

Representation of Allegory, Power Dynamics and Marginality: Reading of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in respect of Capitalism and Communism in 1950s America

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Abstract

Power and its natural corollary to 'silence' the voice of, and deny autonomy to, a group of people who oppose the dominant or who are a weak alternative in respect of class, gender, ethnicity and religious and political identity, has been operating since long. Institutions like the Church and the Government are the sources of consolidated power which is exercised over the dissent to ensure the profit of the authority, ignoring the rights of the individual. Puritanism – a religious institution that regarded individual desire, luxury and joy to be a necessary evil granted the Church an unquestioning authority to meddle with the every aspect of the lives of people and coerced them to blindly comply with the dictates and its rigorous disciplines literally. It is quite natural that in a state totally under control of a theocratic head, people had only two choices---either to accept the doctrine of religion, not morally true always or to transgress the religious authority by ending up themselves as evil. Sometimes the strict adherence to the totalitarian principles of Puritanism and constant fear of its violation resulted in mass-hysteria and gave rise to the misconception that people are not following Religion, and siding with the Devil to harm the community, which needs to be controlled with iron hand. The play *The Crucible* alludes to the theocracy ridden Salem and Witch-hunt of 1692 when thousands of people were innocently branded as witches and arrested, tired and forced to tell a moral lie much against their individual right that they secretly practice witchcraft, not following religious doctrine of Bible. This paper under concern intends to show how Miller makes use of Salem witch-hunt of 1692 as an allegory to comment on the victimization and the subsequent marginalization of Communist people in 1950s America under the control of Plutocratic Government.

Keywords: plutocracy, theocracy, silence, voice, witch, communist, marginalise, victim, church, power

In his memoir *Time Bends: A Life*, a manifesto of his conviction as a playwright, Arthur Miller writes “I could not imagine a theatre worth my time that did not want to change the world”. True to his conviction he laid emphasis on the cathartic role of theatre in diverting the disturbed conscience of people to the faults of time and changing the society to a better understanding. The conflict between authority and individual, self and society, responsibility and personal profit, and the uneven defeat of the individual right, choice and freedom at the face of social tyranny, authority and power constitute the core of his plays. Miller is driven by a ‘sleepless social conscience’, and like Bernard Shaw he has made the stage a pulpit to propagate a particular purpose. If *The Death of a Salesman* is a plea for travelling man, *All My Sons* a plea for better inspection of air plane part, or *A View from the Bridge* an attack upon the Immigration Bureau. “*The Crucible* is, internally, Salesman’s blood brother... It is examining the question of whether conscience is in fact an organic part of human being, and what happens when it is handed over merely to the state or the more of time”(p.3).

In *The Crucible* Arthur Miller capitalises on the famous historical Salem Witch-hunt of 1692 to respond to the contemporary paranoid situation or McCarthyism in 1950s America. The lines of power politics and its exertion between the historical Salem town under control of Church or Theocracy and the contemporary America ruled by Plutocracy can hardly be blurred. The play dramatises how religious authority manifested in the Church forces individual to maintain the doctrinal sanctity of the Bible at the cost of personal moral predilection and right. The play dates back to the religious persecution of Puritan by the Catholic in England, their escape and settlement in New England, Massachusetts. They stressed the need for unity and extreme hard labour to cope with the hostile atmosphere. But their new colony instead of securing the peace and personal interest of individual fanned the

flame of fanaticism and religious intolerance. The church regulated the life of every individual and put forward the superfluity of material pursuit and pleasures. The devil was thought to be literally a figure living in a nearby forest. And it was a general tendency of church's law to stigmatise people as an accomplice of devil and finally excommunicate and punish if he or she detects the falsity of authoritarian church, and seek to assert the individual conscience or voice against the predestined codes of Puritanism. Except acquiescing to the authority of church, an individual has no other way as the judge Danforth makes it clear to Proctor: "... But you must understand, sir, that person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there should no road between..." (p.86). Danforth's wry hint at those who are not following God and the doctrine of the church is well brought out here: "No corrupted man may fear this court, Mrs Hale! None! (89)".

Against this backcloth of rigid and exacting religious ambience and fear of being exterminated, the people escaped into the woods at night to feed the emotional necessity. Dance which Tituba, Betty, Abigail and other girls performed at night may also be taken as a mode of spiritual freedom, an escape route from the stifled religious oppression. They have been spied over by Reverend Parris and a twist takes place when Betty falls ill on the bed and Susana quoting Doctor's words: "he bid me tell you that you might look to unnatural things for the cause of it (10)". Abigail admits before Parris that the rumour of witchcraft is not true, and they only dance at night. Yet Abigail's unwillingness to divulge the truth before the public as she says to Susana "speak nothing' of it in the village, Susana (10)" can be seen how people of Salem were not allowed in any activity which is not prescribed in the Bible. There was no witch nor any proof of witchcraft; only those who prefer freedom and emotional relief through dance at night, singing Barbados songs, reading book at night,

knitting work, having poppet were blindly thought to be witches worshipping the devil to harm the community: “That she sometimes made a compact with Lucifer, and wrote her name in his black book with her blood—and bound herself to torment Christians... (53)”. And as prescribed in religion, confession is the only way to attain absolution, the accused was either to confess the witchcraft or to face death as Parris says to Tituba, the proposed accused: “You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to death, Tituba (42)”. Being cross examined by Reverend Hale, an expert on witchcraft Abigail only to save herself confess a lie and tarnish the name of Tituba who has a genuine love of Betty and her : I always hear her laughing in her sleep. I hear her singing her Barbados songs and tempting me with- (42)”. Tituba is easily targeted because of her different ethnic identity as she hails from African black community. And Tituba confesses and mentions the name of Sara Wood to save her and Hale’s reaction and exhortation follow---

Hale: You have confessed yourself to witchcraft, and that speaks a wish to come to Heaven’s Side. And we will bless you, Tituba.

Tituba: (deeply relieved) Oh, God bless you, Mr Hale!

Hale: (with rising exaltation) you are God’s instrument put in our hands to discover the Devil’s agents among us. You are selected, Tituba, you are chosen to help us cleanse our village. So speak utterly, Tituba, turn your back on him and face God—face God, Tituba, and God will protect you (44)”.

Suspicion dogs everyone, fear grips the mind and chaos and unrest run raging. Abigail furthers the list of others like Goody Osborn, Bridget Bishop, George Jacob, Goody Sibber and Alice Barrow who have no other option other than confessing the lie against their will and saving their skin. Thus Miller creates an atmosphere of fear and distrust in a theocracy

ridden Salem society. Look at the fear of Parris himself if witchcraft is discovered in his house: “We cannot leap to witchcraft. They will howl me out of Salem for such corruption in my house (15)”.

In the play the authority of the church and its power are operated through the trio-- Reverend Parris, a self-serving minister, Reverend Hale, the expert on witchcraft and the Salem Judge Danforth. Parris wants the total surrender from the parishioners to the authority of the church at the cost of any necessity be it personal, moral and corporal. Parris tells Proctor: “There is either obedience or the church will burn like Hell is burning! (46)”. Reverend Hale also demands unflinching faith from an individual. He singles out Proctor and questions him for not attending the church on Sabbath day, for not baptizing his two sons. He has signed many death warrants for not confessing their liaison with the Devil, though he undergoes a change and begins to question the legitimacy of accusing people of witchcraft just merely on the false words of girls. Hale disagrees with Danforth on the nature of proof of the witchcraft and Danforth tells him: “In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up witness to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is ipso facto, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? (91)”. The Salem judge Danforth exercises the authority in its most exacting form. He believes that he is entrusted with securing the Justice of God on earth, and opines that to oppose him is to oppose God. He declares: “he should hang ten thousand that dared rise against the Law”. He makes it clear that the church and the Bible determine every code and conduct of individual living in Salem. Any moral lapses will be treated with seriousness, and he again echoes Hale’s words: “Theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small (63)”. As soon as Proctor defies the corrupt authority of the church and its legal system, Parris, Hale and Danforth come forward to silence him and personally abuse him as Danforth says: “What are you? You are combined

with anti-Christ, are you not? (108)". Proctor do not accept the need for obedience and his protest takes the form of absence from prayer services of the church and town meetings. Proctor's personal freedom is jeopardised and in the court room Danforth cross-examines him only to land him in trouble and to satisfy his ego as a judge and a deputy of God on earth.

Danforth: You are in all respects a Gospel Christian?

Proctor: I am, sir.

Parris: Such a Christian that will come not to church but once in a month!

Danforth (restrained-he is curious) Not come to church?

Proctor: I—I have no love for Mr. Parris. It is no Secret. But God I surely love.

Cheever: He plow on Sunday, sir.

Danforth: Plow on Sunday! (82 &83)

Proctor challenges the corrupt authority of court and tries to dismantle it by mounting the gallows. His refusal to tell the lies and blacken the names of neighbour at the cost of freedom and moral integrity has been a means in to break the power of the puritan society and its abuse. Proctor ultimately tears up his confession and prepares to die for truth and loyalty. Proctor's question "Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clear as God's fingers? (72)" that remain unanswered suggests how the individual voice is hopeless to the power and tyranny of theocratic government.

The Salem-hunt episode of 1692 and the tyranny of theocratic rule has been used by the dramatist as a context to interpret the growing antagonism between two countries America and Russia on the basis of political ideologies – Capitalism and Communism on the

wake of 2nd World War. USA and United Soviet State Republic (USSR) were allies against the axis power in World War –II, but after 1945 USSR tried to exert communist influence throughout central and Eastern Europe as a buffer against Germany. On the other hand, USA along with US would not like see a dictator like Hitler emerge again and tried to exert its influence in France and Germany and set up capitalism supporting leaders. This tension generated fear and paranoia among Americans everyday experienced the nightmarish vision of being attacked by the Communist. This is the reason why Americans set out to target the communists, persecute and drive them away. Miller reflects this in his essay in his essay “*Why I Wrote The Crucible*”--- “...*The crucible* was an act of desperation. Much of my desperation branched out, I suppose, from a typical Depression-trauma era--- the blow struck on the mind by the rise of European Fascism and the brutal anti-Semitism it had brought to power. But by 1950, when I began to think of writing about the hunt for Reds in America, I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors’ violations of civil rights, were fearful of, and with good reason, of being identified as covert communists if they should protest too strongly...”

The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was formed to check the infiltration of the Communist and their acts of espionages and to trace anyone who exhibited left -of-centre sympathies. As the witches of Salem were called to court and tried just on the basis of superficial evidence of hysterical girls, in the same way the HUAC suspected the people as having the alliance with the communist or the spy of Russia on inconclusive or questionable evidence and ruined the lives of many. “Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the communist party?” Thousands of Americans who worked in different offices had to face this question in 1950s America. An atmosphere of fear of world domination by

communists hung over America in the post war years. The transformation of China, the world's largest populous country into a communist country in 1949 and the fear of nuclear holocaust as the Soviet Union exploded its first A-bomb in the same year increased the paranoid situation of America to a large extent. The HUAC hearings and investigations grew cruel and pointless and McCarthy was elected as a senator in 1946 and rose to prominence in 1950. He produced a series of investigations and hearings during the 1950s in an effort to expose the supposed communist's infiltration of the various areas of the U.S. At Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950, McCarthy proclaimed that he was aware of 205 card – carrying members of the communist Party who worked for the United State Department of State. This speech set off an era of paranoia and finger pointing. There were fears that children would be corrupted by the 'Communist' practices depicted in Robin Hood and any school and colleges to ban the classic tale about taking from the rich to give to the poor. McCarthy in his speech before the Republican National Convention (1952) says: "Our job as Americans and as Republicans is to dislodge the traitors from every place where they have been sent to do their traitorous work". Communism was seen to be the Red Devil and the followers are the witches trying to harm the American. As in Salem, there was the corruption of law, during the HUAC hearing, people were unjustly accused of working for the Red Devil. HUAC also targeted the Hollywood film industry. Actors, writers and producers alike were summoned to appear before the committee and prove names of colleagues who may have been members of the Communist party. Those who repented and named names of suspected communists were allowed to return to business as usual. But those who had not confessed to any communist liaison or sympathies, they were sent to jail and subsequently 'blacklisted', which meant they would not be offered work. Dalton Trumbo, screen writer and member of the Hollywood Ten was 'blacklisted' and was forced to use false names to continue writing. Miller himself appeared before HUAC three years after he wrote *The Crucible*. He was treated with

contempt and was sentenced to one year jail though he escaped the jail sentence at the cost of fine.

Thus, it is crystal clear that Miller is a purpose dramatist, a propagandist and he wrote the play with the purpose of reforming and moulding society in a better form. The play show the curtailment of individual right and the conflict between individual and the dictates of society and power in Theocratic and Plutocratic setup. The Play is a plea to demonstrate how totalitarian social structure and forces scuttles the individual autonomy and stifles 'voice'. It demonstrates the falsity of belief regarding individual freedom and right. Whoever will disagree with Power will be crippled, tortured and intimidated and associated with the presence of evil. The incident of 1950s America or the Salem hitch hunt are particular cases in point but the situation has a timeless applicability as long as any form of administration will distort truth and suppress individual to safeguard their authority.

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