CHAPTER I

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The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines preface as "author's explanatory remarks at the beginning of a book". Fowler in his Modern English Usage says that preface "has a 500-year history behind it in English, and, far from being antiquated is still the name for the thing".\(^1\)

Again, Harry Shaw, in his Dictionary of Literary Terms defines preface as "a preliminary statement, an introductory part of a longer work. Preface, from Latin meaning "a saying before", is usually applied to introductory remarks by the author or editor of a book mentioning purpose and scope and offering thanks to others for assistance rendered".\(^2\)

The practice of writing prefaces to plays in modern sense can be dated back to Dryden, but the practice of writing prologue to a play which can be said to be the original form of preface can be traced to the ancient Greek drama. There is a slight but significant difference between a preface and prologue in that the prologue forms an integral part of the play as it requires to be sung or read out by an actor or actress or some deity, before the action of the play begins, but the preface is meant for private reading that forms no part of the stage business. The Greek prologues had importance for the play-goers in the sense that the prologues used to describe the antecedent incidents that

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led to the action of a drama. With Euripides, the prologue seems to take the place of "an explanatory first act"\textsuperscript{1}. In the prologue in the Sanskrit drama a discussion is initiated by Sutradhara or Sthapaka or director 'on some personal business which indirectly hints at the drama\textsuperscript{2} and helps in the start of the action of the drama by creating appropriate climate for it. On the Latin stage the prologue was more elaborately written than on the Greek stage. There is evidence of brilliance in the prologues written by Latin playwright Plautus. The French dramatists, Moliere and Racine, revived the practice of Plautine prologues. With the inauguration of the modern drama, the prologue also appears, directly adapted from the ancient practice. With Shakespeare the use of prologue is quite rare. In the Restoration drama, the playwrights seem to take prologue as an obligatory part of their craft. The preface in modern prose form seems to start with Dryden. He wrote preface to his plays in addition to his customary prologues in verse. Writing brief prefaces was more or less customary with the fictionists of the nineteenth century as is seen in the cases of Henry Fielding, Thackeray, De Quincey, Dickens and Hardy. Again, Johnson's Preface to his Dictionary, Harley Granville Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare and C. S. Lewis's A Preface to Paradise Lost are some of the examples that show that some writers use preface as a kind of literary review. This only proves the broadness of the scope of preface. Shaw's prefaces are not reviews of literary works in the above sense. They are introduced as


Introductions in the older sense of the preface, though, in effect, they have acquired some especial qualities. Dryden wrote prefaces whose contents had bearing upon the play to which they were prefixed. Bernard Shaw revived the Drydenian practice of writing prefaces to plays in an age when such practice continued to be regarded as no part of the stagecraft and was usually frowned upon. By nature an iconoclast, Shaw wrote prefaces to almost all of his plays in a spirit of defying convention. Some of the prefaces are longer than the plays themselves to which they are attached. It appeared almost a pathological trait in Shaw that he must write a preface to a particular play before he gets it published for public reading. Commenting upon this habit of Shaw's Chesterton says, "He is, indeed, a prefatory sort of person. He always gives the explanation before the incident."

Shaw's prefaces, for some time, came to be treated as jokes by some critics. Henry George Farmer quotes critic Edward Shanks as saying, "Shaw's fondness for writing prefaces has so long been a joke that no one any longer cares to be witty about it."

It may be mentioned that prior to writing dramas, Shaw started his career as a novelist in 1879 in concord with the current Victorian fashion of novel writing before him. He wrote as many as five novels from 1879 to 1883 by observing a discipline of writing five pages a day but the refusal of the publishers to publish his novels checkmated his ambition to be a novelist. Commenting on this bitter

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phase of his life Shaw says in the preface to *Immaturity,* "Fifty or sixty refusals without a single acceptance forced me into a fierce self-sufficiency. I became discourageable acquiring a superhuman insensitiveness to praise or blame." 1

When Shaw took to playwriting in 1892 as a better medium of communication with the public, he found in his prefaces an avenue to express himself directly what he could not do as a prose fictionist about a decade ago. The preface which formerly served as mere introductions to the theme of a book began to be used as an excuse for introduction by Shaw for his propagandist purposes. His prefaces began to transcend their traditional bounds. Shaw found in them a convenient vehicle for propagation of his ideas on diverse topics. Drama was not a popular reading when Shaw started his career as a dramatist. By prefixing his plays with propagandist prefaces and investing the plays with elaborate stage directions marked by fictional qualities, Shaw made his plays attractive for the reading public. Thus, Shaw's plays began to serve two-fold purpose - meeting the needs of the stage and those of the home-reading public. St. John Ervine observes in this connection, "The whole traffic of play production in book form was revolutionized by G.B.S.; and the fact that publisher's lists now commonly include plays is entirely due to him." 2

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In the preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* Shaw has put forward a strong defence of his prefaces. The notion that a work of art should speak for itself without any aid of preface and that the artist who appends and prefixes prefaces to his works is a bad artist is, according to Shaw, 'foolish'. Shaw says in the same preface, "The reason that most playwrights do not publish their plays with prefaces is that they cannot write them, the business of intellectually conscious philosopher and skilled critic being no part of their craft." (p. 744). Shaw also holds that the Royal Academy catalogues contain statements which tell the viewers what each picture is about.

It is alleged that Shaw has often failed to dramatize his arguments and themes completely in the plays and such undramatized parts of his themes have been carried over to his prefaces for discussion, and as a result, the plays have not been expectedly self-sufficient or self-expressive. Dr. Sen Gupta seems to slip into a wrong notion about the link between the plays and the prefaces. He says, "Indeed if the prefaces be taken away, no one will understand the purposes of some of his dramas; and one reason why he was so frequently misunderstood is that he had not been able to explain himself in his works of art. He cannot write a drama being a humorous-serious comedian, he has very often to discuss the serious portion of his argument in the preface and then he can indulge in the hearty laughter.
in the play. All the prefaces were written invariably after the plays and only a few prefaces were written in the same year in which the plays were written. The time gap between the plays and the prefaces varies from a few months to thirty seven years as is found in the case of The Philanderer. The contention that Shaw has very often "to discuss the serious portion of his argument in the preface and then he can indulge in his hearty laughter in the play" does not correspond to facts. There was no question of passing over from the plays, rather the hard fact was that Shaw passed over from the plays to prefaces with sufficient time-gap which definitely disturbed the continuity of argument from the plays to the prefaces. Shaw himself has testified to this when he says in his introduction to his Prefaces, "Most of them were written long after the plays, to which they were attached, had been repeatedly performed".

Most critics are prone to expect from Shaw complete dramatisation of the arguments and beliefs set down in the prefaces. However one could maintain that it is not binding on a playwright to dramatise every argument or statement expressed in the prefaces. Shaw also denies the possibility of dependence of the plays on the prefaces and declares, "I hope it is not necessary for me to remind critics unversed in literary tradition that the prefaces to my plays have nothing to do with the theatre". There is an element of

exaggeration in the statement, because though the prefaces are independent, still the prefaces are related to the plays, and they often contain discussions about the world of theatre.

Emphasizing the independent nature of the prefaces, professor Eric Bentley observes, "The full-dress Shavian preface, written after the play is produced, is not an introduction but a series of after-thoughts on the play or more often a treatise on the subject out of which the play arose. There is no overlapping between play and preface". As there was a time-gap between most of Shaw's plays and prefaces, these prefaces can rightly be regarded as after-thoughts on the concerned plays or on problems connected with them. Again, though most of Shaw's prefaces have taken the shape of formal discourse or treatise, still the author must have originally thought of projecting them as introductions as the term preface suggests. Eric Bentley has also rightly observed that the prefaces and plays "radically differ both in form and content" and the relation between them is an "oblique" one.

It is beyond argument that the prefaces and plays belong to two different literary genres. The prefaces, broadly, can be said to belong to the genre of essay though they have certain peculiar qualities which distinguish them from the traditional run of essays. The themes of the plays and prefaces are not cent per cent identical or parallel. The plays and prefaces are different structures, different forms with distinct

2 - ibid, p. 148.
identities. They are related thematically in an indirect and crisscross way. The position a particular topic occupies in the structure of a preface may not occupy the same position in the structure of a play. The plays and prefaces illustrate the difference between Shaw the artist and Shaw the propagandist. The prefaces are pieces of Shaw's conscious and deliberate thoughts; while the plays present his artistic visions. It can be maintained that while Shaw gave his head to the prefaces, he gave his heart to his plays.

Shaw's prefaces are mainly propagandist essays dealing with diverse topics, such as political science, economics, sociology, morality, the institutions of marriage and family, education, religion, medical science, the relation between parents and children, philosophy, art, aesthetics, evolution, eugenics, and many other like subjects. It will be found that the prefaces do not always discuss the themes of the plays—they quite often discuss the background, history, and origin of the plays, and sometimes contain Shaw's reply to the criticism arising out of the first performances of the plays. Shaw's prefaces not only contain Shaw's views on diverse topics, but the autobiographical content in them is also definitely great. About the lack of Shakespearean prefaces Shaw says in the preface to Three Plays for Puritans, "... I would give half a dozen of Shakespeare's plays for one of the prefaces he ought to have written" (p. 745). One could maintain that Shaw's prefaces are invaluable pieces as records of Shavian mind and philosophy. Henry George Farmer observes in
this connection, that if Shaw had not written the prefaces, "... We would have been denied much amusement and certainly robbed of that information about himself and others, whether true or not, which later enabled us to realize how completely "Shaw gives himself away", far more destructively than Shaw Gives Himself away".¹

Shaw was neither a rationalist², nor was he capable of mathematical discipline; at least he could not be so in the field of dramatization. He was not a man who could subject himself to the task of complete dramatization of his theme declared in a preface. He abhorred ready-made plots as the work of a man who puts together "a jig-saw puzzle"³. Shaw's practice was to let the plot grow naturally like a tree. If Shaw's plays are often found to be incomplete dramatization of the given themes, it is because as a 'natural historian' Shaw attempted naturalistic portrayal of the slices of human life to the comparative neglect of the nicety of completed dramatization. Shaw disliked pedanticity about pre-planned plot or construction and technical regulations of drama. In the preface to Cymbeline Refinished Shaw says, "plot has

³ "If you 'construct' a play; that is, if you plan your play beforehand, and then carry out your plan, you will find yourself in the position of a person putting together a jig-saw puzzle, absorbed and intensely interested in an operation which, to a spectator is unbearably dull"—Ref. "Mr Shaw on Mr Shaw" a letter addressed to Alexander Bakshy and published in New York Times, June 12, 1927).
always been the curse of serious drama, and indeed of serious literature of any kind" (p. 869). Shaw laid emphasis on the originality of ideas, not on the craft of the playwright.

In the preface to Three Plays for Puritans Shaw says, "Indeed, I defy any one to prove that the great epoch makers of fine art have owed their position to their technical skill" (p. 751). Shaw makes technique subordinate to ideas when he says in the same preface, "Besides, new ideas make their technique as water makes its channel; and the technician without idea is as useless as the canal constructor without water, though he may do very skillfully what the Mississippi does very rudely" (p. 751). Thus, Shaw directs his powers towards the naturalistic portrayals of human life in comparative disregard of the mechanical perfection of plot construction. This attitude to dramatic art may be said to be the principal reason behind the qualitative difference between Shaw's prefaces and plays. T. E. Lawrence comments in one of his letters to Mrs. Shaw, "The plays are creations: flames. The prefaces are sober plaited arguments addressed to our lower intellects".

Shaw's prefaces are not systematic and well-organised philosophical essays like those of Bacon or Bertrand Russell. They could be called neither 'formal' essays, nor could they be called 'informal' ones. They are products of intermixed qualities.

Something needs to be said about Shaw being called a propagandist writer. The term propaganda is a confusing one. When analyzed, it reduces itself into three things - (i) the advanced ideas appear as propaganda to the common people who have only conventional ideas, (ii) the works embodying the hopes and aspirations of a particular class may look like propaganda to another class and (iii) the writings or ideas of a committed writer may look like propaganda to a non-committed writer. Again, it can be said that the advanced ideas of to-day are the conventional ideas of to-morrow. The question is one of assimilation and absorption. The term 'propaganda' has become associated with the practice of 'brain-washing' or mind-bending. The derogatory sense of propaganda could be attributed to modern politics and modern psychology.

Neutrality, as Shaw says, could be called a figment of imagination. Everything or every person remains attached to or, associated with certain things or beliefs. So, a man or a thing cannot be called neutral in a strict sense. Christopher Caudwell observes in this connection, "There is no neutral world of art, free from categories or determining causes".

2 - "...Since any act may influence mass opinion, an important part of total policy is calculating and managing the psychological impact of every policy" "Propaganda" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 18 (Benton, 1970), p. 624A.
In the same way Randolph Quirk argues that a neutral language is not possible and says, "Let us remember, however, that there is no hard and fast line to be drawn between the 'Language of persuasion' and the 'language of fact'. It is very difficult to say or write anything without adopting some 'angle' and without betraying some point of view, even if we want to be objective: and for the most part we do not very energetically seek to be so". ¹

As said in the preface, an attempt has been made in the succeeding pages of the present work to find out the kind of relation that exists between Shaw's prefaces and his plays — whether there is correspondence between the themes of the plays and the prefaces, or if there is any incongruity or discrepancy, to find out in what way that discrepancy occurs, and whether each particular preface helps in appreciation of each particular play with which it is connected and whether the prefaces are prefaces in traditional sense or whether they constitute a new genre of prose-writing.