

# Satirical Vein In George Bernard Shaw's Plays

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**Abstract:** Bernard Shaw's purpose of writing is social reform, and he uses his plays as weapons to change people's mind, conscience, and cherished institution. He uses satire to puncture a host of social institutions and conventions, thus providing the people with a Mephistophelian image. He has been considered a great satirist by critics. As good satirist his object of writing is to change or correct human or social shortcomings, vices or follies, and that of laughing is the tool he uses for his purposes. He takes attention on what he needs to change, and as a satirist he frequently exaggerates reality with intensity and lashes at it. Through the present research, we aim to highlight how Bernard Shaw used his literary carrier to criticize the follies of his contemporary society; also to attempt to explain how satire is used to reject the social values in the Victorian era.

**Index Terms:** Satirical vein-- social reform--- social shortcomings, vices or follies, Man and Superman-- *Doctor's Dilemma*--

## 1 INTRODUCTION

George Bernard Shaw, known at his insistence simply as Bernard Shaw, was an Irish playwright, critic, and political activist. His influence on Western theatre, culture and politics extended from the 1880s to his death and beyond. He wrote more than sixty plays, including major works such as *Man and Superman* (1902), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923). With a range incorporating both contemporary satire and historical allegory, Shaw became the leading dramatist of his generation, and in 1925 was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Bernard Shaw's purpose of writing is social reform, and he uses his plays as weapons to change people's mind, conscience, and cherished institution. He uses satire to puncture a host of social institutions and conventions, thus providing the people with a Mephistophelian image. He has been considered a great satirist by critics. As good satirist his object of writing is to change or correct human or social shortcomings, vices or follies, and that of laughing is the tool he uses for his purposes. He takes attention on what he needs to change, and as a satirist he frequently exaggerates reality with intensity and lashes at it. Through the present research, we aim to highlight how Bernard Shaw used his literary carrier to criticize the follies of his contemporary society; also to attempt to explain how satire is used to reject the social values in the Victorian era.

## II. Literary Review

There is, no doubt, a vein of satire run through Shaw's dramatic plays. He analyzes information about social institutions, codes and norms in one play after another and reveals their vulnerabilities, shortcomings, etc. He has been warring on sham, hypocrisy, cant and affectation throughout his long dramatic career.

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He wanted to pull down the oppressive system of obsolescent social institutions, and their hollowness which was so frequently exaggerated. We also find him indulging in exaggeration or distortion of facts and in distorted representation of events. In this respect, he is at one with satirists in general. In one play after another, he pulls down old idols by exaggerating their faults and thus holds them up to ridicule. So, Marriage and family structures, romantic love, war, faith, women's worship, respectfulness cults, democracy, etc. all fall under his lash. Conventional respectability and woman's romantic love are held up to ridicule in *Man and Superman*; in *Arms and the Man* romantic love and soldiering, in *Widowers' Houses* slum landlordism, in *John Bull's Other Island* English Imperialism, *Doctor's Dilemma* the medical profession, and in *Heart Break House* European materialism, have been satirized. "Shaw has always been disrupting apple carts, and he has upset the apple cart of democracy in *The Apple-Cart*." In *St. John* he has satirized the authority of The State and the Church that combine in imbecility and hatred to crush the voice of truth, because the truth is often inconvenient to them. In the same way, he also satirized regional English stereotypes and the system of dominance.

## III. Analysis and Result

In fact, in Shaw's works, too much must not be made of the satiric vein. Shaw is distinct from a satirist by the fact that he is not a person who is completely dissatisfied on the contemporary society, his view on life is not darkened or negative, and his attitude is cheerful and hopeful. Shaw does not start from the presumptions of evil in man, but from a profound belief in his essential goodness. His philosophy of *Life Force* shows an optimistic approach, holding out the hope of the gradual emergence of a superior race, and a better and more rational organization of society. This optimism and inherent cheerfulness avoids the intrusion of any resentment in his plays and gives them compassion, not always remembered, but invariable, which makes him unique as a comedy writer, except for Shakespeare. He lacks a Swift's savagery; his purpose is never to cause pain but to bring about social reform and rectification at all times. Apart from that, he is never personal. He warred on a host of social institutions over a long span of time, but did not make even a single enemy. His sincerity of purpose and intellectual honesty are hard to mistake and so his satire is never offensive. Satire is there, but it is only an instrument of a higher and large purpose. Religiously the family background was Protestant but Shaw early rejected the Christian faith. He warred so much on

traditional religion throughout his long career that he was often viewed as irreligious. Therefore, he proclaimed himself an atheist when he was still young in a Shelley Society meeting, and even on Sundays he refused to attend the church. He found all modern religions to be dark wells or alleys that no one could get any light from. He was an intellectual with a sharp, analytical mind which subjected all religions, traditions and institutions to the search-light of reason, found them lacking and was therefore unable to believe in them. In reality, he was a profoundly religious man who replaced the old religions with his own religion. There is both a negative and a positive side of his religion; it is both destructive and constructive. He pulls down old idols, replacing them with his own new idols. Because St. John and Major Barbara are spiritual dramas in nature and the word 'Jesus' is constantly on the Maid's lips, it would be worth examining in some depth his views on religion and God. As St. Joan and Major Barbara are in essence religious dramas, and the word 'God' is constantly on the lips of the Maid, it would be worthwhile to examine his views on religion and God in some details. In the play "Pygmalion," George Bernard Shaw uses satire to mock the rigidity and hierarchy of contemporary British society that prevailed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he can illustrate it using the character of Eliza Dolittle, who was originally a poor girl living on the streets. Shaw portrays the British society's superficiality, which actually blames Dolittle for her bad speech and grammar. Nevertheless, Eliza's main development is that after learning from Professor Henry Higgins, she transforms into what society perceives as a real "lady." British society's arrogance and superficiality is further illustrated because Eliza is so readily welcomed into the upper echelon of society because she was perceived to be the upper class not because of her character or personality, but because of her appearance and voice. Ultimately, the purpose of Shaw's satirization of "Pygmalion" was to depict the shallowness of society which based a person's worth or importance on their social graces, how they dressed, or how they behaved. Shaw satirizes the follies and fatuities of medical science in the play *The Doctor's Dilemma*. As a socialist, Shaw acknowledges that illnesses are generally caused by misery and overwork, and that it is society's responsibility to cure them through the implementation of communism. In this play, Shaw satirized that some of the well-known doctors are blundering idiots, both scientifically and practically. In *The Play Major Barbara* Shaw satirized how religion was subjected to the quest for the light of reason, showed its many shortcomings, paving the way for religious reform. Shaw also focused in this play on shams and affections that are actually mar religion and their complete reliance on capitalists such as Bodger and Undershaft. He has also satirized this play is also about money and passionate denunciation of poverty. It also explains the materialistic pessimism of Shaw. The dramatist proves here that even the girl's noblest enthusiasm who becomes an officer of the Salvation Army, struggles under her father's brute power as a traditional capitalist. According to Shaw, the real problems that he has tackled in the play *The Apple Cart*, are the economic problem of how to produce and distribute our subsistence and political problem of how to select our rulers and prevent them from abusing their authority in their own interests or those of their class or religion. Capitalism, which performs miracles in manufacturing but fails to deliver its goods rationally so ludicrously and disastrously, is no solution. Similarly, voting for

each and every voting authority is not a solution to the political problem. The only sensible path is "Taking the step by which tyranny can be predicted and avoided, and creating a political system for rapid positive work, instead of sluggish nugatory work, fit for the twentieth century instead of the seventeenth. Though the play has satirical vein, it is a clear plea for a modern type of education that will produce ideal governors such as King Magnus.

#### IV. Conclusion:

There are a number of ecclesiastical characters in *St. Joan* and the dramatist has clearly and impartially stated his point of view. Although they are responsible for the Maid's burning, there has been no question about their integrity and purity of intent. Ecclesiastical character painting is one of Shaw's strong points. As for the dignitaries of the Church, it is very unusual for him to keep them to scorn. He sees the priests as he sees other humans, "Creatures of flesh and blood, capable of integrity, but not immune to the worst kind of human failures. Though, through his criticism of institutional Christianity – scattered all over his pages – Shaw did much to expose its errors and sap its foundations, he is all in favour of the practical applications of the economic, political and social teachings of Christ. Finally, one may note that there has been a gradual change in Shaw's attitude towards religion. In his own Evolutionary philosophy, he contrasted more and more the mystic element in Christianity with the magical element.

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