

George Bernard Shaw: Dramatist with a Purpose

Abstract

The name of reverend George Bernard Shaw needs no introduction to those are of literary taste. He was an iconoclast and through the dramas he has touched almost all aspects of human life along with zeal to uplift the miserable condition of the society as whole. He wrote on War and heroism, Prostitution, political ethics, prostitution, Marriage, Preachers, Doctors, Nationalism and what not. He has a powerful signature in support of humanity and justice. He was a man on a pious mission i.e. reform the society and to make this world a place worth to live in with harmony and equality.

Keywords: Bernard Shaw as a Reformer and an Iconoclast Provide Space to His Theory of Life Force.

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw was a dramatist of that age which was really facing a lot of problems related to politics. So he made his plays and theatre as a means of social and political change. Through his plays he advocated the principles of justice and socialism, equality and liberty. As a philosopher and judge he evaluated approximately each form of government and gave his own conclusion. As a Fabian Socialist and dramatist he was in the favour of a strong government that can achieve the interests of society as a whole.

There was situation of cold war in his age between the two broad divisions of society i.e.; capitalists and communists. The capitalists hated the government control and interference. They always tried to handle have not's according to their own benefit. He observed the difference between production and distribution, poor and miserable condition of laborers, class consciousness and birth of class conflict.

The whole condition of the society became unbearable for the dramatist because poverty was shocking and even the talented people were suffering a lot. Shaw boldly blamed the prevailing capitalistic structure and showed his anxiety against these evils of society through his plays like *Widower's House*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Major Barbara* and *The Apple Cart*. He did not showed any shortcut or preach the audience but he leaves it to his audience and readers to think out the nature of the reform themselves. He strongly opposed this organized robbery and raised his voice:

*"A shop keeper or a coal merchant may not pick your pocket; by the may overcharge you as much as he likes. Everyone is free in business to get as much as give as little for his money as he can induce his customers to put up with."*¹

Like Karl Marx, he was also of the opinion that the capitalistic money or property is nothing else but "theft" and unearned. He was against the system of business in which all the profit goes to one hand without considering the others. In *Candida*, Morell hated the business tactics of Burgess and called him:

*"... the lowest, because you paid worse wages than any other employer, starvation wages- aye, worse than starvation wages- to women who made the clothing. Your wages would have driven them to the streets to keep body and soul together. Those women were my parishioners. I shamed the Guardians out of accepting your tender; I shamed the ratepayers out of letting them do it: I shamed everything but you."*²

He did not accept the concept of Police state and governing the people with terrible methods, violent means of administration and iron discipline were condemned by him. He expressed his views of an ideal state in the words:

"In my dreams it is a country where the state is the church and the church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in



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which work is play and ply is life: it is a temple in which the priest is the worshiper and the worshiper the worshipped: three in one and one in three. It is God-head in which all life is human and all humanity divine...³

Shaw's plays have stood the test of the time and place. His plays are admired by the Indian writers and scholars. His plays were in help of solving many problems in the country, it will not be untruthful to point out that Shaw was acquainted with most of the Indian problems. Shaw was affirmative in context of self government in India and expressed as following:

*"The ablest men in India are forced to waste their time and energy on demand for self government which should be achieved at once at any cost to set them free for real service to their country."*⁴

In respect of Home Rule in India, Shaw gave his views as follows:

*"There is no question of granting self government, England can't grant separation to India, The Indians must take it. They must create a situation in which only by setting an English soldier with a rifle to stand over every Indian which is numerically impossible, could British rule be maintained."*⁵

Shaw was of the opinion that all the backward countries should be allowed to have their own way otherwise they would live as rebellions slaves to Britain. He also forbade the British rule for creating obstacle in the path of the progress of the poor and backward nations. He was a man who gave importance to human values. Regarding nationalism Shaw commented in Preface to John Bull's Island:

"... A healthy nation is unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones, but if y break a nations nationality it will think of nothing else but getting it set again. It will listen to no reformer, to no philosopher, to no preacher, until the demand to the nationalist is granted. It will attend to the business however vital except the business of unification and liberation."

The above statement shows Shaw was the supporter of Indian freedom and that too in the premises of his country. He has visited India during his abroad journey. Shaw knows a lot about the principles of Lord Buddha and Lord Krishna. In preface to Saint Joans he remarked:

*"All the popular religions in the world are made apprehensible by an array of legendary personage with an Almighty father, and sometimes a mother and divine child, as the central figure. These are presented to the mind's eye in childhood and the result is hallucination which persists strongly thoroughly life when it has been well impressed.....inspiration which is continually following in the universe....the Celestial vision. And when in the case of exceptionally imaginative persons, especially those practicing certain appropriate austerities, the hallucination extends from the mind's eyes to the body's, the visionary sees Krishna or the Buddha or the Blessed Virgin or St. Catherine as the case may be."*⁶

There was a harmony in the living of Hindus and Muslims before 1947 in India. The poor Indians became the victims of British imperialism before 1947.

Pandit Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and so many other leaders fought for Indian freedom. Shaw had full sympathy with these freedom fighters. He also met Mahatma Gandhi in "England and appreciated Gandhi's weapons of truth and Non violence. Due to riots of 1946-47 in India many Muslims left their houses and migrated to Pakistan with no hopes for bright future. Many Hindus left their homes and lands in Pakistan and started their journey for an unknown India. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 created a lot of political, social and economic problems for the migrants. In Saint Joan Shaw exposed the prejudices between Catholics and Protestants. Shaw was against racial prejudices and religious fanaticism and respected man as man. Through this tragedy he satirized the feudal lords of France and England who exploited the poor.

In Indian economy the gap has widened between Haves and Have not's. The Apple Cart presents a solution to such economic problems. Indian affairs can be checked only when there is a Superman in the position of the Prime Minister and President who must be without personal greed and desire for selfish material gains. Towards the end of the Revolutionist's Handbook Shaw expressed as following:

*"Take care to get what you lie or what you will be forced to like what you get. Where there is no ventilation fresh air is declared unwholesome where there is no religion hypocrisy becomes good taste. Where there is no knowledge ignorance calls itself science"*⁷

India is suffering with illiteracy, migration from rural areas to urban centers, different religions, partition in sub castes and creeds. All religions preached talks about righteousness honesty, non violence, sincerity, kindness and goodwill among the people depending on the principles of the Ramayana , Mahabharat, The Gita, The Vedas and The Purans etc. But people followed the traditional values and cash more money without bothering for ethical values, adulteration is common. Religion is only a ritual and practice of truth is ignored by almost all the common people. People send their children to schools and college for teaching them job tricks and not to make them noble citizens. There is a crisis of faith in society. In the last chapter of the Revolutionist's Handbook Shaw asked people not be hopeless about the situation which is clear from following lines:

*"Where there is a will, there is a way. If there be no will we are lost. That is a possibility for our crazy little empire, if not for the universe; and so much possibilities are not to be entertained without despair, we must whilst we survive, proceed on the assumption that we have still energy enough to not only will to live, but to will live better, That may mean that we must establish a state department of evolution with a seat in the cabinet for its chief are revenue to defray the private persons to achieve successful results. It may mean a private society or a chartered company for the improvement of human live stack."*⁸

Shaw further expressed:

But for the present it is far likely to mean a blatant repudiation of such proposals as indecent and immoral with

nevertheless a general secret pushing of human will in the repudiated direction ; so that all sort of institutions and public authorities will under some pretext or other feel their way furtively towards the superman.”⁹

Regarding the creation of Superman Shaw said:

“One thing at least is clear to begin with. If a woman can, by careful selection of father and nourishment of herself, produce a citizen with efficient senses, sound organs and a good digestion, she should clearly be secured a sufficient reward for that natural service to make her willing to undertake and repeat it .Whether she be financed in the undertaking by herself, or by the father or by speculative capitalist by departmentmaintaining her on the strength.....or by the central government does not matter provided the result be satisfactory.”¹⁰

Judiciary is the only hope for the protection of democratic setup. For these state authorities have got to be respected and obeyed by the people. Shaw clarified the situation and asserted:

“In our present happy-so-lovely industrial disorder all the human products successful or not, would have to be thrown on the labour market; but the unsuccessful ones would not entitle the company to a bounty and so would be a dead loss to it. The practical commercial difficulty would be the uncertainty and the cost in time and money of the first experiments. Purely commercial capital would not touch such heroic operations during the experimental stage.... It will have to be handled by statesmen with character enough to tell our democracy and plutocracythe matter must be taken up either by the state or by some organization strong enough to impose respect upon the state.”¹¹

The Indians love liberty, equality and other democratic values. India is after all the greatest and largest democratic country of the world. We have made tremendous progress in the field of industries, computer technologies, agriculture etc and a lot has got to be done. In Apple Cart Shaw confirmed that there is no end of public service there is one national problem after another and cycle goes on.

Shaw actual problems of contemporary life and civilization with amazing coverage and did not seek an imaginative escape into a visionary world. He wanted to make through is dramas a better society. His basic aim was the bettering of the humanity; Shaw is a social realist of simple nature. Shaw wrote dramas on so many themes as slums, prostitution, marriage, war and heroism, social prejudices and religion and so many. He also remarked for the solution of questions of morality and immorality, rich and poor , nationality and non nationalists , honest and dishonest ethical and non ethical, adulterated and non adulterated , sincere and non sincere, teachers, lawyers, doctors etc.

Gupta says in his play The Doctor's Dilemma “A poor doctor is according to him the most dangerous thing on earth because he has to live on the disease of others and to invent and prescribe medicines even when these are unnecessary.”¹² According to Shaw the diseases are generally caused by poverty because poor become unable to spend money on expensive medicines and necessary testing and over work may be the another reason for their illness. Shaw as a socialist thinks so and tells it the duty of society to cure the diseases by introducing socialism. His first two recipes are, writes Sen Gupta- “1- Nothing is more dangerous than a poor

doctor not even a poor employer or a poor landlord. 2- Of all anti-social vested interests the worst is the vested interest in ill health”¹³

It is reality that a piece of literary art is meant for all ages all kinds of people which motivate the classes as well as the masses, direct and delight the readers by all means. Shaw emphasized the improvement in social and political structure of the country of his time. He touched all the aspects as education, character of parents and children, teachers, preachers, prostitution, classes and what not. Shaw raised the voice of workers against British imperialism, Indian liberty and upliftment of the society. He asserted the evolution as the only hope for social progress.

George Bernard Shaw had an encyclopedic knowledge of human affair and he played the role of social reformer very well. In drastically changing world he was a dramatist with a purpose; purpose, a pious one, social welfare.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of present study is to evaluate the applicability of the theories and ideals of George Bernard Shaw especially in Indian context, those he explored through the medium of his memorable plays. Like in Indian scenario there are consistent problems regarding politics, poverty, religion , morality, ethics & values and this paper is humble effort of mine to sort out at least an outcome to the regressive diseases persisting in the society.

Conclusion

After the thorough analysis of some of the plays of the reverend George Bernard Shaw it would be said that all the persisting regressive problems regarding the politics, poverty, religion, morality, ethics & values may be overcome only with the help of positive and rational thinking that would be gained only after the acceptance of his theory of life force. According to Shaw no one can help unless the mass will realize the importance of zeal for evolution. This is something that comes from the instinct, which compels one to feel the necessity to live life as life, not as a punishment or means of persuasion. So the present paper clearly shows that as a dramatist Shaw has done wonderfully as a reformer and the theories and solutions are still can be the panacea for the incurable social diseases.

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