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Fervour for Femocracy Reflected in the Works of George Bernard Shaw: A Study of His Plays with Reference to the Synergising Feminist and Democratic Ideologies

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Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time.

-H. W. Longfellow

Abstract

It is the truth universally acknowledged that conventionality is not morality. All that is accepted may not be absolute every time but could just be a time bound adjustment to make the 'system' work in itself at a particular period. But as time changes, the laws, rules, or socio- economic codes which permeated one particular era, may stand obsolete for another phase of time; the blow to it always comes in the form of reaction expecting one to retrospect over the existing dichotomy as well as change in the system to meet the changing needs of time. Some may take a safer stance by operating within the system to make it work in itself as well as to keep themselves floating while some may abrogate the norms to change the foundations and re- construct the whole order to adapt to the new surroundings. George Bernard Shaw (26th July 1856-2nd November, 1950) belongs to the second band of reactionists, who will not mind bearing wrath of socio- Cultural temper to unveil hard core reality. A non- conformist 'naughty nineties' writer of partly Victorian era and basically early twentieth century created a new vista through his 'unpleasant' plays by focusing the basis of society in his attempt " to take literatures seriously," the fact pinpointed by his later successor T. S. Eliot; as a committed dramatist, he 'strip (ped) the ragged follies of the time. Naked, as at their birth and with a whip of steel, print (ed) wounding lashes in the iron ribs.' If, for him, 'every great truth commences with blasphemy,' Shaw's blatant attack did not spare anything and anyone right from slum landlordism, quackery, false notions of Valour, prostitution, idealization of femininity and all. In his propagandist mission to expose all evils, His fervour for 'femocracy' is grabbing attention even in the twenty first century and makes him win unequivocally, the label of ' Male feminist' along with being an 'odd-man- out' to his own milieu. The term, a geological compounding of ' female' and ' cracy'

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and so 'women's rule's has been interchangeably used for women Empowerment and women's era has been a buzzword in intellectual as well as 'society' circle in today's time. Shaw, in his fierce endeavour to withdraw women from the stock image of 'angel in the house', undoubtedly becomes the recipient of 'femocrat' tag.

Keywords- Non-Conformist, Unpleasant, Femocrat

Problem Statement: Being a forerunner of femocracy, George Bernard Shaw portrays the 'emerging 'face of the 'new woman'.

Introduction

It is the fact universally acknowledged that most men are forgotten after death. Not so great people. They leave footprints on the sands of time. These footprints get embedded in our minds. Here they stay and make us feel their presence all the time. By living in our minds, these truly great people cast a paramount influence upon us and thus remain immortal. So was the case with George Bernard Shaw in whose case the success was deferred but not denied and by the end of the First World War he had become a cult. Apart from being a problem Playwright, Fabian Socialist, he is today equally recognized as a male- feminist being a Proto- femocrat.

Objectives:

- 1) To awaken the consciousness of people, irrespective of being Male or female regarding gender equality.
- 2) To sensitise the readers regarding the broader role of femocracy to fulfill the purpose of democracy in a truest sense.

Benefits:

- 1) The research paper will work in the direction of pinpointing the importance of divergent path, 'the road not taken', to bring out healthy revolutionary changes as Shaw did through his plays.
- 2) It will also foreground the concept of gender openness in the minds of people and even broaden the outlook of people towards the so-called 'second sex' that a woman is not a 'Barbie doll' to be purchased or sold as well as not to be taken for granted.

Research Method:

- 1) Type of the Research: In this paper, the writer resorts to Descriptive- Qualitative method because it is based on the materials collected from the primary sources, especially the dramas by Shaw like *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, etc.

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2) Type of Data Required for the Study:

- a) Primary Data: The primary data source of the study is the dramas written by George Bernard Shaw and his other works based on his ideologies.
- b) Secondary Data: The secondary sources of data comprise Shaw's biography, interviews published, critical reviews of his works etc.

3) Techniques of Data Collection:

In this case, the writer uses two techniques of collecting data:

- a) Observation: This step is used to make our research more penetrative, by reaching the depth of the matter which involves actual reading of the texts.
- b) Library Research: This involves reading journals, literary Reviews, Encyclopedias focused on the dramas, viewpoints foreshadowed by George Bernard Shaw.

4) Technique of Data Analysis: Our research paper is Descriptive and Qualitative and so the concept of femocracy is elucidated in the light of male- Feminism foregrounded by George Bernard Shaw with special reference to his 'Emerging New Woman'.

Literature Review:

Being a Fabian Socialist, Shaw never thought of 'compromising with the situation 'in order to keep himself 'floating 'in the competition of societal acceptance. So, no sugar-coating of conventions which are constrictive and derogatory, which marred his reputation, too, in his times as 'unpleasant 'or for that matter, 'a Problem Playwright'. So, the idea of 'gendering' of labour was totally against the precepts. Equality in all respects barring the gender is the quintessential aspect of many of his dramas apart from slum landlordism, prostitution, language issues, domestic roles, zingoism, etc. For chronological convenience, one had better commence with *Arms and the Man* (1894). Being a satire on military, it is an amusing exposure of the glory of war and romantic love. The story is based on an incident in a war between Bulgaria and Austria in 1885. The Petkoffs represent an aristocratic Bulgarian family consisting of Major Petkoff, his wife Catherine and his daughter Raina whose head is full of romance and who is in love with Sergius claimed to be a military hero. Into this circle enters a common soldier, Bluntschli, a Swiss, who has joined the Serbian army as a mercenary soldier. He has no illusions about war, places the naked truth about it when he happens to seek shelter in Raina's bedchamber one night from the ruthless shooting of the Bulgarians. The Swiss soldier in this context behaves, as Shaw maintains, a soldier actually should behave, not in keeping with the conventions of Victorian melodrama. The play exhibits what Shaw calls 'natural morality 'as against the 'romantic morality' of those who objected to it. Even Raina's transition from 'becoming 'to fully 'being's in

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making a right choice of a life partner has unveiled the seeds of femocrat in Shaw. The hero of Raina's dreams, Sergius is really a humbug, and his so-called military exploits and glory are mere sham. He is not only a false hero on the battlefield but also in love. Though he is in love with and engaged to Raina, he flirts with the servant-maid Louka. In course of time, it is found that Raina herself cares for her 'chocolate cream soldier', Bluntschli, than for her professed lover, Sergius and grows into a 'thinking, reasoning, evolved' woman. A femocrat in Shaw has found better expression over here.

His *Candida* (1895) too, deserves a special mention here. The play which owes much to Ibsen's influence, attacks the institution of marriage, gives a new meaning to 'the eternal triangle' and champions woman's freedom. Tackling a domestic problem, Shaw makes it a point that it is not sentimentalism but intelligence that governs life. This explains why *Candida* eventually chooses the strong man Morel and not the poet, Marchbank, her sentimental lover.

Close on the heels of *Arms and the Man* and *Candida*, it is *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898) foregrounding the attention of critics when comes to the matter of Male feminism. The play deals with the social and economic aspects of prostitution. It is based on the flinty facts of social economics and Shaw boldly faces the ugliness and brutality of life. It is concerned with a coarse mother and a cold daughter; the mother drives the ordinary and dirty trade of harlotry. The daughter does not know till the end the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. The daughter Vivie Warren, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an iceberg of contempt, which is indeed a very womanly thing to do so; the mother explodes into pulverizing cynicism of so-called 'tainted wealth' which is also very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping like the daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe the trade by which she lives. A male-feminist in Shaw becomes articulate when he makes it a point that prostitution is caused 'not by female depravity and Male licentiousness' but by the poverty and drudgery to which women are generally condemned. Incidentally it refers to the emancipation of the 'New Woman' through his mouthpiece Vivie Warren, who defies Victorian expectations of an obedient woman. She is educated and entirely self-sufficient. She rejects two marriage proposals, reflecting her Reliance on her work ethic and hard-headed approach to life and thus appears to be a product of Gender reformation: a character who is asexual and 'permanently unromantic', not a stereotypical 'Victorian dainty doll' where 'sweetness and Goodness all compact.'

Proto-feminist in Shaw gets evidently Reflected in 'Caesar and Cleopatra' (1899), a puritanical play based on war against romance and heroism, as regards to the matter of his revitalization and reshaping of historical characters Caesar and Cleopatra. While Caesar is a Shavian hero, not so much as "best riding the earth like a colossus"¹ rather "walking the earth with a sort of

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stern levity lightly touching the planet and yet spinning it away like a stone”² his Cleopatra too, in ‘her story’ appears to be more a human, with all her pros and cons, transiting from a ‘girl queen’ to a responsible co- ruler of Egypt with Ptolemy Dionysus, her brother while in his ‘Man and Superman’ (1903), a woman comes out to be ‘ the Life Force’, giving a blow to pervasive, patriarchal ideology foregrounding the view that in every culture, it is the woman who force men to marry them rather than the men who take the initiative. In this drama, too, Male dichotomy gets broken when Ann Whitefield finally persuades John Tanner to marry her, choosing him over her more persistent suitor, a young man, Tanner’s friend, named Octavius Robinson.

The same defiance and not “acquiescence to subjugation’ is reinstated in *Major Barbara* (1905) where we witness the interrogation of the actions of capitalist father by a noble enthusiastic girl who becomes a Salvation Army Officer. Barbara Undershaft, an idealistic young woman, is engaged in helping the poor as a Major in the Salvation Army in London. For many years, Barbara and her siblings have been estranged from their father, Andrew Undershaft, who now reappears as a rich and successful munitions maker. Undershaft, the father gives money to the Salvation Army, which offends Major Barbara, who does not want to be connected to his ‘tainted’ wealth. However, the father argues that poverty is a worse problem than munitions and claims that he is doing more to help society by giving his workers jobs and a steady income than Major Barbara is doing to help them by giving them bread and soup.

This questioning, reasoning woman recurs even in *Getting Married* (1908). It features a cast of family members who gather together for a marriage. The play analyses and satirizes the status of marriage in Shaw's day, with a particular focus on the necessity of liberalising divorce laws, which will be in the interest of both men and Women, through his mouthpieces like Edith Bridgenorth, Cecil Sykes, Lesbia Grantham while in *Misalliance* (1910) we find his Lina Szczepanowska to be going against tide, rejecting marriage proposal in favour of retaining her independence; financially, intellectually and physically and goes with Bentley Summerhays, who finds a shaky new courage, up into the air with her at the conclusion of the play. In this respect, his *Eliza Dolittle* (*Pygmalion*, 1913) and *Annajanska* (*Annajanska, the Bolshevick Empress: A Revolutionary Romancelet*, 1917), too deserve the same mention.

Limitations: The research paper has confined itself only to Bernard Shaw and his Selected Plays, even when the list of Male Proto- feminist writers is quite long.

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Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion, it is totally getting manifested that Shaw was a feminist long before the term became familiar or fashionable. Running counter to the spirit of the age, as a Fabian socialist and Democrat, in his plays and prefaces, he exposes the iniquities suffered by women. His women characters do not conform to the Victorian notions of femininity. As a femocrat, he was the first to present *the new woman* on the British stage. Even his portrayal of great historical figures like Cleopatra, Joan of Arc and Catherine II, shatters their romantic image. This de-romanticized new woman strips off the double standards, shruggishness of Victorian morality which made his heroines appear 'unwomanly' and hence unacceptable to a fast fading Victorian morality. Since we cannot accept any change all of a sudden, the situations develop over a period of time and then reach its culmination to deviation into a norm, in keeping with this cycle of societal change, in this twenty first century, Shaw appears to be a 'worthy torchbearer' of femocrats' clan.

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