



DISILLUSIONMENT AND FEELING OF CERTITUDE AS TRAGIC ELEMENTS IN ARTHUR MILLER'S "DEATH OF A SALESMAN"

SHEKHAR VISPUTE

Director, Target Academy, Dhule (M.S.) India



SHEKHAR VISPUTE

ABSTRACT

Arthur Miller is one of the most successful and remarkable dramatists of the postwar era in America. His works not only throw lights on the middle class anxieties brought on by a society that emphasizes the hollow values of material success but also appeal to human hearts and minds universally. His other important works are 'The Man Who Had all The Luck'(1944), 'All My Sons'(1947), 'The Crucible'(1953), 'A View From The Bridge'(1955). He won the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award for 'Death of a Salesman'.

The present research paper is an sincere effort made to discuss the significance of the concept of Disillusionment and the Feeling of Certitude as tragic features in the play 'Death of a Salesman' written in 1949 by Arthur Miller, American dramatist. In the play, the protagonist, Willy Loman who is a salesman and quite old now, possesses the dreamy desires and emotions throughout the life. He pretends to be a successful salesman but such instincts are nothing but the illusion and prejudices which turn into disillusionment and lead him towards frustration and the sense of loss of identity. The researcher intends to reveal the bitter truth of human life through the mental deterioration and superficial doctrine for success of Willy Loman due to the disillusionment and the feeling of certitude.

Keywords: Disillusionment and Feeling of Certitude, the Modern concept of Tragedy, tragic elements, frustration, pathos, Natural instincts, universal significance

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

It might be the necessity of time and circumstances that the concept of tragedy has been formulated by the modern and post-modern writers regarding its definition, functions and application in their literary works. There has been the great influence of philosophical and realistic ideology of human life and its existence especially of ordinary man whose sufferings and miseries are the cause of extreme frustration and ultimately death as well. Hence, many writers like Arthur Miller has projected and highlighted the tragic elements to the tragedy of

common man in such complicated world. There are many sources responsible to the tragedy of man in this era due to the changing nature of economy, cultures, technology, scientific research and loss of peace of mind of man. Though the world has developed materialistically but the man has lost peace of mind and real pleasure of human life.

What is 'Disillusionment'?

The term Disillusionment can be considered as the most significant factor that makes the play tragic creating the frustration through the breakdown of dreams, desires and illusions.

According to Wiktionary, ' *Disillusionment* means a feeling of disillusionment, a kin to depression, arising from the realization that something is not what it was expected or believed to be, possibly accompanied by philosophical angst from having one's belief. In simple words, disillusionment is nothing but the hard truth of reality that one possesses with certain dreams and ideals. These dreams and ideals are lost by the realization of hard truth of reality and led one towards frustrations or disappointment.

In the play '*Death of a Salesman*' the protagonist, Willy Loman possesses certain dreams and ideals as superficial doctrine for success. He pretends to be a successful salesman and popular before others. But the hard truth of reality is not understood by him. When his certain dreams and ideals are shattered by realizing the fact or reality then he turns into the frustration or disappointment. He is unable to identify the distinction between reality and illusion. He is not a rich man. He is an ordinary salesman but he sees the dream of being a successful salesman. So here it is also very important to note that he is also a victim of American dream (society) which emphasizes that a man is supposed to be a successful who acquires the material success of the world in respect of standard living, big contacts, outstanding personality, wealth, good status and so on.

The researcher intends to point out the bitter truth of human frustration due to the disillusionment through Willy Loman's character that represents to all those people who see certain dreams and ideals and try to cherish those.

What is the concept of Feeling of Certitude?

This concept is accompanied with the disillusionment as the tragic features in the play. It creates the sense of self realization of the deeds and its effects. "*Feeling of certitude is the feeling of assurance or surety or convictions*". It also means the complete sense of knowing and realizing the truth of the action and behavior that one does. Yet like to be stranger to the reality.

In the play, the protagonist, Willy Loman possesses this feeling of certitude like disillusionment. He worked in a Wagner company for 34 years as a travelling salesman but could not

become a successful salesman as he dreamed. He could not be rich. Now he is an old man over sixty. He can't work properly yet he has to work. He knows and realizes the truth that he is not a successful salesman and nobody knows him in outer world. He pretends to be a successful man and known by everyone. It is his feeling of certitude that keeps him alive but it is the same feeling that leads him towards more frustration. His dreams, desires and ideals are shattered by his feeling of certitude which is accompanied with disillusionment.

The researcher intends to signify the concept of feeling of certitude that governs to all human beings. Generally, every human being possesses the feeling of certitude like the protagonist, Willy Loman. There are a number of people in the world who know and realize what they are and what they can't do. They have nothing. They are failures to achieve their dreams and ideals yet they pretend to have everything. They prefer to live in such prejudices or illusions in order to emphasize the hollow values of materialistic success. They get afraid of exposing themselves before others as failure and helpless. Therefore they live in feeling of certitude. This feeling becomes a source of hiding their weaknesses and inability to identify the distinction between reality and illusion. But the same feeling of certitude causes to the extreme frustration of human life.

The Modern concept of tragedy regarding the present play:

In the Modern era, the concept of tragedy is varied from the traditional concept of tragedy of Aristotle in many respects. In the earlier tragedy, the hero seemed to be a man of exalted or high status. It seemed to arouse the feeling of pity and fear through the death of the noble hero. Now there have been many innovative changes in modern age due to the circumstances created by changing scenario. The most of the writers have avoided to the traditional concept of tragedy and accepted the newly formulated concept of tragedy. It seems to be quite philosophical but highly focuses on the predicament and hard reality of human existence in the world. In today's era the tragedy is not the tragedy of the noble or exalted man or high status but the tragedy of a common (ordinary man) that is

drawn from the common life and social situations. Here is a statement as following that will show the nature of modern concept of tragedy-

Man's failure to achieve or to maintain this needed sense of personal dignity the fault of society. He cautions us not to exclude the personal factor, for the hero must not be flawless, not ought to exclude social factors and seek the source of misery solely in our minds. His emphasis is undoubtedly on the social forces, not on the hero's inner weakness. (Goyal, B.S., 57)

In the present play, Willy Loman is a common man working as a salesman. He could not be successful in his life. He failed to accomplish his dreams and ideals. At last, he commits suicide getting tired to the problems. In fact his tragedy is caused by many things such as his personal weakness, the society as well as the disillusionment and the feeling of society. Willy's tragedy is the tragedy of all those ordinary people who cherish several dreams and ideals and fall victims to the disillusionment and feeling of certitude.

Disillusionment and Feeling of Certitude as Natural Instincts (Universal) is the emblem of tragedy in the play:

In this paper, the researcher intends to present the universal significance of the disillusionment and feeling of certitude as Natural instincts as well through the character of Willy Loman in '*Death of a Salesman*' who represents to not only to American society but also the all human beings in the world.

Willy is being an ordinary man; he sees some dreams and tries to accomplish them. But he fails to retain that then he gets so frustrated. His dreams are turned into the disillusionment which is a natural instinct. Willy knows and realizes that now he is a failure in fulfilling his dreams and desires. Yet he pretends to be successful before others it is his feeling of certitude. He doesn't want to let anybody know his weakness. In fact success and failures are the parts of human life. Though he could not be successful salesman but he could free his family by repaying all insurance premiums committing suicide.

Naturally, human life is made of different instincts such as love, anger, dreams, emotions,

desires, morality and so on. These instincts appeal to human heart and mind. These instincts cause to existence of human beings. Likewise, disillusionment and feeling of certitude are also the natural instincts and important parts of human life. All human beings have certain dreams and ideals that they try to accomplish. When they fail to fulfill them, they undergo through the extreme frustration or depression. Such frustration may cause to their defall or end of life. It is true that human life is an accident which has no guarantee, how long one can live. Yet they cherish some kind of dreams and ideals. In the real sense, their dreams and ideals are nothing but illusion that may turn into frustration or depression which is disillusionment.

Though they get frustrated due to their inability to accomplish their dreams and ideals, they know and realize that they are unsuccessful in accomplishing those dreams and ideals yet they pretend to be successful before others. It is their feeling of certitude that is accompanied with disillusionment which work together to create the frustration in human life.

The concepts of Disillusionment and Feeling of Certitude as tragic elements in the play:

In this paper, the concepts of disillusionment and feeling of certitude play very crucial role as the tragic elements which cause to the tragic end of the protagonist, Willy Loman in the play.

Willy Loman is the central character (hero) of the play. He is an ordinary man who struggles for accomplishing his dreams and ideals. He has worked in Wagner Company as a travelling salesman for 34 years. He has a small family including a wife, Linda and two sons named as Biff and Happy. Now he is over 61 years old. His sons are able to earn but don't support him. His wife helps and understands him in all the time.

The researcher intends to show the impact of disillusionment and feeling of certitude which is possessed by Willy. Being a salesman, he could not be a successful person. He always pretends to be a successful salesman before all the people inside the home and outside as well. He lives in American society where the man is regarded and given prominent in respect of having property, money and other material success. Willy fails to retain all these

things. He realizes the fact that he is unable to achieve the success and fulfill his dreams. He doesn't want to expose his failures of being successful salesman before the family and outer world. He always tries to please his family through many things. He performs his role as father and as a husband very well.

Now he is tired due to the deterioration of age. Yet he still have to seek and do job. He cannot drive the car properly. He knows and realizes that he is not able to work but he has to carry out duties towards his family. He badly needs money for family. Despite of two sons, they cannot help him. He reluctantly has to do job. Here is the opening dialogue which creates pathos in readers' heart-

LINDA: Don't you feel well?

WILLY: I'm tired to the death. (The flute has faded away.

He sits on the bed beside her, a Little numb.) I couldn't make it.

I just couldn't make it, Linda. (*Death of a Salesman, 02*)

Here Willy's mental deterioration and unwillingness towards life is shown. His dreams are shattered due to the disillusionment. So he is so tired both physically and mentally. He does not long to live more. He has already tried many times to get his own accident. It shows his loss of desire to survive in this materialistic world. So he thinks that his life is none other than a death and he is so tired to it.

It is very necessary to notice that Willy possesses the dreams and ideals such as to be a great successful salesman like Dave Singleton, to provide the luxuries to his family, and to earn the crowd over his death (Funeral) when he will die. One can see his dreams as common to all human beings. Every man sees that dreams and tries to cherish that. Willy fails to achieve the material success of American society and the world as well. His dreams and ideals are disillusioned and turned into frustration. He realizes that what he is. Yet he pretends to be a successful salesman. He does not want to expose himself as failure before others. But it is feeling of certitude that motivates him continuously to live for more struggles. But it is the same feeling that turns him into frustration.

The researcher intends to reveal the realistic views about ordinary man's life in this modern world which seems to be meaningless and ridiculous that have come from disillusionment and feeling of certitude. Willy commits suicide at the end of the play because he was so disturbed and frustrated due to the breakdown of his all dreams and ideals. He feels so lonely and desperate due to the unfulfillment of his dreams. When he meets Howard for getting job, then Howard tells him that he has two sons then they should do something for him. Willy replied to Howard over his remark as following-

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

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

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: Oh, 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. (*Death of a salesman, 59-60*)

The conversation shows Willy's pride to be independent and self respect. He is the man of strong self regard that he doesn't want to depend on his sons. Though his sons don't support him. He never blames them. On the contrary, he talks about their good qualities. He considers his sons great before others. It is the feeling of father and a man of strong passion to do work.

Willy sacrifices his life for his family. He loves his wife, Linda very much. As a true husband, he shares his problems and failures with her. She is so responsible wife who understands him in his every matter. Willy knows and realizes that his dreams are broken yet he tries to live for family. His family badly needs of the money. He gets so weak both physically and mentally. He never shares his problems with his sons. He doesn't want to make them unhappy and think about his failures. When his sons were studying in schools, then he used to tell them about his success and popularity in the city. He always tries

to motivate them by neglecting their mistakes. He knows that his sons are not capable to carry out the family responsibilities. He is aware about their mistakes. Yet he pretends before others that they are cleverer. It is fatherly feeling towards his sons like every father in the world. Willy stands for all the fathers in the world who have the sons. Willy arouses the pathos in us and compels us to think us like him. He wins not only the sympathy but also empathy of the readers.

Willy's sense of knowing and realizing the fact that what he is and what will happen to him make one think about him and oneself as well. Willy as a common man, a husband, and a father performs his duties but disillusionment of all his dreams and ideals lead him towards frustration. Every man sees certain dreams and tries to fulfill but when the dreams are disillusioned, it creates the feeling of disappointment and frustrations which is natural instincts like several emotions.

Willy commits suicide due to many reasons such as his inability to distinguish between the reality and illusion, his inner conflict of mind, disillusionment of all dreams, feeling of certitude and concerns for his family. He has to pay the insurance premium for his house and other domestic appliances. So he tries to get job meeting Howard but fails to get. He comes to know that nobody will give job and money. So he resolves to commit suicide because after his death, his family would get the money of his insurance. Here Willy's character touches to people's heart that how a man can sacrifice his life for the sake of his life. He loves his family very much so he commits suicide. Here one can see the tragedy of Willy Loman which creates pathos in heart. It makes one think what the ordinary man's life is. His tragedy creates not only pity and fear but also several emotions that make one feel and think about him. Here is statement with reference to Willy's tragedy which is a tragedy of a common man-

Tragedy arouses not only the feeling of pity and fear but several other feelings also. Tragedy affords us pleasure by virtue of its exhibition of human endurance and perseverance. (*Rall Ramji, 97*)

Willy's tragedy is caused by not only his personal dignity or weakness but also American society of which he is a member. He struggles to retain success but fails every time. His tragedy arouses pity and fear but several feelings as well. Willy's tragedy is the tragedy of a common man in the modern world.

All human beings tend to see the dreams; every one's dream may not be fulfilled. There are many reasons behind that but one cannot leave the habit of seeing dreams because it is natural instinct. When dreams are broken, one may get so frustrated. That's all the life is about. Willy wanted to be a great salesman like Dave Singleton and earn the crowd to be present over his funeral like Dave Singleton. But neither of two dreams is accomplished. At last, he sacrificed his life by committing suicide for the sake of getting free his family from the burden of insurance. There are the dialogues at end of the play spoken by Linda for Willy-

LINDA: Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. [A sob rises in her throat] We're free and clear. [Sobbing more fully, released] We're free. [Biff comes slowly towards her] We're free... We're free. (*Death of a Salesman, 106*).

The above dialogues of Linda for Willy shows her extreme love and true feeling on the loss of her husband. She loves him so much and cares him when he was alive. She used to please him and accompany him in his every problem. But when Willy commits suicide, it is her great loss. She is so sad that she can't shed the tears as well. She misses him a lot. She knows that why Willy has committed suicide. Though Willy commits suicide, though he may be blamed for doing such action. At the same time, one should think of his love and sacrifice for

family. But it is also very notable that Willy's sacrifice is the result of his frustration imposed on him by the disillusionment and feeling of certitude. Though Willy commits suicide for getting his family free from insurance, it's all caused by the disillusionment. If his dreams are not broken or disillusioned then he will not be frustrated and commit suicide. But disillusionment and feeling of certitude functions as the role of tragic elements in Willy's life and makes him frustrate. He loves his sons very much. He always wants to do something for his sons but he could not do so lack of money. Biff wants to set up a business but cannot do lack of money. Now suicide was the last options for him because after his death, his family could get twenty thousand dollars of his insurance of money and His son, Biff could start his own business. Though one may consider Willy for his weakness, but his strongest parts of his life is his love for his family.

Willy's tragedy appeals to all the human beings in the world because he possesses the ordinary qualities that everyone has. He remains immortal in every one's mind and heart as a tragic hero. His death creates pathos and makes one think what the real meaning of life is. He is the victim of American society and the personal weaknesses that come from his frustration due to the disillusionment and feeling of certitude which makes one believe in the absurdity of human life. Willy's tragic end is the result of the transformation of his dreams into the disillusionment and feeling of certitude that shows the human life as meaningless and purposeless in the modern world.

Conclusion:

Thus, the researcher has depicted the significance of the concepts of disillusionment and feeling of certitude as tragic elements through the tragic end of the protagonist, Willy. He represents to the common man in the world who sees certain dreams and tries to cherish them. Willy's tragedy is the tragedy of all those ordinary men in the world whose lives are stricken with many problems and failures. Human life is shaped by the several emotions which create the fortune and misfortune of the man at different situations. It is natural to see dreams and try to fulfill. But the breakdown of dreams arouses the extreme frustration that is

emerged from the disillusionment and feeling of certitude. So these two instincts are the more prominent in the life of every human being which functions as the tragic elements. The researcher intended to bring out the impact of the disillusionment and feeling of certitude through the character of Willy over the human life which creates the extreme frustration and leads one towards defalls.

Works Cited

- [1]. Miller, Arthur. *'Death of A Salesman'*. Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2010. Print
- [2]. Goyal, B.S. *'Death of a Salesman: Studies in American Literature'*. New Delhi: Aarti Book centre, 2002. Print.
- [3]. Rall, Ramji. *'Death of a Salesman: A Critical Study'*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, Pvt. Ltd, 2004. Print
- [4]. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/disillusionment>.