

# A Contemporary Shavian Manifesto



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By

Azeez Jasim Mohammed

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FOR

*The Soul of my Youngest Brother*

—*Hussein*—

You are still alive until I expire



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## FOREWORD

Azeez Jasim Mohammed's book *A Contemporary Shavian Manifesto* is an attempt to use a feminist perspective for the interpretation of the plays of George Bernard Shaw—but with a difference. Its difference lies in its deviation from the dominant mode of Western feminism that seeks to present a universal, unified, homogeneous notion of women's issues ignoring differences and contradictions among women. Feminists describe an experience shared by all women and identify common oppressions and common strategies to overcome these oppressions. The search for commonality, however, has led to the universalisation from the feminist's personal experience and creation of an 'essential' model of woman—a model based on a dominant white middle class. This universalising and 'essentialising' approach has served to obscure many differences such as those in race, ethnicity and class, ability and sexual orientation that exist between women and has thus harmed some women rather than helping them. There cannot be a single feminism and there is a multiplicity of feminisms dependent on multiple relational contexts. Although these feminisms are the product of many different women in a variety of social positions, not all have enjoyed the same prominence. The first and second wave feminist movements and theories appear to have been dominated by white middle-class women who were theorising from the perspective of their own personal experience. This led to the experiences of many working class and black women being overlooked. These theories are also Eurocentric, basing their ideas and actions on the lives and experiences of white women in Europe and North America and ignoring or undervaluing the lives and practices of women in the Third World and the way in which their lives have been affected by the conditions of colonialism. Also, contemporary feminism is projected as the feminism for and of all times, all ages and all historical periods, ignoring differences across the human history. This is based on the misconceived notion that feminism as a theory and political practice emerged only in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century and that the women in the ancient ages were not conscious enough to articulate their rights and freedom, build up any women's movement and work for female sisterhood or solidarity. These theorists advance a homogeneous theory of feminism and do not try to historicise their theories. This is the hypothesis of Azeez's book.

What Azeez tries to do in the book is to historicise women's issues by placing them in different periods of European history and in the contexts of women's discourses and movements in these phases, while connecting them to the plays of Shaw. Shaw's plays, as they address certain historical situations, character and backgrounds, are found amenable to such interpretations. Azeez has dealt with three phases of history as the contexts for three sets of plays he has chosen. The first phase covers the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Renaissance), marked by denial of freedom to women to preach and to speak in the church, which is represented in *Candida*, *Major Barbara*, and *Saint Joan*. The spirit and atmosphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Enlightenment, Romanticism and Naturalism), characterised by the debate on social institutions like marriage and denial of women's right to choose their own husbands, is located in *The Philanderer* and *Man and Superman*. Third, *Widowers Houses*, *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *Pygmalion* reflect different economic issues like lack of employment, educational opportunity and prostitution adversely affecting women witnessed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Victorian and Modern ages). But, Azeez eventually wants to demonstrate that it is Shaw's own attempt to write his own lived realities and his own time, agitated by similar women's issues, into these narratives set in different historical periods that give his plays a certain distinctness and peculiarity. Shaw shuttles between the present and past connecting the two. Shaw, it can be said, writes in time continuum.

The form of feminism that Shaw advocates and practises lies in the fact that he questions the traditional notion of self-sacrifice as an essential attribute of a true woman, or womanly woman, and the denunciation of any woman who lacks this quality of self-sacrifice as an unwomanly woman. He rather argues in his *Quintessence of Ibsenism* that a 'true woman' is one who has helped herself first, which would enable her to help her family later on. He twists and reverses the traditional interpretation of 'unwomanly woman' as immodest, wanton and defiant and defends woman's defiance of the shackles of age old patriarchal codes for her autonomy and self-realisation. He has used his own notion of 'unwomanly woman' as the conceptual yardstick and key term for the representation and interpretation of women in his plays: "The sum of the matter is that unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself....therefore Woman has to repudiate duty altogether" (*Quintessence of Ibsenism* 41). This is a shockingly unconventional view that jolts the persons of patriarchal ideology from their complacency and jerks them into an awareness of their position and

re-evaluation of their world view. This, I think, is what existentialist thinkers like Kierkegaard mean by “inwardness”, Heidegger by “authentic self” and Sartre by “being for oneself”. Shaw seems to apply Sartre’s distinction between “being for oneself”, living according to one’s own wishes and tendencies, one’s “inwardness”, or living the “authentic existence” and “being for others”, living according to the wishes and pleasures of others, according to external pressures, or living an inauthentic existence. In this context, a comparison with Henrik Ibsen will not be out of place. Henrik Ibsen’s drama, as we know, was a major influence on Shaw, who adopted the Ibsenian models of domestic drama, problem play and discussion play. In Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, for instance, Nora discovers at the end that she has lived all along an inauthentic existence. When she was a girl she acted according to the pleasures and displeasures of her father, and after her marriage she had to play a docile, faithful, obedient wife and make self-sacrifices to serve and please her husband. Behaving as a doll dancing to the tunes of others, she has lived in “bad faith”; through acts of self-sacrifice she has turned into a sacrificial goat and lost her self. When she finally slams the door against her husband and walks out of the home she goes in search of herself— her authentic, autonomous self. Shaw’s Candida in *Candida*, considered alongside *A Doll’s House*, is not as radical as Nora, though she is portrayed as a rebellious woman. Shaw uses the character of Candida to help her husband reform himself and come down from the high pedestal of patriarchal ideology. In a subtle manner, we find, Shaw is a didactic playwright but not a propagandist.

In the tradition of Ibsen, Shaw’s drama is a drama of ideas and of discussion. But he fashioned out his own brand of the drama of ideas by imparting passion and vehemence to his ideas and making discussion the core of his dramatic structure. The ideas presented in his plays are so intense and complex that they do not strike us as thin abstractions and do not give the impression that the playwright indulges in mere abstractions. His ideas are felt as thick and palpable as any concrete presentation; they are supported and underpinned by a solid system of thought and are related to the actuality of life. The clash of ideas through debates and discussions in his plays generates a lot of dramatic tension, like the dramatic tension arising out of the conflict of characters and situations in a play.

Shaw’s plays span a wide range of historical periods and they together present a panoramic vision of European civilisation and issues confronted by women in their struggle for emancipation from economic, educational and social restrictions. He takes up specific socio-cultural issues and

problems faced by women, dramatises them, and expatiates on them, drawing the readers– both men and women– into the debate and making them participate in it and move themselves into self-examination. Ideas become experience for Shaw, which he seeks to share with readers and with society. Women's issues presented by him are still found in our time in varied forms and complexity. It is a kind of educational theatre that Shaw was working towards, the reflection of which is found in present day theatre activities like workshop theatre and street theatre, which have a certain educational agenda and adopt a discussion mode practised in India and other places. Hence, thematically and technically Bernard Shaw's plays are quite relevant for our time and Azeez Jasim Mohammed's book is a product of the perception of this relevance and an attempt to justify it.

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## PREFACE

*A Contemporary Shavian Manifesto* seeks to study the plays of George Bernard Shaw in terms of his attempt to historicise feminism by locating it in different forms and different historical and cultural contexts and resituating them in his own times. This is different from the studies that employ a general, universal form of feminism to evaluate the texts irrespective of geographical, historical and cultural differences. This book aims to contest the homogeneous form of feminism to foreground the multiple forms of feminism produced by historical forces in different periods of history. The book thus examines the position of women in society through the centuries influenced by the structures of religion, economics, and morality used by George Bernard Shaw to contemplate the conditions of women in his own times.

The study is divided into four chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The first part gives a brief introduction to the project, its aims and objectives, hypotheses, methodology, the type of feminist perspective, a brief overview of criticism on Shaw, rationale for the project, key issues, and arguments and work plan. Chapter One examines the theoretical framework of feminism. The main body of this work is presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four, analysing Shaw's paradigm of feminism and conceptualisation of 'New Womanism' illustrated in his plays. The concluding part sums up the discussions made in the previous chapters to corroborate the hypotheses.



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Azeez Jasim Mohammed



## INTRODUCTION

A writer writes his own time. He incorporates in his writings dominant norms of his time and questions them. In his acts of writing, he draws upon the resources of the past and their implications for the future, and his vision of life. Hence, he writes in the time continuum. This is what T. S. Eliot means when he says that "[The poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (42). The writer, however, must live in the most conscious moment of his time. Each play of George Bernard Shaw has a definite purpose and addresses the problems of his time and beyond it. His plays embody certain ideas which he vehemently advocates. Many of his plays address the issues of women, their position in society, their pain and struggle and their relationship with men. The intensity and drive in Shaw's female characters are complex but are open to interpretation. His treatment of the challenging issues regarding the rights of women in a society has been considered one of the factors that make his plays more socio-cultural documents than entertainments. Shaw displays masterly use of irony despite his dogmatic insistence on truth. He does not explicitly express what he thinks, he only insinuates, and is not understood until the play reaches its climax, leaving its solutions open-ended for the reader/audience.

The ideal of the unwomanly woman occupied Shaw's mind while most of his contemporaries were frozen in a Victorian frame. This ideal appeared in most of his plays. In his book *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw was influenced by the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff, which was the literary sensation in 1890 and an important journal of the time. The diary was about a Russian girl who started writing a little diary at the age of fourteen. Eleven years later, she managed to write thousands of pages in which she created an obsessively detailed monument to her own life which was published posthumously in 1887. Since the Russian girl migrated to France, the diary was hailed as the true portrait of a woman by the French press. Shaw read the running commentary on the outline of the diary given in the June 1890 issue of *The Review of Reviews* by William Stead, the editor. After that, Shaw came to notice that Stead's most important ideal was an ideal of womanliness. Hence, his picture of a woman's mind

presented to him by his ideal was the womanly woman, a self-controlled woman, a true woman. Shaw countered Stead's ideal of womanliness and came to conclude that the self-controlled woman was an unwomanly woman whereas the womanly woman was not true woman. What drew Shaw's attention to this concept was Stead's fundamental understanding of Marie's personality as that of an unwomanly woman because she was a natural woman. In spite of her unwomanly acts, Stead believed, she did not have self-control. This came out in his lines: "Marie was artist, musician, wit, philosopher, student, anything you like but a natural woman with a heart to love, and a soul to find its supreme satisfaction in sacrifice for lover or for child" (qtd. in Shaw, *Quintessence* 30). The fact was that, after making his running commentary on the outline of the diary, Stead found Marie's account of herself in her diary was utterly incompatible with his idealism because she controlled herself after behaving in an unwomanly manner. Stead's judgement of "no self-control" was challenged by Shaw, who referenced Marie's hard work of ten hours a day for six years, which led Shaw to write: "Let anyone who thinks that this is no evidence of self-control just try it for six months" (Shaw, *Quintessence* 30). On this evidence, Shaw enhanced his ideal of unwomanliness and made Stead accept the idea that Marie was not a woman in order to defend his ideal, otherwise Stead would have had to confess that his ideal was false. Shaw was resentful of the idea that the young woman might sacrifice all the powers that had been given to her for her lover or child. He criticised hailing the womanly woman through self-sacrifice, thinking that such type of woman "is not only taken advantage of, but disliked as well for her pains" (Shaw, *Quintessence* 32). He deconstructed the meaning of the true woman by questioning self-sacrifice imposed on a woman under the pretext that she likes it and, if she ventures to contradict the pretence, she is declared not a true woman. "The self-sacrificer is always a drag, a responsibility, a reproach, an everlasting and unnatural trouble with whom no really strong soul can live" (32). Shaw suggested that the true woman is the one who has helped herself first, which would enable her to help her family later on. He asserted that "only those who have helped themselves know how to help others" (32). Shaw appears to be admiring Marie's behaviour and holding her up as his prominent ideal of woman for women characters portrayed by him. That is why Shaw comes to conclude:

The astonishing thing is that women, sooner than be branded as unsexed wretches, allowed themselves to be stupefied with drink, and in that unwomanly condition burnt alive...The sum of the matter is that unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot

emancipate herself...therefore Woman has to repudiate duty altogether. In that repudiation lies her freedom; for it is false to say that Woman is now directly the slave of Man: she is the immediate slave of duty; and as man's path to freedom is strewn with the wreckage of the duties and ideals he has trampled on, so must hers be. (30-1, 41)

*A Contemporary Shavian Manifesto* aims to study the ways Shaw addresses the gender inequality in society through the examinations of the women's role in the social, religious, moral and economic spheres in lived practices. Besides studying Shaw's exploration of the radical woman, the study intends to trace his attempts to project a "new woman", who is the pursuer rather than being pursued. The dramatist advocates woman as pursuer in negating "a feeble romantic convention that the initiative in sex business must always come from the man" (Shaw, *Prefaces* 155). Woman has been given the right to pursue and decide her future by herself without any outer pressure or interference. Thus the playwright questions the relegation of woman to the domestic space, the arbitrary distribution of duties between men and women and patriarchally-determined codes of conduct imposed upon woman. His foregrounding of woman as the force behind what he calls creative evolution achieves a kind of feminisation of the 'life force', the central theme in his plays.

Shaw writes his own time, his own concerns and preoccupations interpreting the occurrences of the past as reflection on his times. This book is an attempt to historicise feminism and locate Shaw's plays in different historical times. It is opposed to the universal feminism which is being currently applied to all geographical regions, historical periods and cultural domains without taking into account differences and diversities. Hence it is to relate Shaw's plays to woman's movements and woman's issues of specific historical periods in which plays are written and in which plays are situated. The marked period which the study refers to is between Fifteenth century and 1923 when *Saint Joan* was written. That is why the methodology of this book is a feminist one, but different from that of the earlier critics. While previous studies have employed feminism of a general and universal type irrespective of geographical, historical and cultural differences, this study seeks to address feminine situations specific to certain historical periods, the periods of the plays by Shaw.

The Western feminism that emerged in the 1960s is used to interpret Shaw's plays written in the late nineteenth century and the 1920s. Its universal applicability to all cultures and all nations is interrogated through my emphasis on the historical aspect of women's issues in

different historical periods. The selected plays are viewed in relation to the women's movements and feminist views expressed at the time of the publication of the play and in relation to the women's issues during the period of the action of Shaw's plays. The interaction between the sets of assumptions and discourses of the author's time and the time of the play is analysed. The historical situations addressed in his plays are shown to be analogous to the contemporary situations of Shaw.

In this respect, we assume that woman's liberation lies in her self-realisation rather than self-abnegation, and in the realisation of her resources and her potential, not in surrender to outward forces. Liberation is to defy codes of womanly conduct constructed by patriarchy and established as womanly manner. Therefore, a woman can achieve her aims in a society by pursuing her love and it is not reserved for man to pursue. She has to break out of the confines of the domestic space into which she has been consigned and claim a space in the public domain of religion, morality and economics.

In a broader sense, most previous studies have focused on women's status in the time of Bernard Shaw. They generalised statements on the 'new woman' or 'strong woman' in his plays. Occurrences of issues during the past centuries are not thoroughly examined. Most of Shaw's plays are problem plays; hence they are influenced by a specific issue in a specific time. It is also to be highlighted that the issue of Shaw's time is correlated to an issue which had already been raised at some point in the past. Thus, there is a need to study the selected plays as representations of the issues in both Shaw's time and in particular periods of time in the past which he used as his sources, as well as ultimately studying his reading of the past issues in the context of his time. In other words, the project is to reconcile the plays with the time and context of production of the text. This method explores the occurrences in the historical periods that relate to Shaw's time and stimulated his creativity to write his text. It analyses Shaw's attempt to resituate the past in the present.

The study looks at the correlation between the time of the play and relevant phases in the past. For necessity of limitation and scope of the study it will be restricted to the following selected plays: *Widowers' Houses* (1885-92), *The Philanderer* (1893), *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893-4), *Candida* (1894), *Man and Superman* (1901-03), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1912-13) and *Saint Joan* (1923). These plays can be correlated to the following three phases:

First Phase: fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Renaissance). The relationship between women during the Renaissance and religious institutions is examined in plays such as *Candida* (1894), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Saint Joan* (1923). Women during this period suffered ill-treatment because of the misconceived belief that Eve was responsible for the fall of Man as she was accused of tempting Adam and causing his fall. Hence, a woman was not allowed to preach and if she attended church, she had to keep silent. Although women followed and obeyed the word of God just as much as men did, they were denied the privilege of spreading it. Men were allowed to take part in all the rituals relating to the worship of God, but women were restricted from performing these. The clerics of the time did not equate women with men in the task and privilege of spreading the word of God. Their role was merely confined to the domestic sphere.

Second Phase: eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Enlightenment, Romanticism and Realism), which form the context for *The Philanderer* (1893) and *Man and Superman* (1901-03). These plays sought to address the relationship between women and morality, which was marked by debate on social institutions like marriage. Women had no right to choose their husbands and had to wait for a proposal and accept it, though it might not suit them. Because of the expenses involved on the part of the husbands, proposals did not often come and many women had to remain single. This study attempts to expose Shaw's reading of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' marriage norms. In this period, women were not given any right to legal redress if they suffered from oppression or were tortured in their married life. They could not obtain divorce as they were considered the property of their husbands. If a woman decided to escape from her intolerable marriage, she would be captured by police and brought back to her husband, who then had the right to imprison her. The church and law sanctioned this treatment of women which was supported and approved by social conventions. Therefore, women had to choose between sitting at home waiting for a proposal and remaining a spinster.

Third Phase: Late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Victorian and modern ages). This phase saw different economic issues like the lack of employment and educational opportunities, and prostitution, which was increasingly considered as a means of employment for poor women. Shaw responds to these issues in *Widowers' Houses* (1885-92), *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893-4) and *Pygmalion* (1912-13). This phase explores the relation between women's issues in the time of Shaw and the incidents in this phase. They have been presented in a chapter examining the relationship between women and economic independence. The plays deal

mostly with working class women who begin working in their teenage years and continue working until their marriage. Women's struggles continued even after marriage as they were expected to meet male expectations or patriarchal expectations of them to be "the angels in the house". Women were like decorative pieces in the house and had to remain devoted to domestic service. They received less education compared to men and were not allowed to attend universities. They endured overworking and low wages. Their purpose in living, however, was to serve and reproduce. Mrs Warren in *Mrs Warren's Profession* chooses to work with leading brothels to change her class from working class to an aristocratic one. Eliza in *Pygmalion*, as a working class woman, is compared to Clara who lives in a middle class community. Blanche in *Widowers' Houses* sees herself as superior to her maid Annie who suffered ill-treatment.

Shaw engages with the feminine situation of the past and the present and uses the past situation as an analogy of his present concern. The important key issues which are to be discussed are confined to the correspondence between a particular situation of his time and similar situation in the past. The study counters the general interpretation of George Bernard Shaw as a patriarchal playwright. It is a deconstruction of feminism as universal and non-political and a foregrounding of feminism of different historical and cultural domains. In the case of Shaw, it is the period between 1890 and 1923 that this book is concerned with. It is to look at the feminisation of the concept of the life force, which is largely held as a masculinist ideology as found in Nietzsche's concept of 'superman'. Moreover, this work is to pay great attention to the influence of social norms on the nature of woman's life and critiquing the marriage laws and the position of the widow in the society. The relationship between poverty and the lack of education on the one hand, and woman's backwardness on the other reflects Shaw's Marxist reading of women's class oppression, the mistress-maid relationship, his female characters as a part of his ideological opposition to war and women's financial problems which lead to prostitution as a substitute to earn her living. It is to shed light on the indignation about violence against women and dress codes as gender-marker, with particular focus on Shaw's advocacy of woman as pursuer.

The content of this book is divided into three parts: introduction, main body and the conclusion. The chapters of the main body are arranged according to the periods Shaw's individual plays address. In other words, focusing on the ways they explore the historical aspects of his plays. Every play Shaw wrote relates an incident in his time to a similar corresponding

incident that occurred at some point in the past. Each chapter is subdivided into several sections. The first part serves as an introduction to this work, whereas chapter one presents a theoretical framework of feminism and a historical background of the author's life, experience and career and an elaboration of what is meant by the historicisation of feminism. It presents a brief overview of the previous critical studies on Shaw and his feminist views. The next three chapters are devoted to analysis of the plays and the last part is the conclusion. Hence, the selected plays discussed are not in chronological order. Chapter two, "Woman and Religion", explores the situations of women in the early fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their interpretation on Shaw's writing. The chapter is subdivided into three sections. Section one, "Sermons and Domestic Relations: 'Virgin Mother' in *Candida*", examines the domestic relationship between a parson and his wife. Shaw calls Candida "Virgin mother" and compares her to "Virgin Mary" in the sense that Virgin Mary is unwedded while Virgin Mother is one who is married but critical about her husband's manner. She does not desert him for her children's sake. Section two, "Saving Souls and Saving Money: Idealist and Realist Women in *Major Barbara*", tackles three types of women. Amongst those heroines, two of them are occupied with saving souls, Mrs Baines and Major Barbara, who work as officers in the Salvation Army, whereas the third one is a housewife, Lady Britomart, who is estranged from her husband and struggles to save money to manage her family. Section three is named "'Woman-Man in Petticoats': Critiquing Masculine Heroism in *Saint Joan*". In this section, a woman deconstructs the concept of military prowess as an exclusively male virtue, and also challenges the construction of radical women as witches. A heroic woman defies the clerics of her age, challenges the masculinist ideology of heroism and behaves in an unwomanly manner to liberate herself and her country as well.

Chapter three, "Woman and Morality", is devoted to the dramatist's questioning of the marriage norms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Women, as this chapter explains, choose to behave in an unconventional manner as they counter codes of normalisation and decide to pursue the men they love. This chapter contains some of Shaw's readings of scientific theories. Section one, "Platonic Love and Philandering: The Self-conscious Woman in *The Philanderer*", explores the woman's fight against entrapment, the negative effect of philandering on her life and shows women as victims of philandering. The playwright suggests a way to contest philandering by establishing "the Ibsen Club" which is suggested as the best way to woman's self-realisation. Section

two, "Marriage and Social Conventions: The Deviant Woman in *Man and Superman*", makes an exposition of the social norms and challenges the masculinist interpretation of the superman, who was presented as the instrument of nature for Life Force.

Chapter four, "Woman and Economic Independence", exposes the analysis of three plays in terms of reflection on the woman's economic status in the Victorian and Modern age. It falls into three sections. Section one, "'The Angel in the House': Independent Woman in *Widowers' Houses*", discusses the class struggle and its repercussion. Use of violence by the mistress against her maid, the violence by a woman against woman, is an effect of the woman's internalisation of patriarchal values. Section two, "Economic Discrimination and Prostitution: Rebellious Woman in *Mrs Warren's Profession*", deals with patriarchal discriminations against woman on the matters of work and wages; overworking and underpayment of women force them into an alternative option, prostitution. Section three, "Poverty and Education: Emancipated Woman in *Pygmalion*", relates poverty to education and projects woman's position in between. It also critiques the commodification of woman.

The concluding part sums up the discussions made in the previous chapters to corroborate the hypotheses. The plays of Shaw are studies of women in changing times. This study examines the position of women in society over the centuries, influenced by the structures of religion, economics and morality used by Shaw to reflect on the conditions of women in his times. This part points out Shaw's paradigm of feminism and the conceptualisation of 'new womanism'.



# CHAPTER ONE

## BERNARD SHAW AND "THE WOMAN QUESTION"

### 1.1 The Time of Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw's early education was in the form of tutoring sessions. His clerical uncle took the responsibility for providing these sessions. Early on, Shaw visited the National Gallery of Ireland, the place where his passion for music, art and literature was stimulated. In 1870, Shaw's mother was unhappy with a drunkard husband. She decided to go to London, taking Shaw with her. In London he found a cultural atmosphere conducive to his aptitude. He spent time in the British Museum Reading Room, and in that place began his creative writing. He worked as a music critic under the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto". There is no doubt that Shaw's interest in art came from his mother's guidance. After that he worked as a theatre critic for the *Saturday Review*, his reviews appeared under the initials "GBS". His career is divided into two parts: as a failed novelist and a successful playwright. He wrote five novels and 60 plays, 3 volumes of music criticism, 4 volumes of dance and theatre criticism, reams of social commentary, political theory and voluminous correspondence. He was not disappointed by the failure of his novels. In 1898 Shaw's first published plays were in volumes titled *Plays Unpleasant* (*Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*) and *Plays Pleasant* (*Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell*). Later on, in 1901 Shaw published another volume titled *Three Plays for Puritans* (*The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*). His religion was not clear until the 1890s, when he renounced atheism and began identifying himself as a mystic. Because of his vegetarianism, Shaw was expected to have been influenced by Hinduism. Before his decision to marry Charlotte Payne-Townshend (1857–1943) in 1898, he was in touch, not in love, with Beatrice Webb and Ellen Terry. His love with Charlotte began when he fell seriously ill, which forced him to resign as theatre critic. "His mother [Lucinda] never bothered to come into his room nor

had she made any effort to deal with his swollen foot.” (Minney 47) Charlotte was in touch with him in a way differed from that of the other women of his time. “Charlotte saw that [he] was looking ill and haggard...with an assertive emphasis [she] announced that she was going to look after him herself” (47-8). After being cured, he decided to marry her, but her condition was such that in their married life they should abstain from sex. As a pro-feminist, Shaw obeyed her desires. He considered marriage a decision taken after someone is in the grip of the life force. His views about marriage were different before and after his marriage. That is perhaps why he regards “love, as a practical factor in society, is still a mere appetite” (Shaw, *Quintessence* 34). Nevertheless, the married couple lived together until their death in a house at Ayot St. Lawrence, London now called ‘Shaw’s Corner’.

Shaw is considered outdated by some critics but a lot of his later works are among the best dramas ever written in English. Future generations saw Shaw as able to communicate in a way that many other writers and thinkers were not. He even wrote about the desperation and misery of prostitution. In writing about the profession that catered to the upper classes he at least rescued prostitution from being an abstract “evil” and showed it as part of the fabric of nineteenth century life, as something having economic causes and economic consequences.

Some of the problems with Shaw’s drama are problems with the drama of the period, the emotional poverty of the language, the terrible condescension to people below the middle-class, the rigidity that illusionist staging imposes. All these he has in common with his contemporaries. Shaw is an immensely important thinker of the twentieth century and his plays are bold expressions of his views about the feminine situation of his times, are interventions in favour of women. In this sense, Shaw deserves an important place in feminist studies.

Shaw was a prolific essayist, a cultural critic, commentator on music and theatre and an activist. An actively engaged intellectual, political and social activist, he was well acquainted with current thoughts and movements. I will present his time in terms of debates and discourses going on at the time.

Let us start with Victor Hugo’s (1802–1885) novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), in which he criticised the religious domination and the political situation of his time. Hugo was resentful about the superiority of religion and criticised the clerics who misled people. Bernard Shaw

later on based his play *Saint Joan* (1923) on the theme of this novel. During that time Shaw had met Edward Aveling (1849–1898), an ardent advocate of Darwinian evolution and the partner of Eleanor Marx (1855–1898), Karl Marx's youngest daughter, with whom Shaw was in love. That explains why the dramatist was influenced by Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) theory of evolution and genetics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Shaw learned that Karl Marx (1818–1883), the co-founder of Marxist theory in collaboration with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), lived in London, he met him for long talks at the end of 1880 and early in 1881. His association with Eleanor Marx, an actress and political activist who had done research for her father in the British Museum and who translated *Das Kapital* into English, helped him read Marxism. Shaw and Eleanor were members of the Shelley Society and at one meeting Eleanor presented a lecture about her father's interest in Shelley, the poet, by whom Shaw was influenced too. Along with Eleanor, several of Shaw's friends, including Henry Hyndman (1842–1921), who explained to Shaw some of Karl Max's ideas, and Mrs Theodore Wright, an actress and Fabian, whom Shaw described as "a revolutionary beauty" and "the friend of Karl Marx" (Laurence 2:474), helped him to understand some of Karl Marx's ideas. The playwright, as evidenced by his plays, had read Alfred Russell Wallace (1823–1913), who made many contributions to develop the theory of evolution and read Henri Bergson's book *Creative Evolution* (1907). In the same library, Shaw had the chance to read the eugenic theory by Francis Galton (1822–1911) and the gynocentric theory by the sociologist Lester Frank Ward (1841–1913), both of which were developed in 1883. The Galton Institute, which was founded in 1907, was named after the former. The institute's name was the Eugenic Education Society, then developed into the Eugenic Society in 1926. The use of the theme of sexuality in his play *The Philanderer* indicates Shaw's reading of *Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study* in 1886 by Richard von Krafft-Ebin (1840–1902), a sex theorist, and Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), the British sex theorist and social reformer who studied human sexuality and who later served as the president of the Eugenic Institute.

George Bernard Shaw, the socialist, also supported a British socialist organization established in 1884 which aimed to advance the principles of socialism called the Fabian Society. Bernard Shaw, who joined the organisation in the year of its establishment, found it an opportunity to look at the world outside England. There were many members of this organisation by whom Shaw was influenced. One of them was Annie Besant (1847–1933), a British Socialist, theosophist, women's rights activist, writer and orator and supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule. In his

preface to the first edition of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw wrote that the first form of this book "was duly read at the St. James's Restaurant on the 18th July 1890 under the presidency of Mrs Annie Besant" (10). In the 1880s she gave him a chance to get acquainted with the philosophy of peace of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), one of the champions of peace and nonviolence. Annie was so impressed by both Gandhi and Shaw that she grew very close to them.

Shaw visited Italy in 1894 and attended an exhibition of "pre-Raphaelites" painters and saw "a very remarkable collection of the works of...British 'pre-Raphaelites' painters" (Shaw, *Prefaces* 728). The pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Movement of the 1840s was a reforming movement that rejected the mechanistic approach to life. This visit encouraged Shaw to write his play *Candida* (1894). Shaw had read Coventry Patmore's (1823–1896) poem "The Angel in the House", first published in 1854, which projected the norms of an ideal happy marriage. After the publication of this poem, the term "Angel in the House" came to be used in reference to women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal; a wife and mother who were selflessly devoted to their children and submissive to their husband, which Shaw critiqued in his plays. His religious play *Major Barbara* (1905) is based on The Salvation Army, founded in 1865 by William Booth and his wife Catherine.

Shaw's reading of Maurice Maeterlinck's (1862–1949) book *The Life of the Bee* in 1901 was synchronised with the year of beginning work on his play *Man and Superman*. Moreover, Shaw was influenced by some of his intimate friends like; the Irish poets William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Gilbert Murray (1866–1957) who was the basis for the character of Adolphus Cusins in his *Major Barbara* and William Archer (1856–1924) a Scottish critic who suggested the plot of his play *Widowers' Houses* in 1885. In the theoretical context, Shaw's contemporaries were eminent theorists like Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who was well known for his existential and phenomenological explorations of the "question of being", Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), the key figure of the philosophy of existentialism, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist, and social theorist, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), a prominent psychoanalyst of Shaw's time, and Edmund Husserl (1859–1939) who founded the twentieth century philosophical school of phenomenology.

The dramatist lived during the two World Wars. The effect of World War I (1914–1918) was positive for women as they got the chance to show their

abilities by working outside the home, which inspired the first wave of feminism. In World War II (1939–1945) the woman's role was expanded to take in positions in the military. This period is related to the beginning of the second wave feminism. During Shaw's time, too, the Irish War of Independence took place from 1919 till the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922.

The playwright had witnessed feminist movements in the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries in different forms and campaigns for reform on issues like domestic violence, maternity leave, reproductive rights, women's suffrage, equal pay, sexual harassment and sexual violence. One of the most important and far-reaching movements in the nineteenth century was that of "The Ladies of Langham Place", established to settle the legal problems of married women, the necessity for women's better education and the need for expanding the opportunities for women's employment.

## 1.2 A Brief Overview of Criticism on Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw is acknowledged as a great dramatist, a dramatist of ideas with definite, strong views on different aspects of modern human situations. Most of the criticism on Shaw has been concerned with his philosophy and politics, but his ideas about women's position as well as their resistance to the norms and taboos fabricated by male-governed social structures have been largely ignored. A few studies on the feminine situation in his plays have been of the universal, general type ignoring the historical of cultural specificities.

Among these studies, in the late fifties and sixties appeared: Jere Veilleux's *Shavian Drama: A Dialectical Convention for the Modern Theatre* (1958), C B Purdom's *A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw* (1963), Barbara Bellow Watson's *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman* (1964) and Raymond Williams's two books *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1967) and *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968).

Veilleux categorises women in Shaw's plays into three types of rhetorical women; the professional rhetorician, the natural rhetorician and the master rhetorician.

In Shavian drama the professional rhetorician is characteristically the one who talks for the sake of talk...The natural rhetorician is the man or woman of action who persuades others more by what he is and by what he does than by mere language...The master rhetorician is a representative of age

and experience, often partially mad or eccentric, who realises the futility and ephemeral value of most persuasion. (171-2)

Shaw's characters have been grouped and classified in many other ways, according to their profession, similarity to Shaw himself or their ideological positions. The utility of the concept of the three rhetorical character types is that it allows a more complete view of the motives and justifications behind the ideas in the play than other classifications may permit (Veilleux 172). This is a fine analysis of female characters in Shaw, but it does not adequately discuss woman's fight against entrapment.

Purdom refers to most of Shaw's plays in a chronological order. He comments that *Mrs Warren's Profession* (A Play 1893) "is a play for woman. The first unpleasant play [in his collection *Plays Unpleasant*] was about slums, the second about women and marriage, and this, the third, about prostitution. It is the best of the three showing its author to be increasing his powers" (152). As a mystery, *Candida* (1894) "is Shaw's best constructed play" (164). Shaw's *Major Barbara* is a play of conflict between the individual and society to which there is no resolution except through social redemption. The conflict arises over money and Shaw puts members of the Salvation Army in a dramatic situation of dilemma over whether to accept money from the whisky distiller and an armament manufacturer for their work among the poor or stop work for want of funds. *Pygmalion* (1912), the film adaptation of which won an Oscar, "is meant to speak for itself and it is not without significance that Shaw wrote one of his shortest prefaces to it" (247). Finally, his chronicle play in six scenes and an epilogue, *Saint Joan* (1923) "is a record of what mankind does to its geniuses and saints. Man wants neither, and the hatred men have for each other flares up intensely against great souls" (278). Purdom's criticism does not fully bring out the gendered identity of woman.

Watson's book, however, is "the first book to consider exclusively Shaw's female characters, covers his entire career and made a marked impact on subsequent Shavian scholarship" (Gainor, *Feminist* 84). This book, dealing at length with Shaw's treatment of women in his political theory and fictional practice, emphasises Shaw's departure from convention in his creation of domineering, clever, sensible, good-humoured, sexually aggressive—in short, "unladylike"—women. Watson deals with the notion of the revolutionary ideas and plots which are noted in the "new drama", while the emergence of the 'new woman' and her contribution to modern