Chapter – 1

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G.B. Shaw is a highly provocative and widely discussed genius of our times. In the light of his voluminous, varied, significant and baffling work particularly his ideological dramatics, he looks an enigmatic figure whom it becomes 'difficult to agree with and probably more difficult to understand'.  

Words more than we can count have been written on his dramas of ideas but his paradoxically and humorously witty and versatile personality and his mystic and mysterious play have invoked contradictory remarks among critics scholars and others. No two critics hold the same opinion. What most critics have done is to bring into light this or that aspect of his ideas. Their opinions differ widely. Some praise him but most of it is amusingly simple or enviable. Some blame him but most of it is incoherent and taunting. The common critics like Leon Daud and Ezara Pound dub him as a ‘fool, an intellectual cheesemit a ninth-rate artist and the like.’  

W.H. Auden calls him 'Fabian Figro'. To George Moore Shaw was ‘funny man in the boarding house.’ The public iterates that Shaw was nothing more than a ninth-rate thinker, a public entertainer, a man of superficial brilliance without any depth and the ‘fifth carbon copy of Voltaire’ etc. 'The unspeakable Irishman' is Henery James' contribution.

The literary critics treat his dramas not more than the mere talks or the socio-political discussions or the tracts at the altar of the dramatic
artistry. St. John Ervine calls him 'John the Baptist, pretending to be Karl Marx'. B.A. Robinson remarks for him 'Red Rags and white Corpuscles'. W.B. Yeats calls him 'a barbarian of the barricades'. Distinguishing between Shaw's religion of Life and the artist's interest in Life, T.S. Eliot remarks, "Mr. Shaw never was really interested in life." Another writer in Middleton Murry's Adelphi once said of Shaw, "he is in love with life but only interested in human beings."

The scholars of social and political thought totally ignore him for coining his socio-political ideas from his dramatics, finding them in unsystematic and contradictory manner. They, moreover, state that his ideas seem propounding the impractical, improbable and uncommon socio-political dictums.

Religion is the corner stone in Shavian dramatics. But it has also been an object of dire criticism from all quarters. Eric Bentley rightly puts forward the views of the various critics:

Shaw's 'religion' has also been attacked from opposite wings. Huxley an agnostics like H.G. Wells, J.M. Robertson, and Joseph McCabe have thought him soft-headed and fundamentally friendly to traditional religion. Prince Kropotkin said that Shaw's case against science was the old Catholic line. On the other hand, Catholics and Anglo-Catholics have thought of Shaw as a neo pagan or at least a Calvinist.... The Catholic view is that Shaw's philosophy is home made and eclectic. It accrues, says J.P.
Hackett, from 'taking over the parts of Christianity that attract, combining them with the latest scientific news, and calling the result the religion of the twentieth century', T.S. Eliot says: 'The potent ju-ju of the Life Force is a gross superstition.' This senesce is one on which probably all Shaw’s hostile critics agree. But they not only speak from different convictions of their own, their diagnosis of the Shavian outlook is also different. To some, Shaw, the champion of will and feeling, is an arch-irrationalis. Perhaps this is what Mr. Eliot means by 'potent ju-ju'. To others, Shaw, the champion and incarnation of intellect is the arch – rationalist. W.J. Turner says: 'Mr. Bernard Shaw is the last and the purest of the rationalists.' This view has spread in ever – growing circles, reaching the readers of 'Life in August 1946 when an editorial declared that, according to Shaw, the human race can add ‘cubits to its stature and centuries to its span merely by taking thought'. Questioned about this, Life's editors wrote to me, 'Shaw believed in the Guiding Force of pure thought and pure reason rather than any faith behind it.'

His political ideas have been criticized by every shade of thinkers. The opposition to these ideas comes from Conservatives, from Marxists and from the Liberals. "The Conservatives dismissed Shaw as an ass or denounced him (1914-18) as a traitor." The Marxists (Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Mirsky, Candwell) stamp him as a petit bourgeois mind. The British Communist R.Palme Dutt once wrote of 'the open blatant counter-revolutionist of Shaw… distrust of the proletariat … the last pitiful bleat of
the rentier or petit bourgeois faced with the conditions of Capitalism which he cannot understand'. Many liberals, especially anti-communist liberals, share Dutt's view.\textsuperscript{14} Winston Churchill called him 'The world's most famous intellectual clown and Pantaloon in one, and the charming Columbine of the Capitalist pantomime.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, Shaw has been a burning point of criticism for his dramas of ideas. One calls him traitor. Another considers his philosophy of Life Force totally worthless. His rationality comes under the cloud. It is thought that he was not genuinely interested in life and his plays are now fangled in an impracticable manner. Revealing the general comment of the people about Shaw, C.E.M. Joad rightly asserts:

\ldots that most people belittled him, deriding him as a mountebank, a fool, a licensed jester (there was a famous Maxcartoon, which represented Shaw, standing on his head and waving his legs in the air) or denouncing him as an advocate of doctrines so outrageous that if by some misfortune they were to be adopted, they would bring society to moral ruin and political destruction after a period of prolonged decadence such as preceded the fall of ancient Rome.\textsuperscript{16}

So it is worthwhile observing chronologically the reaction, that Shaw produced in the minds of critics throughout the long period of over a century. And the critical comments, that follow, will reveal for themselves
the complex pattern in Shaw's reputation over the years. As R.J. Kaufmann has put forward:

"A great writer's reputation is insecure with only partisan enthusiasms to sustain it. What is needed is not fanatic approval but an active body of skeptical opinion, curious and intelligent, about the strategic virtues of the work of any candidate for greatness. If an artist continues to compel the interest of such a jury of readers and critics, his greatness is assured. the work of George Bernard Shaw has been undergoing this trial by scrutiny in the last two decades, his reputation has been rendered firmer by this ordeal." ¹⁷

(1)  **G.K. Chesterton (1909)⁰⁸**

He seems to us wild and unreasonable because he is really much too reasonable to be anything but fierce when he is fighting.

(P.17)

And the English People Certainly have somehow got an impression and a tradition that the Irishman is genial, unreasonable, and sentimental. ⁰⁹

(p.15)

…. Shaw has become a complete and colossal mystic. ⁰⁹

(p.167)

He is the least social of all socialists. ⁰⁹

(p.178)

… He is not specially social or collectivist. ⁰⁹
Bernard Shaw has occupied much of his life in trying to elude his followers. The fox has enthusiastic followers, and Shaw seems to regard his, in much the same way. (p.228)

His critics have accused him of vulgar self-advertisement; in his relation to his followers he seems to me rather marked with a sort of mad modesty. (p.228)

... he has (not always or even as a rule intentionally) increased that anarchy of thought, which is always the destruction of thought. (p.233)

He has, to a very slight extent, but still perceptibly, encouraged a kind of charlatanism of utterance... (p.237)

But this shall be written of our time: that when the spirit who denies besieged the last citadel, Blaspheming life itself, there were some, there was one especially, whose voice was heard and whose spear was never broken. (p.254)

(2) Archibald Henderson (1911)

Shaw glorifies the intellect above all other human traits; yet he disclaims the title of 'realist' in art, and in the same breath, talks like a biologist, in describing his analysis of human life as a 'study of natural history'. the power of sublimation is the power which rules the
world…. Romance, illusion and idealism are the indispensible pre-
requisites to endurable living for the human race. (p.426)

The two leading contemporary philosophers of English speaking world,
Bertrand Russel and W. James found nothing of value in Shaw's
philosophy, brushing it aside as unworthy of notice. (p.128)

His approach to all topics is philosophical (p.128)

He never succeeded in organizing this philosophy of Life Force in a
coherent and consistent whole. It is a cold, arid, unattractive world in
which the sublimities principles of love, romance and idealism are
replaced by reflection and contemplation. It is a religion of a universe
of extinct plants and bloodless race of octogenarians with 'calm of
mind, all passions spent'.

(3) **H.C. Duffin (1920)**

His hard logic freezes our sentiment (p.19)

It is in the belief that the enormous value of his criticism, both
destructive and constructive, is very far from being properly
appreciated. (p.19)

To call him merely destructive is sheer blindness: he has attacked no
evil without pointing the way to something better. (p.233)

The terms, which constrict the minds of most people as with bands of
leather – 'blasphemous', seditious, irreligious, 'ungentlemanly',
'unpatriotic', 'Unbritish-do not exist for Shaw. Their existence means that most of the big questions of life are prejudged.  

(4) **Allardyce Nicoll (1925)**

He was father of the theatre of ideas in England, seriously preaching his sermons on social follies and social vices.  

He is the great destroyer of evil in our modern age, and out of his destructiveness, he seeks to lead us toward a newer, fresher, and more constructive thought.  

Whatever is contrary to the dictates of reason, he has opposed. Whatever is set up as a fetish by the unthinking mass he has ruthlessly destroyed. His socialism is not of the emotional kind.

(5) **S.C. Sen Gupta (1936)**

It has been truly said that 'no man in the modern English theatre has been subjected to so much confused thinking as George Barnard Shaw. The most talked of man of his time, he has been most misunderstood or most variously understood.' The confusion and misunderstanding about Shaw's literary work may be traced to two causes. Philosophical critics have discussed at great length the tenability of his ideas, and this confusion has biased them in their consideration of his art. Literary
critics, again, have judged Shaw's works by laws and standards that he has set at defiance. (Preface)

Bourgeois critics have often blamed Shaw for sacrificing art to the necessities of propaganda. Christopher Caudwell, the communist, however, accuses him of being imprisoned in the categories of bourgeois thought. According to Caudwell, Shaw's failure as a thinker and dramatist is due to his bourgeois faith in the primacy of lonely, individual thought, which made him ignore the close relationship between consciousness and reality. (p.185)

Beautrice Webb complains that Shaw lays too much emphasis on the mere physical relationship between men and women, assigning an inferior position to women, and that he has no conception of religion, by which she means the communion of the soul with some righteousness felt to be outside and above itself. (p.185)

Shaw's preoccupation with sexual and economic problems is undeniable; indeed, he wrote his plays chiefly with a view to making the world reconsider its ideas about the relation of the sexes and the distribution of wealth. (p.187)

The most important feature in him, however, is that he is a phenomenon of nature…. one great reason why Shaw is regarded as a
phenomenon is that he is a mysterious creature, whom it is difficult to
agree with and probably more difficult to understand. 

(p.1)

Shaw has said so many things in so many different ways that he has
been as great a puzzle to his admirers as to his detractors. He has been
often misunderstood because he is not only a prince of heretics, but
also a master of paradox. 

(p.1)

(6) Eric Bentley (1947)²³

Like all surprising art, Shaw's dramaturgy was damned as non-art. The
critics formula was : not a play. 

(P.165)

(7) M. Colbourne (1949)²⁴

... Shaw was always really more interested in his array of hobbies – his
economic studies and political free lancing, his tub – thumbing and borough
counseling, his Creative Evolution, his spelling reforms and so forth – than in
the play righting devil that fortunately possessed him ... What, then, is Shaw
first and foremost? I would say an amateur thinker.

(p. 18)

...an ardent votary of cerebration in his knees in the Temple of Intellect
before its immanent deity, the will. 

(p.19)
Shaw is generally considered an original thinker and an original writer. He is neither. (p.38)

…the Russian lie not only survives, but persists and spreads; a lie that Shaw, by weaving into his later works threads of Russian propaganda, has faithfully served. (P.45)

…Shaw was a monarch of men's mind and, at once irritating and loveable…… (P.xi, Postscript)

(8) C.E.M. Joad (1949)25

He was for us not only a wit who might or might not be funny: he was a philosopher and political thinker whose doctrines were quite indubitably true: he was also, as I shall try to show, a great liberator. (p.8)

As a socialist, a vegetarian, a free thinker - - even, it was commonly averred, a free - lover - Shaw was peculiar joy and possession precisely because he was anathema to the smug world of Edwardian respectability against which we were in revolt. (p.8)

…Shaw burst into the closed chamber of late Victorian conventions, he opened the doors of our minds and let in light and air and freedom. (p.21)
...I emphasise a characteristic which was, ..., the chief instrument of my own peculiar pleasure – the plays are about something that matters.  

(p.101)

(9) A.C. Ward (1950)²⁶

Shaw has been for modern Britain what Socrates was for ancient Greece.  

(p.11)

One of the curiosities of popular criticism of Shaw is the complaint, on the one hand, that his characters are merely mouthpieces for his own ideas – that they preach openly or by implication, Shaw's own gospel: and, on the other hand, that Shaw is a purely destructive critic with no gospel to offer.  

(p.23)

It has for one half-century been the settled opinion of the British that Bernard Shaw is a revolutionary; but few have a clear notion of what it is that he has revolutionized.  

(p. 37)

(10) E. Strauss (1950)²⁷

The main quality which made Shaw a great dramatist was neither his powerful intelligence nor even his lively imagination, but the great moral passion, which made him the man he is. In all his finest works he is deeply concerned with the same great problem – the state of the world and of society, the means to its improvement, its final destiny.  

(pp. 61-2)
As a dramatist he has taught people to laugh at things, which had been thoughtlessly admired and to hate systems which had little in their favour but their power to stifle opposition.  

(11) Desmond Mac Carthy (1951)^28
What Voltaire was in Europe in 1778, the year of his death, Shaw is in the world to-day.  

(12) Hesketh Pearson (1951)^29
It is the combination of actor and critic, of clown and prophet, that makes him unique in literature. His was not simply the gaiety of the great artist, like Shakespeare or Cervantes, it was as if a great teacher like Socrates or Christ or Budha could not resist the temptation to diversify his sermons with somersaults.  

(13) St. John Ervine (1956)^30
He sometimes lacked wisdom, but he never lacked charity, and when he gave, he gave without reproach or condescension. His heart was large: it contained multitudes. His courage, his candour, his unfailing faith, and his fearless announcement of the truth as he saw it, made him a beacon in a time of intellectual darkness.  

(14) Bruce R. Park (1958)^31
Modern criticism has ignored Shaw because it has paid little attention on the kind of literature he writes, and it has no way to value it. Used as a touchstone to certain identifying aspects of modern criticism,
Shaw's outlook reveals a curious constriction in its vision.

(p.42)

(15) Bertold Brecht (1959)\textsuperscript{32}

I feel that a theory of Evolution is central for him, one which, in his opinion, differs considerably and significantly from another theory of evolution of definitely lower clibre. At any rate his faith that man is capable of infinite improvement plays an important role in his works.

(p.18)

(16) Margery M. Morgan (1960)\textsuperscript{33}

None of Shaw's plays has been more strongly disliked than back to Mathuselah… its vision is found repellent; and the teasing, if naïve, question of whether Shaw means what he says, when he is evidently talking nonsense, is more sharply provoked than any of his other works.

(17) G. Wilson Knight (1962)\textsuperscript{34}

Shaw's dramatic Socialism contains strong aristocratic sympathies. The aristocratic connections of so central and admired a person as lady cicely in Captain Brassboun's Conversion (1899) are intrinsic to her dramatic stature. In Misalliance (1910), democracy and aristocracy are regarded as interdependent. On the Rocks delights in relating a modern attempt at "Platonic Communism" to the ruling class, a duke and
leading figures of the services and of finance, embracing the change while the voices of proletarian Socialism reject it … The apple Cart (1929) is a dramatic essay on aristocratic and royal valuation. (pp.120-21)

(18) Richard M. Ohmann (1962)\textsuperscript{35}

In making himself the critic of things as they are, Shaw places himself in the position of an outsider. Everyone, to be sure, can imagine a better world than the present one; everyone has some grievances. But Shaw does not want the status quo merely doctored up a bit, and few can face such a wholesale scrapping of traditions as he does propose. The poor, who might profit by revolution, have no voice, and even if they had they would balk at many of Shaw's iconoclasms – his attacks on marriage and conventional religion, for example. (p.26)

To an advanced thinker like Shaw, most of what other people think is Eolithic groping, and must simply be denied. (p.37)

(19) C.B. Purdom (1963)\textsuperscript{36}

It is as a dramatist that his name will live. When I first encountered his plays at the Court Theatre in 1904, they were a revelation that opened a window into mind. (Preface)

The mask in which he appeared in the public eye was ofte4n that of a mountebank and scoffer, an irresponsible joker and trifler. The real
man was sensitive and generous, interested in people and deeply concerned about the future of mankind, a hard worker in everything he undertook, and especially serious a playwright. (p.3)

Shaw's political, economic and linguistic theories were fundamental to his art. As a dramatist he was interested in people, in the theatre, and in language, and while the theories, he held, had no control over his art, they had an intrinsic place in his athletic mind, ever on the stretch, and therefore, in his art. His plays are living drama because of the kind of man he was, and because he was in immediate and present contact with his time. (p.74)

What we see in his plays is a mind at work, a mind that grasped what it set out to do. (pp.117-18)

Shakespeare's greatness, that we feel his work 'to be united by one significant, consistent, and developing personality', may equally be said of Shaw. I believe 'In the life to come' says Anna in Man and Superman. Shaw announced the future which is a reason to suppose that his plays will endure; for by the words of the prophets men live! He spoke for those yet unborn in whom the new man and the new society will be affirmed as he affirmed it. (p.118)

(20) Robert Brustain (1964)
He is, in fact, subject to the granddaddy of all illusions…  (p.100)

If Shaw is too much of a 'realist' to don the mask of personal immortality, he has too much of an 'idealist' to face the 'dread' of the 'Arch-Inexorable'.  (p.101)

Philosophy, according to Montaigne, consists in learning how to die; but death has no place in Shaw's philosophy, since it calls an end to progress, and mocks all human aspirations.  (p.101)

Shaw's messianic philosophy has alienated him from us, the myths of Shavianism neither console nor convince; his "scientific religion" has come to look neither like science nor religion, and his own illusions seem just as pronounced as the ones he sets out to expose… Shavianism may seem just as quacks as Sweden borgianism…  (p.105)

All this talk about the spider-woman, treacherously lying in wait for a male quarry and imprisoning him for her own purposes, sounds dangerous.  (p.108)

(21) **R.J. Kaufmann (1979)**

George Bernard Shaw is a regiment in himself. He lived so long, wrote so much, talked so endlessly and so dismayingly well, embraced so many careers, and invented so many gospels, it is no wonder lesser
men have some–times tired of his relentless brilliance.

(p.1)

In the plays of George Bernard Shaw, failure is generally exposed to ridicule, but the failure of a great man through misunderstanding and consequent trivialization of his proffered gifts is tragic. (p.4)

Shaw himself said, "the man of letters who is more than a confectioner is a prophet or nothing. Prophets are uncomfortable social bedfellows, but it is as a prophet – a seer of the still hidden course our temporal follies lay down for us – that Shaw is best understood.

(p.8)

Shaw was a visionary of a peculiarly well-informed, socially engaged type. (p.8)

One of the still-to-be-digested facts about Shaw is this : he is godfather….. (p.11)

(22) Stray Comments

(I) The British Council Pamphlet

Shaw's plays are rooted in the perennial interest of human behavior independent of time and place….. those, who consider Bernard Shaw's work as a whole, and in relation to his tireless crusade for social justice and righteousness and the intellectual enlightenment, he generated and
spread abroad can have little doubt that he belongs to the ages and with the immortals.

(II) **Kingsley Martin**

It was a voice that exposed shams, cleared the way and liberated us from bad conventions and confused ideas.

(III) **Frank Harris (1931)**

And what is worse, Shaw has no imitators

(IV) **B.W. Levy**

He was so indeed, 'more than a mere playwright, a mere artist; but being an artist, too, he was more than a mere mortal man.

The above stated reactions of different critics reveal a complex pattern of comments on Shaw. Thus, he remains a burning point of criticism for his dramas of ideas since their very composition. Being aware of this fact, Shaw himself gave a word of warning against all the diverse opinions of his critics. In "A Warning from the Author", attached to a special popular edition of his complete plays, he says:

I must warn you, before you attempt to enjoy my plays to clear out of your consciousness most resolutely everything you ever read about me in newspapers. Otherwise you will not enjoy them. You will read them with a sophisticated mind and a store of beliefs concerning me, which have not the slightest foundation either in prosaic fact or in poetic truth. In some
unaccountable way, I seem to cast a spell on journalists, which makes them recklessly indifferent not only to common veracity, but to human possibility. the person, they represent me to be, not only does not exist but could not possibly exist.\(^{39}\)

In fact his mission, as a dramatic artist, was always didactic. He did not want to write any play merely merely for the sake of amusement as he asserts in "The Epistle Dedicatory to Arthur Walkely" in *Man and Superman*; "For art's sake alone, I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence."\(^{40}\) He fostered immoral and heretical ideas of socio-political gamut with the object of converting his country in particular and the whole world in general accordingly as he asserts: *I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals.... write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions... I have no other effectual incentive to write plays.... If I were prevented from producing immoral and heretical plays, I shall cease to write for the theatre and propagate my views from the platform and through books.\(^{41}\)*

Whatever criticisms have been extended to Shaw, it is but definite that he has written his dramas on some problem leading to a carefully conceived conclusion. Besides, he was endowed with an ability to make his ideas live. He possessed an agile mind that had the capacity by twists and turns to give the original answers to the social and political problems. No doubt, Shaw was
not a profound exponent of human character, yet he had the ability to make ideas and points of view his own. His philosophy is not pure metaphysics rather it is scientifically utilitarian. He upholds the permanent power of the will which he christens as the Life Force and he realizes the limitations of intellect that account for human sufferings. He is an unconventional evaluator of things. He attempts to lash out all sorts of evils – Social and political.

The present thesis on is an humble attempt to expose comprehensively the social and political views of the long lived profound dramatist, G.B. Shaw, who had varied experiences of life and who had embraced so many careers and so many gospels that lesser geniuses often get tired of his relentless brilliance.
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