Chapter VI

Conclusion

Shaw is a Fabian feminist who believed in gradual reform instead of a revolutionary overthrow. He was foresighted enough to know that such a change comes at the level of psychology of individuals and does includes within its reach the benefits of marginalised unlike a revolution which benefits the cause of a selected section of the society. Thus, instead of calling for a mass revolution he tried to change the set ideologies and alter the prevailing stereotypes by making people accept the desired changes after thinking over them rationally. As such, he didn’t provide any solution to the problems he presented in his plays. Instead, he discusses various points of view, opening the eyes of his audiences and readers so that they can reach that conclusion by themselves that he intended them to derive. For instance, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* points out society’s unacknowledged responsibility for prostitution; *St. Joan* demonstrates successful partnership with nature for a sustainable existence; and *Pygmalion* proves how equal opportunities of education can bring about a classless society.

His interest in improving the lot of societal affairs has been, thus, fore grounded by the critics in his plays thereby overshadowing other aspects of his dynamic works. But there is much more to Shaw’s genius than has been concluded in various researches so far. For example, Shaw’s art of characterisation; each of his characters are created keeping in mind the psychological and sociological influences to the extent that one could feel acquainted with someone like them in real life. Shaw’s mastery in this art can be understood from the personality traits of two of his oedipal characters- Henry Higgins and Frank Gardner. Although, both show mother fixation, one is self-satisfied while the other is hostile towards others. This variation in
their manifestation of mother fixation finds roots in their oral stage and anal stage fixation respectively. So minutely Shaw has taken care of each and every detail in the creation of his characters that it is nothing short of a proof of his dramatic genius. Apart from this, the apt parallels that he draws between his characters and stage setting and props also lends his work an air that is out of ordinary. His bent of mind towards the women interests also finds manifestation through several of these dramatic devices.

Unlike the Second Wave Feminists who attacked the western world with their critiques of literary oppression and atrocities on women as a discovery unprecedented, Shaw through his dramatic techniques created a whole range of contemporary literature where women freed themselves from patriarchal shackles and established themselves as equal and sometimes superior individuals much before this bondage was brought to light by the Second Wave Feminists. And it is much more than a mere coincidence that there is one playwright who is categorically ignored in all the feminist critiques of male writings given by the Second Wave Feminists and yet all the concepts, complains and tenets of the later waves of feminisms seem to address what has already been addressed by Shaw.

Beauvoir sets out at the beginning of her discussion of myth in *The Second Sex* about the metaphysical bind in which myth has such a crucial role to play. The myths she talks about are creation myths, in which women are always subsidiary (Eve as Adam’s rib and subordinate); fecundity myths which identify women with a passive body and with nature (woman as earth, man as the plough); virginity myths, in which virginity is prized in young women but feared as unmastered sexuality in older women; femme fatale myths, in which women are held responsible for the sins of the flesh and for tempting men (Eve; the figure of the mermaid; woman as vampire, symbolically castrating the male); myths of the Holy Mother (Mary, the inverse of
Eve), in which Mary is apparently glorified but only in return for her role as servant of God, and myths of the evil mother, in which fear of mothers is channelled into stepmother stories (Snow White, the goddess Kali); the Pygmalion myth, expressing the male desire to model and educate his wife; the myth of feminine mystery (Freud’s dark continent), which permits men to ignore women’s real needs and words.

The ambivalence of the myths is also identified by Beauvoir which reflects man’s essential ambivalence about nature- in women’s bodies he both reveres nature and is at the same time reminded of his natural origins in a woman’s body, and thus by correlation, of his inevitable death. Beauvoir notes that these mixed feelings are often expressed through binary opposites – a concept later developed by Hélène Cixous. A second characteristic of myth is its absolutism, that is, myth does not accept any challenge to itself in the face of proves and experience. Myth replaces an eternal truth for the multiple and group experiences of women. It fixes women into the position of “other”. Beauvoir observes that the third feature of myth materialize from the myth of feminine mystery – one which caters to the interests of the ruling male caste the most. The myth of feminine mystery is an expansion of the fact that other people are always a mystery, since others’ account of their experiences remains subjective. “Between the sexes, Beauvoir believes this mystery to be deepened by the fact that each sex has no access to the other sex’s subjective experience of sexuality (a concept which is returned to frequently in her literary readings). There is then a counterpart to ‘female mystery’ in the mystery that the subjective experience of male sexuality represents for women. But this is never described as a male mystery, not only, Beauvoir argues, because male conceptual categories are always constituted as universal and absolute, but also because there is an economic infrastructure to the notion of mystery.” (Plain and Sellers 90) The economic equal or superior is never said to be a mystery –
but the economic dependency has an alienating effect on women. The myth of feminine mystery is most influential when it sways women into believing that they are a mystery to themselves, making it impossible for them to gain recognition.

From the abundance of material on literary representations of myths, Beauvoir identifies a number of important points regarding the general functioning of the same about women. First, myths by nature are inevitably vague and contradictory. Woman is both Mary and Eve, man’s salvation and his disgrace. The purpose of myth is to represent woman according to patriarchal needs, and as opposite to whatever man considers himself to be. “Bardot replaces the femme fatale model with a child-woman model, whose tousled hair; simple dress and petulant behaviour suggest an unsophisticated child of nature who requires male taming and protection.” (Plain and Sellers, 90) Beauvoir feels that the rising popularity of the child-woman can be seen as a direct response to the growing role of women in public life. And thus, she feels the need for de-mystifying the texts of these female models.

However, Shaw identified and de-mystified many of these myths much before Beauvoir called them to notice: Pygmalion, subsidiary and child-woman myths in Pygmalion, Virgin Mary myth in Candida, virginity myth in Mrs. Warren’s Profession and fecundity myth in St. Joan. Eliza was a raw mould of clay; an almost unadulterated child of nature. Higgins who metamorphosed her into a duchess felt a claim over her on account of re-creating her speech. Just because he found her in a socially inferior position he continued to treat her like his subordinate even when she became almost his equal in articulating phonetic speech. But Shaw hasn’t created Eliza to be of the submissive kind. It was her zeal towards improving her station in life that brought her to Higgins in the first place. Thus, rejecting all the options given by Higgins while he was coaxing her to return to him, she created those option that would help her have an upper
hand over him like teaching the skills taught by Higgins to others or to his rival Nepommuck. Thus, she doesn’t submit to her creator just because she was at the inferior position of being a creation. In the sequel, she did not took to any of the options suggested by her in Act V because that wasn’t what she came to Higgins for. If she had done so, she would have continued Higgins’s tradition and thus would have served as a way for the continuation of his legacy which would have served the interests of reproduction (of skills) for bachelor Higgins and thus would have catered to the fecundity myth. But Eliza’s returning to her original purpose frees her from all the subordinations and reproductions that would have been imposed upon her just like the bet. Thus, she used her education to gain her independent status; independent not only in her position in society but also from the above mythical representation in literature.

Shavian ladies manage to turn the men to cater to their wishes: Eliza made Higgins rant and be troubled by his valuable skills and knowledge being put to auction by Eliza; Candida made Morell agree and accept the fact that she is the true head of his household and he was just a dummy figure; Joan made the sergeants to give into her whim of freeing France and Vivie made Frank give upon her without a single trace of remorse but a satisfactory smile. In Candida, the portrait of Virgin Mary finds mention in the stage setting of the first Act as Shaw had planned to break this myth and reverse the positions in the end. Candida was portrayed in the beginning as a devoted caregiver just like Mary who submits to Morell’s desires making his home a Heaven. In all the conventional portraits Mary has been shown to worship her son, Jesus. But here, ‘Mary’ of Morell’s household assumes a superior position in the last Act with Morell on his knees, as a beggar recognising her worth and worshipping her for all that she does for him and his household.
The virginity myth, in which virginity is something to be cherished in young women but must be lost through society’s sanctioned alliances before the passage of appropriate age as it may be a nightmare due to “unmastered sexuality” in older women, is broken by both the Warren ladies in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*. Mrs. Warren flourished at the income she derived from her own “de-flowering” as well as that of other young girls. On the other hand, Vivie Warren decided to give up the sexual dependence on men to lead a life that is independent. Joan instead of being the reproductive earth served as tool (plough according to the fecundity myth) for France’s freedom while Dunois and other king’s men prayed and tried to coax the nature to change the course of West wind. Here, child-woman myth also gets reversed as it is Joan who enlightened the soldier’s by bringing to the fore the faults in their warfare which they practiced like amateurs.

Wollstonecraft’s first complaint against the male authors, that was, idealising beauty as a woman’s only asset is also shunned by Shaw. It is important to note that none of his heroines were apostles of beauty. Rather, they were plain faced. Higgins’s Galatea in *Pygmalion* is introduced as:

> She is not at all a romantic figure. . . . Her features are no worse than theirs; but their condition leaves something to be desired; and she needs the services of a dentist. (Shaw 8)

Shaw’s description of Eliza clearly discards the mythical idea of beauty as something bestowed by the Divine. Instead, it affirms that beauty is a matter of maintenance enhanced by a lady’s financial affordability of it. Similarly, Candida is “like any other pretty woman who is just clever enough to make the most of her sexual attractions for trivially selfish ends.”
Therefore, there isn’t anything extraordinary about Candida; Joan had “an uncommon face” which wasn’t pretty enough to arouse any romantic interest; and Vivie isn’t “so handsome” as her mother. All these Shavian women had an identity more than what their face revealed. Thus, Shaw not only demystified the traditional literary representations of women but also gave them an identity other than their face. His creations stand among the more humane lot who are not just found in fiction but are a living reality.

Shaw, in fact unlocked that room for women which they have long aspired for; where they can remove the stigma of femme fatale that Bible attached to them; which recognizes them as a primary being and not someone’s subordinate. New women of Shaw embrace their femininity instead of giving upon it. In this they were distinctly different from the creations of contemporary writers. The unique feature about Shaw’s stand for feminist cause was that he actually showed that women are superior to their male counterparts and intellectually evolved. Eliza showed in the sequel of Pygmalion that women can be the bread earners in a middle-class or even higher middle class household, thereby exchanging the positions with their spouse. Candida broke the “angel of the house” image in favour of the “head of the house”. She made the walls of domesticity her work area in a professional fashion and by her display of superior understanding and insight than other characters had.

Joan and Vivie seem to be cast in the image of the “Superman” Shaw has envisioned. They fit in the definition of genius and intellectually strong beings given by Shaw which was: “a genius is a person who, seeing farther and probing deeper than other people, has a different set of ethical valuations from theirs, and has energy enough to give effect to this extra vision and its valuations in whatever manner best suits his or her specific talent.” Vivie’s father being unknown and her mother’s positive affirmation that her father was not one from the list of
intellectually inferior people of her present social circle points towards a man who had been so superior in his intellect that he bred a bright and intellectually advanced girl like Vivie from a woman in a brothel. Joan’s irregularity with her visionary personality is a result of her intellectual superiority. She was identified by Shaw as a ‘New Woman’ in an era where this term was still below the horizon. Vivie’s shield from the emotions gives her a clear and practical perspective and this shield is definitely not common due to the biological make-up of human beings. Thus, it is likely that they represent the future product of human evolution, that is, superman and if not that, then definitely a forerunner of superman. His conceptualisation of women as first “supermen” stands testimony to Shaw’s firm belief in a woman’s intellectual superiority.

They were not “unsexed” women but those who recognize their self, identify with their own sex and also who are well comfortable with their identity which was independent of male assistance and acceptance. Candida managed to show how a woman can be independent of the influences, opinions and dominion within the realms of domesticity. She proves to be a matriarchal head in a patriarchal society. And in her, Shaw has created the most unconventional of all the unconventional new women. Joan also lacked some qualities expected of a typical new woman. But instead of those qualities she possessed those which make women equivalent to men in their status and not just in appearance. She managed to take the place of the commander in the army that was earlier believed to be an all-men profession. By giving upon her mother for continuing her business and all her rebellious feminist thoughts, Vivie can be seen as the first “Second Wave Feminist.” She gives up the idea of marriage and motherhood to disown any dependency on men and patriarchal system. In this way she gives the basic code of belief of the Second Wave Feminism much before it actually started. Those who were to remain her friends
would have to accept her as a human being and a woman who is incapable of sentimentality and romance.

Shaw tried to create equality among various classes of society, and women owing to their doubly marginalised status in a class divided society didn’t escape their inclusion in his agenda. The issue of non-payment of reproductive labour—the labour which is not remunerated being that of the private household sphere—comes to the fore in Candida where the arc supporter of the communist cause, James Morell finds himself placed in the position of a Capitalist. The division of money here is not possible on account of the labour of Morell but it is the labour of Candida in her household management that divides the money earned by him in such a way to satisfy all of them who stand a party to it. It is the recognition and payment of this labour that Candida is all about. Candida’s selection of John Morell over Eugene Marchbanks is neither an issue of submissiveness to the set norms as feminists have seen it. Rather, it’s a choice to continue her ownership on the household she created from her skills. A very important issue in Marxism was brought to the fore in this selection. Dissatisfaction at not receiving the desired remuneration for their work makes the workers give up their right on the things created by them. Instead of claiming their right of ownership they seek other possible places for better chances which may or may not yield the desired result. And in the process they leave and never again think about what was rightfully theirs—their own creation. Shaw’s opinion on prostitution as can be seen in Mrs. Warren’s Profession is very much similar to those given by existential feminists. Shaw’s women thus, fight both—the oppression by opposite gender and ruling class. They play a crucial role in bridging the gap that separates the two genders across the classes by claiming identical rights for better future prospects.
His plays are mostly seen in the light of reformation of society at which they are aimed but they also abound in instances that reflect the undeniable association and dependence women and nature share with each other. This aspect of his writings has been largely overlooked. But it has been explored in the present research. Shaw’s comic dialogues in the play *Saint Joan* have overtones of vegetarian ecofeminism and they clearly point towards his hidden agenda which was not just the portrayal of ecclesiastical atrocities. Eco-feminists argue that separation from nature makes women separate themselves from their natural motherly instincts and this is what Shaw has shown in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*. Nature is being seen by the Radical Feminists as unfair with regard to the motherhood which women are burdened with and hence, they too advocate women’s distance from these natural instincts. It is important to note that all these ideas were given by the feminists after Shaw’s time and yet Shaw had incorporated this phenomenon of separation with nature in his plays beforehand. Shaw has not only shown how women are related to nature but also what will happen if this nature-woman tie breaks i.e. loss of all sentimentality and what has conventionally existed and beautiful; leading to separation with motherhood.

Although his stress on the manifestation of ‘Life-force’ has been criticised by radical feminists for limiting the role of women to mothers, it is to judge a book by its cover. Shaw has actually shown women as intellectually evolved species who are a ready source of ‘creative energy’ for the reproduction of a ‘Superman’ unlike men who still need to be intellectually evolved in which they are helped by their superior female counterparts—for example the role Candida played in Eugenes’s life. Also he had shown mature and non-sexual lesbian bonds between his women characters thereby giving a completely new perspective to ‘Lesbian Theory’.
It is perhaps no overstatement to say that there isn’t an area of woman’s question that is not covered by Shaw. In his novella, *The Black Girl in her Search for God* (1932), Shaw was perhaps the first one to identify the lack of a “mother figure” in all disciplines. Recently, feminists have constantly asked about the mother of a genre as all the social and scientific literature talks about the father of their disciplines. But the Black girl in her dialogue with the conjurer identifies this gap and failing of proper recognition to women, at a time when the scientific achievements were just beginning:

“That was clever, baas” she said. “Great magician, you. You perhaps tell black woman something. I am in search of God. Where is he?”

“Within you” said the conjurer. “Within me too.”

“I think so” said the girl. “But what is he?”

“Our father” said the conjurer.

The black girl made a wry face and thought for a moment. “Why not our mother?” she said then.

It was the conjurer’s turn to make a wry face; and he made it “Our mothers would have us put them before God” he said. “If I had been guided by my mother I should perhaps have been a rich man instead of an outcast and a wanderer; but I should not have found God.”

But even these gods who are half goats are half men. Why are they never half women?”
Besides, she questions the idea of priesthood and its restriction to men. The conjurer says, “To make a link between Godhood and Manhood, some god must become a man” (Shaw 48). The conjurer wanted to say that in order to make the communion of the human world with the divine possible, there is a need of someone in-between, who for him should be a man. However, the black girl responds, “Or some woman become God . . . That would be far better, because the god who condescends to be human degrades himself; but the woman who becomes God exalts herself” (Shaw 48). Cullen Murphy believes that the exclusion of women from priesthood is based upon the teachings of the Bible, which “has been interpreted over the centuries as forbidding a role for women in preaching and ministry” (Murphy 13). The black girl suggests that the task of mediation that man is accredited with can only be a failure, whereas if women are given the opportunity to mediate between the human world and the divine things would be far better.

Within the same work, the need for a crusade for women rights in Islam is brought to foreground by George Bernard Shaw:

“And your wives?” said the black girl. “Are they also to know many men in order that they may learn your value?”

“I take refuge with Allah against this black daughter of Satan” cried the Arab vehemently. “Learn to hold your peace, woman, when men are talking and wisdom is their topic. God made Man before he made Woman.”

“Second thoughts are best” said the black girl. “If it is as you say, God must have created Woman because He found Man insufficient. By what right do you demand fifty wives and condemn each of them to one husband?”
Through the black girl, Shaw also disapproves of a traditional stereotype linked with unmarried women. This concerns the idea that all single women are prostitutes. This attitude was shared among men in the Victorian era, when the image of woman was viewed either as “revered wife and mother” or scorned as “prostitute” (Kent 180). Indeed, in order to maintain women in the domestic sphere, men insisted on the idea that outside the family hearth women could only be prostitutes. When Shaw’s black girl encounters the first man in her adventures, she also shuns the perception of white men who used to take slave women as their concubines. When the “aristocratic looking white man” asks her to bring him her “favourite child”, he was surprised by her answer, “I have no child . . . I am a virgin” (Shaw 9). It was because that this man was thinking that the girl was a wife and mother else she would not go outside the family hearth. The girl’s virginity is much important, for it nullifies the idea of prostitution and questions women’s role as exclusively reproductive and sexual. The girl is not a prostitute despite her decision to go outside the walls of her house and explore the world as a bird that had just learnt flying. By the same token, her quest criticises the Victorian ideology which “offered two possible images for women […] the idealized wife and mother, the angel in the house, or the debased, depraved, corrupt prostitute” (Kent190). The black girl shows that a woman can have a public and political life, without being waged with prostitution.

Thematically speaking, the black girl goes beyond her quest for God and starts a quest for the rights of women. The black girl is the mouthpiece through whom Shaw’s vindication of the rights of women is spoken out. She asks for a public and political life for women. She shows that women could participate in public debates as much as men do or more than them. There are many incidents in the novella where she disapproves the injustice and inequality among people and races that are the result of patriarchy. For example, she asks one of the men she meets, “Did
you make the world? . . . Why did you make it with so much evil in it?” (Shaw 11); she adds, “How much better will the world be when it is all knowledge and no mercy. . . . Haven’t you brains enough to invent some decent way of finding out what you want to know?” (Shaw 23-24) One can understand from these witty questions that the patriarchal system is depraved and that it is high time men gave women the chance to contribute in the public life so as to ensure a better future for humanity. She opposes the domesticity openly through her antagonism towards the institution of marriage. According to Kent, the “traditional, patriarchal marriage, characterized by inequality between spouses and the notion of the ‘natural’ subordination of the wife, remained the accepted norm throughout the Victorian and the Edwardian eras” (Kent 246). The black girl harshly criticises the institution of marriage which served as a medium to propagate the subordination of women to men effortlessly. Shaw through his black girl compares this marriage to pure tyranny:

Well, let you be King Solomon and let me be Queen of Sheba, same as in the bible. I come to you and say that I love you. That means I have come to take possession of you. I come with the love of a lioness and eat you up and make you a part of myself. From this time you will have to think, not of what pleases you, but of what pleases me. I will stand between you and yourself, between you and God. Is not that a terrible tyranny?” (Shaw 29)

Concerning slavery in South Africa, Shaw had made his explicit opposition to it in 1932. In February of the same year, during a visit to this South Africa, he “made a radio address to the nation …. In which he admonished his hosts to stop living off the work of slaves. The broadcast was significant politically” (Bertolini 2004) for the reason that its objective was to denounce slavery. The black girl proves her intellectual skills in each encounter of her with the white race.
The black girl’s intellectual capacities oppose stereotypes like the “irrationality” and “primitiveness” of the black race:

A God who cannot answer my questions is no use to me. . . Besides, if you had really made everything you would know why you made the whale as ugly as he is in the pictures. (Shaw 13)

In fact white people have been shown to be intellectually inferior to her. The incoherence and discrepancy of their conversations can be deduced, for instance, from a passage which reads:

“I am a surgeon; and I know, as a matter of observed fact, that the diameter of the vessels which supply blood to the female brain is excessive according to the standard set by the male brain…."

“Your literary style is admirable, Doctor” said the first gentleman; “but it is beside my point, which is that whether the sun’s heat is the heat of pepper or the heat of flame, whether the moon’s cold is the coldness of ice or the coldness of a snub to a poor relation, they are just as likely to be inhabited as the earth. (Shaw 37)

She also points out towards the injustices inflicted upon her people:

Only to deliver us into the hands of the man-beating slave-driver and the trampling baas. . . . Lion and elephant shared the land with us. When they ate or trampled on our bodies they spared our souls. When they had enough they asked for no more.
Thus, although Shaw hasn’t addressed issues that interest Black feminism directly, his selection of a black woman to speak for the rights of black people says a lot about his outlook. Towards the end he also advocated the marriage between the two races through her marriage with an Irish man. In this selection of his protagonist he spoke against both patriarchal and racist subjugations inflicted upon a woman and gave the strength of a character to her to voice herself. The interest of black, colonised and marginalised women totally escaped the notice of second-wave feminists. But it was not so with Shaw. And this provides enough proof for the recognition of the wave of Shavian Feminism that has remained latent so far. In this way, Shaw’s ideas seem to carry the forecast of what third and fourth wave feminists will bring or rather what should be the true agenda of Feminism.

From this point of view excluding Shaw from the feminist movement creates a huge gap that always betrays the presence of a missing link. Shaw’s ardent support to the cause of women and belief in their superiority over their male counterparts had always guided him in the creation of women who stand as milestones on the road of Feminism. He serves as a bridge to connect the thoughts from Wollstonecraft’s to Beauvoir’s and also as a flyover to divert the abundance of traffic of ideas with regard to feminism leading directly to the third wave feminism.
Works Cited


