

CHAPTER-V

THE CONFLICT IN AFTER THE FALL

I. ABOUT THE PLAY :

After The Fall, like A View From The Bridge is a psycho-social play. The problem in it is not only psychological but also a social aspect. About this play Atma Ram observes :

After The Fall is essentially Miller's indictment of social and moral weaknesses. He rejects the so-called passive good because it contributes to the evil. The protagonist of the play. Quentin, in the end, regains his sanity with the help of introspection.¹

Thus it is a play based on introspection. As such, the play moves from the present to the past. Another important aspect of the play is that it is a biographical play. Quentins traumatic childhood experiences and the relationship between his parents play a crucial part and give Quentin lessons in his early days. His childhood is marked by human betrayal and selfishness. In his later days the impact of the childhood is seen on his relationship with

his two wives. The play suggests not only the innocence that belonged to man in his prelapsarian state but also its political counterpart which the political moralists try to exploit by forming House-committees and hurling suspicion on the innocent, independent minded thinkers and intellectuals. All this leads to loss of innocence and violence resulting ultimately in man's atrocities to man. Generally the play is considered as an autobiographical play and the two aspects discussed above are ignored. The play raised fierce and bitter controversy regarding its autobiographical meaning. Some critics, stressing much autobiographical parallel's blame. Miller of washing his dirty linen in public. Some critic wrong call the protagonist Quentin-Miller and some reviewers found in it nothing more than a piece of advice "When life becomes unbearable find a new woman and start a new life", Thus the play in the beginning received adverse and fierce criticism. Richard Gilman unfortunately upto the extent that he calls the play as a process of self justification. But Miller himself refudiates all autobiographical allusions. The playwright doesn't put himself on the stage, he only dramatizes certain forces within himself. But what is important is its general application to other men besides himself. For paltry discovery of few facts resembling the author's life, the critics have generally ignored the gravest truth about the human situation represented in the play.

There are two threads : one is that of Quentin's relationships with his formal two wives, the other thread is important from the view point of the social background of the play. The first thread is in the foreground. The second thread deals with a vital social relationship between other characters, for example, Lou and Mickey, Lou and Quentin. The house Committee on Un-American Activities is yet another power full image of man's suspicion and cruelty towards man. This image demonstrate more dramatically how human relationship fumble and fail and broken under social forces. This happens in Lou's relationship with his wife. What is more significant in the play is the tragic repercussions of social forces on the individuals and social relationships. Micky, for example, who was charged by the court for American Activities, decides to name the name. Quentin's moves in the play like a refrain, as such, this image means a lot in the context of its theme.

After The Fall is a play about separateness and togetherness. When you broke your commitment to others, you become separate. Quentin could not be a separate person, so keeps fluctuating in his commitment to Lou. His loyalty and integrity are constantly changing and affected by external social forces. Quentin himself is guilty of being an accomplice in the entire game of being separate person. His guilt haunts him. His problem is who and what he is.

In After The Fall Miller uses expressionistic technique but not to its full, according to V.Rajakrishnan. "The Playwright takes too many themes and ideas. It suffers from an overweight of materials, and it would have needed on the part of the playwright a more disciplined use of the form of the Expressionism to lend control and coherence to these materials."³ Rajakrishnan observes.:

There is a political sub-theme which involves the effort of Quentin and his friends to live a straight forward life in times of international moral chaos. This theme is prominent in Act I. The sexual motifs assume importance in Act II and the dramatic interest shifts to Maggie and her personal crisis. In the Act I Miller analyses philosophy of Marxism. The lesson which Mill seeks in this long, one act play is : In the times of cruelty, the individual can find genuine freedom only if commitment even to the point of death, provided he must accept the responsibility voluntarily. Thus After The Fall is the story about a man who fought as hard as he could against having to become a separate person. It is a trial of a man by his own conscience, his own values, his own deeds, It is a play about commitment and choice.

II. SUMMARY :

The story in After The Fall does not proceed straight forwardly. Miller has used expressionistic technique her.

So the action shifts from present to past. The play opens with Quentine facing the question of choice. He has to make decision whether he should or should not marry for the third time. He says, "I have two divorces in my safe deposite box." Turning to Holga, who is his prospective wife, he adds, "I tell you frankly, I am a little afraid." This provides him with an opportunity to indulge in serious introspection, to review his past life and career and relation with other men and women, particularly with his friend Lou and his two former wives, Louise and Maggie. Finally he understands the truth and "the need to admit the inconstancy and violence of man and yet to renew love in the face of this knowledge. In the course of the play he learns to accept that the world which he inhabits is a world seen after the fall. Now he has broken down situation.

Quentin's mind goes into his own childhood and he remembers how he was tricked into staying at home when the rest of the family went to sea. He says, "God why is betryal the only truth that sticks". He remembers some other incidents revealing the breakdown of deeply personal and intimate bonds of human love and relationship. He remembers how Lou had been humiliated by his wife, Elsie, when Lou wanted to publish a book he had written about the unlawful and wicked activities of the House-Committee. Elsie ridiculed him by saying that he would be incapable of defending himself. This treachery and violence between

those who ought to be united by love makes him think of Lou's remark, "If every one broke faith there would be no civilization."

Quentin's coldness had baffled both Louise and Maggie. Louise took shelter of psychotherapy, and Maggie committed suicide. The following conversation reveals his cold-heartedness :

Louise : You don't pay any attention to me....

Quentin : But I do pay attention just last night
I read you my whole brief.

Louise : Quentin, you think reading a brief to
a woman is talking to her ?

Quentin : But that's what's on my mind.

Louise : But if that all on your mind, what do
you need a wife for ?

the barriers of self-defence in the terrifying moment of self-examination.

Quentin arrives "weighed down with a sense of his own pointlessness and the world's. He only see his own egotism in his success and no wider goal beyond himself. This egotism, according to him, leads to cruelty or violence and, finally, to his separation from his fellow human beings. It is a source of guilt and evil in society. About his past life Quentin realizes that for many years I looked at life like a case at law, a series of proofs. When you are young

you prove how brave you are, or smart; then, a good lover; then, a good father; finally how wise, or powerful. He is disillusioned with everything. He can see that underlying it all is a presumption "that I was moving on an upward path towards some elevation ... I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. All that remained was the endless argument with oneself." Thus Quentin is put on trial by his own awkward conscience. Here Quentin himself is both the judge and the defaulter. He has a quest for meaning in life and society. The judge is not up in the sky but in one's conscience, in one's own heart.

Quentin is suddenly appalled by the discovery of his own potential for violence in personal and social relationships, his ability to hurt others. On the verge of remarrying for the third time, he becomes aware of his own responsibility for the world's evil.

III. WRONG CHOICE :

In Miller's tragedy it is not malignant fate nor is it the protagonist alone that brings about disaster. It is never, social forces alone that lead to disaster. The division of blame is shared between man and society. There are

Some social forces working on the Miller protagonist. They make him choose in a wrong way. Here the protagonist has some alternative. Thus the protagonist is free to choose between the alternatives. After The Fall is a memory play and covers the whole span of Quentin's life from the childhood experiences to the failure of his two marriages. The choice is already made. Let's see how social forces contributed in making that certain choice. Quent is not innocent. He himself admits that he is guilty. What made him do the guilt? The seeds of the guilt are not only in his character, but they are in the society as well. Quentins traumatic childhood experiences and the relationship between his parents play the crucial part and give him early lessons in human betrayal and selfishness. Later its impact is reflected in Quentins relationship with his two wives. Quentin has seen that House-Committees are formed and suspicious are hurled on the innocent. All this leads to loss of innocence and violence resulting ultimately in man's atrocities on man. The mind of Quentin is moulded in such circumstances, so a sense of disbelief has grown in his mind. The central image of the House Committee on man's suspicion and cruelty towards man. Mickey's cruelty to Lou is another example of man's atrocity to man. More significant in the play is the tragic repercussions of social forces on individual lives. Quentin's psychology should be understood

against this background. Thus why he chose to be indifferent before the tragic crisis came could be explained on this background. Quentin's loyalty and integrity are constantly changed and affected by external social pressures. Thus whatever Quentin chooses it is partly due to the social pressures.

IV. THE CONFLICT IN THE PLAY :

If we consider to what extent the social forces play their role in moulding Quentin's mind and how much scope there is for the free play of his will, we will definitely come to the question of tragic conflict. The conflict in After The Fall is an external conflict. It is the conflict between an individual and the society, the fundamental conflict in Miller's plays. Who are the combatants in this conflict? Outwardly there is conflict between Quentin and his wives. The action in the play takes place in the mind of Quentin. Therefore, the conflict is represented in the form of an internal one. Private conscience of Quentin is on one side and the social forces are on the other side. Quentin is unable to love his wives because he finds it hard to believe in any individual. He can not be responsible for anything or anybody in the society. Neither is he detached from the society. His marital relationships form a part of the longer, vaster network of social relationship.

The problem in the play is psycho-social problem. Quentin has got early lessons in human betrayal and selfishness from his family. He remembers how his parents kept him back alone and went out. Quentin is obsessed by man's atrocity to man. The tower of House-Committee is always in the background which suggests violence. Thus in Quentin's mind two tendencies innocence and violence are always at combat. Quentin is much depressed by the atrocities and social violence. He has no faith in social good. Even he could not love his wives sincerely. Thus a tormented mentality finds that all society is cruel and suspicious. Quentin tells Lou, "a radical past is not a leprosy - we only turned left because it seemed the truth was there".⁴ Thus we find here the conflict between an individual and the social forces. Here it is suggested that individual conscience is crushed by the tyrannical social forces which are represented by the House-Committee in the play. Miller himself was persecuted on the charge of being pro-communist. What is more significant in the play is not whether Miller was once a communist or not but the tragic repercussions of social forces on individual lives and social relationships.

The conflict representing the tragic effects of social forces on the social relationship is the conflict between Mickey and Lou. Mickey, who has been subpoenaed for un-American Activities, decides to name the names of the

pro-communist persons. Lou, who is certainly more honest of the two, says, "Mickey, if you did it, you are selling me for your own prosperity. If you use my name I will be dismissed. You will ruin me. You will destroy my career" (p.44). It is very tragic to see that after such a friendship, such a love between them, and for so many years, Mickey and Lou break apart. Here we see the tragedy of human relationship. There is external conflict between Mickey and Lou, but the causes are social pressures.

Santosh Bhatia observes : "It is the play about separateness and togetherness. Separateness in the serve that commitment to others are broken, forgotten or set aside."⁵ Quentin, who could not bear to be a separate person, keeps fluctuating in his commitments to Lou. May, his boss and Louise, his first wife, both tell him not to "endanger his whole firm to defend a Communist." Louise even says, "you tend to make relatives out of people" (p.62). But Quentin says, "I am defending Lou because I love him, yet society transforms that love into a kind of treason, what they call an issue and I end up suspect and hated" (p. 62). He does not want to be a separate person and he does not want to consign that "decent broken man who never wanted anything but the good of the world" to hell. But he also says, "I really don't want to be known as Red Lawyer; and I really don't want the newspapers to eat me alive; and if it

come down to it Lou could defend himself" (p.49). In short, Quentins loyalty and integrity are constantly changed as a result of the external social pressures. Quentins commitment to others has to be determined in the light of his commitment to Lou. When Lou is killed by a subway train, Quentin is relieved and he feels a secret sense of joy because his danger and burden is removed. Quentin be free from having been an accomplice in the entire game of being a separate person. He confesses it to Maggie :

Yes, I lied Every day. We are all separate person, I have to survive too, honey. (pp.110-11).

Quentin's guilt is the guilt of the survivor. He is never blind to his selfishness and innate violence he openly declares -

"I declare, I am not innocent ! nor good."

(P.91).

There is also internal conflict in the mind of Quentin. He has to make a decision whether he should or should not marry for the third time. The play opens with this conflict. The decision is terrifying because he says, "I have two divorces in my safe deposit box". Quentin hereafter indulges in serious introspection. He thinks of his past life, career and his relationship with other men and women, particularly, with his friend Lou and his two

former wives, Louise and Maggie. He finally arrives at an understanding of the truth and "the need to admit the inconstancy and violence of man and yet to renew love in the face of his knowledge. In the course of the play he learns to accept that the world which he is living in is the world seen after the Fall, the Original Fall of Man. To this conclusion he comes after the self examination.

Thus the conflict in the play gives rise to the themes of love, innocence and fidelity and violence.

V. THE COSMIC DIMENSION OF THE PLAY :

The theme of the play After The Fall is responsibility. At the end of the play Quentin is aware of his own responsibility for the world's evil and the reality of the human situation. Now he knows that the evil things like guilt and violence are to be there permanently and everybody is to be responsible for them. Because it is to be thereafter the Fall of Adam.

The lesson of the play we should have certain responsibility for others. You have to accept the evil things because the world is not ideal. In making love you have to reciprocate with your partner. Commitment is an imperative for the stable relationship. Thus every play of Miller comes

to the conclusion - awareness of a sense of responsibility and commitment to the fellow being you live with. And this is true about everybody. It seeks to raise "the truth consciousness of mankind."⁶ This is a cosmic truth. About the play Santosh Bhatia observes :

After The Fall is a social drama but of a new kind. In it impersonal social themes are projected through the dilemmas of the individual. Social issues are turned into personal issues, which, in turn, makes it more effective as a tragedy. It seeks to raise "the truth-consciousness of mankind."

Thus the play is relevant to all mankind. Because the questions of love, fidelity and innocence are universal issues. It is a guide to every lover.

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