CHAPTER VIII

Concluding Remarks - A Summing Up
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It will be clearly seen from the preceding chapters that though the prefaces are prefixed to the plays, they are not prior to the plays. The fact is that the prefaces were written after the plays and some of them were written long after the plays.

Chesterton's remark that Shaw "always gives the explanation before the incident" may be considered as inadequate. It will also be seen from the previous chapters that if somebody expects to find in a preface full Shavian explanation or elucidation of the theme of the play with which it is connected, he is more often than not, likely to be disappointed. The time-gap between the plays and the prefaces caused difference in the mood of the author who offered to call himself primarily a journalist.

It will be also seen that the prefaces are not only about the themes of the plays with which they are connected, but also about themes behind the themes of the plays. The socialists are apt to judge matters from the social contexts. Shaw as a socialist and sociologist cannot but look at a subject without looking at the social contexts and environments also. It will be also be noticed that the link between the prefaces and plays is indirect and angular and the link is of different kinds. It will be found that of the forty prefaces written by Shaw and considered in the present work, most of the prefaces are connected with the plays by background.

1 - The preface to The Sanity of Art (The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw, 1965), p. 800.
2 - "Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms." Marx & Engels: Selected Works, Vol. I (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 24.
account and direct thematic link is found only in three cases (vide Appendix II). Most of the prefaces are seen to have mixed content. Some of them have mixed up guideline account with thematic discussion and some of them have mixed up thematic discussion with associated matters. Three prefaces have discussed only matters associated with the plays. The prefaces to six one act plays have only brief guideline account. It is perhaps not right to look for direct and rectilinear discussion of the themes of the plays in the prefaces; the proper attitude would, perhaps be to see whether the prefaces are relevant to the themes of the plays. The degree of relevance of the prefaces to the plays is generally high; it can be said to be weak only in two cases, namely, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet and On the Rocks. From this, one can safely maintain that the prefaces are on subjects which are connected with the plays in some way or other. Linking the prefaces with the plays only with thematic discussion would have been for Shaw perhaps school-boyish. His was not a mind to remain tied down to a particular subject; it must rove and rove around the theme for other sights and points. Again, as the background to a play is also a theme behind the theme, so the background discussion in the prefaces are definitely important for better understanding of his plays. So, to the question whether Shaw's prefaces help in appreciation of his plays, the answer must be an emphatic 'yes'.

It is already stated that the plays and prefaces are not thematically cent per cent interlinked. Consequently, one would find that each individual preface does not provide complete explanation of the issues raised in each individual play. The prefaces as a whole serve as a reservoir of Shavian ideas which can help in understanding all the different aspects of a particular play for which the attached preface may not supply all the necessary information.
This kind of want or insufficiency is seen in the prefaces to Plays Pleasant (in case of You Never Can Tell), The Doctor's Dilemma, Misalliance, Fanny's First Play, Too True to be Good, On the Rocks, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Geneva, Buoyant Billions, Farfetched Fables.

There are certain prefaces which are crucial for understanding of the Shavian philosophy. These prefaces can serve as background to a number of plays. Among such prefaces could be named the prefaces to Plays Pleasant, Three Plays for Puritans, Man and Superman, The Doctor's Dilemma, Getting Married, Misalliance, Back to Methuselah, The Apple Cart, and Too True to be Good.

A technical point demands clarification on the question of the link between Shaw's plays and prefaces. When it is maintained that the prefaces help in understanding or appreciating the plays better, one could naturally infer that the plays are not expectedly self-expressive or independent as works of art. It should be remembered that the plays are for the theatre-goers, but the prefaces are for private reading by the public. The question of writing prefaces for the stage or for play-goers does not arise at all. It would be a wild imagination to maintain that Shaw wanted the play-goers to be thorough with the prefaces before going to witness his plays. Again, Shaw cannot expect the theatre-goers to be interested in private reading. Thus, obviously the prefaces cannot form any part of the theatre-business. The link between the prefaces and plays is an entirely academic question; that is to say, when it is maintained that there is link between the plays and prefaces, and prefaces help in understanding the plays better, it is only meant academically. The link is of academic interest, not of theatre interest. It does not affect the independence of the plays as works of art. But how
far the plays are self-expressive, is an altogether different question, and that has to be judged by canons having nothing to do with the prefaces. In order to understand the thematic discrepancies between the plays and the prefaces, leaving aside the exceptions, one has to look into the basic structures and characteristics of drama and prose narrative as two different literary genres. In prose narrative, particularly essays, the relation between the author and the reader is direct and frontal one. In essay-type prose narrative a propagandist author can use all his instruments of rhetoric to convince the reader as to the rightness of his view or perception. But in a drama, the spectators cannot be addressed directly. The dramatist, of necessity, has to maintain his air of distance and detachment, and his propagandistic intent has to be compromised with the demands of drama as an art form. In the prefaces Shaw speaks to the reader directly on different issues of real life, and as a propagandist writer, he tries to argue his readers into his line of thinking. But in the drama, he has to suspend his method of direct propaganda and engage in the task of creating an illusion of human life. In prose narrative the author makes his presence felt, as his work involves a bilateral relation between the author and the reader; but in a drama the dramatist cannot express himself directly as his work involves a trilateral relation among the dramatist, the dramatic world and the spectators, and in that relation the dramatist has to remain hidden in the background. In a drama, the dramatist has to maintain his illusion of non-interference in, and detachment from, the activities of the dramatic world. To quote Hudson, ".. In theory the drama is entirely objective, and the dramatist is supposedly limited to the indirect method of
interpretation. As the dramatist remains outside the arena of the dramatic world, he can only express his views only through his characters. Again, he cannot, even, indirectly express only a one-sided view. He can present several views on a certain aspect of life impartially and can suggest the superiority of a particular view to other views without breaking the illusion of non-interference or detachment. Besides, in a prose narrative a writer can appear as a debater or a propagandist, but in a drama, the dramatist has to appear as a creator of life and society. The dramatist has the limited power of expressing his views through his characters who have to be fully individualized human beings with their personal emotions intact. The propaganda made in the drama has to be implicit in the total activity and atmosphere of the dramatic world. While a dramatist attempts objective picture of life and society, he has to endow every character with his or her subjective emotions. While doing so, a dramatist has to make use of his own subjective emotions and experiences. In this way, a dramatist can give expression to his unconscious self also. Thus, while the polemic writings in the prefaces engage mainly Shaw's conscious self, the dramas draw out Shaw's unconscious self also in addition to his conscious self. Eric Bentley also argues almost in the same way when he says, "When he writes a play, however, we know that Shaw gives himself up to his unconscious as readily as any surrealist".

Shaw's rejection of rationalism, his antipathy of ready-made

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3 - "I did not take refuge in Allah as long as I could help myself; but not for a moment will you find in my plays any assumption that reason is more than an instrument". Ref. "Mr Shaw on Mrs Shaw", Shaw on Theatre, ed. West, E.J.*, pp. 184-65.
plots and his penchant for allowing natural growth of plots have also something to do with the discrepancy between the plays and the prefaces. A rational dramatisation of a given theme cannot be expected from a dramatist wedded to the philosophy of naturalism in drama. In the prefaces Shaw describes life and its problems to the people, but in the plays he shows life itself to the people. The prefaces are generally argumentative essays meant for reading, but the plays have a visual interest and are meant for showing. In the prefaces Shaw has drawn his own conclusions, but in the plays he has to let the people draw their own conclusions. In such ways Shaw's job in the prefaces differed from that in his plays. All these together can be said to have contributed to the discrepancies of different kinds and degrees between the themes of the plays and the prefaces.

Shaw's prefaces cannot be called 'introductions' in the conventional sense of the term, because a conventional introduction means discussion of a certain preliminary matter by the author the knowledge of which is deemed necessary for reader before he enters the text of a book. Shaw, in his prefaces, does not seem to be interested in, or content with, discussing the preliminary matter for the benefit of the reader. In his bid to give the reader extra benefit, Shaw wrote lengthy prefaces which, in effect, became the medium of vigorous self-revelation. In the name of introducing the plays, he wrote elaborate discourses on the current problems of economics, politics, religion, sociology, morality, life and theatre which far transcended the scope of conventional introductions. Thus, the prefaces serve two-fold purpose— they serve as introductions to the plays and they also serve as independent essays on different problems of life and civilization. Thus, the prefaces can be said to have formed a
new kind of prose-writing. This new kind may be called a hybrid product of a marriage between introduction and formal treatise. However, there is difficulty in calling Shaw's prefaces a genre as they have not, till now, seemingly, set any precedent for the succeeding dramatists or fictionists. Among the qualities mentioned by Abrams that serve as criteria for evaluating literature are, "sincerity," "intensity," "organic unity," "high seriousness", "maturity" and "ironically qualified attitudes". Though Shaw's prefaces can be broadly said to have the above qualities, still they cannot qualify for the position of genre unless and until his type of prefaces becomes a practice with some writers. Though they are not a genre, they can surely be called a class by themselves. As prose pieces, they are sui generis in that they have combined in them the dual functions of introduction and formal discourse. The prefaces with their virtue of organic unity can claim the right to be considered as a literary species. The prefaces would always remain a part of the most important writings of Shaw, because they have drawn out the best in Shaw as a prose-writer. As vehicles of scintillating intellectual brilliance and moving rhetoric, Shaw's prefaces would always remain as pieces of permanent source of attraction and delight for the readers.