

Socialism in G.B Shaw's *Arms and the Man*: A study of Realism and Idealism

Santanu Panda

Department of English,
(MA student) Sidho-
Kanho-Birsha University,
Purulia, West Bengal,
India

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to describe socialism in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* and compare and contrast between realism and idealism. George Bernard Shaw known as Barnard Shaw is a famous dramatist of later half of 19th century and early half of 20th century. Shavian play is gradually based on social problems. Shaw introduces the problems and also find a solution by discussion. So, his plays are known as 'problem play' and 'discussion play'. Shaw reveals his idea through shocking sentences. His words at first shatter our old ideas but gradually we realize its utility. The Shavian hero posses Life Force. Life Force means a practical mind without any illusion of life. The play *Arms and the Man* is also followed the same tradition. The subtitle of the play is 'an anti romantic comedy in three acts'. In his play the first act introduces a problem, second act develops it and third act resolves the problem with discussion. Shaw's pleasant plays are apparently comic but it makes us laugh but they also make us think. Shaw also delivers serious ideas through the guise of comic manner. As a result common ideas seen new. Here he placed two heroes Bluntschli who is rational and calculative and Sergius who is romantic and impulsive and two heroines Raina and Louka. In this play Shaw satirizes War by these two hero, Marriage by these two hero and heroine and Slavery by Nicola.

Keywords: Life Force, Problem Play, Romantic Play, Fantasy, Realism

George Bernard Shaw known as Barnard Shaw is a famous dramatist of later half of 19th century and early half of 20th century. He has written several plays like *Arms and the Man*, *Major Barbara*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Caesar and Cleopatra* are prominent. In 1938 he wrote a careen play for a filmed version of *Pygmalion* and he awarded an 'Academy Award'. Shavian play is gradually based on social problems. Shaw introduces the problems and also finds a solution by discussion. So, his plays are known as 'problem play' and 'discussion play'. Shaw reveals his idea through shocking sentences. His words at first shatter our old

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ideas but gradually we realize its utility. Such ideas are called ‘Shock- Therapy’. Shaw is a well known socialist and his plays deal with class issues and society. This is detectable in this play:

“Despite the prominence of debate and speechmaking in his plays, one sometimes forgets that before Shaw-the-playwright came Shaw -the-debater and public speaker. All were platform spellbinders” (Dukore 385)

The Shavian hero posses Life Force. Life Force means a practical mind without any illusion of life. The play *Arms and the Man* is also followed the same tradition. The subtitle of the play is ‘an anti romantic comedy in three acts’. In his play the first act introduces a problem, second act develops it and third act resolves the problem with discussion. Shaw’s pleasant plays are apparently comic but it makes us laugh but they also make us think. Shaw also delivers serious ideas through the guise of comic manner. As a result common ideas seen new. The word anti-romantic shows that Shavian plays shatters romantic illusion. In this play three such illusion are war, marriage and slavery. The play *Arms and the Man* has an epigraph extracted from virgil’s *Aeneid* (aram.virumque cano) which in English means ‘Arms and the Man I sing’. Shaw uses the title to suggest arms or intellect and the man who uses it. This play was performed for the first time in Avenue Theatre, London on 21st April 1894.

The play *Arms and the Man* treats three romantic illusion in society war, marriage, slavery. Shaw knew that he must choose a setting where people have such illusions. At that time Bulgaria and Serbia were such countries which were inferior in thought. So he chooses the setting of such countries to criticize the follies of Society. This play has two heroes Sergius and Bluntschli and two heroines Raina and Louka who plays the theme of marriage, the two heroes and Raina’s father Major Petkoff deals with the theme ‘war’ and Nicola and Louka deals with ‘slavery’. The description of Raina’s room interior “half rich Bulgarian, half cheep Viennese” (Shaw1) is the first hint of Raina’s obsession for cheap foreign materials. Shaw implies that under develop countries blindly imitated without knowledge. The ‘paperback novels’ in Raina’s room suggest her character. One critic stated:

The World, as he [George Bernard Shaw] looks out upon it, is a painful spectacle to his eyes. Pity and indignation move him. He is not sentimental, as some writers are, but the facts grind his soul...in a word, art has an end beyond itself; and the object of Shaw’s art in particular is to make men think, to make them uncomfortable, to convict them of sin (Salter 446)

These cheep novels present love and novel in glorious term. In other words Raina is suffering with the illusion about war and marriage. Shaw sets the play on a civilization which is in the process of imitation. Like Raina, Catherine is also like her. But unlike Raina the physical feature of Catherine still retains the old barbaric features when the Bulgarians mostly lived in mountain. But the comic side is that she always wears a Vienna gown to show herself a civilized type. Shaw also shows us the romantic notion about the bravery of captain Sergius.

Catherine compares Sergius to an 'avalanche'. When a snow boll moves forward rolling, it destroys everything on the way. Similarly Sergius scatters the Serbian soldiers with guns. The scattering of Serbian soldiers with the strife of flail the husks of chaps are scattered. Similarly Sergius like attacked his enemies. Raina is also romantic about war. When Raina learns that her betrothed lover Sergious won a battle in heroic manner she becomes ecstatic. She realizes that Sergius has fulfilled the qualities of a romantic hero. In Raina's own words "It proves that all our ideas were real after all" shows that. Unfortunately she once doubted the heroic spirit of Sergius. She had doubt that real battle was different than the battle in stories but Sergius fought like a romantic hero and proves its worth. So, Raina calls herself faithless and little. She now feels that Sergius is worthy to be a romantic hero. In her speech "I was only a posaic.....what unspeakable fulfillment" Raina pays her devotion to her betrothed lover. She had a doubt that Sergius would fail in the battle field. But Sergius proved that all her ideas were real. Now Raina realizes that "Sergius is just as splendid and nobles he looks!" She also realizes that she leaves in a glorious world where women dreams and men make it come true. But when she learns about the Serbian soldiers who are chased and killed her ecstasy changes into pity and anxiety for the fugitive. She thinks that "what glory is there in killing wretched fugitives". Shaw here implies that war produces similar contrary emotions in the mind of common man. War seems glorious from far. But if we face it in reality we will be shocked by its violence. Raina also learns this truth of war from a fugitive who forcefully intrude to her room. This man will shatter all the false romanticism of war one by one. "It is our duty to live as long as we can" or "This is a better weapon than the revolver" (Shaw2) is a direct slap on the face of false romanticism. A Shavian possesses Life Force. Life Force means the instinct and will to survive. The man in Raina's room reflects the idea. He escapes into Raina's room not to get killed He is not afraid to fight, but he takes his chance to shave himself. Again he uses Raina's cloak only to prevent Raina. He realizes that Raina's social dignity is more important for her than her life. Hence he rejects the revolver and uses the cloak as a weapon. It is to be remember he is not insulting Raina, he is only increasing his chance of survival. Another realistic answer by the man is he is 'professional Soldier'. A professional soldier is one who fights not out of patriotism but for money or salary. Shaw implies here that War is not a glorious place and soldier is an emotional act. Rather soldiering is a profession to earn money. This is a direct attack on Raina's romanticism. The Russian officers and the soldiers who came into the room in search of the man the missed vital points and the commented that "Nine soldiers out of ten are born fool" (Shaw3). When he comments about the cavalry charge in which Sergius is the leader he simply comments "It's like slinging a handful..... rest in lump" (Shaw4). Raina get excited about the cavalry charge. Her betrothed lover Sergius was the hero of the very charge. So, when Bluntschli mentions about the very charge her emotion is roused. She eagerly waits for a romantic description but the man simply jocks on the incident. He compares cavalry charge to the children's play throwing peas against window pane. Bluntschli means to say that as the peas returned back one after other, similarly

the soldiers cavalry attacked one after another. Hence it was a funny sight. Shaw uses humor only to shatter the false glory of war. The cavalry is compared to peas suggesting their weakness before machineguns. Sergius attacked the machineguns with Sward. But Raina fails to realize the fact. Shaw here denies the myth that Soldiers are super human beings. When Raina leaves her room leaving Bluntschli alone, Bluntschli became out of her mind. Extreme physical pain made him half conscious of the situation. He felt that he was still in the battlefield. He searched for danger because only danger could keep him awake. He repeatedly used words like sleep and danger to suggest his contrasting states of mind. But when he ultimately found the bed of Raina 'a blissful expression' was reflected in his face. He fell asleep. The act of Bluntschli proves that food, shelter, sleep are also essential for soldier. Another implication is that blissful while war is only cruelty of mankind.

Nicola is another mouthpiece of Shaw. Through him Shaw reveals his idea of slavery. Nicola is a prudent servant. He objects the defying attitude of Louka. Cathlerine also believes in idealistic and romantic ideas. She thinks that the Bulgarian soldiers including her husband are fool. They should capture Serbia. But she has no idea that it is impossible to capture another country as it was done in old days. Modern international politics do not allow such attempt. The ideas about dressing hands and body and not to shout to call servant rather to press a bell, they all suggest that Library suggests social status. But both of them are not ready to accept the idea of other. This shows that though the surface level is meek and mild but the root is corrupted. Sergius also follows the romantic ideas about war. Sergius won the battle in a wrong manner. He attacked the machineguns with sward. But he defeated them. This is a serious issue about not ensuring the scientific method of war. Petkoff in his statement stated that "soldiering has to be a trade like any other trade" (Shaw5) is a vital proof of realism. He has learned by experience that soldiering is a scientific and methodical action. It is not impulsive or glorious place as common man to think. A soldier has to learn the skill of fighting before he fights a real battle. But some soldiers think that war is a place to achieve fame. So they ignore the skill of war and fight in their own way. But petkoff has learned from this war that people like him should not join soldiering. Only a fulltime professional man should be soldier. Another realistic answer from him "There had have been no war without them" (Shaw6) is an answer of modern war. The rich and developed countries have created a war market to sale arms and they are provoking the developing countries to fight each other. So that they can make their profit. But on the other side Raina and Sergius are always in romantic state. According to her Sergius has proved himself worthy of any women in battlefield. In contrast She finds herself inactive, useless and unworthy of any man. She is like Ibsen's *A Doll's House* who also worships her husband and lives in an artificial world.

The opening of the Act III is also thought provoking. The scene opens in a Library. But the odd thing is a kitchen table which is using as a writing table. The kitchen is a deplorable state. The writing material like canister, eggcup, are also humorous in respect of

writing. Shaw implies that these people are still struggling with reading writing habit and scene is a clear proof. The famous answer by Bluntschli “It’s part of your youth, part of your charm....infatuated admirer” (Shaw7) reflects another Shavian idea of Love and Marriage. In their first meeting Bluntschli shatters some of her noble but false idea. He frankly tales her that he does not believe in noble attitude and thrilling voice of Raina. He knows it very well that her affectation is full of lies. Apparently Raina is hurt. But she has to admit that Bluntschli is right in his judgment. Bluntschli also acts that Raina’s romaatic beauty and charm make her attractive. In fact he has become her infatuated admirer because of her noble attitude of thrilling voice. Another realistic approach from Bluntschli is he called Nicola the ablest man for two reasons. He is extremely professional in respect of marriage. Secondly he is extremely professional. He chooses between impulse and freedom, his ultimate desire is freedom. At the last of the Shaw very rationally engaged Raina and Bluntschli and Nicola and Sergius. Raina needs a man who is realistic and prudent not guided by impulse and Sergius also need a woman like Louka who is not belong to a so called artificial world.

The characters are placed in a balanced form. There language, style, behavior all described very minutely and it also describes the social values. According a critic:

Characters whose impulses are conventional or traditional will use language reflecting their mechanical responses and will be satirized accordingly, while characters who possess a Shavian Vitality will express that spontaneity through a freedom not only from moral and ethical formulas but from verbal convention as well (Weintraub 215)

Shaw in this play shows the contrast and compare between Realism and Idealism. He broke the conventional idea about war, slavery and marriage. While the great poet glorifies the weapons and soldiers who wield them, Shaw applies the glorious term to criticize the modern soldiering and the hollow romance of war. Shaw does not negate the contribution of great soldiers of past who becomes the hero of classical epics like The Aeneid Iliad and Odyssey. But he implies that modern war has no such noble causes of war and battlefield. Moreover since man has developed his intellectual power with the progress of civilization, war should never be the way of solving conflicts. Thus Shaw emphasizes the cultivation of intellectual power as arms and the elevation of man to a highly intellectual superman.

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