

REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL EVILS IN THE PLAYS OF G. B. SHAW

Dr. Poonam*

Associate professor, Department of English
Hindu Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Sonipat (Hr.), India

Email ID: poonamfogat80@gmail.com

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw is opposed to capitalism and imperialism since they are the causes of wars and social unrest. Shaw abhors violence and death, whether it be in battle or for sport, as a civilised man. The only way to achieve the good, to strengthen social ties and discipline, in his opinion, is through equality. The only thing that truly promotes peace and prosperity on this planet is equality. Shaw lived in the late Victorian era, yet his time period is known as the Shavian age because he was one of the few English writers who had the ability to sway readers with his potent prose. Shaw expressed his views verbally through the use of art. He used humour to explain matters that were quite serious. He believes that humour is the finest approach to convey the harsh facts of society and to illuminate the many elements of the social problem. He was a social reformer, and his comics expressed his beliefs. His voice had distinction. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1952 for his idealistic and humanistic works. Shaw is an insightful thinker. He perceives the truth and communicates it via art, which he believes to be the most effective teaching tool. His perspectives and 246 firm beliefs are frequently explained in lengthy prefaces and epilogues. He believes that the most crucial role of all the arts is social criticism. Shaw aims to inform and persuade his audience that society's issues should all be taken seriously and that earnest attempts should be made to address all of the personal and societal difficulties.

Paper Identification



**Corresponding Author*

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Introduction: G.B. Shaw's plays demonstrate his intellectual zeal in identifying the basic causes of societal and personal evil that, in turn, lead to social unrest and personal and social disorder. Therefore, it is only natural that his comedic plays reveal his cerebral struggle at both reforming society and the individual. He thus thinks that an artist must act as a reformer. He believes that in order to be a reformer and fight for social change and a better life, a man needs put in a lot of effort. According to him, the playwright must simultaneously play the roles of an artist and a preacher, utilising his writing to combat the various social, political, and economic evils that are pervasive in society. His plays reveal that he has a unique perspective on life compared to other people. Shaw examined slum landlordism, prostitution, marriage, free love, politics, militarism, nationalism, capitalism, and other ideologies rife with hypocrisy and deceit as a social reformer. He had been a socialist, vegetarian, and pacifist all of his life. Shaw had a vision of a society in which every man may live in complete freedom, independence, and harmony, regardless of class, gender, or colour. He could not accept any evil, whether it existed in a person or a societal institution, due to his extremely acute and penetrating eyesight. Thus, sarcasm, irony, and comedy are traits of his writing. Whenever he discovered or encountered any evil or imbalance, he satirised without reserve. Earnest Reynolds comments:

the English Drama was an ostrich unwilling to draw its head out of the comfortable golden sands of force, pageantry and poetic melodrama into the rational area of discussion and intellectual progress. It is only 59 due to Shaw that this unwilling ostrich compelled to breathe this fresh air. (Reynolds 16).

Shaw is one of the most famous playwrights in the world who has addressed the problem of evil appearing in various forms. Shaw's profoundly sensitive intellectual concerns set his work apart. He frequently emphasised how his art was both intellectually and socially engaged. Therefore, each of his plays is connected to specific concepts, ideologies, and social issues. Shaw plunders every aspect of society as a writer of brilliance. He always focuses his creative attention on institutions related to society, culture, politics, and religion.

Shaw's hatred for glorifying war and desire for people to be aware of the horrible consequences of war are both made clear in *Arms and the Man*. He uses irony as a powerful tool to destroy romantic ideas about conflict. In this play, Raina likes her fiancé Sergius because he survives the war and becomes a hero. Heroes are admired for their bravery, courage, and capacity to overcome death. Raina eventually realizes, however, that Sergius and others did not win the war due to their bravery and courage, but rather due to the inferior weapons and ammunition used by the enemy, which led to their defeat. In reality, Shaw is attacking from two angles—those who exalt in war as well as those who seem to have won. Any war's inevitable conclusion is annihilation.

Arms and the Man is one of the four plays referred to as the Pleasant plays. This play first appeared in print in 1894. Shaw wants his readers to know that they are not excluded from his criticism of social evils in his comments. While reading his pieces, he makes the audience laugh, but he also gets them to consider their surroundings carefully. His use of the comedic aspect serves as a vehicle for, rather than an end in itself, his moral message. This play is set in 1885, at the height of the Serbo-Bulgarian conflict. Young Bulgarian girl Raina, the book's protagonist, is betrothed to Sergius, a military hero in her eyes. Bluntschli, a Swiss volunteer for the Serbian army, barges into her bedroom one night and begs her to conceal him so he won't be killed. Raina agrees, even though she believes the man to be a coward, especially after learning that his only weapon is chocolate rather than pistol rounds. The protagonist and primary example of realism in this drama is Bluntschli, who has no preconceived notions about how war actually works. Instead than droning on about bravery, he gives Raina a completely new perspective on battle as experienced by a professional. He explains her that soldiers must not be categorised by braves and cowards but; “the experienced soldiers are those who are not particularly keen about dying first.”(*Arms and the Man* 66).

Critics thought Bluntschli's fondness for chocolates over cartridges was the most absurd of Shaw's ridiculous ideas; Bluntschli is not your typical soldier, Shaw says. Shaw claims that chocolate is simply one of the most popular foods a soldier could have because it was the cheapest and most people could easily get it in order to fill their bellies and stop feeling hungry. This is done in a realistic setting. Then, during a conflict, chocolate can be utilized for soldiers who don't have access to enough food, thus it is more than just a simple treat for kids. One of the most horrifying things Shaw says about war is that it puts people under unnatural pressure. Under the pressure of hunger, thirst, exhaustion, or dread, a person's endurance is limited, and this bad situation may cause him to regress into a state of beastliness. Man has always been

known to eat, drink, or do the most amazing things under pressure to survive in this natural way. Allardyce Nicolle observes as; “the desire for liberty in domestic and in moral circle was paralleled by the desire for liberty in social life” (Nicolle 78).

Shaw paints a vivid picture of the awful conditions in which the impoverished live, and when they look around them, all they perceive is the tragedy of contemporary civilization, the devastation of war, and the depression. That’s why Shaw referred this play as an anti-romantic comedy. Shaw pokes fun at war in humorous ways, yet the humor is so intense that it almost makes you cry. When he tells his Bulgarian guests the tale of his own companion and twelve other men who were burned alive in a wood yard fire after being shot in the thigh by a stray bullet, Bluntschli is forced to convey the horrors of war in such an informal manner that it seems both awful and silly. All the characters are horrified by this terrible tale. Shaw satires on war as; “Oh war, the dream of patriots and the heroes, is a fraud, Bluntschli! A hollow sham like love!” (*Arms and the Man* 122).

We must fight because it is a necessary evil, according to Shaw, when there is no other option but to go to war. According to him, all soldiers are naturally foolish and cowards during battle, and food is more crucial than weapons. It is the soldier's responsibility to safeguard and protect his life as much as he can, even if that means leaving the battlefield. Shaw is opposed to glorifying war and implores people to fully see its terrible truth and not to be misled by it. In his opinion; “Soldiering is the coward’s art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm’s way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage, and never, on account, fight him on equal terms.” (Shaw 30). Shaw wants the Swiss democracy, a realist, and a mercenary, the better of the two worlds, to fulfil his goal in the drama.

According to Shaw, institutions like the church and the classroom teach people valuable lessons, and just like these institutions, the theatre conveys its ideas to its audience by staging a fight. The audience is drawn in by this battle because it is based on a real-life occurrence, such as a general conflict or "war," and it compels them to consider ways to stop this destructive and horrific evil. War results from a brutal force a desire to kill and perish. All of Shaw's plays have conflict, but this one only features a disagreement over one of the playwright's opinions on war. Sadly, society's lack of knowledge and our failure to learn from our past mistakes mean that we are doomed to repeat many of those mistakes.

In *Pygmalion*, Shaw also speaks about social evils. Shaw makes some important points about moral standards and human frailty. The play clearly highlights the disparity between men's ideas

regarding values and women throughout. The dramatist has taken into consideration social interactions and human nature in all of its forms. Colonel Pickering, Professor Henry Higgins, and Eliza Doolittle are the three important figures in the play *Pygmalion*. Eliza is a very sympathetic and sensitive young woman, in contrast to Higgins, who is conceited and has just phonetics on his mind. Women have no place in his life since he is so preoccupied with language. Indian-born Colonel Pickering is a gentleman and fluent speaker. He treats Eliza with respect, in contrast to Higgins.

The theme of the play is transformation. Higgins is confident that he can turn Eliza, a flower girl, into a duchess with his great talent. Since Eliza is the play's protagonist, changing her would be a blow to his sense of professional pride. With the assistance of Higgins, who trains her, this flower girl has suddenly evolved into a lady in just six months. He chooses the flower girl for his inspired experience of making something significant out of the inconsequential, a poor and dirty girl, since she seems so desperate and captures his attention. He views his victory as a significant professional and scientific accomplishment. He lives in an idealized and imaginary world because of this. In reality, he has consented to go through this experience in order to maintain his spiritual purity, disregarding and dismissing the tragedies and terrible practices of real life. Social life is awful, as Higgins learns, because the main forces are hypocrisy, stupidity, and snobbery. To him, civilization is only a mask.

Despite his education, he holds ideas that are opposed to conservative culture. Any reunion with society norms is seen by him as a betrayal of his integrity. He sees these customs as a cage that restrains the will of man and imperils his intelligence. It is astonishing how a flower girl in *Pygmalion* gets transformed into a duchess; this transformation results in the construction of a new persona with brand-new manners, a brand-new outlook on life, brand-new speech, and brand-new awareness of the outside world. The old character must be destroyed in order to generate the new one. In other words, Higgins must kill the flower girl in order to become a duchess.

The play tells the tale of Professor Higgins' success in educating slum dweller and Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle how to speak and act like a lady. In essence, the class system is being satirized. Even class prejudice is wrong in Shaw's eyes. Concerns over women's complete independence and self-reliance are also raised. Shaw aims to make clear that there are other differences between the rich and the poor in addition to the obvious ones related to education and socialization, as well as the desire of the poor to behave in a way similar to that of the rich. To transform Eliza into a woman means giving her liberty as Henry B. Richardson comments;

“since a lady is as much a slave of upper-class convention as the flower girl is a slave of poverty; both of them being mechanical wind up dolls full of automatic responses to social stimuli” (Richardson 45).

Eliza is viewed by Higgins as a non-living being. He comments; “The girl does not belong to anybody, is no use to anybody but me,” (Rosenthal 219). He behaves in a way as if she were a piece of property. Despite her new state, she makes the decision to leave his home and refuses to return because she no longer wants to be treated like a slave. Higgins is comparable to Satan, who tempts Eve by offering her a chocolate from the fruit bowl known as “the tree of knowledge.” Eliza's soul is destroyed as a result of his mistreatment, which is more significant to him than her voice or face. She calls him the devil as a result of all of these. In his general observations and critique of Pygmalion's societal themes, Norbert F. O'Donnell claims that the play represents a conflict between human vitality and the artificial system of middle-class normality. The basis of this system of agreements is built on the vulnerabilities of modern life. Eliza gains strength and bravery to confront life by overcoming her anxieties and uncertainties, but she also imprisons herself in the middle class system since she pursues marriage, which is a social custom.

Contrary to what the audience may have expected, Shaw does not end this particular production of the play with Eliza and Higgins being married. Even though Eliza's predicament would naturally be remedied by her marriage to Higgins, this does not occur, and the issue stays unresolved. Eliza's problem is still unsolved by Shaw. After Eliza has undergone the experiment, Higgins begins to ignore her. Pickering and Higgins both contend that Eliza must wed Freedy. She must now resolve the issue on her own. *Pygmalion* addresses the issue of education as a major theme, with a focus on women's education, their status in the workforce, and their place in society.

Shaw made an effort to persuade people to abandon their outdated social and economic ideals, despite the fact that he cannot be considered an unwavering champion of women's rights. He seems to need education to bring about such transformations. As a result, the play's narrative compels readers to consider the true meaning of education. He was more concerned with the problems that plagued London society, especially the unequal wealth distribution, the fundamental injustice of the class system, and the dominance of man in society. Eliza's life is unhappy since she has worked really hard to support herself. *Pygmalion's* conflict is really an effort to help Eliza learn how to advance in society. The play's most overtly humorous conflict is this one because the audience may identify with Eliza's blunders by employing slang and bad

grammar in their own speech. Eliza and Higgins' argument serves as a vehicle via which Shaw conveys his own ideas to the audience. She is currently struggling with loneliness and identity loss; she looks for a place to fit in in her new social setting. She feels hopeless and depressed due to her search for a new social identity and the loss of her previous identity. She needs a sense of community in order to be happy, which is crucial.

This drama criticizes the British class system, particularly that part that relates to women's conditions. Shaw shows the reality of society with all of its flaws and weaknesses throughout the presentation of Eliza in both social classes—the poor, when she is a flower girl, and the rich, when she is a duchess. At the same time, he subtly paints a clear picture of society that demonstrates its competing ideals.

To sum up, the majority of Shaw's writings, both dramatic and non-dramatic, demonstrates his unwavering commitment to improving and enhancing human life as an intellectual dramatist. He envisions a society where justice, equality, peace, and love are the norm and believes that every man has ultimate freedom. He possesses specific intellectual qualities that constitute socially transformational philosophies and ideologies due to his harsh critique of capitalism and how widespread it is in human society and the mind. His plays will always be highly regarded in the literary world. Shaw's plays make his opposition to social Darwinism, which is frequently justified by a harsh battle for dominance, very evident. Shaw's adamant opposition to war, particularly wars fought for domination and control over people and power, is also extremely easy to see. As we've already seen, he has meticulously outlined not only the consequences of wars but also their fundamental causes. He has expertly outlined the negative effects of war on interpersonal and social connections. Shaw's opposition to capitalism and imperialism puts him far more in line with the literary and intellectual debates created around the world.

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