

CHAPTER-IV

THE CONFLICT IN A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

I. ABOUT THE PLAY IN GENERAL :

Miller's first three important plays are more social in nature than the last three ones, which are more psychological ones. From A View from the Bridge, the social aspect goes into the background. Miller inspects his protagonist more psychologically in A View From The Bridge, After The Fall and The Price. A View From The Bridge is a departure from Miller's practice as a social dramatist.

A View From The Bridge is written on the pattern of Greek classics. Miller draws our attention^{to} the classic outline when he says : "When I heard the tale first it seemed to me that it must be some re-enactment of a Greek myth which was ringing a long buried bell in my own subconscious mind"¹. Miller in this play deals with the classical theme of Elemental Passions. The lawyer, Alferi whose manner of narration and explanatory function reminds us of the Greek Chorus,^{It} is another proof that the play is based on the ancient Greek model. Eddie Carbone is basically a good man but is living under the influence of a sick and troubled mind and finally meets an awakening. This is also one of the features of the Greek tragedy. Eddie is not an intellectual like Quentin (the hero in After The Fall). He partly understands

the hidden sexual forces in him.

The play A View From The Bridge shifts from the societal to the personal and from the external to the internal cause of catastrophe. The play probes into the nature of man as he exists and what his needs are. In his earlier plays All My Sons, Death of A Salesman and The Crucible, the heroes seem to be the victims of cruel social forces. But in A View From The Bridge the motivation is psycho-sexual one. We are given a view of the action from the bridge. It makes the play a poetic one than a realistic one. It also adds to the tragic impact. We feel we are not witnessing not a real like but an abstraction of it.

Like Miller's earlier hero, Proctor, Eddie also can not make compromise. He struggles to get back his self-esteem, his identity, his name. He is ready to lay down his life for that. In this connection Ronald Hayman observes:

Like Proctor, he will die for his name and, like Joe Keeler, he has been betrayed by the law of his own nature into breaking the law of his duty to humanity. He has violated the accepted morals of his people out of a necessity created by an illegitimate passion.²

As, contrary to Eric Bentley's views, Ronald Hayman has observed : ".... Miller uses sex as a means of carrying his social argument forward."³, Miller has used sex in A View From The Bridge as the motive force in his protagonist. Here he has used the psychological theory of "Oedipus Rex" in the form of a working passion in Eddie. Santosh K. Bhatia observes :

The fate of the state and community is closely linked with the inner drives of Oedipus. The psycho-sexual drives inside man and the social code of the world outside him both work as uncontrolled pressures under which the hero crumbles.⁴

Thus the hidden incestuous love of Eddie for Catherine brings about social crisis and intensifies his own sufferings and enhances the tragic effect of the play.

To use Ivor Brown's words, A View From The Bridge is a "Stool tragedy" and not a "throne tragedy". The protagonist comes from the common lot of the society. He is not a king or a person of a higher rank. We can sympathise with him. Miller here is in tune with the demands and spirit of the modern democratic age. Eddie is not a victimised innocent or a martyr. He is guilty of incestuous love. Thus in this tragedy social forces as well as the individuals guilt precipitate the tragic crisis. In this play Miller

tries to answer the more fundamental question : namely, how to live ? This is a story of a single person, all other characters play an apparatus to bring about the tragic conflict and fall.

A View From The Bridge is the only exception where the hero's past does not play any part, otherwise in almost every other play some action, some choice, or some influence of the past go a long way to determine the hero's present and the course of tragic events in the play. Alferi is a third person narrator. It builds a kind of aesthetic distance between the author and the story and breaks the stage effect of realism.

For the reason that of all Miller's protagonists Eddie is prone to the dark side of his psyche, the concept of neurosis, guilt and jealousy is easily applicable to him. It is a grim tragedy. Eddie is a neurotic character, afflicted by a sense of guilt and shame, and jealousy. He dies to redeem his name and to show that he is not weak. A guardian has to move his ward out into the world but Eddie is unable to do so because he is a possessive type of character. When somebody touches Cathy, he becomes angry out of his unexpressed incestuous love for Cathy has made him jealous and selfish.

II. SUMMARY OF THE PLAY :

Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman, an Italian, living in America with his wife Beatrice who has invited her neice, Catherine, to live with them. Eddie has deliberately taken upon himself the responsibility of looking after Cathy whom he calls Madonna. Eddie, very strangely, develops a feeling of love for her and tries to exercise his control over her. He does not like her waving to Louis, a neighbour. He is shocked to know that she wants to work outside and support the family.

Meanwhile, the cousins of Beatrice-Marco and Rodolpho arrive on Beatrice's invitation. Their immigration is illegal. Eddie protects and shelters them at his house. He regretfully learns that Cathy is getting closer to Rodolpho. He feels jealous and tries to stop Cathy, who now does not care for his advice. Beatrice also does not pay attention to Eddie and encourages Cathy. Eddie argues that Rodolpho is not sincere and that he wants to marry her because he needs a document legalising his stay in America and that does not want to return to Italy. Eddie has an argument with Marco and Rodolpho and even Beatrice. As Beatrice points out, he can not get Cathy, he feels ashamed and develops a sense of guilt and a sense of loneliness. Everybody leaves him alone. Cathy moves out with Rodolpho. When all his hopes are dashed to the ground, he goes to the

Immigration Office and informs the official about the illegal stay of the too Italian. Maroco challenges him. In this fight Eddie gets killed and dies in lap of his wife. Beatrice who is in the crowd covers him with her body and returns to the audience.

III. THE WRONG CHOICE :

A tragic protagonist is always concerned with a choice. He makes a wrong choice which leads him to the tragic conflict and ultimate fall. Always there are two alternatives and there is the conflict in these alternatives. The slow unfolding of the whole tragic process, generally, brings the past into the play. On one hand Eddie has social morality, and the impulse of the passion, his incestuous love for Cathy on the other. Economically Eddie belongs to the underprivileged community, he is a longshoreman whose job is to carry goods from Brooklyn Bridges to the open sea where the ships wait. That is the area of his activity which limits his vision and affects his attitude. Like most of Miller's protagonists he is unimaginative, inarticulate and uneducated. He pitches coins when he has no work. "He is haughty, a husky, slightly overweight longshoreman,"⁵ Miller writes in his stage directions. Thus Eddie is such a stuff that he could not realize fully the grave effects of going against social morality. Again Alferi also had advised him, though not fully and properly.

“Yes, but these things have to end, Eddie, that's all. The child has to grow up and go away. The man has to learn to forget.”

But, Eddie did not take any hint from this advice. He chose the wrong way. He becomes a dangling man. But we can not say that he decided unwilling to nurse his unconscious tendencies and neglect his conscious personality. Thus he chose his way on his own. The wrong choice certainly leads to tragic conflict Eddie deliberately chose to run away from social ethics and chose the evil way of incestuous love. His gullibility to immoral temptations and animal desire is the flaw in his character. Like Oedipus he is given to the taboo. The choice is made already before the play opens. From Alferi we get an idea that Eddie lacks elegance, glamour. He is not a refined man. Little did he think before he acted. He vehemently refuses to "settle for half". He chooses the wrong option because he is under the impact of passion. He has a strange type of Greek ferocity. He neglects his alter-ego which is represented by Alferi. But Eddie is driven beyond the ultimate bond of caution to destruction by the overwhelming force of the Oedipus Rex.

Thus Eddie has two alternatives before him : one directed by animal instinct and socially and morally harmful and the other directed by social ethics and social good. This wrong choice by Eddie inexitably leads him to the tragic conflict.

IV. THE CONFLICT IN THE PLAY :

The basic conflict in Miller's plays is always between the individual and the society. Eddie Carbone is destroyed when he breaks the law of community living. The conflict in A View From The Bridge is a complex one. It is not a linear one. As far as the conflict, which is the soul of A View From The Bridge, is considered there is two-fold conflict in the play. One is the internal, purely psychological, conflict in the mind of Eddie regarding his hidden incestuous love for Catherine. A View From The Bridge is a psycho-social drama, internal conflict has got to be there. Eddie, unlike Quentin, the hero of After The Fall, is not an intellectual hero, the conflict is not well pronounced in the play. However, there are strong indications in the play that Eddie does partly understand those hidden forces, he is not articulate enough to realize the forces fully. He feels nervous and guilty at times when Beatrice and Alferi talk about it. This shows his inability to realize fully the natural hidden forces of sex.

The other conflict in the play which is clearly at the heart of the tragedy, is more external in nature. It is a conflict between Eddie Carbone on the one hand, and the moral principles of the society in which he lives. In other words, it is the conflict between individual conscience and social obligation.

But the social and psychological forces in the play are so inextricably combined together that they can not be separated from each other. In Greek tragedies, the social and the psychological aspects are generally inter-related. The fate of the State and community are closely linked with the inner drives of Oedipus. In Greek tragedies, the psycho-sexual drives inside man and the social code of conduct of the world outside the protagonist both work as uncontrolled pressures under which the hero is crumbled. The present play, as we have seen, is written on the lines the Greek tragedy, here also we find the two forces : social and psychological blended together. The hidden incestuous love of Eddie for Catherine gives rise to the social crisis because in the established pattern of family, this type of lowly incestuous love is not allowed, it is a taboo. This crisis intensifies Eddie's own suffering and increases the effects of the tragedy.

A View From The Bridge marks departure of Miller's practice as a social dramatist. It is not a social in the same sense in which All My Sons, Death of a Salesman and The Crucible were written. This is so because the most of the celebrated forces which act as the conflicting force to the hero; namely, economic forces and political pressures, are no longer present in the present play. Instead of that greater emphasis is given on psychological forces in conflict with the social ones. It shows Miller's shift from the

social to the personal, from external to the internal cause of catastrophe.

The result of the conflict is as high as that of the Greek tragedies. We can not deny that A View From The Bridge is as high psychological as Oedipus The King. "It is a drama of the "Whole Man" in the sense in which Miller would have us to understand"⁶, observes in Miller's own words :

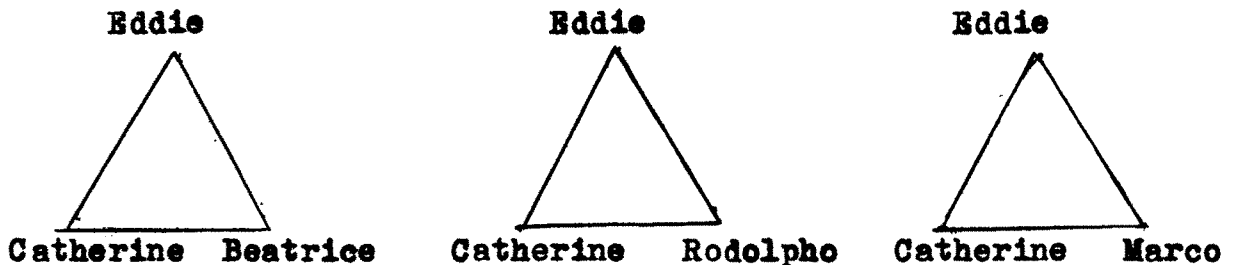
Social drama in this generation must do more than analyse and arraign the social net work of relations. It must delve into the nature of man as he exists to discover and exteriorized in terms of social concepts. Thus the new social dramatist, if he is to do his work, must be an even deeper psychologist than those of the past and he must be conscious of the futility of isolating the psychological life from of man lest he always falls short of tragedy.⁷

This is true because the modern age is the age of democracy. Society is changing. Importance shifting from stately persons to the layman. So a playwright must keep himself in tune with the changing circumstances. It also suggests that in a good tragedy the psychological life of man can not and should not be isolated from his social life. In A View From The Bridge Miller provided the psycho-sexual

motivation to bring about the desired change. But even though these conflicting forces have gone through change, the real theme of the play is still located in the underlying dramatic conflict between individual actions and social ethics. The real meaning of the play, despite its psychological characterization, is still embodied in the relationship of the individual with the society.

The horror and monstrosity of the act of the hero can be justly appreciated only if it is weighed against that communal background. "The mind of Eddie Carbone", says Miller, "is not comprehensible apart from its relation to his neighbourhood, his fellow-workers, his social situation. His self-esteem depends upon their estimate of him, and his value is created largely by his fidelity to the code of his culture."⁸ Alferi's wife has warned him that the neighbourhood lacks elegance and glamour. This gives us a clue to Eddie's character. Unless the character is properly understood, it is not possible to draw the conflict out. It is because Eddie is not a educated man, he falls prey to Oedipus Rex. Eddie is a creature of his environment as well as an exception to it. That helps us to make him a tragic figure because a tragic figure throws "some sharp light on the hidden scheme of existence, either by breaking one of its profoundest laws as Oedipus brakes a tatoo, and therefore, proves the existence of a taboo, or by providing a moral world at the cost of his own life."⁹

Talking about A View From The Bridge in an interview, Miller said : "Disaster comes from excess,"¹⁰ Eddie's excess of love for Catherine makes him irrational and blind and he brakes the law of corporate living which determines his existence in society. Santosh Bhatia thinks that there is no traingular conflict but a three-fold triangular conflict, rather than a straight-forward one. Bhatia's following diagrams help us analyse the three-fold triangular conflict :



Here the third angle only varies. This is so because of the arrival of the two Sicilian immigrants : Rodolpho and Marco, Otherwise it would have been merely a personal or family conflict. But now the conflict broadens till the family actually disappears and the societal issues come forth. Thus this conflict helps us to understand the nature of man as well as his relationships with the society at large. The three-fold triangular conflict also enables to understand the theme of human passions versus social responsibility. Thus "I" mixes" with "we". The relation of Eddie with Catherine is interfered by three persons. When it is Beatrice who interferes there is no problem for Eddie because it is family relationship. But there come Rodolpho and Marco

in between Eddie and Catherine it becomes social issue and Eddie has to think of the society and its ethics. Thus the three-fold triangular conflict helps us to understand the theme of the play.

V. THE COSMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE PLAY :

A good work of art should have cosmic dimensions. It should appeal all humanity. It should deal with a general principle or issue. In A View From The Bridge, the individual is presented in direct conflict with social forces. It is an exceptional case in Miller's plays. Here family does not play important part. The play in showing the horrors of an anti-social act, expands its vision and transcends the social level. It becomes a drama of the "Whole Man". It tells how should one live in the society how one has got his responsibilities towards the society, what is his commitment to the society in which he lives. The audience or the read of the play will never venture any incestuous act in the society. Here in lie the cosmic dimension of the play.

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