

THE NEW AMERICAN DREAM IN ARTHUR MILLER'S DEATH OF A SALESMAN

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ABSTRACT: *The twentieth century was pick period for the development of American drama. The great literary figures emerged in American literary world- Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Sam Shepherd, David Mamet, and August Wilson. Most of them started their career as dramatist after the Great Depression in America. Having known the realities of life and being great learner of the facts of contemporary American society, they depicted these in their writing. In their writing, there is frequency of a theme called as new American dream. This new American dream was nothing but a short-cut to get the success. Every American persona was rushing behind the success having false assumptions of success in their mind. The way of their success was based in illusion and not in reality so they had to face with failure throughout the life. In H.W. Brands words: "The new dream was the dream of instant wealth, won in twinkling by audacity and good luck."¹ Arthur Miller's protagonist Willy Loman from his play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is a product of this new American dream which is deeply rooted in the misguiding and illusionary principles of success. It is far away from the reality of life and based on wrong ideas of success.*

Key-words: *Illusion, American dream, false assumptions, Great Depression, success-failure.*

Arthur Asher Miller (Oct.17, 1915-Feb.10, 2005) was an outstanding American literary figure next to Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. He was born on 17th October, 1915 in New York in a well-to-do family; but because of the Great Depression in America his family lost their income and school going young Arthur had to work early in the morning before going to school to help his family's economic conditions. Somehow he managed his school education but couldn't enter college immediately after completing his school. To get some money he worked for two years and earned a little which could be used to pay one semester's fees. With that only he entered the University of Michigan and got financial help from the National Youth Administration.²

The Great Depression in America played crucial role in the development of Miller's life and it affected strongly in his writing. Many characters in Miller's play are affected with two great influences, the first one is Great Depression and second led by the first is New American Dream. As a playwright Miller mostly known for his four best plays that rank him up in the list of great American playwrights- *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View From the Bridge* (1955).³

The present play *Death of a Sales man*, deals with different themes including the new American dream, greed for wealth, guilt, evil, psychological disturbances,

hollowness of the modern American society and problems of common man. The play opens with the frustrated protagonist Mr. Willy Loman in his home after a long drive from his business. Willy is 62 years old title person, a salesman working for Howard Wagner. His earning is very little so he is unable to satisfy his family's middle class needs. His family includes his wife Mrs. Linda, Biff is his elder son and the younger one is Happy. Though he is earning very limited his wants in life are very different. His way of life or even we can say the way of contemporary American life is very different. Though the earning is little his expenditure is a lot than that and to maintain the gap between earning and expenditure he has a dream, just like American society has, which is called as American dream of success. This American dream of success never brings satisfaction to Willy or to his fellow American dreamers because it is based on the false assumptions of success. One most important term of Willy's dream is 'well-liked' and he illustrates it as the key of the success. He had great proud of his elder son Biff being well liked because he was a football star with lots of potentials in school. Many a times Willy rejected Biff's failure intentionally and make him believe in well likeness. He thinks that well-liked person cannot fail in life. To quote Willy-

I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want.⁴

Willy always has false assumptions and believed in something unsound. He thinks that success automatically comes to the well-liked person. He never gave importance to the quality of products he was selling instead of that he supposes himself as a well-liked and so he gets buyers. He applies the same philosophy to his elder son Biff and assumes that he will be a successful person in his life.

Miller amplifies that Willy's hunt for the American dream is the major reason of his failure throughout the life. His false assumptions about the American dream and his wrong philosophy of the success leads him towards the psychological dilemma which at the end of play become the reason of his suicide. He fails to capture the difference between American dream and his success of his life or reality of life.

There are two role models for Willy's personified dream- one among them is David Singleman, a renowned salesman and well-liked person by the people all over, who knows himself very well and wherever or whenever he goes out for selling, he gets a lot orders even over phone calls he gets many orders. The success story of Singleman has tremendous influence on Willy which leads him towards his downfall. When this man died his funeral was attended by the people from all over. Willy dreams for this type of personality and he selected a job as a salesman because of this person. The second role model for his falls dreams is his brother Ben throughout the play Willy talks about Ben but Ben never appears on the stage. It seems dream character in the mind of Willy. Once Willy talks to Happy about Ben-

What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of 21, and he's rich!!⁵

In this way Willy fantasizes to reach the American dream. Because of such wrong predictions and short-cuts to get success Willy always lives in illusions and never sees brighter side of reality. Reality was far away from the life of Willy due to his misconceptions about the success. This wrong predictions lead not only his but also his family's desires of the great future, towards the failure. His false concept of well-liked leads his son Biff into the darker side of life because of him Biff also could not see the realities of life. But at the end of the play after Willy, Biff comes to know about the reality of life. Biff gets the sense of reality after Willy and he cried out with pain for both the things- loss of his father and loss of his life till the day-

He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong. He
never knew who he was. The man didn't know
who he was... I know who I am, kid.⁶

At the end though he comes to know about his failure, for the success of his son, he committed suicide thinking that his insurance money will help his family. But Willy is not there but his dream of his funeral also dried up like a raisin in the sun, only five people attended his funeral.

To put in a nutshell, we can study Willy Loman as a product of failed American dream. We come to know that there is no short-cut for success. If we are in search of the short-cuts to get success then definitely there will be a downfall in our life which is experienced by Willy Loman throughout the play. We notice that Willy is a representative of the contemporary American society, who was rushing behind the American dream and ruined the future of his whole family.

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