

Motherliness and Independent Qualities of Women Characters in George Bernard Shaw's Plays



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Abstract : *The Present article aims at making an in-depth study of Women Characters in George Bernard Shaw's Plays in various directions. Shaw, the rationalist has drawn his women in unsentimental and unromantic terms. Most of his women are unpleasant women. As a matter of fact the world of Bernard Shaw has a large place for women. He honoured women showing in his plays that they were not only to be loved, but respected. Shaw was an almost perfect example of the shy man with an inferiority complex. Shaw's family situations and contemporary social conditions must have gone a long way in formulating his concept of woman. Shaw's inferiority complex and androgynous nature must have had considerable impact on his ideas on women.*

Key Words : *Motherliness, Independent, Unsentimental & Androgynous nature*

I. INTRODUCTION

George Bernard Shaw, the great dramatist of the twentieth Century, has drawn his women in unsentimental and unromantic terms. The most influential woman in Shaw's life, however, was his mother. Shaw admired her from his childhood for her ability and masculinity. Mrs. Clandon of "You Can Never" and Lady Britomart of "Major Barbara" have been, like Shaw's mother, living separately from their husbands. Both of them meet their husbands, after a long time not with any intention of compromise, but only to settle the future of their children. The hostile attitudes of Mrs. Clandon and Lady Britomart towards their husbands remind one, of the face that Shaw's mother never reconciled with her husband nor did any member of the Shaw family attend the funeral of George Carr Shaw.

Mrs. Dudgeon of Devil's Disciple is one of the hardest women one can find in Shaw's plays. She is exceedingly disagreeable and hence considered to be exceedingly good. But the way in which she treats Christy, Essie, Dick, Judith and even Anderson is abhorring. Shaw manages to create sympathy towards even this hard woman, by referring to the unequal law which forbids her right to property. She dies miserably, having caused misery to others throughout her

life. Mrs. Higgins is another authoritative woman but yet cannot cope up with her son Higgins. But there is no hatred between them. They cannot get on well with each other, mainly because of Higgins disorderly and unpredictable behaviour. Mrs. Higgins, to him, is the very idea of a lovable woman, hence he remains a bachelor. This kind of Oedipus complex, which is found in Higgins, can be seen in Shaw himself.

Most of the women in Shaw's plays are endowed with motherliness which Shaw's mother and the Shavian mothers lacked. Candida is another best example of Shaw's mother – woman. The mother – like qualities have been consistently seen in the play. Candida's appearing on the stage for the first time has been well – timed and Shaw gives a picturesque stage direction. Candida has just come in, and is looking at them with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression. She is a woman of 33, well built, well nourished, likely to become matronly later on, but now quite at her best, with the double charm of youth and motherhood, a wise hearted observer.

Nora Reilly in John Bull's Other Island is a young woman whose self respect does not permit her to be a daring pursuer. But she has motherly qualities which are revealed when Broadbent behaves romantically with her perhaps under the influence of alcohol. Instead of being angry with him she takes his arm with motherly solicitude and urges him gently towards the path.

Even Joan in St Joan who disowns her woman lines is not without motherly qualities. She is motherly particularly towards the Diuphin, calling him Charlie and treating him like a child "Thou poor child, thou hast never prayed in the life. I must teach thee from the beginning.

The funniest example of motherliness of Shaw's women is seen in Queen Jemima in The Apple Cart. Having been insignificant throughout the play, she becomes motherly instinctively when she fears that her husband is overworking. She consoles Magnus to come for dinner "Like a good little boy."

II. LITERARY REVIEW

Critics have analyzed Shavian woman from different angles. Erie Bentley groups them as 'capable unromantic women,' 'passionate woman,' 'newer new women' and 'the girl heroines.' Nethercot has discussed Shavian heroines as

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'womanly woman', 'the pursuing women' 'the mother women', 'the New woman' 'the younger generation' and 'the manly woman'.

Elsie Adams finds the Shavian women as " permutations of basic literary type" mother, goddess." However, the various categories suggested by the critics are of often overlapping.

While the motherly quality in almost all the heroines has already been discussed, it will be convenient to study the Shavian heroines under two broad divisions, namely, the pursuing woman and the independent women. A brief analysis of Shaw's philandering nature, the causes and effects of it, and his socio – economic and philosophic ideas will help to understand the Shavian women in this proper perspective.

According to the Shavian Life force theory, woman is the primary wooer in the evolutionary process. Woman is creating and forming the race, preoccupied with the future human race whereas man, required only for a brief period in the biological process, is to concentrate on intellectual and social problems. Fearing to lose him, woman keeps man in domesticity by showing feigned interest in his intellectual and social pursuits. While ordinary man yields to this ensnaring of woman, the genius escapes to fulfill his allotted function of the Life force.

Shavian philosophy has often been attributed to his androgynous nature: " I am probably ninety percent female and the other one percent or so male. Have you ever met a pure female ?, I haven't " Shaw probably never met a pure female. The women, whom he knew intimately, were either actresses with independent views or married woman who did not have happy married lives. His experiences with these women- women like Alice Lockett, Jenny Patterson, Eleanor Marx, May Morris, Annie Besant, Edith Nesbit Bland, Kate Salt, Janet Achurch, Florence Farr and Ellen Terry must have resulted in this theories. It was Jenny Patterson who broke Shaw's virginity when he was 29. Perhaps because Shaw preferred woman who knew what they were doing , all the women with whom Shaw was philandering were married women. The most paradoxical incident in the life of the incorrigible philanderer was his unconsummated marriage with Payne Townshend.

The war of 1914 – 1918 brought a welcome change. The war was a massacre of men, but it resulted in the liberation of women. England could no longer deny women the rights they demanded as their labour was indispensable. The suffrage, which was grudgingly given to women, though Shaw was not quite optimistic about the right use of it, was symbolic of the rise in the status of women. Better education and wider opportunities enabled women to advance and win recognition on their own merits in society. Two prominent examples among them are Annie Besant and Beatrice Webb.

III. ANALYSIS OF MOTHERLINESS AND INDEPENDENT QUALITIES OF WOMEN

Shaw's preference goes to such independent women who are not socially, economically and intellectually inferior to men. However, the Shavian women is a paradox herself. If She is to fulfil her primary duty, according to the Life Force theory, she has to pursue man and has to depend on him at least for biological reasons, Whereas Shaw would very much prefer woman to be independent of man socially and

economically. In Shaw's plays, one finds both types of women convincingly characterized. Shavian woman like Vivie Warren, Eliza Doolittle and Joan are independent while women like Blanche, Raina, Gloria and Ann Whitefield are pursuing women, fulfilling the dictates of the life Force. But, as an artist, Shaw has created both types women as individuals making use of his acute observation and fertile imagination

IV. RESULT OF MOTHERLINESS AND INDEPENDENT QUALITIES OF SHAVIAN WOMEN

Shaw's independent women thrive and improve themselves against odds. Eliza, a flower girl, hence, meets Higgins with the intention on learning pronunciation. So that she could start a flower shop, She, being an intelligent girl, pick up, not only pronunciation but also manners and a sense of independence. She has passed from gutter into a refined world. Shaw effectively brings out the contrast between the two positions of Eliza through stage directions and her style of language.

While Eliza is thankful to Higgins for having taught her Phonetics, she is all gratitude for Pickering for having always treated her like a lady. She has by now acquired a fine sensibility and a sense of independence. She tells Pickering how she feels after her transformation, in a refined style, which itself is a sign of her change. Humiliated by the lack of appreciation on the part of Higgins, after having been presented as a lady, Eliza declares that she can do without him. Her education is complete and she has acquired intellectual independence, which is symbolically marked by her hurling slippers at Higgins.

Joan, independent woman of Shaw, dies as a martyr. Shaw, while describing Joan, does not refer to any of her feminine charms. She is dressed in red, and "able bodied country girl of 17 or 18." Her first words in the plot are quite shocking to Captain Robert, as they communicate, as Joan claims, instructions from God to Captain Robert through Joan: " Captain: you are to give me a horse and armor and some soldiers, and send me to the Dauphin. Those are your orders from my Lord." Shaw is very careful in the character – delineation of Joan. Though he makes use of coincidences quite effectively in the form of miracles, he keeps Joan quite innocent of them. The only miracle she claims to achieve is to make the Dauphin, the king of France.

As long as Joan is helpful for the success of the French army, she and her " voices " are respected, even feared. Once the victory is achieved, Joan becomes superfluous and her " voices" become blasphemous. When Joan is arrested, the French do not go to her rescue. When she is trailed in the Ecclesiastical Court, Joan is found guilty. If she apologizes, accepting the guilt, she will live. Joan consents to apologize hoping to live freely. But when she comes to know that she will be kept in prison till death, she prefers to be burnt, on the stakes. Joan is burnt on the stakes. She appears again in the epilogue, canonized. But her tone is sadder: " O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

In her sense of frustration and the gradual loss of faith in the educability of man himself, Joan can be compared with king Magnus. As an iconoclast, she has felt differently, behaved differently, hoping to improve the society where sense of freedom is respected and other religions are tolerated.

A sign of her independent thinking, which is almost a sacrilege for others, is Joan's dress. She is always in man's dress. She has no taste of an ordinary woman: " I am a soldier: I do not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman. I do not care for the things women care for. They dreams of lovers, and of money. I dreams of leading a charge, and of placing the big guns."

V. CONCLUSION

Thus an in-depth study of Shavian women in various directions, one may conclude that Shaw has drawn his women in unsentimental and unromantic terms. Most of his women are unpleasant and unsexed women. As a matter of fact the world of Bernard Shaw has a large place for women. He honoured women showing in his plays that they were not only to be loved, but respected. Shaw's family situations and contemporary social conditions must have gone a long way in formulating his concept of woman. Shaw's inferiority complex and androgynous nature must have had considerable impact on his ideas on women.

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