

---

**THE REAL ASPECT OF LIFE- FORCE IN G. B. SHAW'S PLAYS: AN  
OVERVIEW OF *ARMS AND THE MAN*, *MAN AND SUPERMAN* AND *PYGMALION***

MD TARIQUL ISLAM  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Cooch Behar College  
Cooch Behar, West Bengal

**ABSTRACT**

George Bernard Shaw is regarded as one of the greatest Victorian playwrights whose greatness has really been exposed through his dramas written mainly in his times. Through his dramas, he has portrayed a social philosophy which is undeniably so much importance in this existing society. The theme of most of his plays is war, politics, prostitution, law, love and marriage. Before Shaw, love was considered as divine and beautiful by writers and poets, but Shaw was opposite to them. As a philosopher, Shaw presents his philosophic doctrine as creative evolution. Later, his philosophic doctrine is known as the doctrine of life-force. He intends to convey the meaning of life- force theory to the society for which he has depicted most of his woman characters in a very vivid manner in the plays. His women presented in most of his plays are based on practical minds which will help them to choose the right, not the wrong. If his women fall in love, they will judge it minutely before marriage in a practical way for their benefit in future. Shaw exposes the motive of the women behind falling in love, and the concept of life force in his plays. This paper also attempted to focus the theme of life-force found in his three plays *Arms and the Man*, *Man and Superman* and *Pygmalion*.

Keywords: Victorian, Philosophy, Love, Life-force, New woman

## **THE REAL ASPECT OF LIFE- FORCE IN G. B. SHAW'S PLAYS: AN OVERVIEW OF *ARMS AND THE MAN*, *MAN AND SUPERMAN* AND *PYGMALION***

Shaw, a creative dramatist of the Victorian period, is reputed for the new kind of dramas. Through his dramas, the dramatist introduces the new women. His new woman characters are different from the past woman characters cited by the dramatist himself. They are stronger than the man characters. They are active and practical minded women living in the society. They have judging power through which they can do what is right for them in the existing society. They are conscious of their futurism. Through his plays, Shaw has given his woman characters an open platform to put their own choice of their mates rejecting the past notions of love and marriage. Here, he rejects the Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest and natural selection, he believes that the world relies upon the process of creative selection. In his play 'Arms and the man', he shows how Raina rejects Sergius and decides to marry Bluntschli, and how Louka turns back her mind from Nicola and opines to marry Sergius. In his play, 'Man and the Superman', he presents Ann Whitefield who decides to marry Tanner rejecting Octavius for the benefit of her and her future-generation in future. In 'Pygmalion', Shaw shows how Eliza rejects Prof Higgins, a famous Professor in Phonetics, and agrees to marry Freddy. My sincere effort is to present the concept of life-force focusing on the three plays-*Arms and the Man*, *Man and Superman* and *Pygmalion*.

Shaw's 'Arms and the Man' is one of his finest creations during the Victorian period. It is well-known as an Anti-Romantic comedy. To bring out the follies and vices of his contemporary times, he has presented the lively characters in his plays. The conflict is found among his creative characters. The conflict between man and woman characters expresses the

elements of life-force. He has made the concept of life force in most of his plays written after the play 'Man and the Superman'. His play 'Arms and the Man' provides the concept of life-force. The heroines of this play are more powerful than his heroes. He said that the aim of a woman is to find out a man in society to be married. After the marriage, the man would be a better father to her children and even her. This is the concept of life force found in the woman's skill. Shaw highlights this concept presenting the woman characters in his play *Arms and the Man*.

In this play, he shows the theme of love and marriage through man and woman in relationship. In it, women are revolved in love as they are desirous for passionate love. Raina has a dream like element in her; she believes in higher love beyond any real existence. Her disillusion shatters all the illusions of love and make her realize what real love is. According to Maurice Valency: Raina passes from the one to another, and in the process is redefined something more closely approximating her true self. The action thus describes an educational experience which foreshadows the education of Cleopatra, Eliza Doolittle and Barbara Undershaft (not in the sense of love but realism) (Valecy 109). She has a higher love for Sergius. Later, the concept of higher love is shattered between the two as Sergius starts loving Louka, a maid servant of Petroff's family secretly instead of Raina in her absent. On the other side, Raina begins to love Bluntschli, the mouthpiece of Shaw. Raina gradually changes her opinion about him and falls in love with Bluntschli as Sergius has won the battle of Slivnitza in an unscientific way for which he is not promoted. This reality is revealed to her by Bluntschli. Raina finds Bluntschli as a superior man. Besides, he seems to be more honest and loyal than Sergius. He would be the better father for children than Sergius. Here lies the Life- Force in the character of Raina. Louka, on the other hand, cheats Nicola as she

comes to know that he has no other objectives in life, and he is too faithful to his mistress. Besides, he fails to achieve anything in life that would not better for her future children and even herself. For this, she has rejected him as her lover or husband. In this play, Louka, the maid servant of Petroff's family, is presented by Shaw as an ambitious woman who wants to have comforts and luxuries in her life. So, he decides to marry a man who is able to satisfy her demands, take care of her and her children for the future. Thus, Shaw has brought out her practical mind, which helps her to choose the ideal man to be her husband, and hence it is the life force found in Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*.

*Man, and Superman* is one of the most notable plays of Shaw, depicts the philosophy of creative evolution. His credit lies in presenting difficult ideas of love, marriage sex and romance are dramatically enhanced in most of his plays. Through his play 'Man and Superman', Shaw expresses the Shavian concept of Life- Force, and creative evolution, for which the drama has been popularized in this recent century.

Shaw, who is a stern realist, has turned down the past theories like theory Darwin and the theory of God concerned with Christianity. Like a modern dramatist, he has provided men the theory of Life-Force. His belief is that there is the existence of power behind evolution, it is known as Life-Force. In his Society, there remains evil, error and mistakes which have been brought out through his creative and lively characters. To solve these problems his characters have fallen in conflict through which problems are raised and even solved. Thus, Shaw has found a solution of evil, which was not available in the earlier Christianity.

In *Man and Superman* woman's role is vital in respect of creation as she is the embodiment of creative power behind the universe. Her creative power is nothing but her Life-Force. Therefore, her life force has its own design and purpose, but its aim is unknown.

*Man, and Superman* is a comedy in which philosophy of love is exposed. Through this comedy, the relationship between man and woman has been merged with an exposition of the idea of life force. C. B. Purdom writes "Man and Superman is an exposition of the Idea of Life Force expressed in the comedy of the central chase of man by woman to create a better mankind, and more profoundly in the Don Juan episode in hell, which is a plea for the extension of consciousness in men so that we may choose to do world's will, not our own.. . (Purdom 195-196).

According to Shaw, Life- Force makes man and woman comical. In respect of love, woman acts like the role of a huntress in search of a suitable man, a superman. Through Ann Shaw has given the concept of woman initiating physical relationships. In the words of Purdom "The relations between the sexes are displayed as the love chase of the man by the woman. Man is not victor in the duel of sex is the idea round which the simple comedy is built: an idea of natural biology. Man is helpless in a woman's hands....in sex with the woman." (Purdom 198).

Ann is a woman who does not deceive herself while living in her society. She loves Tanner but not Octavius. She wants to remain true to Tanner to get him as her husband for the better future. She has sacrificed herself to win the heart of Tanner, not Octavius though Octavius is mad for her love. But she is criticized as a woman for choosing Tanner after rejecting Octavius. Here, she is abhorred. Griffith writes "Feminists have abhorred the

portrait of Ann and the attendant theory of which among other things mother women seems to confirm the traditional view of man's superior capacity for abstract thought" (Griffith 179).

*Man, and Superman* exposes the theme of Life- Force. It is well described in this play.

Ann Whitefield is a beautiful creative woman in it. At the very outset of the play, Ann is portrayed as simple docile and naïve woman. She is a well woman full of disciplines. She obeys her parents and never goes against them. After her father's death, she is kept under the caretaker of Ramsden and Tanner. But Ramsden is dissatisfied for Tanner as he is kept as her co-guardian. Later, she manipulates the situation by involving her mother, and finally convincing both the men to be her guardians. Octavius, another character of the play, becomes fascinated with the beauty of Ann Whitefield, for which he tries to woo her again and again, but all his efforts are in vain. Therefore, he has become frustrated in both body and mind. Ann, on the other hand, keeps on loving Tanner which is inexpressive. Tanner understands about her love. Yet, he tries to avoid her. But finally, she can conquer the heart of Tanner who, at the end of the play, falls in love with her. Here it is easily said that Ann Whitefield is a practical minded lady who chooses Tanner practically for her better future, and even her children. Shaw calls this the life- force that helps Ann to avoid Octavius and choose Tanner as her best husband. It is Tanner who marries Ann and proves to be a good husband of her. With Ann, G. B. Shaw succeeds in Proving that Life Through woman makes man to carry life to higher levels. In the words of Morgan: "The play *Man and Superman* whilst destructive of the time worn and faded figure of the modest heroine progressed beyond Shaw's earlier works in embodying a very definite philosophy of love" (Morgan 49).

G. B. Shaw, the distinguished dramatist of the 20th century, introduces the theory and concept of Life-Force in his plays. The Instincts and wills of most of his female characters are more determined than her male characters as his woman characters are influenced and commanded by Life-Force. In 'Pygmalion', his heroine Eliza Doolittle is influenced by Life-Force, and her success behind action depends on it. It makes her independent and helps her turn into a lady of manners. She can choose a right person as her husband. It is clear that life force prevails relevantly in his play 'Pygmalion'.

Shaw's 'Pygmalion' is a play which indicates the concept of life force. In this play, Eliza is presented as a flower- girl belonging to poor class society. Though she is a poor girl, she has her inherent instincts and willing power. Her main problem is that she is an illiterate girl in her society. She has been deprived of her facilities due to lack of education. To establish herself in society, she needs language training for which she meets Higgins, the Professor in Phonetics. She understands herself that if she fails to learn the proper language, she will lose the identity in her own society, and it is the proper language that finds her a new identity through education. Besides, she comes to know the social distinctions like the barrier of class, accents etc., which can easily be got over through the training of language. Whenever she is educated, she knows well that better education is concerned with social progress. Using language, people like her can comprehend the meanings of different things in society. In the words of Wardhaugh "Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share such knowledge, although how it is shared- or even how it is acquired- is not well understood. ...Psychological and social factors are important. ...a wide range of skills and activities is subsumed under this concept of 'proper use' (Ronald Wardhaugh2).

She used to love Higgins, her Phonetic teacher, but he treats her like lower class flower-girl. He does not show her any sympathy and kindness to her. Whenever she visits Mrs. Higgins's house, Higgins tells her mother that she can learn the system of pronunciation quickly. After listening to this, Mrs. Higgins praises a triumph of the art. Then, he does not behave with her well. He rather treats her just like the flower girl. Therefore, she expresses her antipathy for his behavior. For this, with anger, she leaves his house, and gives up the idea of loving him, and she turns her mind back from him and begins to love Freddy, a young romantic man. She thinks that he would be better father for her children and even her in future. Finally, her Life- Force helps her to marry Freddy.

It can obviously be said that Shaw's greatness lies in establishing the relationship between man and woman in most of his plays. Through this relationship, he has expressed his idea that life is about the creative selection. It is said that his creative women are not simple to be hunted easily in the realm of love and marriage. All his women show the instinctive drive or impulse in search of their mates. They remain insufferable from social and moral inhibitions. They can make contrast to their mates in any situation for better chance. They act just like agents of life-force which does not know compromise with conventional standards of morality and womanliness for which his women seem to be aggressive and outspoken. They can discuss their problems just like the good talkers. Shaw's real motive is to the creation of superman and every man and woman who will work towards it. In the modern times, the concept of life-force has been changed, and now every woman is in search of man who can give financial security. But this modern conception remains the same as it is like Shaw's theory of life- force. According to Shaw, women act what they like in respect of their love and marriage for reality. His women are based on practical minds. They seek for the men



who can provide them financial support, and it will be better not only for her but also for her children. Hence, here lies the theory of life-force. With the help of this concept, Shaw gives equal rights and status to women, and makes them the driving force in the society.

---

### **WORKS CITED:**

Griffith Gareth: Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought Of G. B. Shaw (Routledge, 1993).

Iain ,Sangeeta. Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2006.

Morgan, Margery M: The Shavian Playground. An Exploration of the Art of G. B. Shaw (Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1974).

Nethercot, Arthur H. "The Vivie Frank Relationship in Mrs. Warren's Profession" (The Shavian 15th Ser. June, 1959).

Purdom C. B. : A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw (Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1963).

Valency, Maurice. The Cart and The Trumpet: The Plays of George Bernard Shaw, (Oxford University Press, 1973).

Wardhaugh, Ronald. 2006. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Blackwell.

Watson, Barbara Bellow (1991). "The New Women and the New Comedy," Critical Essay on George Bernard Shaw, Ed. Elsie.