CHAPTER – V

Mrs. Warren's Profession

The Veiled Snare: Capitalist Patriarchy

Oscar Wilde was already well established in the dramatic circuit in the 1890’s when George Bernard Shaw first started writing his plays. Shaw, who early in his career worked as a drama critic, admired Wilde’s intelligent wit and verbal eloquence, but rather than write “society plays”, he wanted to expound his theories as a “socialist” and concentrate on “the dramatic value of the mere facts of life”. Introduced to socialism vide Karl Marx and Henry George in 1882, Shaw realized the significance of the “economic basis of history”. His first play in this genre Widowers’ Houses focused on ill begotten wealth from the exploitation of the poor.

He was to continue this treatment in his next play Mrs. Warren’s Profession. Significantly the germ of the play came from a woman- the famed actress Janet Achurch’s New Woman play Mrs. Daintree’s Daughter, wherein a successful brothel keeper aims to keep her daughter away from the contaminated life that she leads. However when the daughter learns of her mother’s business, she rejects her and in the end unintentionally kills her with a morphia overdose. Shaw’s play too deals with a mother- daughter relationship and on the upbringing of a young girl through wealth got by immoral means. However Shaw concentrates more on the economical aspects of the situation in contrast to Achurch’s focus on emotion and melodrama. In fact Shaw considered Mrs. Daintree’s Daughter as unfit for the 1890’s theatre, smugly declaring that “the ending is not the sort of thing for this (upmarket) audience”.

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In his own play, he does away with melodrama, and as in *Widowers’ Houses*, focuses on the evils prevalent in society. Bentley maintains that in both plays, Shaw blames the society for the immorality of the individuals.

The system, not the individual is responsible- which to him means, not that no one is guilty, but that everyone is guilty.¹

Like the previous play in this dissertation, this play too deals with “fallen” women and “women with a past”. However unlike Wilde’s Rachel Arbuthnot in *A Woman of No Importance*, Mrs. Warren in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* never feels guilty or ashamed of her past. In fact she is proud of how she has turned things out, as she tells her daughter Vivie.

VIVIE: And are you really and truly not one wee bit doubtful-or-or-ashamed?
MRS. WARREN: Well, of course, dearie, it’s only good manners to be ashamed of it: it’s expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don’t feel. …..But I cant stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. Whats the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world that way for women, there’s no good pretending it’s arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really.²

But the censors were well and truly scandalized, and though the play was written in 1894, it was not produced till 1902 for want of a license. Apart from *Mrs. Daintree’s Daughter*, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, and *A Woman of No Importance*, Pinero’s *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* also resembles our play. Of course, Shaw also openly acknowledged being influenced by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and his social plays that were creating waves in the European theatre circuit with their revolutionary themes about women and society. In his problem plays, Ibsen made scathing attacks on a narrow minded society that hampered the growth of an individual. Impressed by Ibsen’s mode of writing in his plays of social realism, Shaw too started writing realistic plays in contemporary social settings. *Mrs. Warren’s
Profession, produced and set in London, celebrated the new wave of feminism that had engulfed Europe in the late nineteenth century by looking at social issues from a definite female perspective. The chief protagonist is here depicted in a favourable light even though she pursues a supposedly amoral profession. This was a complete contrast to the Victorian notion of what constituted a “good” or a “bad” woman and Shaw had the courage of his convictions to go against the tide.

It is hard to see how Shaw could more boldly have affronted Victorian values. Within the scheme of bourgeois morality and bourgeois fiction a prostitute must be either strong and villainous or weak and virtuous.\(^3\)

Mrs. Warren is neither. She is here given ample platform to voice her opinions and justify her going into the brothel business. Shavian plays, as Shaw confessed in his Preface, depict "society and not any individual as the villain of the piece". (31)

Shaw's notion of a good drama is reflected in most of his plays including Mrs. Warren's Profession. He thought highly of ‘Problem Plays’ which he believed contained “real drama” and that "real drama is the presentation in parable of the conflict between man's will and his environment", i.e. between his aims and his natural and social circumstances. In our play, Mrs. Warren's high social aspirations of becoming a gentlewoman, and earning money as well as respect are in conflict with her immediate social surroundings that abound in biased patriarchal attitudes, where women are looked upon at best, as cheap sources of labour. However, she boldly topples patriarchal notions about women and womanliness to emerge as a well respected woman in a male dominated, chauvinistic society. Her bold and revolutionary ideas about a woman's dignity instill within her a fierce hardness and drive her to reach a status in society.

MRS. WARREN: Don’t you be led astray by people who don’t know the world, my girl. The only way for a
woman to provide for herself is to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she’s in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she can't expect it: why should she? It wouldn’t be for her own happiness. (69)

With two strong women protagonists, this powerful feminist piece of literature was a pioneering work in the English language from an established male playwright, which championed women's issues and looked at the evils within the play as arising not because of women, but because of contemporary social surroundings. It was the third in Shaw's series of 'Plays Unpleasant' and dealt with the problem of social corruption and evil through the metaphor of prostitution. The play highlights the fact that "prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together." 

After the 1870’s, “The Great Social Evil”, as it was called was finding a lot of coverage in the press, and Shaw familiarized himself with the Victorian domestic virtues, where the wife was looked upon more as a housekeeper and a mother rather than the husband’s companion, making the husband turn to the poor working class women, for whom prostitution was an opportunity of earning some extra money.

The play is set in contemporary England in the late nineteenth century, when it had reached the height of the capitalist takeover. Industrialism and Imperialism were both expanding, but in spite of rising prosperity, social upheaval and unrest were noticeable in all strata of society. Sheila Rowbotham points out how capitalism adversely affected the different classes of women-

Middle class women found themselves cut off from production and economically dependent on a man: working class women were forced into the factory and became wage labourers.  

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Life became more difficult for a working class woman as she had to manage the dual responsibility of housewife and worker. However Mrs. Warren does not face these hassles as she has managed to detach the personal from her professional life and vice versa. It may be worthwhile to add here that Shaw strongly believed that there existed two types of women- the Womanly Woman or the domestic woman, who needed to be protected and the Working Woman who was independent. Significantly, though Shaw is often looked up as a feminist, it is ironical that he never believed that a woman was capable of multi tasking- of being able to take care of her house as well as go outside and earn money.

It is thus destined that both our protagonists, Mrs. Warren as well as Vivie who fall into the second category, remain in their sphere in watertight compartments. Mrs. Warren is a professional and her life can be clearly segregated into two parts- the personal and the professional. Staying true to Shaw’s ideals, Mrs. Warren has to sacrifice her personal emotions and family life (mainly staying away from her daughter) so that she can successfully run her profession, which would later also turn out to be true for Vivie Warren who gives up love and art to settle into business.

In the first half of this chapter my focus will be on the personal life of Mrs. Warren which is an absolute contrast to the conventional life that patriarchal society expects from a woman. Traditionalists have always believed that the woman is an inferior creature who has to be protected and provided for by the male species. Mrs. Warren however has never been subject to this line of thought throughout her life. Growing up without a father, she never had any male member ruling over her. It was her widowed mother who ran the house and also brought up four daughters single handedly. Thus definitions of patriarchy which state that the male head of the house
had absolute legal and economic rights over the dependent family members never held any significance for her. By remaining single, (by virtue of her reputation or by design?) Mrs. Warren ensures that she does not have a husband ruling over her in her adult life. Nevertheless, her decision to remain unmarried does not indicate that she abhors men and their company. In fact she has had many lovers and enjoys going around with them. Her flirtatious attitude towards the young Frank is quite indicative of her nature. She is almost boisterous in the company of her male friends Crofts and Praed, but once she is alone, she is seen as “resigning herself to an evening of boredom now that the men are gone”. (61)

For Mrs. Warren, men are companions, not true friends or soul mates. In fact she does not consider them worthwhile enough to go in for a long-term relationship. She breaks patriarchal assumptions that a woman's main goal in life is to get married and take care of her husband and children. Mary Wollstonecraft attacked the "cultural conditioning" of girls wherein girls were trained from childhood to be fearful and fragile and were brought up on the notion that within domesticity, marriage and motherhood, lay their true happiness. Similar to Agnes Ebbsmith in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, Mrs. Warren is against the institution of marriage. Her revulsion towards it is extreme and reflects her anger at society for imposing marriage upon a woman.

MRS. WARREN: What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man's fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him? - as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference to the right or wrong of the thing. (68)

Though it is not explicitly brought out in the play, Mrs. Warren's anti marriage stance may have arisen because of the bitter marital experience of her half sister, “the
respectable one”, who suffered a great deal in spite of adhering to conventional patriarchal notions about marriage and motherhood, as Mrs. Warren sadly recalls-

MRS. WARREN: The other was always held up to us as a model because she married a government labourer in the Deptford victalling yard and kept his room and the three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week until he took to drink. (66)

Mrs. Warren's decision to remain single is all the more defiant as she has an illegitimate daughter. Of course the prudish society of late nineteenth century England was not an easy one to live in, and Mrs. Warren would have found it extremely difficult to find a husband in her situation. However she manages as best as she can. Throughout history, it has been very difficult for women to take unconventional decisions and harder still to implement them. In her 1792 classic Vindication of The Rights of Women, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that men had more scope for freedom than women because of the biased attitudes of society.

There are some loopholes out of which a man may creep and dare to think for himself but for a woman it is a herculean task, because she has difficulties peculiar to her sex to overcome which require almost superhuman powers. 7

Mrs. Warren has this superhuman power and her resolve to bring up her daughter single-handedly poses a challenge to the chauvinistic attitudes of a patriarchal society. Her courage and determination ensure that the mother figure emerges as victorious in a world dominated by men. The father is clearly an unimportant element in her scheme of things. Sir George Crofts, her close friend, is frustratingly aware of her haughty ‘feminist’ attitude as is revealed in his conversation with Praed-

CROFTS: But she's so determined to keep the child all to herself that she would deny that it ever had a father if she could. (44)
The fact that her daughter Vivie is "well brought up, straight forward, hard working" does credit to Mrs. Warren who gave her the best possible upbringing. Of course, she was never there personally to bring up her daughter, but was resourceful enough to ensure that Vivie was always in good hands. Though she herself was hardly educated, she left no stone unturned in giving her daughter a decent education, thus helping her achieve a respectable position in society. Mrs. Warren thus proves that a woman can bring up her daughter single handedly against all odds if she has the right attitude.

VIVIE: Mother: suppose we were both as poor as you were in those wretched old days, are you quite sure that you wouldn’t advise me to try the Waterloo Bar, or marry a labourer, or even go into the factory?
MRS. WARREN: (indignantly) Of course not. What sort of mother do you take me for! How could you keep your self respect in such starvation and slavery? And what's a woman worth? What's life worth? Without self respect! Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first rate education. ....Because I always knew how to respect myself and control myself. (69)

Mrs. Warren's strong and independent nature is inherited by her daughter Vivie who represents the sensible, able, highly educated young middle class Englishwoman ....Prompt, strong, confident, self possessed.(34) In a way, both Mrs. Warren and Vivie in their demand for, and assertion of self respect represent the New Woman that was creating a rage in England.

In the 1880's, literature was invaded by the figure of the New Woman who was a contrast to the ideal of true womanhood cultivated by patriarchal society. Ibsen's Nora in A Doll's House (1879) leaves the comfort of her home to search for her own “self”. Olive Schreiner's Lyndall in The Story Of An African Farm (1883), chooses not to marry her lover even after becoming pregnant. Pinero's Iris in Iris (1901) and Agnes in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895) face hardships from a
conservative male dominated society. All these are prototypes of the New Woman who enthralled men and women alike. Shaw, with his focus on writing “realistic” plays too jumped onto the bandwagon of playwrights writing about the New Woman, and in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, we see the emergence of a strong and hitherto unacknowledged New Woman viz. Vivie Warren. In her refusal to live a comfortable life on her mother’s ‘brothel fortune’ and her decision to chart her own course in life she is similar to Ibsen’s Nora; in deliberately choosing to give up her lover Frank, and concentrating on her work she is similar to Lyndall; while her decision to go out into the masculine world is similar to Iris’s and her convictions are as strong as Agnes’s in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. However, not all New Woman literature depicted women in a positive light. Sydney Grundy in his 1894 play *New Woman* depicted the New Women with distasteful masculine qualities, making them objects of bitter humour. Vivie thus was also looked at as the caricatured New Woman, an object of derision for some with her androgynous characteristics. Nevertheless some critics like Jean Chothia feel that Shaw’s Vivie is a positive incarnation of the New Woman, truly admirable, in spite of her quirks.

With her strong handshake, cigar smoking, extreme rationalism, Vivie Warren,… who being lazy has settled for second place in the Maths Tripos is the type writ large, although her independence and self sufficiency are clearly offered for admiration and the humour is with rather than against her.  

Carl Selle calls Vivie the "too masculine New Woman who forges her way in the midst of financial and social ease". Vivie, fortunately, has never had any problems in life because of her mother's "vitality, thrift, energy and outspokenness" and though Mrs. Warren has not always been physically present, she has always tried to make Vivie comfortable. Vivie, the practical rationalist, herself acknowledges her good luck during her conversation with Praed-
VIVIE: I only see her when she visits England for a few days. I don't complain: it's been very pleasant; for people have been very good to me; and there has always been plenty of money to make things smooth.

(39)

Though Vivie has a social standing thanks to her mother's money, she maintains it with her intelligence and her academic achievements. Her "tieing" with the third wrangler in the mathematical tripos is considered a "magnificent achievement", especially when we consider how the educational odds were stacked against women. Nonetheless in the 1890's, doors were opening for women in renowned educational institutions and women were proving to be not only as good as but sometimes even better than men. In sketching Vivie's character, Shaw may perhaps have been inspired by Phillipa Fawcett, who in 1890, scored higher than even the top man in the Maths Tripos at Cambridge. Vivie has achieved what most women can only dream about, but she is humble to the point of being disrespectful about it.

PRAED: It was perfectly splendid, your tieing with the third wrangler….
VIVIE: It doesn't pay. I wouldn't do it again for the same money.
PRAED: (aghast) The same money!
VIVIE: I did it for £50
PRAED: Fifty pounds!
VIVIE: Yes. Fifty pounds. Perhaps you don't know how it was. Mrs. Latham, my tutor at Newnham, told my mother that I could distinguish myself in the mathematical tripos if I went in for it in earnest…. I said flatly it was not worth my while to face the grind since I was not going in for teaching; but I offered to try for fourth wrangler or thereabouts for £50. …I was better than my bargain. But I wouldn't do it again for that. £200 would have been nearer the mark. (36)

Vivie, as we clearly see is a businesswoman. She is a practical workaholic, who cares neither for romance nor for beauty, the typical traits attributed to women. She loves to slog and dreams of making it big in the world of business-
VIVIE: I shall set up in chambers in the city, and work at actuarial calculations and conveyancing. Under cover of that I shall do some law, with one eye on the Stock Exchange all the time. I’ve come down here by myself to read law: not for a holiday, as my mother imagines. I hate holidays. (37)

Keith May calls both mother and daughter temperamentally similar who "wish to manage affairs and live without sentiment". They are interested neither in art, nor in beauty nor in music. Mrs. Warren and Vivie thus play the role of the New Woman to perfection. They refuse to sacrifice themselves for others and are keener to call themselves women of business rather than wives or mothers. They hold no frivolous emotional attachments. Vivie’s speech towards the end of the play seems to reflect what her mother must have thought a generation ago-

VIVIE: …But there are two subjects I want dropped, if you don’t mind. One of them (to Frank) is love’s young dream in any shape or form: the other (to Praed) is the romance and beauty of life… You are welcome to any illusions you may have left on these subjects: I have none. If we three are to remain friends, I must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single and permanently unromantic. (93)

Conventional patriarchal tenets that consider women as emotional weaklings are ably defeated when confronted with the iron will and determination of Mrs. Warren and Vivie. However, the victory comes with a price, when towards the end of the play, Vivie cuts herself off completely from her mother. It is the same Vivie who just a night before was so enthralled by the courage of her mother, that she gave her the highest compliment.

VIVIE: My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England. (69)

However, on discovering that her mother still pursues her profession, and more importantly, that she herself is living off on that money, Vivie decides to break off
from her mother. From a feminist viewpoint, their rupture is indeed heartbreaking as it is almost a triumph for society who believes that successful women can never have happy domestic lives. But it also shows Vivie’s courage who, though being Mrs. Warren’s daughter refuses to follow her path, preferring instead to live the hard life that involves work and not pleasure.

VIVIE: But my work is not your work, and my way not your way. We must part. It will not make much difference to us: instead of meeting one another for perhaps a few months in twenty years, we shall never meet: that’s all. (103)

What follows after this, is even more significant; where both women realize they need to give each other space; that they are different individuals and once they are parted, both seem to be happy. Love as we all know is about keeping, but it is also about letting go. By letting go of each other, Mrs. Warren and Vivie solve a crisis that would have always haunted them.

VIVIE: Yes: it’s better to choose your line and go through with it. If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another. You are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you goodbye now.

MRS. WARREN: And now I’d better go than stay where I’m not wanted.

Mrs. Warren goes out. The strain on Vivie’s face relaxes, her grave expression breaks up into one of joyous content. (104)

What is significant here is that in spite of this being an “unhappy ending” from the conventional Victorian viewpoint, with the breaking of family ties, the daughter Vivie is content and so would be her mother, we assume, once her attention shifts to her business.

The boy does not get the girl; mother and child are parted; yet Vivie is happy. She refuses to accept the situation- not out of an individualistic heroine’s smug disdain, not out of socialist conviction, but out of
spontaneous vital protest, out of the feeling of having her own life to live.\textsuperscript{12}

On the personal front then, both Mrs. Warren and Vivie are destined to live the lives that they have been living till now- alone, without any attachments and so it would come as no surprise that both women plunge into their work with a vengeance that would definitely make them successful.

This brings us to the professional aspect of Mrs. Warren’s life. In this second half, my focus will be more on Mrs. Warren as a woman of business whose bold and unconventional lifestyle crosses over from the personal to the professional. The society as portrayed in the play is a highly capitalistic and patriarchal society which has no value for women's work. It considers them fit only for menial jobs and employs them as a source of cheap labour in the absence of men. Mrs. Warren rebels against this unjust social system in her own way - by going into a profession that is considered immoral and antisocial by society and thus requires a lot of gumption to be successful.

Considering the stronghold of patriarchy over society in general and women in particular, my focus here is on a variant of patriarchy - capitalism. Capitalism is synonymous with class struggle- the struggle between the rich and the poor, between the capitalist and the worker. To counter the evils of capitalism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels advocated Marxism- a socialist system, wherein private property would shift from the minority bourgeoisie to a collective ownership. Significantly, neither capitalism nor Marxism consider women as part of its movement. In the modern age capitalism assumes a form of patriarchy where capitalists play the roles of traditional patriarchs. The historical development of capitalist patriarchy in England can possibly be dated from mid-eighteenth century with the rise of industrialism.
Capitalist Patriarchy invested tremendous power in the hands of the capitalists who being owners of the factories became masters over the hundreds of people working under them. Just as a patriarch in a family has complete rights over his family members, the capitalist master controls the economic and consequently the personal and familial lives of his workers. Zillah Eisenstein states that "power is seen as deriving from either one's economic class position or one's sex ".\textsuperscript{13} Taking this theory into account, the capitalist patriarch becomes all powerful, since he is male and belongs to the bourgeoisie. In our play, men like Sir George Crofts and his brother belong to this breed of powerful capitalists who are only interested in the profits and returns of their factory without bothering about the working conditions of their labourers. Crofts himself admits to the deplorable conditions of the workers in his brother's factory-

\begin{quote}
CROFTS: Do you remember your Crofts scholarship at Newnham? Well, that was founded by my brother the M.P. He gets his 22 percent out of a factory with 600 girls in it, and not one getting wages enough to live on.
\end{quote}

The nexus between capitalism and patriarchy increased women's oppression. Kuhn and Wolpe quoting from \textit{The Communist Manifesto} state that modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Feminists rebelling against patriarchy in industry called themselves Marxist feminists who "think it impossible for anyone especially women to obtain equal opportunity in a class society where the wealth produced by the powerless many ends up in the hands of the powerful few."\textsuperscript{14}

Marxist feminists locate private property as the source of all evil and look upon capitalism as a branch of the evil tree. In her essay "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex", Hartmann traced the problems of woman both as mother and
worker, reproducer and producer: she concluded that women's oppression has to be understood taking into account both capitalism as well as patriarchy. It is an unfortunate historical fact that women have always received lower wages than men as their abilities were considered inferior to men’s and unfortunately the trend continues even today- right from menial backbreaking jobs to administrative white collar jobs, from jobs in the fashion and glamour industry and even onto sports- the woman is always paid lesser than her male counterpart, once again reemphasizing the patriarchal nature of the society we live in. The Russian feminist Clara Zetkin believed that the capitalist had taken maximum advantage of this aspect-

The most valuable aspect to the capitalist was not the cheap labour of women, but their greater subordination. Capitalists speculated on two specific points:

a) To pay women as little as possible
b) To depress male wages as much as possible as a result of female competition.15

Mrs. Warren herself has had first hand experience of this unjust treatment to women when she did backbreaking jobs at meagre wages, starting off as a “scullery maid in a temperance restaurant”.

MRS. WARREN: Then I was waitress; and then I went to the bar at Waterloo Station: fourteen hours a day serving drinks and washing glasses for four shillings a week and my board. (66)

Women were not only a cheap source of labour, their lives also came cheap. Isabella Ford portrayed the terrible working conditions of women in her pamphlet Women as Factory Inspectors and Certifying Surgeons

Unless you have lived among oppression and injustice it is most difficult to realise how full of it is our industrial system particularly when it touches women.16

Mrs. Warren’s half sister Anne Jane died due to highly dangerous work circumstances in a whitelead factory:
MRS. WARREN: One of them worked in a white lead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week until she died of lead poisoning. She only expected to get her hands a little paralyzed; but she died (66.)

Mrs. Warren had realised there was no way she could achieve a respectable position in society under such exploitative work conditions, and when her sister Liz glided in one day, dressed in fine clothes, she knew she had to take her advice: “What are you doing there, you little fool? Wearing out your health and your appearance for other people’s profit!” (66). Her business acumen is reflected in the reason why she chooses to go into the brothel business.

VIVIE: (intensely interested by this time) No; but why did you choose that business? Saving money and good management will succeed in any business.

MRS. WARREN: Yes, saving money. But where can a woman get the money to save in any other business?.....All we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men. Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shop girls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? (67)

Mrs. Warren considers the world’s oldest profession as the best alternative for women who want to escape the clutches of a cruel society. However the contemporary press and public cried foul against the rationale given by Mrs. Warren. The St. JamesGazette declared the play as “wholly evil”.

It contains one of the boldest and most specious defences of an immoral life for poor women that has ever been penned.17

Feminists too condemn prostitution as a profession that degrades women. Laurie Shrage convincingly puts forth an argument in this support in her essay—

Women who provide sexual services for a fee submit to sexual domination by men and suffer degradation by being treated as sexual commodities.18
Of course, like a true feminist, Mrs. Warren is livid at the fact that there are no other respectable avenues open for women, and accepts that “it’s not work that any woman would do for pleasure”; however she justifies her profession as the best prospect for a poor woman who wants to maintain her self respect.

VIVIE: Still, you consider it worthwhile. It pays.
MRS. WARREN: Of course, it’s worthwhile to a poor girl, if she can resist temptation, and is good looking and well conducted and sensible. It’s far better than any other employment open to her. I always thought that oughtnt to be. It cant be right, Vivie, that there shouldn’t be better opportunities for women. I stick to that: it’s wrong. But it’s so, right or wrong, and a girl must make the best of it. (68)

This open-minded view of Mrs. Warren is reflected in Ericcson's essay *Charges Against Prostitution: An Attempt at a Philosophical Assessment*. He believed that the problem in prostitution arose because of the hypocrisy and prejudice surrounding it. He looked upon prostitution as a free contract between individuals in the market in which services are exchanged for money. Mrs. Warren follows this neutral line of thought in her professional dealings and is thus able to run a flourishing business. Her heroism lies in the fact that in spite of being a woman she has been able to carve a niche for herself in the male dominated capitalistic business world. In his preface Shaw boasts about his heroine- Mrs. Warren's "vitality, her thrift, her energy, her outspokenness, her wise care of her daughter and the managing capacity which has enabled her and her sister to climb from the “fried fish shop down by the Mint” to the establishments of which she boasts are all high English social virtues."(22)

Mrs. Warren thus turns the tables on a conventional patriarchal setup. The "capitalist bully" Crofts is highly impressed by her professional talents and confesses to Vivie that her mother is "indispensable as managing director."(82) Mrs. Warren takes the traditionalists’ theory of a woman being able to run the house quite literally
when she runs her business houses in Brussels, Ostend and Vienna. Things have never been easy for her as she tells Vivie-

MRS. WARREN: Liz and I had to work and save and calculate just like other people, elsways we should be as poor as any good-for-nothing drunken waster of a woman who thinks her luck will last for ever. (68)

Both Mrs. Warren and her daughter Vivie display a penchant for unconventionality. They refuse to accept age old notions that patriarchal society has set down for women and therein lies their heroism. Keith May praises Shaw on his ability to “contrast what he regarded as the seamiest sort of career with what he saw as exemplary female aspirations”.

On the one hand is Mrs. Warren, part owner of whorehouses in Brussels, Ostend, Vienna and Budapest, an accommodating survivor who must normally consort with such an insensate blackguard as Sir George Crofts; and on the other hand is Vivie, clever mathematician, ambitious businesswoman and, as she turns out creature of serene conscience.¹⁹

They are the prototypes of women in the New Age drama that treated women with more respect than earlier literature. In his portrayal of the brave modern woman, Shaw inspired contemporary artists to treat the woman as a human being with feelings and not as a self sacrificing Goddess. The New Woman thus truly came of age to England in this play of Shaw.
NOTES

2. Bernard Shaw, “Mrs. Warren's Profession”, *Complete Plays With Prefaces* Vol. III (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962) 69. [This edition has been used throughout the chapter and page numbers have been mentioned in parentheses.]
7. Mary Wollstonecraft quoted by Sheila Rowbotham in *Hidden From History* 25.
9. Sydney Grundy’s play ‘The New Woman’ depicted the New Women in a satirically, humourous way depicting women as men- dressed in male attire with close cropped hair, and indulging in manly behavior like back slapping, cigarette smoking etc.


16. Isabella Ford as quoted by Sheila Rowbotham in *Hidden From History* 63.

