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Role of Individual Conscience and Freedom of Expression in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

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Abstract: Literature is a source of inspiration as well as guidance for human race. Emotions of human beings find an outlet in drama. Questions of individual conscience and freedom of expression are crucial to decide the difference between right and wrong. Arthur Miller writes his plays with a purpose and the purpose is not to appease the system but to present a realistic picture of the situation. *The Crucible* was staged in New York on January 22, 1953. It is dubbed as a historical drama. It deals with the Salem witch trials of 1692. The witch hunt trials were the outcome of this tug of war between the Puritans and the upcoming upholders of individual freedom and individual conscience. Further, some people tried to settle their personal scores in the guise of witch hunt. In *The Crucible*, individual conscience and freedom of expression are threatened by state machinery. Proctor, the protagonist in this play, retains his individual conscience and freedom of expression at the cost of his life.

Keywords: freedom, conscience, individual, hysteria, witch-hunt

Literature is a source of inspiration as well as guidance for human race. The emotions of human beings find an outlet in drama. Both comedy and tragedy are the two aspects of drama. Thus, drama contains in itself a larger than life significance. The joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, success and failure, life and death, love and hate, loyalty and betrayal find expression in drama. There is no aspect of human past, present or future which remains untouched by drama. The playwrights who write drama present a universe in which “one blood, man and beast are born” (Charlton 226). Thus, the question of individual conscience and freedom of expression are crucial to decide the difference between right and wrong.

Arthur Miller is one of the most celebrated playwrights of America. His works demonstrate an intense understanding of human nature. He is a playwright who demonstrates a sense of responsibility towards society. He writes his plays with a purpose and the purpose is not to appease the system but to present a realistic picture of the situation. Imagination often leads us away from reality; but in Miller's case, imagination leads him to a deeper reality. Thus, imagination for Miller is a vehicle to transcend the boundaries of time and space.

In his plays, Miller is concerned with the people who are denied a sense of community. National and international events of early twentieth century were of a very complex nature which caught Miller's attention. The Great Depression of 1929 which affected the whole world for a decade was a traumatic experience for both the rich and the poor. The rise of Nazism and World War II, threat of communism, and McCarthy witch-hunt in America laid the ground for politically oriented plays.

Miller was, perhaps, the most vocal playwright of the fifties who took up cudgels against the McCarthy tyranny and horror of fifties and came out with flying colours against this aberration in political history of American people. McCarthy trials were a challenge to the liberal values of American society. Freedom of conscience, individual liberty and freedom of expression were at stake, as D. Venkateswarlu says:

Arthur Miller, more than any other dramatist wrote a powerful play [*The Crucible*] on the fifties against

McCarthy's Congressional Committee which made a mockery of the liberal concepts like individualism and freedom. The only other writer to attempt a powerful critique of McCarthy era is E. L. Doctorow who in *The Book of Daniel* tells the ignominy of Joe McCarthy's Congressional Committee and what they symbolise in terms of the liberal crisis. Miller is a major playwright who explored the liberal dilemma in post-war Europe. (Venkateswarlu 93)

Throughout his literary career, Miller has been preoccupied with the moral question of right and wrong; and he exhibited his preference for morally and ethically right values quite unambiguously and emphatically when he says:

In all my plays and books I try to take settings and dramatic situation from life which involves real questions of right and wrong. Then I set out, rather implacably and in the most realistic situation I can find the moral dilemma and try to point a real though hard, path out. I don't see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong as bars. (as quoted in Martin xxi)

In American political history, the decade of fifties is marked by betrayals and "naming names"; the House Un-American Activities Committee took "the role of the grand inquisitor" (Meyers 146). This Committee was a direct threat to liberal democratic ideal of individual liberty. And it is also significant to note that the idea of individual liberty finds a prominent place in the constitution of the United States. The idea of individual liberty is deep rooted in the psyche of the American people. Interference on the part of state and government in the individual life of citizens to the extent that how one should think and act run counter to the democratic essence of American political ethos. Miller was summoned to appear before the HUAC to explain his position vis-à-vis communism and communists. Quite fearlessly he appeared before the committee and expressed his stand in unequivocal terms so as to highlight the totalitarian, undemocratic and fascist nature

of the HUAC hearings. Miller was a man and artist of integrity. He never compromised with his principled position vis-à-vis HUAC hearing. He neither succumbed to the temptation of remaining silent, nor buckled under the tyrannical and threatening pressure of the HUAC:

He openly criticised the committee itself, whose 'rather ceaseless investigating of artists was creating a pall for apprehension and fear among all kinds of people.' His testimony covered a wide range of political topics. He advocated the repeal of the Smith Act; defended his contribution to a fund that supplied vitally needed medicines to Red China; discussed the ideas of his plays; condemned Ezra Pound's anti-Semitic broadcasts from wartime Italy. (Meyers 143)

Miller's play, *The Crucible* begins with Reverend Parris praying for his daughter, Betty's recovery, who is lying unconscious on her bed. It is revealed through conversation between Reverend Parris and his niece Abigail Williams that the latter and Betty and a number of other girls were engaged in occult activities in the woods. It was Tituba, Parris' slave servant, who led the girls to occult rituals. Abigail drank chicken blood to kill Elizabeth Proctor. She also warns the girls that if anyone disclosed anything about the occult rituals, she will kill that fellow. As Parris was spying on their activities, he jumped from a bush and the girls were surprised and frightened by his presence. During Parris' sudden entry into the scene Betty fainted. She was still inert on her bed. There were rumours of witchcraft in the town. Reverend Hale is summoned to examine the incident. He is an expert in occult practices. He questions Abigail who accuses Tituba as being a witch. In order to save herself from hanging, Tituba confesses faith in God and accuses Goody Good and Goody Osborne of witchcraft. Abigail and Betty also confess faith in God. They also admit that they had been bewitched by occult activities. They also name a number of people whom they claim they saw with the devil. Deputy Governor, Danforth, also comes to Salem to supervise the court proceedings. John Proctor's wife Elizabeth Proctor tells him that he should visit the court and testify against Abigail and the other girls. Some time ago, John Proctor had an affair with Abigail, but now he wants to forget it. So he does not want to get

involved in witchery trial. Mary Warren gives a small rag doll to Elizabeth which she has made in court during her hours in the court that day. Hale enters and questions John Proctor and Elizabeth Proctor about witchery. Giles Corey and Francis Nurse also enter the scene. They have come to seek advice as their wives have been arrested. Next, a marshal arrives to arrest Elizabeth Proctor on the charge of witchery. Elizabeth was accused by Abigail for stabbing with a needle through a doll. John Proctor asks Mary to testify against the girls. Francis Nurse, Giles Corey and John Proctor present their case against the girls to Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne. Giles Corey tells that Putnam had incited his daughter to accuse Corey's wife of witchcraft so that Putnam could grab his land. He tells that he had a witness but he could not disclose his name for fear of his being arrested. Unfortunately, on refusal of Corey to disclose the name of the witness, Danforth orders Corey's arrest because of contempt of court. Mary Warren tells that she never saw the devil or any spirits. Abigail argues that Mary is telling a lie. As the court seems to be beguiled by Abigail, John Proctor tells everyone that Abigail was a whore. He also tells that he had an affair with Abigail. Elizabeth tells that John Proctor did not have an affair with Abigail. Mary is fickle-minded. She returns to Abigail's side. The girls accuse John Proctor of witchery. Proctor accuses Danforth of being afraid to take the side of the innocent people. Proctor is arrested. Reverend Hale feels that the court is not serving the interests of justice. He denounces the proceedings. There is rumour that in a nearby town the people have revolted against similar witch trials. People of Salem also fear similar uprising in their own town. Now Parris and Hale realise that they should come to the help of the innocent people. They tell them that they should make false confession in order to save their lives. John Proctor goes by Hale's advice to save his life by admitting that he is a witch but he refuses to name the others. As the court asks him to name the others and decides to post his confession in public, Proctor tears off his confession. John Proctor listens to the stirrings of his conscience. He does not want that he should be blamed for the death of innocent people. He tells the court that his confession was a lie. He is taken to be hanged with the other accused.

The Crucible was staged in New York on January 22, 1953. It is dubbed as a historical drama. It deals with the Salem witch trials of

1692. Miller has tried to present the details with the accuracy of a historian. Most of the characters in the play are based on real figures of the time. In this play, Miller has discussed the sociological framework of Salem in the late seventeenth century. It was basically a transitional period in which old Puritanical codes were being discarded and a sense of nonconformity and individual freedom was gaining the ground. It is also important to note that political and religious establishment felt threatened due to the fear of losing their control. In this scenario, in order to maintain their authority and control over the people, they resorted to highhanded tactics of punishing those who were raising their voice against the Puritanical establishment. The witch hunt trials were the outcome of this tug of war between the Puritans and the upcoming upholders of individual freedom and individual conscience. Further, some people tried to settle their personal scores in the guise of witch hunt:

The Crucible takes for its point of departure the Salem witch trials of 1692, but it also reflects Miller's reaction to how the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) operated at the time when the play was written, and the dangers of the McCarthyist fervour that gripped America in the 1950s. It is typical of his work in its sense of purpose, humanity and the desire to bring society to a better understanding of itself. (Abbotson xxiii)

There is contemporary relevance of *The Crucible*. Brooks Atkinson wrote in the *New York Times*: "Neither Mr. Miller nor his audiences are unaware of certain similarities between the perversions of justice then and today" (qtd. in Foulkes 95). John Mason Brown says, "the likenesses between the past and present are disquietingly clear" (qtd. in Foulkes 95). The play generated a lot of criticism because of its political overtones in the context of McCarthy trials in 1950s. Thus, almost all the criticism of this play is politically oriented. It was because of the political overtones, the York Little Theatre of Pennsylvania showed reluctance to stage *The Crucible*. Despite William Bayer's accusation that the play was "pamphleteering on behalf of today's political persecutions" (Bayer 185), it may be said that *The*

Crucible was a bold attempt on the part of Miller to challenge the political terror in the form of McCarthyism. As we notice in *The Crucible*, religious and political authorities of Salem were bent upon scuttling and subduing the voice of dissent; similarly, McCarthy trials were also to scuttle the voice of dissent in post World War America. Walcott Gibbs treats *The Crucible* as “sacrifice of drama to polemics” (Gibbs 39). Actually, the polemics lead us to the regions of man’s conscience. It may be said that individual conscience was the heart of the play’s meaning. In Jerry Tallmer’s opinion the play says, “‘No’, not merely to witch-hunters, but to every betrayal of the self” (492). John H. Ferres argues, “Miller believes a man must be true to himself and to his fellows” (8).

In Mottram’s opinion Miller in *The Crucible* “comes as close as he can to supporting the individual against society without crying for revolution” (35). Mottram highlights the “liberalism it embodies” (38). Robert Warshow who strongly attacks *The Crucible* admits that *The Crucible* is relevant to the McCarthyian period of American history, “Mr. Miller has nothing to say about the Salem trials and makes only the flimsiest pretense that he has. *The Crucible* was written to say something about Alger Hiss and Owen Lattimore, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Senator McCarthy . . .” (166).

Miller’s play *The Crucible* (1953) is deeply rooted in the history of (colonial) America. The play refers to the actual incidents and the trial which took place in the second half of the seventeenth century in Salem. But the play reminds us of the dictum – history repeats itself, in the sense, that it has clear parallels with the contemporary America – post World War II America. It was in February 1950 that senator Joe McCarthy addressed the Ohio County Women’s Republican Club and claimed that he had a list of “two hundred and five” (Nannes 182) communists working in the State Department. McCarthy’s revelation switched on the panic button. Conservatives rallied behind McCarthy. Investigation started. And by 1953 the hurricane of the witch-hunt of communists engulfed the entire nation. Political elements of far Right started baying for the blood of communists. Their propaganda against communists paralysed the mind of the people. Mass hysteria was created against communists who were charged with subversive

activities – they were publicised as agent provocateurs, wreckers of constitution, grave threat to American democracy and American interests. It was, indeed, a well-planned and calculated attempt to crush the voice of the communists. About McCarthy terror, Miller writes:

It was the fact that a political objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. The wonder of it all struck me that . . . such manifestly ridiculous man, should be capable of paralysing thought itself, and worse, causing to billow up such persuasive clouds of “mysterious” feelings within people . . . Astounded, I watched men pass me without a nod whom I had known rather well for years! And again . . . that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered . . . that so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in *The Crucible*. (Miller 1973, 39-40)

Vested political interests under the garb of McCarthyism and witch-hunt of communists were out to grab and administer the individual conscience of man: “Above all, above all horrors, I saw accepted the notion that conscience was no longer a private matter but one of state administration. I saw men handing conscience to other men and thanking other men for the opportunity of doing so” (Miller 1973, 40).

In 1950s and '60s in particular and throughout the cold war in general right, radicals and fundamentalists remained busy in identifying the internal enemies of democracy in America. In April 1961, Robert Welch, the founder of Birch society dubbed President Eisenhower “a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy” (qtd. in Westin 239). In January 1961, Welch alleged that “Communist influences are now in almost complete control of our Federal Government” (qtd. in Westin 243). While delivering his “evil empire” speech “on March 8, 1983, President Reagan . . . speaking to his political base at the Annual Convention of the National Association of

Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida . . . charged that the Soviet Union continued to act with the aggressive impulse of an evil empire” (Donaldson 273). In 1982 President Ronald Reagan of US in an address to the British Parliament referred to Soviet Union as “totalitarian evil” (Knott 78). In religious terms evil is equated with Devil. It can easily be inferred that President Reagan considered USSR as Devil’s empire. Thus, we can safely assume that McCarthyism smacked of Puritanical and Catholic attitude inherent in the psyche of American society – cruel, rigid in the case of McCarthy witch-hunt of communists:

[It is] to conceive the Devil as a necessary part of a respectable view of cosmology. Ours is a divided empire in which certain ideas and emotions and actions are of God and their opposites are of Lucifer. . . . since 1692 a great but superficial change has wiped out God’s beard and the Devil’s horns, but the world is still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes. . . . when it is recalled that until the Christian era the underworld was never regarded as a hostile area, that all gods were useful and essentially friendly to man despite occasional lapses; when we see the steady and methodical inculcation into humanity of the idea of man’s worthlessness – until redeemed – the necessity of the Devil may become evidence as a weapon, a weapon designed and used time and again in every age to whip men into a surrender to a particular church for a church-state. (Miller 1973, 248-249)

Miller visited Salem to study the court records and to get first-hand knowledge of the Salem trials (1692). The “misplaced pride” of State that characterises the attitude of the judges during Salem trials was very much evident and alive in the air in Massachusetts during Miller’s visit. Miller observes:

At the time of my evening walk, no Massachusetts legislature had passed so much as a memoir of regret at the execution of innocent people, rejecting the very suggestion as a slur on the honor of the state even two

and a half centuries later. The same misplaced pride that had for so long prevented the original Salem court from admitting the truth before its eyes was still alive here. (Miller 1990, 336-337)

In the testimony of Abigail and Parris, Miller found that it was a shameful and reprehensible process of “cleansing through the projection of one’s own vileness onto others in order to wipe it out with their blood. As more than one private letter put it at the time, ‘Now no one is safe’” (Miller 1990, 337). One of the main motives of the Salem witch trials was to terrorise the people to submit to the authoritarian and theological regime of those times; similarly, one can easily infer that the McCarthy trials, mainly, aimed at terrorising the people to submit to the anti-communist policy of the state. Harold Clurman rightly equates McCarthy trials with Salem witch-hunt and avers that both were meant to terrorise the society:

The Crucible, written between 1952 and 1953, is still a visible protest against the aberrations of McCarthyism. That the witch-hunt of Salem cannot be equated with the fear of communism is not valid as a criticism of the play. What *The Crucible* does is to show us a community terrorised into a savagely hysterical fury that is reprehensible whether it is based on fact or on falsehood. The play asks, ‘Is the accuser always holy now?’ A question all together suitable to the situation of the fifties. ‘Vengeance is walking Salem’ had become almost literally exact. (Clurman 147)

Thus, Miller treats Salem trials as an attack on individual freedom; and the attack of the same nature one comes across in McCarthy trials. It is also pertinent to note that the court’s attitude in *The Crucible* is quite threatening and authoritarian, dictatorial and biased; and this attitude instils awe in the heart of John Proctor and others. Danforth warns Francis categorically and curtly in a very stern and harsh tone: “you must understand, sir that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between” (Miller 1973, 293). To maintain the dignity of man is of utmost importance as far as

his relationship with society is concerned. Miller admits that it was the contemporary society and “what was in the air” (Miller 1973, 11) which motivated him to write the plays. In American history early part of the 1950s was marked by the McCarthy witch-hunt of communists and their sympathisers because the communist party of America and their followers and sympathisers were treated as a serious threat to the security and well-being of the nation. Suspected communists were summoned before the HUAC of the Congress and asked to confess their links with communist party; they were also asked to name others if they wanted to be absolved of the charge of sedition. During the same period Miller happened to read Marion Starkey's book *The Devil in Massachusetts*. He was surprised to note that the witchery trials conducted almost two and a half century back in Salem paralleled the McCarthy trials of communists in 1950s:

The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old woes – where upon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. In other words the same spiritual nugget lay folded within both procedures – an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air. The Salem prosecution was actually on more solid legal ground since the defendant, if guilty of familiarity with the Unclean One, had broken a law against the practice of witchcraft, a civil as well as a religious offence; whereas the offender against HUAC could not be accused of any such violation but only of a spiritual crime, subservience to a political enemy's desires and ideology. He was summoned before the committee to be called a bad name, but one that could destroy his career. In effect, it came down to a governmental decree of *moral* guilt that could easily be made to disappear by ritual speech: intoning names of fellow sinners and recanting former beliefs. (Miller 1973, 331)

John Hale's account of witch-hunt trials published in 1702 (*Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*) testifies to the fact of vengeance instead of witchery. Thus, Hale's testimony exposes the hollowness of the charge of witchery. Similarly one can say that McCarthyian trials were, in fact, the trials of vengeance because due to the Depression in 1929, socialists had criticised capitalism in vehement terms; this criticism of capitalism was not to the liking of political leaders like McCarthy. Hence, McCarthy and his cohorts acted in the manner of vengeance against those who had faith in socialism. Griffin remarks, "In many of these cases there had been antecedent personal quarrels, and so occasions of revenge; for some of those Condemned, had been suspected by their Neighbours several years, because after quarrelling with their Neighbours, evils had befallen those Neighbours" (70-71).

It was the idea of guilt which was successfully utilised in Salem trial, and again repeated in 1950's during the witch-hunt of Communists in America. During Salem trials the idea was that of sexual guilt; during McCarthy witch-hunt to be a Communist was to indulge in political guilt. As regards Salem trials Miller remarks:

Here was guilt, the guilt of illicit sexuality. . . . Had there been no tinder of guilt to set aflame, had the cult and culture of repression not ruled so tightly, no outbreak would have been possible. John Proctor then in being driven to confess not to a metaphoric guilt but to actual sex with an identified teenaged partner, might save the community in the only way possible, by raising to consciousness what had been suppressed and in holy disguise was out to murder them all. (Miller 1990, 341)

Thus, it is the Puritanical attitude of suppression and ruthless implementation of moral and ethical and legal code of conduct which led to all sorts of intrigues in personal and social life of people. Sex outside the domain of marriage was treated as emanating from the ill-effects and communion with the Devil. And this metaphoric introduction of Devil in matters personal and social was figment of perverted imagination. Though at that point of time during Salem trials there were laws against witchcraft – this does not mean that laws

emanating from perverted imagination could be treated as laws reasonably good for the welfare of individual and society. As regards witch-hunt of communists in 1950s, Miller finds its parallel with Salem trials the way the syndrome of guilt played dominant role in victimising the communists in America. Communists belonged to the party of the Devil. McCarthy and his chums were holy judges and arbiters to save society from the influence of the Devil and witchcraft of the communists. Miller observes:

Without guilt the 1950s Red-hunt could never have generated such power. Once it was conceded that absolutely any idea remotely similar to a Marxist position was not only politically but morally illicit, the liberal, with his customary adaptation of Marxist theory and attitudes was effectively paralysed. The former Communist was guilty because he had in fact believed the Soviets were developing the system of the future, without human exploitation and irrational waste. . . . But as in Salem, a point arrived, in the last forties, when the rules of social intercourse quite suddenly changed, or were changed, and attitudes that had merely been anti capitalist – anti establishment were now made unholy, morally repulsive and if not actually treasonous, then implicitly so. America had always been a religious country. (Miller 1990, 341-342)

In contemporary civilisation and society, it is a matter of great concern that Americans have continued to treat political issues in religious terms. It is something appalling for a democratic secular State to treat the opposition as emanating from Devil. In *The Crucible*, Miller grants topmost priority to individual conscience. He says, “there were moments when the individual conscience was all that could keep a world from falling” (Miller 1990, 342). In *The Crucible* John Proctor listens to the voice of his conscience and “sets aside his guilty feelings of unworthiness to ‘mount the gibbet like a saint’ . . . defies the court by tearing up his confession and brings on his own execution” (Miller, Miller 1990, 342). Thus, political tyranny and nonsense can be resisted, but one has to remain prepared to listen to the voice of one’s

conscience. It is man's conscience which can withstand and challenge the legal authority and political power if it adopts an unreasonable and undemocratic course to punish the right thinking people in society. However, the price of maintaining voice of conscience is, generally, to sacrifice one's life.

In *The Crucible*, Miller espoused the cause of retaining the individual's conscience under tough political circumstances; and it will not be out of place to infer that in similar fashion, Miller faced the bullying attitude of McCarthy enquiry without compromising his conscience – Miller refused to name the friends and acquaintances because his conscience did not allow him to become the informer. Miller endeavours to impress upon the audience that government acting as the arbiter of moral and ethical values is a bad government – such government is a threat to the individual's conscience and liberty and freedom of expression. Excessive involvement and unwarranted interference of government in the individual life of a person to force him to act and think in the manner the government dictates is dangerous for liberal and democratic norms of government. McCarthy's witch-hunt for communists posed serious threat to human dignity and spirit of tolerance. It was the ugly reality of the liberal crisis which Miller dramatised and hinted at in *The Crucible*. It is through a parallel in history that Miller disapproves the contemporary witch-hunt of communists. It was reign of terror let loose on the communists; it was a very shocking spectacle of willing participation of the people in naming the names and thus getting release from the murderous clutches of the McCarthy hounds.

Judges are supposed to sift the truth out of the evidence produced before them, but the judges in Salem trials appeared to be biased in favour of those who were falsely implicating the innocent persons for witchcraft. Judiciary is, perhaps, the most important and impartial pillar of any political system. Even judicial system prevailing at that point of time – Salem trials (1692) – failed to protect the innocent; judicial system rather punished the innocent. The evil engulfed the whole society including judicial and political wings of state power and even the testimony of honest and innocent men miserably failed to convince the judiciary of the nonsensical value of the whole affair of the witch-

hunt. From the legal and moral point of view, it was the false evidence and from psychological point of view, it was imaginary evidence, that is, simply the figment of imagination of some perverted and distorted minds, and it was simply false accusations which registered the victory of the complainants. Commonsense could not stand as bulwark against the frantic, fanatic, prejudiced, dogmatic, and revengeful forces in society and state.

The very considerable dramatic power of *The Crucible* derives from its revelation of a mounting tide of evil gaining in an entire society, an ascendancy quite disproportionate to the evil of any individual member of that society. What is so horrifying is to watch the testimony of honest men bouncing like an India rubber ball off the high wall of this belief that other men have built around themselves, not from ingrained evil, but from overzealousness and a purblind confidence in their own judgement. What meaning has proof when men will believe only what they want to believe and interpret evidence only in the light of their prejudice? To watch *The Crucible* is to be overwhelmed by the simple impotence of honest commonsense against fanaticism that is getting out of control and to be painfully reminded that there are situations in which sheer goodness (“mere unaided virtue”, in Melville’s phrase about Starbuck) is just not enough to counter such deviousness. (Welland 84-85)

In Salem witch-hunt trials, society and state failed to unearth the motives of the accusers and the state authorities were swayed by the mob mentality of society which was out to punish the honest and innocent persons who were in minority. Salem witch-hunt trials draw parallel to the witch-hunt of communists in America in 1950’s which overwhelmed the psyche of American society, and in particular the elite ruling class, to the extent that McCarthy trials brought disgrace to American democracy:

. . . it will remain a more important document of McCarthy's America than would a more partisan plea. The ugliness of that affair, which caused so much perplexed anxiety to the friends of the United States, was not the megalomaniac aspirations of a cynical demagogue, but the appalling ease with which his methods achieved results. So far and so wide did the infection spread that it could only be visualised as a force of evil of which ordinary men and women were the unintentional agents and the unrecognising victims. In many ways its moral damage was more serious to those victimised by it and this is what *The Crucible* so splendidly communicates. (Welland 85)

In short, in *The Crucible*, individual's conscience and freedom of expression are threatened by state machinery. Proctor, the protagonist in this play, retains his individual conscience and freedom of expression even at the cost of his life. Contemporary industrial society has evolved democratic ethos which grant freedom of individual conscience, freedom of expression and if these principles are violated by state and the individual succumbs to the coercion by the state; under such circumstances individual is reduced to the level of subhuman being and society and state too degrade themselves to the subhuman barbaric level.

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