

The Middle-Class Value Theme in Arthur Miller's and Mahesh Dattani's Works

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Abstract

The current paper examines the theme of middle-class value, specifically how Arthur Miller and Mahesh Dattani criticize materialism valued by the middle class. Through the theme of the middle-class value of materialism, both playwrights reveal that man is caught in the whirlpool of materialism and becomes its victim, which frequently leads to his destruction in human relationships, family conflicts, and violations of social and moral values. Miller's plays make this point very obvious. "Death of a Salesman" and "All My Sons" are two of his plays. Miller critiques the upper middle class's indifference to human existence in its quest for money. The idea of American culture aims to achieve greater wealth, social standing, success, and happiness through materialism. The plays "Where There's Will" and "Dance Like a Man" by Mahesh Dattani demonstrate that materialism is a problem in all societies, whether they are Indian or American. The Has Mukh family's upper middle class was ruled by the concept of money.

Mankind's addiction to materialism provides solace in the form of satisfaction and happiness. Miller and Dattani are social dramatists, and their plays primarily address social themes such as individuals' relationships with society and their proper place in society. They raise their voices against social and economic issues, as well as a materialistic world in which the middle class seeks comfort through unethical means.

Keywords: Materialism, Money, Power, Popularity

The materialism valued by the middle class is criticized by Arthur Miller and Mahesh Dattani. Both the playwrights through the theme of the middle-class value of materialism unveil that man is caught in the whirlpool of materialism and becomes its victim, which often leads to his destruction in human relations, clashes in families, and violation of social, and moral values.

Mankind is seeking the solace of satisfaction and happiness through the addiction to materialism. Miller and Dattani are social dramatists and their plays chiefly deal with social themes like individual relations with society, and their rightful position in society. They raise their voice against social and economic matters and raise their voice against a materialistic world, where the middle class tries to acquire this comfort through foul means.

American playwright Arthur Miller originally gained notoriety in the years after World War Two. He shed light on the time's American culture by addressing the concerns and aspirations of a people adjusting to a world that was changing quickly. *The Crucible*, "Death of a Salesman," and "All My Sons," among others, are today recognised as modern classics. His distinctive style may be seen in all of them.

Miller didn't deal with fantastical issues, and his characters didn't use excessive affectation. He preferred speaking in plain English that was presented with style but without exaggerated affectation. His heroes are frequently Americans of the working class, and their tales don't always have happy endings. The emphasis on the difficulties of common people and the tragedies as well as the victories of life displays a distinctly modernist perspective.

The National Endowment for the Humanities reports that Miller had a great belief in the ability of theatre to influence society as a whole. As a result, he frequently used allegory in his plays, which was disguised as realism but had deeper meanings. In "The Crucible," which purports to discuss the Salem Witch Trials but instead acts as a thinly veiled critique of the anti-communist hysteria permeating America at the time, a famous instance may be found.

The plays of Miller tackle serious questions of right and wrong. Most significantly, they emphasise how people handle those challenges under extreme stress. To feed his family, a businessman in "All My Sons" sells the army defective parts, yet in "The Crucible," the reactions of good people to the crimes of the Salem Witch Trials are depicted. In each of these instances, Miller's writing displays a strong understanding of moral principles as well as how challenging it may be to uphold those principles.

Miller's writing never loses a sense of genuine compassion for his characters, whether they uphold their morals or compromise them. We sympathise greatly with his everyday hero in "Death of a Salesman" and the helpless Puritans entangled in "The Crucible's" web of mass hysteria. The final tragedy of their lives, as well as the way they battle and suffer under more powerful forces than themselves, are meant to make us empathise with the difficulties of our fellow humans. Miller is quoted as saying "There's a world of people outside and you're responsible to it" by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In addition to writing plays, Arthur Miller is also known for his work as an essayist and novelist. Despite having a lot of good fortune in his writing career, his notoriety is the result of his brilliant ability to manipulate what he wants his readers to visualise or feel. Miller writes cleverly, as one of his detractors puts it, "conveying the notion that if the proper subject of mankind is man, man's inevitable problem is man." Every person thinks, feels, or worries about something, but often finds it difficult to convey, according to Miller. In *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller uses symbols to illustrate Willy's (and the other Lowmans') struggles with his family, society, and himself.

The fact that many of Arthur Miller's plays are a reflection of or a result of events in his life makes him an intriguing author. He was the son of a prosperous businessman who was born in New York City in 1915. Nevertheless, his father lost much of his income during the Great Depression. This has a significant impact on Miller's life and shapes many of his later writings' themes. Miller worked as a truck driver, warehouse clerk, and cargo mover to help support his family. As a result of these odd jobs, he became acquainted with the working-class individuals who would later serve as the inspiration for many of the characters in his plays. Miller develops his love of literature while working various jobs; he is particularly moved by Fyodor Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* because it explores the unspoken social norms, a topic he frequently ponders, particularly after the Great Depression.

The Crucible is propelled in large part by Miller's use of style. Thematic interpretation of the work depends on style and approach. The stage directions offer one illustration. Stage directions are brief in conventional theatrical presentations. Miller purposefully uses stage directions in *The Crucible*. Another type of narrative voice is provided by the stage directions.

The way Miller's prose sheds light on the diverse political viewpoints that many Salemites held is one distinctive way his writing adds to the account of the Salem Witch Trials. By describing the individual prejudices held by many Salem residents, Miller enriches the account of the events in Salem. This allows Miller to investigate the subjectivity behind the ostensibly "objective" trials.

The playwrights whose styles were distinguished by the boldness of experimentation left their imprints on Arthur Miller, and his style is not exempt from them. Inside His Mind was the

original title of the play. The play's title aims to convey the inner realism of a mentally fractured guy whose consciousness dangles between the north and south poles of his history and present.

Extreme psychological restlessness could strike Death of Salesman's main character. Arthur Miller has chosen a careful method of capturing Willy Loman's inner state to support this theme. The protagonist's psychological stability and equilibrium had completely collapsed, driving him insane. He always had psychological unrest. Peace of mind was foreign to him. He couldn't think at a normal level. Miller employed a technique that takes Voltaire and Willy Loman's fluctuating moods into account to engage this kind of nearly insane character.

The speech in Death of a Salesman is in a vocabulary that is more commonplace than that of traditional dramas. The use of poetic and decorative language in tragedies has long been accepted practice. Characters (the protagonist) should communicate with other characters in poetic language, according to a generally accepted tradition. But Arthur Miller no longer followed this tragic norm. Nearly all of the characters in his Death of a Salesman, including the protagonist, use everyday language. Miller has employed a language realist aesthetic. They occasionally also utilise slang and dialect words. Also, they come from a working-class background. Hence, it won't be surprising if we encounter those characters speaking in their accent to other characters.

Expressionism lacks the physical and visual realism of photography. It offers crucial cues about reality. Dramatists frequently make use of certain devices to offer these hints. Arthur Miller also used these techniques in Death of a Salesman. These tools include music, symbolism, and flashbacks. In this piece, Miller similarly used symbols. A significant symbol is music. The more the protagonist approaches his true self, the louder this sound becomes. When he starts to distance himself from himself, the music is soft. There are numerous symbols in addition to this one. The setting of Willy Loman's home is a miniature representation of the metropolitan environment in which the defeated human soul struggles to realise his or her elusive ideal.

Willy Loman, the play's protagonist, frequently thought about committing himself since he was so unhappy and irritated. Loman's conscious self was split between the past and the present as he struggled with suicide. His history was out of his control. Instead, his past had a habit of dangerously resurfacing in his present. He was unable to maintain control of his present because of his helplessness. The realm of the present was mercilessly invaded by the past. The reappearance of his history could equally be seen as the unconscious or nature returning. Arthur Miller used the technique of fusing the protagonist's past and present to depict this aspect of the protagonist's inner realism. This stylistic element is intimately related to the play's central theme.

Miller plays make this point very obvious. "Death of a Salesman" and "All My Sons" are two of his plays. Miller critiques the upper middle class's indifference to human existence in its quest for money. The idea of American culture aims to achieve greater wealth, social standing, success, and happiness through materialism. Willy Loman and Joe Keller's characters serve as a window into this middle class mindset. They work really hard to succeed financially, which ends up taking their lives. Willy Lowman's desire for contemporary goods like diamonds and cars eventually led him to venture into the forest in search of jewels. Says Willy Loman....

“The man went out and got it because he knew what he wanted!

was twenty-one when he emerged from the forest after entering it

And he's wealthy!”(Miller 32)

Money became the infamous happiness slogan. Americans by birth have an inherent drive to live the American ideal of material achievement. People believe that prosperity comes from hard effort. Willy, however, struggles to recognise how his innate gift for woodworking may help him work hard and make money. He borrowed money from his pal because his finances were in ruins. Biff finally persuades Willy to explore the bush in search of diamonds. Willy kills himself out of the desire to provide a decent life for his family and to pay for insurance.

Joe Keller embodies the mindset of every working-class American society that adheres to shallow principles in order to pursue monetary comfort. Because of his poverty, Joe Keller is immoral for sacrificing pilots' lives to make money.

Keller: I have no idea what you mean. I made money because you demanded money. You required cash, didn't you?

Kate: This is not what I wanted. (Miller 76)

According to Joseph Keller, he did everything for his family. Kate, however, claims that he didn't want money at the expense of other people's lives.

Jim: " Someone's headache made him believe he was about to pass away".

"Money-money-money"(Miller 73)

Dr. Jim explains to Kate how the majority of individuals in the world are focused on making money. As a result, individuals experience stress, unease, tension, and a sense of impending death. The conventional middle class value of materialism and the contemporary value of societal wellbeing are at odds. While Joseph Keller seeks business stability, his son seeks moral security. In the guise of his company, Keller strives to provide Chris with the only stability he is aware of.

The lines that follow make it apparent.....

Keller: " There is nothing wrong with that money because it is excellent money." (Miller38)

Chris, though, is seeking moral stability rather than material stability. Keller admits to Chris that he did it for financial gain. Everyone engaged in it for financial gain. Since the army received all of the weapons and vehicles it needed during the conflict in exchange for payment, he did nothing illegal in his pursuit of financial gain. Even Jim Bayliss's wife prefers that her husband earn more money than spend it on charitable endeavors and fruitless research. The play is entirely about money, and it is money that causes Joe Killer and Willy Loman to pass away.

Mahesh Dattani, the most unconventional and modern playwright related to Indian English drama, used the stage to bring unseen topics to the audience's attention. Mahesh Dattani is a multifaceted artist who specialises in modern Indian English plays.

He is a director actor, dancer, instructor, and writer. All of these personas are the outward expression of the persona that was born on August 7, 1958, into a Gujarati family that had settled in Bangalore. Like any other middle-class boy resemblances were accepted by his parents into an English-medium high school, and he pursued his education there. His academic background includes degrees in history, economics, and political science, as well as a postgraduate degree in marketing as well as advertising management.

After working as a copywriter, he joined his father's company. In 1984, he started the theatre company Playpen. *Mango Soufflé*, his first picture to direct, was released. He is a skilled and qualified Bharatanatyam dancer. He is a theatrical instructor at Portland State University in Oregon, USA, where summer sessions are offered. His studio is where he holds workshops.

'Final Solutions' and other plays, for which he won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1998. The plays of Dattani bring forth the contemporary themes dealt with by him. In the process of questioning the old-age norms and conventions of our society, he raises issues like – homosexuality, lesbianism, child sexual abuse and religious intolerance.

Dattani innovates ways of creating a real world on stage with a complete portrayal of the fabric of Indian society, which consciously and unconsciously discriminates based on gender. Male is preferred to females in every possible way by both (males and females) equally. In the play 'Where There is a Will' Dattani explores the absurdities of the patriarchal code of Indian society in which a child is entitled to the lifelong agenda to be followed by his father even before the birth of the child. With his birth, a child is not only into the riddles of relationships – being someone's son, brother and so on but even he has been constantly under the crusher of his family's expectations. He has no choice but a list of choices to be followed. The play 'Bravely Fought the Queen' establishes the position of women in Indian society as marginalized however globalization has affected the core of our society. The dramatic canvas of Dattani is coloured with all sorts of unconventional, contemporary and free from taboos themes. Homosexuality- as an argument of preference rather than a psychotic disorder, has been presented by Dattani in his plays like 'Bravely Fought the Queen', "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai" and "Do the Needful. The next major thematic thrust of Dattani is to foreground the Hindu-Muslim tussle in his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning play 'Final Solutions'. It examines the so-called liberal attitude towards communalism.

Dattani as a contemporary playwright investigates socio-cultural prejudices making his plays thought-provoking and introspective because he deals with that strata of society, that is facing an identity crisis, feeling isolated and marginalized. He takes up fearlessly for the welfare of human beings, whatever has been pushed under the rug or neglected. The themes of his plays are not confined to a society or a country, but they are universal in appeal because his themes draw the attention of the audience instantly as whatever, he writes he is concerned for humanity at large. Since his themes are universal, they cross all social and linguistic barriers eliciting emotional and intellectual responses from the audience.

The plays "where there's will" and "Dance like a man" by Mahesh Dattani demonstrate that materialism is a problem in all societies, whether they are Indian or American. The Hasmukh family's upper middle class, which was ruled by the concept of money, is represented by the phrase "Where there's will." He fails to use the concept of money to dominate his family. Kiran, his lover, and his in-daughter law's Preeti is a perfect example of the savvy, materialistic woman of today. Preeti wants to live a life of luxury, so he prepares to murder his father-in-law. As she has her eyes on his money, Hasmukh's mistress Kiran marries Gaming for the sake of money. Preeti doesn't like her dominating her family and her stay in their house.

Kiran says, "I never intended saying it outright, but now I have to make it clear to you. As the trustee of the Hasmukh Mehta Charitable trust, I have the right to make a statement declaring that since the recipients of the trust, namely you all, are not complying with the rules set down by the deceased, the holdings of the trust will be divided between certain charitable institutions recommended by the founder. Which will mean that you won't ever get to see even a single rupee earned by your father-in-law? Now, will you refuse to let me stay here?" (CP: 494)

Dattani keeps a close eye on the conditions of working women. Thirty to forty-year-old blonde Kiran Jhaveri appears youthful. In any event, a woman today is equal to a man. Even Hasmukh Mehta, the business magnate, is dependent on Kiran, the contemporary working woman. Kiran is the quintessential modern woman, self-aware to the extreme. Although Kiran told Sonal that she hoped Hasmukh would trust her, her true motivation was to obtain his money.

"Kiran: Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money." (CP: 506)
Hasmukh was unable to change his family's dynamic on his own.

In the play "Dance like a Man," Amritpal upholds the conventional view that a man's responsibility is to provide for his family and earn a living. He considers that Jairaj is unable to please him. He chooses to follow his passion rather than obey his father, yet he is unable to provide for Ratna and his family. The reader is left wondering what "being a man" really means after reading Jairaj's questions to Ratna about everything. The dilemma is if a man who sacrifices his wife in order to support himself becomes a "perfect man." Amritpal encourages Ratna to keep Jairaj from dancing. Where for this, Amritpal will never oppose her for dancing.

Amritpal seems to be asking whether, if he uses all means necessary to provide his wife with enough money, that makes him a man.. help .me I will never prevent you from dancing" (Dattani 427)

Amritpal and Ratna stand in for the importance to the middle class of name, fame, and wealth. Jairaj gets caught between father and wife and loses his passion of dancing.

He asks Ratna "would I have been a man then? Giving my wife to her own uncle because he was offering us food and shelter?" (Dattani 410).

He chooses to follow his passion rather than obey his father, yet he is unable to provide for Ratna and his family. The reader is left wondering what "being a man" really means after reading

Jairaj's questions to Ratna about everything. The dilemma is if a man who sacrifices his wife in order to support himself becomes a "perfect man." He seems to be asking whether, if he uses all means necessary to provide his wife with enough money, that makes him a man. Ratna marries Jairaj so she can carry on dancing and become more well-known. She even makes advantage of her daughter to realise her dreams of achieving widespread national renown.

Conclusion

Using the theme of middle class materialism, both playwrights show how man gets trapped in the whirlpool of materialism and becomes its victim, which frequently results in his devastation in interpersonal relationships, conflict in families, and transgression of social and moral norms. Humanity is addicted to consumerism in an effort to find happiness and satisfaction. Since Miller and Dattani are social dramatists, their plays frequently address societal issues including how each individual interacts with society and their proper place within it. They raise their voices in opposition to social and economic issues as well as the materialistic society in which the middle class tries to obtain this luxury by deceitful ways

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