

Images of Man in the plays of Arthur . A concise construal of 'All My Sons', 'Death of a Salesman' and 'A View from the Bridge'

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***Abstract :** The present paper is an endeavour to exhibit that man's struggle for the attainment of the dignified image becomes meaningful only when he realizes the integrity and inviolability of community values.*

The problem and issue of image can have various dimensions-cultural ,social, psychological and even metaphysical .But Arthur Miller being a playwright uses it as a dramatic metaphor of human condition He provides a concrete social basis for the formation of its various components Each central character and in some cases even each subordinate character , is found engaged in this all-important struggle for image, which includes his concern for his name , his self-knowledge and self-discovery , the knowledge of the world surrounding him and a grasp of those vital forces that define the meaning of life.

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Introduction

A critical analysis of Arthur Miller's early plays, from the point of view of evaluating and locating the theme of 'Image of Man' reveals the playwrights preoccupation with this theme to a considerable extent. Though the problems of guilt and betrayal constantly recur in these plays, the 'Images of Man' remains their central area of operation. The illusions generated by the American Dream, the false hopes of becoming successful in the land of failures, add to man's predicament, particularly when he is suspended between the contradictory forces of life and society.

For Arthur Miller, man's image does not have mystical implications. He regards it as a social product and shows in his plays how man's concept of his own image is constantly shaped by his awareness and interaction of the social forces that operate on his consciousness and sensibility.

In the three plays analyzed in the present paper—'All My Sons', 'Death of a Salesman' and 'A View from the Bridge', Miller explores different forces for his dramatic emphasis. In 'All My Sons' and 'Death of a Salesman' the main action centers on economic values and in "A View from the Bridge" it revolves on psychological values. But each play reveals the necessity of observing a social code or of following the voice 'Images of Man' is dialectically related to social and individual values and can never be understood or studied in isolation from them.

'All My Sons' is the tragedy of a man who can't see beyond his own image and his family. He is "an uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in many commonly known things".(1) There would be many, for instance, who condemn Joe Keller in 'All My Sons' for his duplicity, cheating, dishonesty and responsibility for the death of his own son. But we can not afford to forget that individual responsibility apart, he is forced to become what he is by the very pressure and structure of his society. Joe Keller spends a life-time in building up a business and he can not afford to let it go down the drains at any cost. For him, his business is the very means of his own survival and the survival of his family. Moreover, he believes that the faulty machinery would never be put to actual use.

Arthur Miller depicts that how a man's 'anti-social action' leads to the growth of a distorted psyche and then a distorted image, but along with this, the dramatist also attaches equal importance to man's conscience which may exercise a relatively autonomous influence in respect of his image. It is the result of the awaiting of Joe Keller's conscience that he commits suicide in order to regain his image. Miller explains his point as:

"In All My Sons Joe Keller is a father and a citizen but because he could not take the citizen side seriously he became less of a father and destroyed his own

children. You literally have to survive with this whole because you can't survive without it.”(2)

Chris and Larry Keller are also the product of the same society , but they know how to sub-jugate the prevailing system of values in their burning idealism . They are somehow able to retain their hold over their conscience owing to which they do not hesitate to expose their own father's criminal guilt towards society .

'Death of a Salesman', further , reveals an individual's strenuous struggle for a vague search for meaning, identity , and his image , The Image of a Salesman is given to Willy Loman by the society and he struggles for achieving and understanding his (real) images of a father , of a husband, and that of a man .

The story of the play deals with Willy Loman, a salesman of lower middle class, “past sixty years of age”(3) whose tragedy lies in his acceptance of the over publicized ideals of material success and blatant optimism. Willy Loman is not a sad and vicious character who has no ideals, Miller writes “The trouble with Willy Loman is that he has tremendously powerful ideals”.(4) Throughout the play , Willy tries to project an inflated image of himself to impress his son and to achieve some sort of recognition as a father. Although , he lives with psychological tension , frustration and with the resultant distorted and fractured image of the self. but in the end , he dies for the welfare of his family and achieves a dignified image of a father and a husband as well as of a salesman who “is not ready to settle for the half “.

The loss of one's name poses the severest threat to ones image and existence. Eddie Carbone in 'A View from the Bridge' spoils his name in a fit of jealousy. He is a longshoreman , having very protective attitude towards his niece Catherine whom he doesn't want to get mixed up with the rabble. He tells her: “ You are gettin' to be a big girl now, you gotta keep yourself more, you can't be so friendly, kid” (5)He tries to retrieve it, but when he finds that it is too late. he is confronted with the only honourable alternative, death. His death is possibly an atonement for what he has done. The loss of his name becomes for him a cross on which he can die but without resurrection . And at the price of his life, he might regain his lost image.

In conclusion, it may be said that there is a predominance of psychological and social themes in the plays of Arthur Miller .That is why . one of his major concerns as a playwright has been to explore man's search and awareness of his image in a world of conflicting and contradictory values and forces .The problem of image is seen by Arthur Miller as the product of the dialectical inter-relationship between man's psyche and society . As Gerald Weales finds that the recurring theme in all Millers plays is “the relationship between a mans identity and the image that society demands of him.” The focus in his plays is always on large issues like man's

image and his ultimate status in society , a search for stable human relationships and an endeavour to synthesize human dignity with social needs and challenges . In a world dominated by repressive forces of all hues and variety , man is losing a grip on his basic humanitarian impulses .He is gripped by fear and guilt , sorrow and despair because he is unable to realize his true image and retain his creative being .Unable to discover his genuine moorings , man get lost in a jungle of confusion and contradictory impulses, but in spite of the constant play of these negative forces , man continues to struggle to succeed and survive with dignity and honour for sustaining and maintaining his images as an integral and vital part of the larger socio-cultural matrix.

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