INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller, who is undisputedly acknowledged as one of the most gripping and powerful playwrights of the post second world-war era and the 'Literary Wonder' of modern times, was born on October 17, 1915, in the Harlem section of Manhattan in New York city, to Isadore and Augusta Miller, a well-to-do Jewish couple. His father successfully ran a profitable business and his mother, herself was daughter of a manufacturer, had been a teacher in the public school that Miller attended in Harlem. As a boy, Miller was hardly studious, but rather athletically inclined and an avid baseball fan who "spent most of his boyhood playing football, baseball, skating, swimming, dating, reading adventure stories and just plain fooling around." 1 In Miller own words, "I was a very physical kid" 2 and that "until the age of seventeen I can safely say that I never read a book weightier than Tom Swift and Rover Boys, and verged on literature with some of Dickens." 3

This 'physical kid' used to the security of his family, knew nothing about the change which was to completely transform and reshape his future life. The change was introduced in his life by a single event - "The Great Economic Crash" of 1928, which utterly ruined his father's business and forced him to move the family to a small house in Brooklyn. After graduating from high school in 1932,

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
the young Miller had to discontinue his studies and take up odd jobs to help his father. His hopes for a football star at the University of Michigan, were terribly shattered. The inevitable change sharply altered his aims and profoundly affected his whole outlook on life.

Responding to the poor economic conditions of the family, he took up various jobs and by the mid-1940's, Miller had gained experience in many jobs - as a delivery boy for a bakery, as a dishwasher and waiter, as a singer at a local radio station, as a ware house clerk, as a night editor of a university newspaper, as a truck driver, and as a factory labourer. These jobs awakened his social conscience and "it was during his dawn patrols as a delivery boy, the young man gained an early inkling into the meaning of tragedy,"¹ and he also "came face to face with the catastrophic potential in the human condition, and with the inexplicable buffetings which man expect from an essentially alien universe."²

His working in the warehouse for two years immensely enriched his experience and sharpened his insight that enabled to understand the intricacies and complexities of modern industrial environment. There he learnt about emptiness and despair, and about hope and its fulfilment. (Infact, by the meagre savings that Miller made from the salary of the warehouse, he was able to join university of Michigan after two years and thus, his long cherished hope was fulfilled. He has vividly, with a nostalgic feeling, portrayed his experiences in the play 'A Memory of Two

2. Ibid., p.15.
Mondays"). And from those he left behind he had learnt "the heroism of those who know, at least, how to endure (hope's) absence." ¹ He had gained his first awareness of man and his world and in so doing he began to notice "how things were connected. How the native personality of man was changed by his world, and the harder question, how he could in turn change his world."² His knowledge and awareness began to broaden and deepen, laying the basis for his 'Social Vision', and he learned to feel "beyond the edges of things."

Indeed the impact of the Depression on Arthur Miller has been enormous and fundamental, that enabled him to develop a "Social Vision", and gave it not only its substance but also its direction. To Miller, the Depression was one of the two national catastrophes in America (the other one being the Civil War). It was none of Miller's fault that there was the Depression, but it became, as Miller himself confessed, his learning ground:

"I did not read many books in those days. The depression was my book. Years later I could put together what in those days were only feelings, sensations, impressions. There was the sense that everything had dried up."...... What the time gave me, I think now, was a sense of an invisible world. A reality had been secretly accumulating its climax according to its hidden laws to explode illusion at the proper time. In that sense 1929 was our Greek year. The gods had spoken, the gods whose wisdom had been set aside or distorted by a civilization that was to go onward and upward on speculation, gambling, graft, and the dog eating the dog. Before the crash I thought 'society' meant the rich people in the social Register. After the crash it meant the constant visit of strange men who knocked on our door pleading for a chance to wash the windows,

1. Miller, Arthur. "Introduction"
The Depression made Miller realise the context of things and their inter-relatedness. His understanding of the context of things is illustrated in 'Death of a Salesman'. Willy's tragedy is neither of his own making nor that of the external factors alone; Willy's fault combined with the faults of the ethos bring about his tragedy.

So in his plays both individual and society are seen as belonging to each other, to a continuous and inseparable process. He himself affirms:

"Society is inside of man and man is inside society and you cannot even create truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relation and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not." ¹

Miller had come to understand the socio-economic context of living and had thereby learnt that there was a social basis of art.

The Depression exposed the weakness of the capitalistic system and for Miller it was a picture of failed capitalism. Miller had personal experience of the failure of capitalism in the American Society, it had ruined his family. In 'Death of a Salesman' and in 'All My Sons', "Willy" and "Joe Keller" are the product as well as victim of the capitalistic society. The irony of Willy's tragedy is that the material goal is a mirage. Willy might have been a superb craftsman but he is forced by demand of a mechanized world to run pantingly in search of the will-o' the-wisp, financial wealth. He takes on the vapid, superficial life of the salesman, the false heartiness, the emptiness, the loneliness, covered up by colossal bluff, the fleeting pleasure of a sportive fling, and the anodyne

of alcohol. Miller is amply able to place before his audience "Willy Loman", a man who shared many of their ideals, ones which have been summed up by the Phrase "the American Dream". The "American Dream" is a combination of beliefs in the unity of family, the healthiness of competition in society, the need for success and money, and the view that America is the great land in which free opportunity for all exists. To become successful in the American Dream means to believe in competition, to reach the top as quickly as possible by proving oneself better than others. Success is judged by the amount of wealth which can be acquired by an individual. Success is external and visible, shows in material wealth and encouraged. Money and success mean stability, and stability can be seen in the family unit. In "All My Sons" the competitive society compels its individual to forsake native talents in favour of achieving material success, at the price of human dignity. All the events described in the family of Willy Loman and 'Joe Keller' can be taken to represent at large the American middle-class family in general, which could not bear the shock and strain caused by the onslaughts of Depression and their financial stability began to disrupt. Miller himself said in the preface of his collected works:

"These plays, in one sense, are my response to what was "in the air", they one man's way of saying to his fellowmen, "That is what you see everyday, or not had the time or the disinterestedness, or the insight, or the information to understand consciously." Each of these plays, in varying degrees, was begun in the belief that it was unveiling a truth already known but unrecognised as such. My concept of audience is of a public each member of which carrying about with him what he thinks is an anxiety, or a hope, or a preoccupation which is
his alone and isolates him from mankind, and in this respect atleast the functions of a play is to reveal him to himself so that he may touch others by, virtue of the revelation of his mutuality with them." 1

So the first great influence on Miller was that of his age, the age of depression. Besides the age, he was influenced by the books he read, not all books but the books which told about the world a man was living in. Miller writes: "I read books after I was seventeen, but already, for good or ill, I was not patient with every kind of literature."

A single work which enormously influenced him and left an indelible imprint on his mind was Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov, a tense and magnificent story which profoundly involves the questions anarchism, atheism and the existence of God and fulfils its author's aim, 'to find the man in man'. The novel prompted awareness of the flux of things in this world and yet brought a consciousness of the hidden laws. It was from Dostoevsky's book that Miller learnt the test for the discovery of hidden order in the world:

"There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature. The good are those who do this. The evil say that there is nothing beyond the face of the world: the surface reality. Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature." 2

During his long subway ride every morning for the warehouse job, he began to read some of the books he had to put off because of too many outside activities in high school. He read straight through 'War and Peace' while hanging into subway strap and he often went to the

library in his lunch hour. Jean Gould has explicitly summed up the process of accumulation of his experience:

".....Miller did not find the experience like "a season in hell", a 'cage', or prison, but saw it rather as a liberating force that released his inner being to the whole wide world of the mind as revealed in literature. He read everything he could cram into his waking hours, discovering for himself the delight in the words that expressed the truths of life - partly in poetry, more in novels, but mainly in plays."

At the university of Michigan he read the book entitled, "Write That Play" by Kenneth E. Rowe, of the university of Michigan Drama Department and he plunged into playwriting as if he had been born to the theater. Clifford Odets' 'Awake and Sing', and the core of its message, "Life should have some dignity", also made a deep and lasting impression on him. The telling line, "Go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills," seemed to epitomize the attitude of thirties towards the false ideals of the twenties.

The concepts of moral responsibility within the family which were to furnish the central themes of his plays, began to take shape during this period and the influence of Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill and the expressionists sharpened his concepts of inter-relatedness and moral responsibility.

'Ibsen', said Bjornson, "is not a man, but a pen" and the "pen" profoundly influenced Arthur Miller. He says about him -

"I had a private wish to demonstrate that Ibsen is really pertinent today, that he is not "old-fashioned," and, implicitly, that those who condemn him are themselves misleading our theater and our playwrights into a blind alley of senseless sensibility, triviality,

and the inevitable waste of our dramatic talents; for it has become the fashion for plays to reduce the "thickness" of life to a fragile facsimile, to avoid portraying the complexities of life, the contradictions of character, the fascinating interplay of cause and effect that have long been part of the novel. And I wished also to buttress the idea that the dramatic writer has, and must again demonstrate, the right to entertain with his brains as well as his heart. It is necessary that the public understand again that the stage is the place for ideas, for philosophies, for the most intense discussion of man's fate. One of the masters of such a discussion is Henrik Ibsen.1

He was deeply influenced by the persistence of theme, which was centre of his force and a profound source of strength.

"There is one quality in Ibsen that no serious writer can afford to overlook. It lies at the very center of his force, and I found in it – as I hope others will – a profound source of strength. It is his insistence, his utter conviction, that he is going to say what he has to say, and that the audience, by God, is going to listen. It is the very same quality that makes a star actor, a great public speaker, and a lunatic. Every Ibsen play begins with the unwritten words: "Now listen here!" And these words have shown me a path that leads beyond the through the wall of "entertainment", a path that leads beyond the formulas and dried-up precepts, the pretense and fraud, of the business of the stage. Whatever else Ibsen has to teach, this is his first and greatest contribution."2

He has described the deep-rooted and indelible impact of Ibsen on his mind:

"I connected with Ibsen not because he wrote problem plays, but because he was illuminating process. Nothing in his plays exists for itself, not a smart line, not a gesture than can be isolated. It was breath-taking from his work read again and again with new wonders cropping up each time –as well as through Dostoevski's, I came to an idea of what a writer was supposed to be. These two issued the license, so to speak, the only legitimate one I could conceive, for presuming to write at all. One had the right to write because other people needed news of the inner world, and if they went too long without such news they would go mad with the chaos.

1. Miller, Arthur. 'Introduction', p.36.
of their lives. With the greatest of presumption I conceived that great writer was the destroyer of chaos, a man privy to the councils of the hidden gods who administer the hidden laws that bind us all and destroy us if we do not know them. And Chaos, for one thing, was life lived oblivious of history." 1

Ibsenite influence is clearly perceptible in 'All My Sons' the 'An Adaptation of Ibsen's 'An Enemy of the People'.

Miller praised Chekhov for his balance, long vision, intense presentation of character and psychological insight. He wrote about Chekhov:

"It is hard to imagine any playwright reading Chekhov without envying one quality of his plays. It is his balance. In this, I think he is closer to Shakespeare than any dramatist I know. There is less stacking of the card, there is less fear of ridiculous, here is less fear of the heroic. His touch is tender, his eye is warm, so warm that the Chekhovian legend in our theatre has become that of an almost sentimental man and writer whose plays are elegies, postscripts of a dying age. In passing, it must be said that he was not the only Russian writer who seemed to be dealing with all his characters as though he were related to them. It is a quality not of Chekhov alone but of much Russian literature, and I mention it both to relate him to this mood and to separate him from it." 2

Miller gives credit to Chekhov for his broad vision:

"......while Chekhov's psychological insight is given full play, and while his greatest interest is overwhelmingly in the spiritual life of his characters, his farthest vision does not end with their individual psychology." 3

Miller has clarified that in the beginning he did not have an inclination of admiration towards O'Neill. However, later on he realized that O'Neill's comment on man and religion was something that he could appreciate; O'Neill had said: "I am not interested in the relations of man to man, but of man to God." Miller later acknowledged the significance of

1. Miller, Arthur. 'Preface' to 'An Enemy of the People', pp.16-1
3. Ibid., p.37.
meaning in this remark:

"I thought that very reactionary. Until, after repeated
and repeated forays into one play of my own after ano-
other, I understood that he meant what I meant, not
ideologically but dramatically speaking. I too had a
religion, however, unwilling I was to be so backward.
A religion with no gods out with god-like powers. The
powers of economic crisis and political imperatives
which had twisted, torn, eroded, and marked everything
and every one I laid eyes on." 1

Miller was deeply influenced by his reading of
the Greek and the German expressionists also. He found a
remarkable similarity between them. Both lay stress on the
hidden forces and such stress is fundamental to living and
art. Miller remarks about them:

"I was struck by the similarity of their dramatic means
in one respect—they are designed to present the hidden
forces, not the characteristics of the human beings
playing out those forces on the stage. I was told that
the plays of Aeschylus must be read primarily on a
religious level, that they are only lay dramas to us
now because we no longer believe. I could not under-
stand this because one did not have to be religious
to see in our own disaster the black outlines of a
fate that was not human, nor of the heavens either;
but something inbetween. Like the howling of a mob,
for instance, which is not a human sound but is never-
theless composed of human voices combining until a
metaphysical force of sound is created." 2

Therefore, Miller's "Social Vision" which is
relentlessly involved in the exposure of social, cultural
and economic maladies of the contemporary age and which
peeps deep into every corner of social relatedness if the
resultant product of interaction and fusion of various
influences. Ibsen's "illuminating process", O'Neill's
"concern for contemporary interests", "moral eye" of
Bernard Shaw, "reformist attitude" of Galsworthy "Balance",
"broad vision" and "psychological insight" of Chekhov,
"Zest for the discovery of hidden order in the world" of

Dostoevsky and the "lessons learnt from the book of Great Depression of 1929", are all the fabrics which went into making of texture for his 'Social Vision' and thus enables him to scan the American social, cultural and economic scene seriously.

He strengthened and continued the tradition of Eugene O'Neill but added to it heightened consciousness and deep insight to the social interests and realities and, thus, attained a place of prominence among the dramatists who dominated post-war American dramatic scene. Arthur Miller shares with Eugene O'Neill and Tennesse Williams the rank of the three foremost dramatists that American has produced. His plays indicate that he is a child of bewilderment and protesting age, but his plays also distill a message of love and hope.

Miller's immense and fundamental involvement in social realities has made him earn the title of a social dramatist and he himself calls his plays as social drama or the 'whole drama', in which his keen social vision portrays the problems, ethos and malaise of American society. Dennis Welland has aptly remarked that all the plays of Miller are enquiries with the nature of being an American. His play, 'Death of a Salesman' has been called 'a time bomb expertly placed under the edifice of Americanism'.

Unlike the plays of O'Neill and Tennesse Williams, his characters maintains the link with social environment and the social consciousness and the relatedness of the individual and the society are the themes
which render an over-increasing relevance, to Miller's plays and bestow upon him an unprecedented esteem. "In the last two decades", says Nelson, "a veritable parade of playwrights has marched, strutted, danced and crawled to oblivion while Arthur Miller, stepping firmly and boldly, has remained on the high road of American drama. As the time goes by, his plays continue to endure, many of them infact gaining in strength and impact."

His 'Social Vision' infact, thus enabled him to bring "new dignity and import" in modern American drama and helped him to earn tremendous international esteem and recognition by making his plays vital documents on the state of humanity in the contemporary world that has been variously described as "an age of broken values", "an age of night-mare", "an age in which man, cut off from all sources of vitality, has become rootless and disintegrated. Miller could bring back into the theatre the drama of social questions by focussing upon a single subject - "The struggle of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in his society" and in his family and what happens when "he does not have grip on the forces of life." In simpler words, his dramas deal with man's relationship with society and family. No doubt, Miller criticises society, a business-oriented society in which social institutions have rapidly undergone a change, consistently lost their meaning and significance, in which corruption, selfishness, indifference turn men into machines yet it is increasingly clear that his primary concern is with personal morality, the individual's relation to a society in which
their virtuous goods are almost as suspect as the
vicious methods. So "the theme that recurs in all his
plays - the relationship between a man's identity and
the image that society demands of him - is a major one;
in one way or the other it has been the concern of most
serious playwrights. A big theme is not enough, of
course; Miller has the ability to invest it with emotion.
He is sometimes emotional, sometimes romantic about both
his characters and their situations; but sentiment and
romance if they can command an audience without drowning
it, are not necessarily vices."

1. Welland, Dennis. 'Arthur Miller', (New York: Grove