

## Tragic Flows in Arthur Miller's All My Son's

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**Abstract:-** In his Play formulates his theory on the nature and function of tragedy. The novelists said that miserable feeling is invoked in us when we are in the presence of a character that is ready to end his life to secure personal quality. It employs a pattern that is fundamental to most tragedies. In a tragedy we always come across an individual who tries to gain rightful place for him in the society. Man's failure to achieve his personal status is the fault of the society. Miller asserts that the personal factor is not entirely passive. While examining a tragedy we should not exclude the individual's flow; though the most dominating factor is the society.

**Keywords:** Arthur Miller; Isolation; Postmodern; Research; Alienation

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller is an American playwright who came to the scene after the Second World War. Miller was born in a prosperous family on October 17, 1915, in the Harlem section of Manhattan, New York. His family were of Austrian Jewish origin, but the Jewish element does not appear to have been important in his upbringing or environment. Miller was prosperous manufacturers. His grandfather "had been a blunt cost of Germanic business all his life; had a factory of importance for many years." But soon the Miller was ruined by the economic crisis which hit America in 1931. Otherwise Miller's father (Isadora Miller) as a prosperous manufacturer, and his mother (Augusta Barnett Miller), herself the daughter of a manufacturer, had been a teacher in the public school that Miller attended in Harlem. Miller had a brother and sister too.

Miller gradually from high school in 1932, but was unable to go on to college as "nobody in the house as in the possession of the fare." The alternative was obvious and he accordingly worked for two years in an automobile parts warehouse on Tenth Avenue in Manhattan at fifteen dollars a week in order to pay his way to college.

He has written about nine major plays, film scripts, short stories and several critical essays. Miller has been married three times, the second marriage being to the famous Hollywood actress Marlin Monroe. But the first to marriages broke up unhappily and at present Miller lives with his third wife Ingeborg Morath on a farm at Roxbury, Connecticut, USA during his years as a playwright, Miller has earned all the fame and success that a modern writer is capable of getting. At present, he ranks with Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, as one of three foremost playwrights of America.

He has written three novels and a few short stories too. More than any other contemporary playwright, Arthur Miller has assumed the mantle of Robert Sherwood as the public conscience of America. He seems to have been concerned with international peace. He is popular playwright because he has the touch of the common speech mingled with democratic idealism, poetic expression, and an ancient people's capacity for understanding the anguish of the soul" (Jean Gould). He is the Mulkraj Anand of America.

The poverty of an early life forced upon him a revision of life's values. "Practically everything that had been said and done 1929 turned out to be a fake. It turn out that there had never been anybody in charge." It can easily be seen that the traumatic experience of sudden poverty coincided in Miller's life with his adolescence-an age which in any case brings disillusionment and knowledge as a part of the process of growing up. In the speech mentioned above, Miller talks repeatedly of the hidden forces of life which is stronger than individual man's effect or will. What he means is that as in Greek tragedy, man is a victim of the forces which operate outside of his control and are generally at cross purpose to his own action and design.

The piece was once again goes back to the conventional realistic form and the typical situation of sons trying to examine their relationship with their father. Victor and Walter are two brothers who meet after many years in the house of their father who has recently died. They have an appointed with a junk deal to which they wish to sell off the furniture and other valuable. As they were waiting, they reminisce about their past. Victor, a middle aged police sergeant, resents his rich brother Walter who is a doctor.

During their conversation, however, Victor discovers that his father had money even during the days of

their poverty but fact as kept secret from everybody. Consequently, Victor couldn't get good education. Miller's purpose in the play is show that none of the characters in the play- the two brothers or their dead father- has moral right to blame others because nobody is perfect. We all have our faults and only when we recognize them can we live at peace with ourselves.

Miller's point of view they could not understand. Similarly, Cain does not act out of evil, as is commonly believed, but out of fear of God. This play, not at all successful on stage, has shown that Miller is trying to break fresh ground in experimenting with new forms and themes. The interest of the public and of literacy world in the works of Arthur Miller has by no means diminished. Every new play by him is a major event. His plays, besides being highly entertaining are rich in the dramatic content. But more than anything else, the intellectual appeal of his plays is very strong. He generally has a contemporary scene in mind even while writing about the myth of Adam and Eve.

### **Failure of Men in Miller's plays**

Miller portrays moral failure of his male characters: that moral failing of Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, the self-destructive self-deceit of Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, the adultery of John Proctor in *The Crucible* or the abnormal incestuous love of Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge*. In his early plays, Miller actually portrays a gallery of male failures. Joe Keller fails to realize the higher morality; country comes first, home second; Willy Loman misunderstands his own place in society; Eddie Carbone is never aware that his own love towards his niece Catherine is abnormal.

### **Married Women's Relationships in the Family**

*All My Sons* considered as a drama of family relationships. Though Miller appears to be arguing strongly in favour of a certain positive relationship between the individual and society, but in *All My Sons* family relationships are predominant. The play deals with the relatives of mother and son, the father and son, the husband and wife, brother and sister and so on.

Joe Keller says that family is everything to him. Kate as a married woman realized her responsibility in her family as well as in the society. Kate says about her husband, "There is something bigger than the family to him" (p81). But Miller makes Keller to say before his suicide:

KELLER: Nothing „is bigger“

MOTHER: There is something

KELLER: Nothing's bigger than that and you're going to tell him you understand? I'm his father and

he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!

This shows that Keller considers his family as the most important unit of the society. Therefore Kate as a wife and mother is unable to go against her husband wish. Though she understands moral responsibility as a married woman, she has to belong to her husband for her living in the society. Kate is a traditional mother. She cannot bear the idea of her husband as a criminal, nor can she see her sons in distress. She is not prepared to believe that her elder son Larry is dead. Such a way she experiences hallucination of her son being alive. Nobody can convince her of the reality that Larry is no more. She says even to Anne that Anne has to wait for his death. For this reason, she opposes the marriage between Chris and Anne. This shows that Kate Keller has real sense of motherhood and she cannot let her husband die in his guilty. Thus marriage between Chris and Anne would require her to believe that Larry was dead, and if Larry was dead, it means his father Keller killed him like other pilots. So Kate feels that God does not allow a son be killed by his father. A famous critic Orm Overland says "Joe Keller emerges as a criminal. He has sold defective cylinder heads to the Air Force during the war and was thus directly responsible for the deaths of twenty-one Pilots".

### **Married Women as Victims of the Dominant Patriarchal System:**

Apart from being the victim of the social conditions and the cultural values, the married women are also victimized by the dominant patriarchal system. In the patriarchal society, men are given freedom and become what they like, even to fail they choose, but women are caged in domesticity and play the limited social prescribed roles. Miller's awareness of women's entrapment and enslavement is shown evidently by presenting the silent, distorted and marginalized house – wife and mothers.

### **TRAGIC FLOWS IN ARTHUR MILLER'S "ALL MY SONS"**

*All my sons* are certainly a tragedy in the literary sense of this word. A tragedy depicts the downfall and death of some important person, and thereby arouse in the readers or the spectators of such feelings as pity, fear, awe, and terror. Of course, *All My Sons* is not exactly a powerful tragedy of kind written by such author as Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Webster. But *All My Sons* is certainly a moving and poignant play. The protagonist in this play is a manufacturer or industrialist by the name of Joe Keller. It may here be pointed out that the protagonist in this play does not meet the requirements of a tragic hero as conceived by Aristotle.

Protagonists in this play not a king or an army general or an exalted personage in any sense of the word. Now- a-days, we live in democratic times when there are no kings governing the people and when a king or queen reigning in any country is merely a figure-head and only a relic of the past. In this time, therefore, we can expect only on average kind of person as tragic hero.

If Aristotle had lived in our times, he might have changed his mind about the tragic hero, and he might not have laid down the rule that the protagonist in tragedy should be a man of a very high or exalted rank. We live in democratic times when theories of social equality are in favour, even though there is no actual social equality anywhere in the world. Joe Keller belongs to the affluent class of society; and therefore he differs from the ordinary kind of human beings who constitute the majority in every country.

A conflict is an essential ingredient of tragedy. A good tragedy contains both outerconflict and inner conflict. In *All My Sons* we witness both these kinds of conflict. As for, we outerconflict have a confrontation between Chris and his father over Chris's desire to marry Ann who was engaged to marry his brother, Larry. There is a confrontation between Chris and George when the latter accuses Chris's father of having brought about the ruin of the Deever family.

There is a confrontation between Chris and his mother Kate who firmly opposes Chris's intention to marry Ann because Kate believes that Larry is still alive and would come back home one day. But the biggest confrontation takes place when Chris discovers his father's guilt and when his father confesses this guilt.

Chris would now like his father to face the consequences of his criminal action; but Keller defends himself first on the ground that he had done everything for the sake of Chris and for the sake of the family, later on the ground that everybody in the country has been using all kinds of fair or foul means to make money. Then there is the inner conflict. Both Joe Keller and Kate Keller suffer from a sense of guilt, but they have been able to subdue their sense of guilt so that the conflict in their minds is of a very mild kind.

In Chris we witness an acute mental conflict. He suffers from a sense of guilt because he has survived the war while all the men under his command had killed in the course of the fighting. Chris has a sense of guilt even about his desire to marry Ann. He faces this conflict in such an acute form that he has taken three and a half years to make up his mind to propose marriage to Ann; and even then he has not been able completely to overcome his sense of guilt.

Chris faces another conflict when he finds himself unable to take any action against his father even after the later has confessed his guilt. Finally, there is a kind of inner conflict in Keller when he wavers between going to the police to confess his guilt and his disinclination to do so. They comes the catastrophe. Joe Keller does finally decide to pay the price for the crime which he had committed; and so he shoots himself. This is certainly a very moving end to the play.

Pathos is always the prevailing atmosphere of a tragedy, even though there may be some lighter moments in it. Pathos is the key-note of *All My Sons* also, despite its many light moments. There is Kate's distress at the very outset of the play when the apple-tree has been brought down to the ground by the wind. Then there is her pathetic belief that Larry is still alive and that he would come back home someday. George's description of the plight of his father first to Chris and Ann, and then to Joe Keller is also very moving because George's father is spending his days in prison in a miserable condition because Joe Keller had told a lie in the court.

Chris's sense of guilt is another moving ingredient in the play, as is Dr. Jim's frustrated desire to pursue medical research. Larry's letter to Ann containing his decision to commit suicide because of his father's criminal action is also deeply moving. Chris's predicament on finding that his father is, after all, guilty of fraud and cheating is deeply moving too.

Chris now decides to leave home and to look for a job elsewhere to earn his livelihood instead of continuing to participate in his father's business. Then, of course, Joe Keller's suicide at the end comes as a climax to all these moving situations. Joe Keller's suicide certainly satisfies Chris's conscience but at the same time it grieves him deeply just as it grieves Chris's mother also.

*All My Sons* is undoubtedly a deeply moving play. But we cannot affirm that it fulfils Aristotle's condition of what he called the Catharsis of the feelings of pity and fear. Pity is certainly aroused in our hearts by the events of this play, as has already been pointed out. In fact, the feeling of pity aroused in us in the course of the play is very deep; but it is not of the same magnitude as in the case of the great Shakespeare tragedies. The feeling of fear is also aroused in us. But this feeling too is not of the same intensity.

## II. CONCLUSION

Thus Miller exposes clearly the fact that married women are exploited and enslaved in the male dominant society. They are the victim of the patriarchal system. Hence *All My Sons* deals with large social issues revealing interaction of various family relationships. Both married

women like Kate and Linda have suffered a lot. It shows their suffering and frustration under the oppression of male superiority and dominance. Simultaneously, Miller shows his capability to transform the times by presenting married women with strength and courage.

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