

**THE AMERICAN DREAM IN ARTHUR MILLER'S "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AND BUSINESS REALITIES: A STUDY****Dr. Nandkishor Damodar Sonar**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Arthur Miller was born in the New York on 17 October, 2024. Mr. Miller is an advocate of the underprivileged and people. American dream creates hopes and provides opportunities to touch the new horizons that can helps individuals to achieve their full potential. It is the symbol of the best that America has to offer. This research paper critically examines the myth of the American Dream. It sheds light on the disparity between aspiration and reality. Willy Loman's relentless pursuit of material success, despite his lack of tangible achievements, symbolizes the flawed nature of this dream. This is a poignant reminder of the fact that external success does not necessarily equate to personal happiness. This play is the story of a common man who is in search of love, success, pride, ambition, but finds himself disintegrated and disillusioned. He does not understand weird and cruel language of the postmodern and consumer world*

*Keywords: Miller; Death of a Salesman; Common man; Business; American myth; Dream: Silence; Death*

**INTRODUCTION**

Arthur Miller was born in the New York on 17 October, 2024. It is the common man who is the subject of most of his literary work. Miller's works like, "A view from the Bridge", the movie "The Misfits" are the example drawn from his first-hand experiences of life. His first success was his popular play, "All my sons", a play which investigates about different aspects of capitalist society. Mr. Miller is an advocate of the underprivileged people. His play 'Death of a Salesman' is his most popular play. He got the Pulitzer Prize in 1949. According to him, common man is the fit subject for tragedy.

The American Dream is much more cherished goal everywhere and it has ignited the minds of generations after generations from all corners of the world. It tests one's resilience and perseverance. American dream creates hopes and provides opportunities to touch the new horizons that can helps individuals to achieve their full potential. It is the symbol of the best that America has to offer. One needs to acknowledge the fact that the world has become a global village and it is constantly changing and to succeed one needs to embrace diversity and promote inclusivity that would consequently help to develop the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Death of Salesman is also a study of a struggling of a salesman whose pursuit of success leads to his emotional and mental downfall. It is the perfect example of the American dream's intricacies and its potential pitfalls. Day dreams are bound to shatter when they come in contact with reality. Similarly, Willy Loman embodies that having charming personality and being well-liked are the keys to business success. He has the illusion that he will great a break and that will definitely bring him prosperity. But the reality is starkly different. Will's dreams remain unfulfilled which highlights the rift between the harsh reality and The American Dream.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the enduring relevance of the American Dream and its implications for individuals navigating the complexities of the modern business world. This research paper critically examines the myth of the American Dream. It sheds light on the disparity between aspiration and reality. Primarily it focuses on Willy Loman's struggle with personal identity and the destructive nature of self-delusion. The play is basically about the myth of the American Dream, highlighting the disparity between aspiration and reality. As far as style of the play is concerned, there is an interplay between past and play (Willy's flashback and the present).

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There is abundant use of symbols like seed (which represents growth and development) and the rubber hose symbolises Willy's suicidal thoughts. Willy Loman's mental state reveals insights into depression, illusions of grandeur and how failure makes a permanent mark on the subconscious mind. This play is significant from the psychological point of view.

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

This research paper hypothesizes that the American Dream, as critiqued in Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," reveals enduring flaws and disillusionments that persist in today's business world. The study will show that the pressures, materialism, and identity crises depicted in the play continue to affect individuals in modern business environments.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. To explore the themes of success and failure of the business world in America.
2. To analyse the portrayal of the American Dream in the seminal work "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The research work is undertaken through primary and secondary data collection, analysis of the data interpretation, collation and an attempt to arrive at a conclusion that seeks to validate the hypothesis.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

From the Marxist's point of view, this play is a critique of capitalist ideology and commodification of human life. Willy Loman's relentless pursuit of material success, despite his lack of tangible achievements, symbolizes the flawed nature of this dream. (Otten, 1982), Miller critiques the American Dream by illustrating how it sets unrealistic expectations that ultimately lead to personal failure and disillusionment. (Bloom, 2007). The play challenges the notion that hard work and determination invariably lead to success, instead portraying the American Dream as an elusive ideal that can lead to an individual's downfall. Linda Loman's role, portraying her as both a silent and supportive wife and a silent sufferer, whose emotional labour as well as sacrifices underscore the personal costs of the American Dream. Linda's steadfast support of Willy, despite his flaws, highlights the often-overlooked emotional toll on those who support the dreamers. (Porter. 2012) This foundation has supported further analysis and discussion in the research paper.

### **DISCUSSION:**

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" critiques the materialistic and superficial aspects of the American Dream and how it resonates with the harsh realities of the contemporary business world, ultimately suggesting that its pursuit can result in devastating consequences for individuals and their relationships. Following remarks are noteworthy to understand the topic:

Arthur Miller has written a superb drama. From every point of view, 'Death of a Salesman,' which was acted at the Morosco last evening, is rich and memorable drama." He highlighted the depth and complexity of Willy Loman as a character, as well as the play's powerful critique of American society. (The New York Times, 1949)

Willy Loman puts his hopes on one of his two sons. He advises his sons to develop personalities that make them successful in the business world. Willy is not interested in academic achievements and does not impart any ethical instruction to Biff and Happy. Happy with his narcissism and Biff becomes emotionally paralysed. The major characters in the play strive to achieve prosperity and happiness, but at the end, nothing happens; an aging salesman Willy Loman ends his life, his ever-smiling wife loses her husband and lives alone. Loneliness becomes a torture for the rest of her life. Happy and Biff do not find better work. When these major characters wish to get something successfully, reality strikes them. These characters work from one direction and destiny works from another direction. The whole play centres on typical middle class American families. The central theme of the play is uncertainty of life, everything that we do will vanish in no time, resulting in no reward for the hard work as in Death of a Salesman.

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*International Journal of Applied Engineering & Technology*

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Thus, the play critiques the consumerist culture and the American Dream. Willy's life is filled with symbols of consumerists' society. -like his car and home. But these material possessions bring no satisfaction and fulfilment. He always senses that 'something is burning' in the home. His constant struggle to pay off debts and maintain appearances underscores the emptiness of a life focused solely on material possessions. Willy believes that being wealthy and having material possessions are the ultimate measures of success. He dreams of financial prosperity and constantly pressures himself and his sons to achieve it.

Willy Loman is in search of greater autonomy, comfort and convenience and financial independence. But it creates high levels of stress and potential burnout due to relentless and ruthless pursuit of money. There is a vast collective madness. Consequently, personal relationships and social connections are lost due to prioritising work and financial gain over family and friends. He does ethical and moral compromises to achieve financial freedom, leading to a sense of guilt and regrets.

Foregoing discussion makes it amply clear that we destroy overall happiness and fulfilment if money becomes the sole aim of our life and start neglecting other aspects of a well-rounded life. One needs to do a balancing act in managing financial success while maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life. It gives us the message that one needs to live in the present, and not to think of the past which is dead and about the future which is yet to come. Be in the present, consequently joy arises within you without any effort.

As a researcher, it reminds Edwin of Arlington Robinson's poem, "Richard Cory", the poem describes a man named Richard Cory who is admired and envied by the townspeople, but ultimately meets a tragic end. Richard Cory is extremely wealthy, even richer than a king. The people in his town continue with their hard lives and are filled with labour and deprivation. Despite their struggles and longing (like Willy Loman) for a better life, they are shocked to learn that Richard Cory who seemingly has everything, takes his own life one summer night. This is a poignant reminder of the fact that external success does not necessarily equate to personal happiness. It challenges readers to look beyond appearances and recognize that everyone has their struggles, regardless of how perfect their lives may seem. The tragic ending underscores the complexities of human experience and the often-hidden nature of personal suffering.

This study found that surface simplicity is always deceptive. One cannot judge a person from his outward appearance. The play 'The Death of a Salesman' reveals that wealth and status do not guarantee happiness and that internal struggles are often hidden from the outside world.

Willy Loman was influenced by his brother Ben. According to Ben, any person who is good-looking, handsome and well-liked can become successful in the business world. This becomes Willy Loman's dream. Willy believes that wealth and material possessions are the real parameters for success. Willy focusses only on the misplaced superficial values and consequently believes that outward appearances lead to overlook the important qualities like hard work, dedication and devotion for the work. He dismisses the qualities of hard labour, as represented by his own brother, Ben, who achieves success in the wilderness. He goes off into that wilderness of Alaska and Africa, luck favours him and he discovers a diamond mine; He conveniently overlooks hard-earned success achieved by his neighbour, Charley. Willy's boss and the son of Frank Wagner, is a cold, selfish person who inherits his success without doing anything. Just like what Basho Matsuo says "Sitting silently, doing nothing, spring comes and the grass grows by itself". He symbolizes the new, impersonal force of the corporate world. Ben is a role model for Willy even if he is very antithesis of his life. He achieves the complete success story that only Willy dreams about. Willy has illusionary vision of complete success. Ben success story is a type of 'psychological crutch'. Therefore, he romanticised Ben's success story. Charley's success story is repugnant for Willy. Charlie achieves success story.

Eventually, Willy fails to achieve material success as promised in his American Dream and in the process, he overlooks the tangible things such as love, affection for the family in pursuit of financial success. Willy's obsession with American Dream affects his family drastically, particularly his sons, Biff and Happy. Willy imposes unrealistic expectations on them which causes conflict, discord, maladjustment and ultimately

## *International Journal of Applied Engineering & Technology*

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disappointment. Biff, struggles with his own identity and challenges aggressively against his father's dreams and eventually rejecting it. Willy's tragic pursuit of the so-called American dream underlines the dangers of placing too much value on material happiness and societal approval which later on becomes a deep source of conflict and disillusionment.

Willy's struggle is the struggle of the common man and the challenges faced by the lower-middle class in striving for success in a competitive business environment.

The play also demonstrates the impact of consumerism. It serves as the critique of capitalism and bitterly criticises the capitalist ethos that equates personal worth with professional success and material wealth. It also addresses the impact of consumerism on individual identity and societal values. Historically, this play is also significant for understanding the economic conditions and cultural attitudes of the post war civilizations. Understanding the historical backdrop of the post- World War era. It raises certain moral issues about integrity, honesty, probity and the true nature of success. It is a multifaceted work which provides ample content for scholarly research and academic exploration across numerous fields.

Following quotations from the play substantiate what is stated on the play:

Willy Loman

I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!"

Have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts."

The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead."...

Biff Loman

I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you.

Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?Charley- (Loman' s neighbour)

Nobody blames this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life."(Arthur Miller, 1947)

These quotes capture key themes of the play, including identity, aspiration and the harsh realities of the American Dream. Moreover, following is the excerpt of the dialogue between Willy Loman and Howard Wagner, his boss when Willy is fired in the play "Death of a Salesman" This dialogue between Will Loman and his employer amply makes the validity of the remarks made above. Willy Loman's desperation and his futile attempts to hold onto his job and dignity. It is this vital moment that underscores the themes of obsolescence and the harsh realities of the business world. These lines from the play are quite apt to validate the above statements:

Willy: Howard, are you firing me?

"Howard: I think you need a good long rest, Willy.

Willy: "Howard...

Howard: And when you feel better, come back, and we'll see if we can work something out.

Willy: But I gotta earn money,

Howard. I'm in no position to...

Howard: Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a hand?"

Willy: They're working on a very big deal.

## *International Journal of Applied Engineering & Technology*

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Howard: This is no time for false pride, Willy. You go to your sons and you tell them that you're tired. You've got two great boys, haven't you?

Willy: No question, no question, but in the meantime...

Howard: Then that's that, heh?

Willy: All right, I'll go to Boston tomorrow.

Howard: "No, no.

Willy: "I can't throw myself on my sons. I'm not a cripple!

Howard: Look, kid, I'm busy this morning.

Willy: (Desperation rising) Howard, you've got to let me go to Boston!"

Howard: I've got a line of people to see this morning.

Willy: Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and...

Howard: (Impatiently) "I've got to see some people, kid.

Willy: (Stopping him) I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance!

You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit!

Howard: Now pay attention. I've got a lot of work to do. Sit down, take five minutes, and pull yourself together,

and then go home, will ya? I need the office, Willy. Oh, yeah, whenever you can this week, stop by and drop off

the samples. You'll feel better, Willy, and then come back and we'll talk. Pull yourself together, kid, there's

people outside." (Arthur Miller, 1947)

This study is a sincere attempt to show struggling middle class people of the post middle class society. They have become slave of the capitalism. This play is the story of a common man who is in search of love, success, pride, ambition, but finds himself disintegrated and disillusioned. He does not understand weird and cruel language of postmodern and consumer world. This family faces many problems and consequently encounters the death of Willy Loman. Linda lives in pathetic ways supporting the unrealistic goal of her husband putting her sons in jeopardy.

### **FINDINGS:**

It has been found that the play 'Death of a Salesman' by Arthur Miller demonstrates the pressures, materialism, and identity crises caused by the American Dream and continues to resonate with contemporary experiences in the business environment.

This research paper concludes with the statement that the American Dream, as critiqued in Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," exposes persistent flaws and disillusionments that continue to resonate in the modern business world. "Death of a Salesman" is a powerful exploration of the human condition, ambition and the harsh realities of pursuing success. Its enduring relevance and emotional depth continue to provoke discussion and analysis in the world of literature and theatre. The play is set in the late 1940s, a time of economic boom in the U.S., yet it underscores the instability and pressures of corporate society.

### **SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

Further research can be undertaken to study the psychological effects of parental expectations on Biff and Happy which can offer a basis for understanding family dynamics and individual psychology and even would throw light on bad parenting.

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