> Once upon a time I used to think that when I got money again I would have a maid and my wife would take it easy. Now I got money, and I got a maid, my wife is workin’ for the maid. (70)

But that doesn’t excuse him from the guilt. Rather maid represents here a class too, which is generally treated with utmost insensitivity. How the wife runs the show at home front with perfect élan, with or without the maid, is beyond the comprehension of the husband. It is the woman’s world where one
female cares for the less privileged one, ultimately merging into one class in the male dominated system.

The conversation between Joe and Kate reflects the tension between the thick-skinned husband and the meek wife:

KELLER. Look at you shaking.

MOTHER. I can’t help it.

KELLER. What have I got to hide?

What the hell is the matter with you, Kate?

MOTHER. I didn’t say you had anything to

hide, I’m just telling you to stop

it! Now stop it! (74)

When husband seeks solace from his family at the exposition of his guilt at George’s arrival and wife claims to have no strength left in her to think any more, the husband retorts – “The minute there’s trouble you have no strength.” (119) And the outburst of the wife conveys a lot of pent up anger, never given an outlet –

Joe, you’re doing the same thing again; all your life whenever there’s trouble you yell at me and you think that settles it. (119)

Kate’s pain is poignant to see, how desperately she is trying to retrieve her small world which is constantly slipping from her hands. Ann reassures her – “Don’t let them bulldoze you. Ask me anything you like.” (77) And the hapless
woman strives to gather some strength in her life. But as Virginia Woolf puts it – Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, life is a luminous halo.

The play shows the turmoil of the woman’s heart who is unable to consolidate her position in the web of life. She constantly reminds her husband –

Be smart now Joe. The boy is coming. Be smart. (89)

The husband in hopeless fury, slams the door violently behind him leaving the wife sitting “stiffly, staring, seeing.” (89)

When she is unable to understand how to tackle the situation, she would turn to her son -

We’re dumb, Chris. Dad and I are stupid people. We don’t know anything. You’ve got to protect us. (90)

Linda’s sense of insecurity for her family exposes her helplessness and vulnerability in the male dominated society, where only the husband or the son can bail them out of the chaos. She is unable to find out a way herself, although she reveals a better understanding of the whole situation.

What binds all these characters in the play is love, though it becomes a corrupting love eventually. It is Larry living not Larry dead that the mother clings to, and she does this because to admit his death would make both love and life more difficult. It is generally true of Miller’s women protagonists to compromise in life. As Arvin R. Wells points out:
Kate’s final loyalty is to her husband; to him as a living substantial being, she, like Linda in *Death Of A Salesman*, has made an irrevocable commitment in love and sympathy which no knowledge about him can destroy.

(46)

Ann, another important female character in the play, in the hope of love and marriage, rejects the seeds of hatred and remorse which her brother George offers her. The brother declares to Chris:

Your father took everything we have. I can’t beat that but she’s one item he’s not going to grab. (103)

But George’s decree of not to marry into Kellers family, as they have ruined them, falls on deaf ears. Not allowing George to treat her as an item, Ann’s focus is on retrieving her own world with Chris, as she lives in present. Her philosophy is to be happy with what she has. She is not the type of character who will look before and after and pine for what is not. She assures Kate that she won’t do anything to Joe if Kate frees Chris from the guilt of stealing his brother’s girl friend:

You made Chris feel guilty with me. Whether you wanted to or not, you’ve crippled him in front of me. . . . I’m not going out of here alone. There’s no life for me that way. I want you to set him free. And then I promise you, everything will end, and we’ll go away, and that’s all. (121)
This practical approach of the desperate young girl, whose father is in prison, and the only brother groping in darkness, gives further insight into a female character who tries to reconcile with her circumstances on her own terms. One may say undeniably that she is able to relate to people and situation in a far better way than others.

Although woman in Miller’s work appears to be on the margin, the difference between the new and old generation of woman is starkly visible. Whereas Kate is happy with her imperfect world, Sue, Lydia and Ann represent the new women who show the signs of rebellion or endeavour to balance their world on their own. Sue’s words about her husband reflect her tough-mindedness –

My husband has a family, dear. Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he’s compromising by not giving up everything for research. As though Chris or anybody else isn’t compromising. . . . He meets a man and makes a statue out of him. (93)

Her worldly-wise approach regarding financial sharing at home reinforces her firm personality:

As soon as a woman supports a man he owes her something. You can never owe somebody without resenting them. (92)
When Ann avers –“I think the doctor is very devoted.” (92), Sue’s reply – “Oh, certainly. But it’s bad when a man sees the bars in front of him. Jim thinks he’s in jail all the time.” (92) - assimilates her with the class for whom money reigns supreme and social responsibility has no meaning.

Lydia, the ever cheerful girl, chooses a right match for her in Frank when George gets busy fighting fascism in war. Ann, too, is not ready to retreat when idealism of George pulls her back as she is focused on charting out a happy and peaceful life for herself living in the present. Hence a stark contrast is clearly visible between younger and older generation of women in the play.

Although the men in the play seem tough-minded at first and the women merely dreamers, it turns out that Kate and Ann are the only ones willing to face reality in all its ugliness. They may try to shield their men from the truth, but they never hide it from themselves. Their great virtue lies not only in knowing the truth but also in knowing how much of it ought to be suppressed.

Kate blurts out the truth because the burden of guilt is finally too much for her when she brags that Joe “hasn’t been laid up in fifteen years” thereby spilling the beans. Linda in Death Of A Salesman and Beatrice in A View From The Bridge (1955) have much the same quality.

It may be stated that Arthur Miller in providing a criticism of modern civilization in perspective of class and gender in his play, has a reformative viewpoint. His commitment to the lives of those who seldom have access to power, comes less from an idea of political and social process than a sympathy
for the dreamer betrayed, for those whose lives he knew and were a part of his upbringing.

The tone and temper of social life - as Mahatma Gandhi in India also said and proved - can only be improved through the morality of men and women who matter in different situations of modern life. Miller had all along felt that alienation and disillusionment in different classes including gender as a class can be defeated only by facing the various challenges in a spirit of life-affirmation, as social and political values are limited to classes but not morals.

As we have in these times, how we succeed is not more significant to us than success itself. Struggle for existence goes on and there is survival of the fittest but fittest on what grounds, is the point for consideration. Judging on the yardstick of morality, the playwright does not take side with the father. Sufficiently sensitive to all the classes, he, however, doesn’t give ample freedom to the woman characters by giving them wings. It is not like creating a space for her, both in her mind and soul in his plot as the title itself speaks of gender bias.

Also Miller is conspicuous in his notion of remaining on surface level in dealing with the finest creation of God i.e. man, never delving deep into the realms of human nature as Shakespeare and other dramatists do.

To conclude, one may say that Miller’s plays generally show his serious preoccupation with the problems facing his society. His concern, however, is not so much with general problems but with a vital problem — the predicament of modern man in a rapidly advancing commercial society, i.e. the conflict between self and society, and so on. To be drawn towards one’s blood-relations is a
natural tendency but there’s a limit to it. One should expand one’s activities beyond the narrow circle of self to embrace as large a circle as possible. The basic truth that needs to be grasped once again is that man’s quest to give meaning to his life lies in the ideal of living usefully as well as meaningfully. And the preliminary urge of this is seen within the confines of family.
Works Cited


