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Evaluation of Characters in the Materialistic World: Reading Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Dr. S. K. Yadav

Assistant Professor

Deptt. of English

M. L. B. Govt. College of Excellence

Gwalior (M.P.)

&

Rachna Rathore

Research Scholar

Jiwaji University, Gwalior (M.P.)

Abstract

Materialism is love and affection for materials or gadgets. The modern society is highly materialistic. We can define materialism and materialistic world through definition. "Materialism is a theory that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and process and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter."¹ Arthur Miller represents in his many famous works the materialistic world and the struggle of common man in this modern world for their physical comforts. Materialism is disruption from spiritualism. This paper discusses that People have no self-realization or self-knowledge and self-assurance in this busy life. Willy Loman and Biff Loman in *Death of a Salesman* are the main characters who are struggling in this money-oriented world. Greed for achievement has eaten up large numbers of populace in this money-oriented world. Arthur Miller is concerned with the theme of man being the victim of the evils of commercial society.

Key Words: Materialism, Death of a Salesman, Identity, Commercialism, Spirituality.

Introduction

Arthur Miller represents the individual mechanism of the human psyche for illuminating the inner promises of self-deception in the American culture. From the beginning of his writing career, Miller has been outspoken in condemning the utilization to which ordinary populace are subjected to the selfish industrialist and profit mongering American commercialism.

Miller focuses together the social and the psychological views in his works which is not the study against the personal relationship, not are the individuals merely illustrations of some aspects of life. Miller's characters suffer from anxiety, depression; and guiltiness, and it was the genius quality of Miller to represent their tenderness and sorrowfulness practically and this creativity impressed the audience. This greatness of Miller gives the spiritual power to common people to struggle with their psychological and social problems. Miller is not only the greatest writer of America but also the hope for audience to fight. Miller shows the real picture of society and the mind of common people through his main characters of his great plays like Willy Loman, Joe Keller etc.

Death of a Salesman interweaves the innermost character Willy Loman's present with his reminiscences of a better-off past. Willy is quite a misfit in the environment in which he lives. He is depressed by the harshness of his life and surrounding the greater his imagination escapes into a world of pastoral bliss. Nature has a strong lure for him. An escape into the beauty of nature become a recurring aspect of Willy's personality and provides him with an escape from his immediate surroundings. It must, however he stated that nature happens to be Willy's second love only. His first love is of course success in the traditional context of middle class urban society. Willy feels too frustrated in the pursuit of his dream of success that he falls upon his second dream of pastoral happiness. No physical or mystical agency interferes with his life, but the sense of bothered solitude the psychosomatic neurosis shatters him to pieces. In addition, for all of Willy's inter disagreement, unquestionably here is the cruel monetary set up of present American civilization. As Willy says,

The Street is lined with Cars. There is not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass do not grow any more, you cannot raise a carrot in the backyard. They should have had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and biff hung the swing between them?²

These lines give us an idea about the illustration of this newest world or this money-oriented world, which is full of crowd. Willy criticizes this mercenary Society. Here Willy proves that people have no meaning of natural world. He values of the city are power, brings money. Willy though has never liked the city, and prefers the country, because there is not so much pressure. He is attracted to the wild, free and open countryside.

Willy's fear is that he wants to be as a fine, well-mannered human being. He thinks that he is a well-liked, well-mannered person who does not make mistakes. He is liked but not well liked, illusions are genuine to him. Genuineness is that he makes mistakes several times. He does not want to depart 'the world of dreams'. He never accepts his failures, as not doing glowing in business; he was untruthful on Linda, viewing her to be a commodity of which he takes advantage. He believes that he is so flourishing, well liked and thinks so highly of himself. This is the problem of materialistic society that they become unreasonable, argumentative and self-centered. Willy is the man who is with no achievements in his subsistence.

Willy's problems are his repression, his troubling relationship with his sons and the American Dream. "Repression is the unconscious blocking of unacceptable thoughts, feelings and impulses. The key to repression is that people do it unconsciously, so they often have very little control over it. "Repressed memories" are memories that have been unconsciously blocked from access or view".³

Willy Loman's wife is Linda Loman. She chooses him to marry and she is the emotionally supporter of Willy Loman who is a man who wanted to be great and famous – but defined greatness as being "well liked" by others. Because of Linda's choice, the rest of her life will be filled with disappointment. Unfortunately, Willy does not understand how much she values him, because he's too blinded by his insecurities and self-absorption. He is unable to recognize his wife out of the savings from his own conceited selling career has already cleared the actuality

that he has already conquered the world materialistically as the last due on the housing loan. Miller creates an unforgettable character in Willy Loman, the hardworking but ill-starred salesman. The author describes how an American visionary can lose his sense of worth by many negative situations that occur throughout his life. When Willy is unable to be the ideal man, he wants to be, he loses his will to live and deems himself as a failure. We can say, through some lines Linda represents the condition of new generation who have the problem of identification and position in this materialistic world. It is not the only problem of Biff Loman but the problem of all. Linda understood the reality of her son, Biff and she wants to realize this to Willy. Therefore, she says Willy, "I think he's still lost, Willy. I think he's very lost."⁴ She knows her duty very well towards her husband and her children.

Biff Loman is one of the main characters in *Death of a Salesman* who plays a fundamental role by having an effect on every main character in the story. He is thirty-four years old. He is the elder son of Willy and Linda, brother to Happy. He is physically good-looking, muscular and socially energetic. Unfortunately, his potential was wasted when he decided to not make up a failed math class. This makes Biff seem as if he wasted his own life. He is also the origin cause of Willy's hope, nervousness and dream. He has been a failure like his father because he tried twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs. A good-looking personality does not lead Biff anywhere near to success. He hated the competition and saw working as suffering. Biff still tries to make up for his mistakes and tries for another profession. Money is not everything for Biff. Biff says,

Well I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on what subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying.... that's how you build a future.⁵

World has a different meaning & significance beyond the mercenary influence and illusions for Biff. The materialistic world frustrated him. Biff always seemed to hold Happy in a loving manner. He changes from treating Happy as a younger brother to an equal. He also talks to Happy as if he was talking to another side of himself. Biff is an archetypal quintessence of all misplaced youths that are unable to cope with the fast changing patterns of society. His tragic awareness arises from the sense of meaninglessness of futility and lack of purpose. He feels estranged. It is the main problem of new world's age group. Biff wants to fit in somewhere, somebody, but cannot.

Happy Loman is Willy's youngest son and is often over shadowed by his older brother Biff and ignored by his parents. He constantly relies on other people's opinion to make his own decisions. Happy was always striving for Willy's attention, but never really got it. This is shown when the young Happy is always telling his father, "I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?"⁶ The need for attention continues as an adult, but Willy and Linda continue to brush Happy off in much the same way they did when he was younger. Happy Loman has grown up to be a well-adjusted man of society. He has developed from a follower to a potentially successful businessperson.

Happy Loman, a character dominated by his material greed and desire to crush anyone standing between him and the almighty dollar, represents a skewed perspective of that Dream, a perspective shared by an increasingly large amount of Americans. Through his insatiable appetite for power, lust, and wealth, Happy Loman embodies the modern capitalist American Dream. In addition, through his never-ending discontent and incessant feeling of unfulfillment, Happy embodies the fallacy and shortcomings of that Dream. Happy is not succeeding because he works hard, because he is well liked, or because he's exceptionally good at what he does. He is succeeding through the neo-American shortcut to happiness. Happy says,

All I can do now is waiting for the merchandise manager to die. In addition, suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He is a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I'd do. I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, plenty of women, and still, goddamnit, I'm lonely."⁷

He has amassed concrete wealth; it is the intangible aspects of life that Happy craves. Material things and many hook ups with random girls just do not seem to be the kind of success that Happy truly wants.

Arthur Miller uses *Death of a Salesman* to expose America's preoccupation with materialism after World War II. This preoccupation is the main cause of Willy's mental stress. Willy had a lot riding on him being successful. We spend most of our time either making money or spending it. We want to reach at the top. Virtues like honesty, integrity and helpful attribute are rare commodities these days. Willy's interaction with all of the supplementary characters in the play expose a bottomless sense of unhappiness, hopelessness, and disenchantment as Willy clings to his description of the American Dream and alternately attacks and defends the citizens in his existence. People find that the American dream is merely a dream and nothing else. Willy has numerous dreams; unluckily these are all extremely unachievable. Willy Loman was a very flawed individual who had a huge impact on many people's lives. It is the main problem of the materialistic world that they have lots of desires and requirements. The desires to be well liked are the basic human weak point, which is moving the human beings to collect the resources that others should make a base to do so. The American Dream has become all about money and material. The raise of monetary prosperity of civilization and by this means of the persons has not brought a sense of protection in the mind of up to date man.

In the new world people cannot live without money and status, they want financial prosperity. Money brings good and bad effects in our life. Money makes us greedy and desirous. It destroys friendship and family. Some family quarrels over big lands, gold, and even kill other family members just to take their property. It also destroys friendship when arguing about it; money is just so powerful that leads everyone does anything just to get it. Money destroys the love, faith, and happiness in our life. Actually only money is not the problem to make us materialistic but desires also make us materialistic. As we can say in the play *Death of a Salesman*, Willy has many desires and requirements, he thinks that the attractive personality and

money give him success and prosperity but he was wrong. When people become successful and wealthy in their life, they forget all their bonds and good terms with their kith and kin. People, who are rich and wealthy, want to be more rich and prosperous by hook or crook. In the present society the word, 'Status' means a lot and keeps a good value. A person who has no money and status, nobody asks for him, even his wisdom and intelligence lies hidden and covered. Today we are conscious about materials but not about our spirituality. We forget our self-identity. We should not think about the status in the society but should think about the position of our mind. The materialism affects the whole life of human being. We become self-satisfied if we control our expectations and desires.

Conclusion

The problem of identity, alienation, loneliness and the problem of communication are the main problems of this new world. In the busy life, people have no time to spend with their family and children, so they become frustrate and disappointed. It is the main solution that we should limit our desires and dreams to be happy in whole life. Many plays of Arthur Miller represent the sense of insecurity, a capacity for self-deception, which leads to family quarrels and all kinds of tensions, a breakdown of human relationships, and a sense of alienation in this materialistic world through his characters who belong to common life. When people become successful and wealthy in their life, they forget all their bonds and good terms with their kith and kin. People, who are rich and wealthy, want to be more rich and prosperous by hook or crook. In the present society the word, 'Status' means a lot and keeps a good value. A person who has no money and status, nobody asks for him, even his wisdom and intelligence lies hidden and covered. Today we are conscious about materials but not about our spirituality. We forget our self-identity. We should not think about the status in the society but should think about the place of our mind. The materialism affects the whole life of human being. We become self satisfy, if we control our expectations and desires.

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