

Shaw and His Social plays

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G. B. Shaw is a socialist. He produced his art not only for the sake of art but also to change the world towards a better life and to get rid of social and political vices. His fundamental aim in his plays is bettering the lot of humanity by subjecting accepted connections and institutions to the cold, searching light of his penetrating intellect. All his plays are about some important aspect of contemporary social life or some important social evil.

Shaw read Karl Marx whose writings influenced him very much. He was eager to reform English society. He was gaining the recognition of the type of audience that he wanted to attract to the theatre. He began writing for the theatre. He was greatly influenced by the social plays of Ibsen. Shaw was essentially a comic dramatist while Ibsen was tragic. Shaw called himself a rationalist, a realist and an anti-romantic. He was against all shams, affectations and false conventions. He is against all romantic outburst of emotion and sentiment.

G.B. Shaw considers poverty is an evil. He scorns capitalism and advocates socialism. As a socialist, he thinks about the problem of family, love, marriage and sex-relations. Shaw objects to marriage and family because these institutions are based on false economics and false biology. As a biologist, he thinks that procreation is the most sacred work of all, and as a socialist he demands that all work should be suitably paid for. The most serious of social injustice is done to women.

Mrs Warren's Profession is designed to draw the attention of the public to its own responsibility for prostitution. It is a sociological as well as moral play. Its theme is prostitution though it is limited only to a few passionate utterances of Mrs Warren. In this play Shaw exposes the evils of capitalism which turns women into prostitution under-payment and ill-treatment. Mrs Warren like her

sister came out of a slum and became a prostitute and prospered exceedingly. Shaw did not bring prostitute to a bad end.

In *Back To Matthuselah*, he gives glimpses of an ideal society, in which Family and marriage and private property are no more and the state is responsible for the rearing of children. In this ideal society, women like Zoo, who specialise in the breeding of children, do not recognise their own children, nor do they know about their paternity.

Widowers' House is directed towards slum landlordism. Dr Harry Trench, while on a tour of the continent, meets Mrs Jenny Patterson, the daughter of a respectable middle class gentleman Sartorius. He gets engaged to her. When he returns to England, he is shocked to find that Sartorius is a slum landlord. Later on he discovers that he himself is living on the income derived from slum this leads to reconciliation between him and Blanche. The tragedy of personal righteousness is brought hero to the hero by a series of successive shocks.

Shaw calls *Arms And The Man* an anti-romantic comedy and uses it to expose the hollowness of romantic love and glorification war. Here Raina is shown to be a girl, full of romantic illusions about love and war. Her lover Sergius is romantic in his approach to war. She is leagerly waiting for his return in almost romantic conditions. She finds a Swiss officer Bluntschli, seeking refuse in her bedroom. He has no illusion about love and war and he tries to shatter those of Raina through a series of shocks. He thinks that "Carrying food is more important than carrying cartridges and that the best thing a soldier can do is to save his life." (*Arms And The Man*)

Through the play Candida, Shaw expresses his views on love and marriage. G.K. Chesterton says that "Bernard Shaw expresses something that is not properly expressed anywhere else and i.e. the idea of marriage. Marriage is not a mere chain upon love. Marriage is a fact, and actual human relation like that of motherhood, which has certain human habits and loyalties. A marriage is not slavery."

Shaw objects to marriage and family because these institutions are based on false economics and false biology. As a socialist Shaw demands that all works should be suitably paid for. The most serious social injustice is done to women. They are under paid in the industrial world. They are not allowed to have any

independent income for their work in family. Underpayment in the industrial world leads to prostitution. The husband thinks that he provides security, defence, honour and prestige of the wife. But in candida it is the wife who provides comforts for the man and keeps vulgar cares away from him.

Shaw was against orthodoxy, conventional morality and conventional manners. He was conscious of the exploitation of women by men. He said that even married women should be allowed the liberty to have male friends and vice-versa.

Shaw believed in the theory of love for the sake of love and marriage. He was against faithless wives. He likes candida because she was a faithful wife. She did not disturb the family peace and did not cross limits. She taught to Eugene and told him what love is. Shaw was a realist and he did not like the romantic approach of Eugene. Morell and Candida are happy with each other after the departure of Eugene. The purity of home is maintained. Though he was frank with Eugene yet she never entertained any sinful thought for him. Eugene lived in the world of his romantic illusions and his world of illusion is shattered by Candida. Secondly, she shattered the illusion of her husband also. Candida is Shaw's new woman, like Ann Whitfield in Man And Superman. She asserts her independence, and is able to control and manipulate the two men who have entered her life.

In the Auction Scene, Candida says "I will stay with the weaker of the two." (Candida)

James Morell is esteemed in society as a highly respectable gentleman and in his private life he is an ideal husband who is intensely devoted to his wife. Candida regards him a great treasure. He has full faith in the mystery of holy communion and sacraments. He tells Laxy :

Ash, my boy , get married to a good woman and then you'll understand, that's foretaste of what will be best in the kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth. (Candida)

St. Joan is considered to be Shaw's best play by many critics. In a certain way it transcends Shaw because he curbs his tendency towards irrepressible laughter, suppresses the input to propaganda. The suggestion for

writing a play about Joan came from Charlotte, who works on her suggestion very cleverly.

The Apple Cart is an important play as it reveals Shaw's political faith more plainly than anything else. Shaw did not give much significance to this play as he described it as a frightful bag of stage tricks.

In such plays as The Man Of Destiny and Caesar And Cleopatra, he subjects heroes to the taste of commonsense and shows that they are enjoying a place in history disproportionate to the value of their contribution. Getting married embodies his criticism of the marriage system. Major Barborá is his criticism of the capitalist economic social system. Man And Superman is devoted to a consideration of his philosophy of creative evolution and working of the life- force. In The Doctor's Dilemma, the various Doctors present the ridiculous medical theories not only a dramatist or a critic but a reformer and to some extent he was feminist. He wrote in the support of equality without any type of prejudice as well as discrimination. Shaw's idea of realism is different from that of others as it has a constructive plan and reformatory zeal. He was a realist and unsentimental critic of life. He worked throughout his life as an iconoclast and propagandist. He always tried his level best to break the traditional concepts related to the different aspects of life like women, religion, marriage etc. not fit in the modern society. He pleads for the equality of women and emphasizes the need of women's redemption from the dependence. Shaw raised his voice against injustice, exploitation and tyranny and favoured social justice, righteousness and intellectual enlightenment. As a thinker and dramatist, he compelled people to think, to analyse and to find out the solutions to various problems. As a writer he showed great boldness and asked the new generation to plan and concern new things and thoughts.

Thus, he is admired for his mental capacity, ethical approach and revolutionary zeal. He was a revolutionary dramatist and his plays are admired by all kind of readers for his social and political approach.

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