



# INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

( Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal )

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.71 (SJIF 2021)

## Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: A Saga of Modern Man

**Dr. Harish Subhash Ghodekar**

Assistant Professor & Head,

Department of English,

Shri P. D. Jain Arts College, Ansing, Tq. Dist: Washim

DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <http://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2021-33335417/IRJHIS2105005>

### **Abstract:**

*The loss of identity and the quest for it has been a recurrent theme in contemporary American literature. Arthur Miller's works can be studied in the light of the same. The American Dream, i.e. the ability to become prosperous, shows the traditional spirit of Americans in Miller's Death of a Salesman. The play focuses on a man named Willie Loman. He is a salesman by profession and does adequately in terms of income, but his life is all but a failure. Willie is a man who does not have a true sense of himself. He does not even recognize how much his family loves and cares for him. In Death of a Salesman, Willie and his family members face various psychological elements deal with many problems. Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, could not follow the change in time and become obsessed with the old values of success from the past. It all ends in the tragic end of an American salesman. To a great extent, it is the saga of a modern man.*

**Keywords:** American literature, the American dream, salesman.

### **Introduction:**

The celebrated Pulitzer Prize winner, American playwright Arthur Miller has successfully penned the different aspects of human life in his works. How a social event or the whole society can bring about significant changes in the self-perception of an individual is painted by his perception of life. *Death of a Salesman* tells a lot about the modern man engaged in the fulfillment of materialistic desires. The end of materialism is always painful and disastrous. It cannot ever give permanent happiness.

It is the story of Willie Loman, a man of many dreams and fantasies. He is a salesman. It is his job to sell commodities made by someone else and owned by someone else. Willie appears on stage when the play begins. He has been a travelling salesman for thirty years. Willy has always been under this illusion that his career as a salesman would take him to the top and also he would face no

difficulties even in his old age. As the play progresses, he loses his job. He discovers that his idealized elder son is a failure. His younger son gets successful in business but is morally rotten. In the end, Willy loses everything, including his self-respect and has nothing more to lose except his life. Willy dies as a victim of what is called the great American dream. The word “American dream” denotes that a man can attain material success through personal attractiveness, charm, magnetism and contacts. We understand the futility of the term ‘American dream’ by the end of the play.

In American literature, the first attempt to deal consciously with the human problems stimulated by economically and politically distorted societies were made in the first half of the twentieth century by the modern generation. The decays of the forties assume massive importance and cultural position in any study of modern literature that deals with the themes of anxiety, depression, isolation and insecurity. Arthur Miller has a great concern for the welfare of American society. He has dedicated himself to the investigation of the moral plight of the white American working class. His insight into the psychology of desperation and his ability to create stories that express the deepest meanings of struggle has made him one of the most highly regarded and widely performed American playwrights.

#### **A series of negativism in life:**

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller describes how an American dreamer, Willy Loman loses his self-worth by many negative situations that occurred throughout his life. Willy wants his sons Biff and Happy to be successful and settled, but they do not succeed. Willy believes that Biff will be a successful businessman. However, in reality, Biff is still searching to find himself which hurts Willy and makes him disappointed. The conflicts between Willy and Biff are deep-rooted and old. When Biff was younger, he was very good at sports. However, once he failed in his math class. Biff travelled to Boston to visit Willy, who was on a business trip. There he came to know that his father had an illegal affair with a woman. Biff left and never took that math class over. Willy feels guilty and believes that he is responsible for Biff's choices in life. He considers himself responsible also for the failure of Biff. This conflict makes Willy weak and tremendously guilty, which stays with him as a reminder. Depressed, Willy finds no way to make the situation better.

#### **Depression:**

Depression is the temporary sadness and loneliness that almost everyone feels. In contrast to normal sadness, severe depression can impair a person's ability to function. People with major depression often have feelings of despair, hopelessness, and worthlessness, as well as thoughts of committing suicide. Miller has made a consistent attempt to dramatize Willy's depressed state of mind in this play. In the case of Willy, under the drive of social success, he tries to achieve a successful career and longs for the admiration and friendship of his buying customers to reinforce his sense of worth as a person. Nevertheless, he is unable to make enough money to support his family.

He says, "My God if business doesn't pick up, I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (P.18) "I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you or a business for the boys" (P.20). He is no longer in harmony with his work. He deeply falls into depression.

But Willy's wife Linda is practical, and she differs from her husband on various grounds. She understands depressed Willy and even fights for him when her son blames Willy. She says: "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person." (38) According to some critics, Linda, in some respects, is Miller's mouthpiece. She has been identified with all the best values in American society – care, love, courage and humanity. Because of these reasons, she remains a very sympathetic character for most of the play. She is a devoted wife. She shows a constant wifely solicitude towards Willy. The play concludes in a tragic end when Willy leaves the house and crashes his car to end his life. With all the failing attempts, this time, it had been successful. The major depression leads to the destruction of an American dreamer and the dreams of his sons.

### **Conclusion:**

Arthur Miller puts the so-called prosperous society of the United States of America on the stage for the audience through this play. Willy's sad ending is the result of his denial of reality and repression. He is unable to come out of the world of illusion. Sadly, Willy perceived that his only escape from the pain of life was suicide. Despite this failure, Willy makes the most extreme sacrifice in his attempt to leave an inheritance that will allow Biff to fulfill the American Dream, which is his obsession. Willy's dream and fantasies of success and wealth are accompanied by failure and disillusionment in his professional and private life. The American Dream does not come true here. Somewhere it brings the fact to the surface that over-expectations from ourselves for the gratification of the carnal and materialistic desires would surely lead to depression and destruction. Willy is the representative of all modern men who are madly running behind the materialistic pleasures. All of it is going to end in a futile way as Willy met his end. Willy met his end, but he could not meet his desires and expectations till the end. It is the fate of modern man.

### **References:**

1. Bigsby, CWE. *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. Print.
2. Elliot, Emory. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Print.
3. Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New Delhi: Surjeet Publication, 2008. Print.

4. Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. Print.
5. The Authors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Ego." Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 22 Feb. 2016. Web. 02 Oct. 2016.
6. The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller (Cambridge Companions to Literature), Christopher Bigsby, editor (1998, updated and republished 2010)

