

SHAW'S CONCEPT OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

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Abstract:

G. B. Shaw has carved a niche for himself as a playwright in English literature. Unlike the dramatists of his age, he has dealt the theme of love and marriage in a different vein impressing the audience with his stark realism. In the present write up, the concept of love and marriage is taken for discussion with special reference to Arms and the Man. As well, the paper throws light on Bluntschli, who makes an attempt to dismantle the romantic idealism with his strong intellectual reasoning and sensible argument. Besides, the paper analyses the sense of rationality and significance of practicality in human existence to lead a serene life.

Key words: Love and marriage, stark realism, rationality, practicality.

Introduction

Shaw is well known for his shrewd intellectual attitude and reasoning ability. In fact, he has great insight into social problems that have shattered the British society. Of course, he appeals not to a particular society, but society as a whole through his creative caliber and exuberant wit and humor. He presents love and marriage as a social problem. He deals with this relatively lighter problem mostly in his “Plays Pleasant” and “Plays Un-pleasant” and especially in *Arms and the Man* which is essentially anti-romantic.

In *Arms and the Man*, Shaw's conception of love and marriage differs from *The Philanderer*. The title *Arms and the Man*, is suggestively ironic. The heroic theme of war is given a shake, turned upside down to make it ridiculous. Virgil in his *Aeneid* celebrates soldiers and weapons but Shaw in his play makes a parody of them. The play is deliberately anti-romantic both in its intention and execution. The two themes, war and love, are intertwined in this drama. Shaw's conviction that 'war is evil and stupid' while love, culminating in wedlock is 'desirable and good' finds its dramatic expression in the play. “The main message embodied in *Arms and the Man* is that a romantic approach to life is no longer viable, if indeed it ever was”. Keeping in view of the play, the proposed paper analyses and authenticates Shaw's concept of love and marriage.

Analysis of the Play

Raina, the heroine who adores Major Sergius Saranoff has once for all decided to get married to him only. But for war, she would have done it. Meanwhile, the ugly episode, the headlong retreat of an enemy officer (Chocolate-Cream-Soldier) uncovers to her utter dismay, the sordid ugliness of war and it's so called heroism. She learns from her Chocolate-Cream-Soldier, Bluntschli, the hero, the real truth behind Sergius' victory. Soon after the war, she finds her war hero, who, a short while ago has professed earnest love for her, flirting behind her back with her servant maid, Louka. Her romantic dreams collapse, illusions are shattered; stark reality stares in her face and she is thoroughly disillusioned. However, Captain Bluntschli's plain but common sensual approach to things, especially on war and love, his sense of humor make deep impression on her. Shedding her romantic delusions, she decides to have Bluntschli, her Chocolate-Cream-Soldier, instead of Sergius, the Bulgarian 'hero'.

As the play opens, Raina is found alone sitting in her bed-room thinking about her lover Sergius, who is fighting against Serbs; intermittent shootings and war cries outside the house grip her attention, when she is bubbling with joy to hear about her lover's escapades in the war. Meanwhile, a fugitive enters her room by the help of a water pipe and stays in her bedroom by initiating and absorbing conversation with Raina. He speaks eloquently about war by shattering her illusions, that she has been entertaining regarding her lover's exploitations on the battle field. The fugitive gives a crystal clear picture about war and her lover's ostentatious moves in a realistic manner:

Raina : Ah, I knew it: Tell me Tell me about him.

The Man : He did it like an Operatic tenor. A regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting his war cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills but when the sergeant ran up as white as a sheet, and told us they'd sent us the wrong ammunition and that we couldn't fire a round for the next ten minutes. ... And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known... He and his regiment simply committed suicide; only the pistol missed fire: that's all. (Act I, P.404)

Raina, being perturbed by the fugitives' account of Sergius' quixotic feats on the battle field, shows his portrait to the man. However, the man recognizing the figure says:

... Yes: that's Don Quixote: not a doubt of it. (Act I, P.405)

Sen Gupta rightly says, "In the first scene of *Arms and the Man*, the natural morality of Captain Bluntschli is set off against the conventional beliefs to Raina. In this scene it is the fugitive captain, sheltering in a strange house, who ought to look perturbed, and Raina ought to meet him with perfect self-composure: But the tables are turned; it is she who appears to be the intruder and captain Bluntschli quietly makes himself master of the institution". Since she has been under the romantic illusion about war and her hero, she curiously learns more about war and soldiers from the man.

When Sergius returns from the war he meets Raina, and her parents, Catherine and Petkoff. In course of their discussion, Sergius tells about soldiers in reply to Catherine's comment. Sergius says:

.... Soldiering is the cowards' art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong. And keeping out of arms when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms. (Act II, P.421)

When Sergius and Raina are left alone, we get a scene of, 'higher love', between the two. Sergius calls her his 'Queen' and his 'Goddess' and she calls him her 'King', and her 'hero'. Sergius expresses his apology for his comment that has irritated Raina. Raina says:

... You have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment.
Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought. (Act II, P.425)

As Raina leaves the garden, Sergius diverts his attention towards maid servant Louka, and exhibits his exuberant feelings regarding the monotony of 'higher love'. He says:

... Louka : do you know what the higher love is?
Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time.
Louka: One feels and the need of some relief after it. (Act II, P.425-426)

Shaw pricks the bubble of higher love through Sergius who advances and embraces the maid servant without hesitation. In spite of her requests to let her go, Sergius who is over powered by her physical charm cannot release her, besides; he gives vent to his feelings regarding higher love. Sergius says:

... I may be worthless enough to betray the

higher love; but do not you insult it. (Act II, P.426)

On learning about the rival to Sergius, through Louka, Sergius prevails upon her to reveal the fact, but Louka refuses as she may lose her place. However, Sergius compels her; even then she does not tell anything about the matter. Then Sergius indignantly says:

That shows you are an abominable little
clod of common clay, with the soul of a servant. (Act II, P.428)

She being stung by Sergius' comment says:

... now I have found out that whatever clay
I am made of, you're made of the same. As for her,
she's a liar; and her fine airs are a cheat; and I'm worth six of her. (Act II, P.429)

The fugitive who has taken shelter in Raina's bedroom appears again to meet Catherine and Raina. Before entering, he sends a little-ticket on which his name is written as 'Captain Bluntschli'. Recognizing the person, Louka says to Catherine that he is a Swiss.

Louka, taking the advantage of Sergius' weakness, tries to provoke him by revealing the fact that Raina will not marry him as his rival has come back. Having shocked by the news, Sergius ferociously says:

I will kill the Swiss; and afterwards I will do as I please with you. (Act II, P.455)

Louka, further attempts to ruffle his feelings. She says:

The Swill will kill you, perhaps. He has
beaten you in love. He may beat you in war. (Act II, P.455)

As Sergius being instigated by Louka, challenges a fight with Bluntschli. Bluntschli readily gives his consent for the fight by telling that he has been given shelter in Raina's room, when his life has become precarious, besides, he explains how one of his friends who has informed about Bluntschli's escape is burnt alive in the war. Sergius, unable to control his temper, says:

And how ridiculous: Oh, war: the dream of patriots and
heroes: a fraud Bluntschli, A hollow sham, live love. (Act II, P.459)

Enraged by Sergius' observation, Raina says:

Like love: you say that before me: (Act II, P.459)

Sergius guesses that Raina has mistaken that the informant is Bluntschli's friend. Raina immediately asks:

Who then? Ah, Louka : my maid: my servant :
you were with her this morning all that time after-after-oh,
what sort of God is this I have been worshipping : Do you
know that I looked out of the window as I went upstairs,
to have another sight of my here; and I saw something I did not
understand them. I know now that you were making love to her. (Act II, P.459)

Since Raina has witnessed and disclosed the flirtations of Sergius with Louka, Sergius says:

Raina; our romance is shattered, life's a farce. (Act II, P.459)

Then Bluntschli says:

You see: he's found himself out now. (Act II, P.459)

While they are all exchanging haughtily, Petkoff and Catherine enter the scene and try to diffuse the tension that has pervaded there. Bluntschli, after having disclosed his identity and his adventure, proposes to marry Raina, since Sergius has been engaged to Louka. Raina, who has been under the impression that Bluntschli is a married person, surprises to hear his proposal. She refuses to marry Bluntschli. Bluntschli says:

... I appealed to you as a fugitive, a beggar
and a starving man. You accepted me. You gave

your hand to kiss, your bed to sleep in, and your roof to shelter me. (Act II, P.471)

As Bluntschli draws her attention with his clever verbal repartee, Raina condescending from her stand accepts his hand. She says:

To my Chocolate Cream soldier. (Act II, P.471)

Howsoever, Shaw has succeeded in shattering the romantic ideals of Raina and Sergius by creating Bluntschli and Louka. Salgado rightly says "The Chocolate Soldier tilts at the twin targets of military glory and romantic love. The realistic attitudes and behavior of the hotelier turned soldier Bluntschli are set against the impossible and unthinking idealism of Sergius and Raina, which may be fairly taken as the orthodox Victorian attitude to war and heroism.

Conclusion

Conceived as an anti-romantic comedy, *Arms and the Man* shatters romantic idealization of love and war. Shaw strips war of its heroism and love of its romantic glamour through the creation of a "Chocolate-Cream-Soldier". Further, he treats romantic love as mere lust and calls soldering a coward's act. "Like Tolstoy he tells men with coarse innocence, that romantic war is only butchery and that romantic love is only lust... He does not so much dislike love as the love of love". His whet wit drives away the romantic illusions of Raina and Sergius from the world of romantic idealism. Shaw fills the play with light-hearted banter, whimsicality and humor. Thus, Shaw has twisted the concept of love and marriage in real sense of the term against the popular notions prevailing in the society of past and the present.

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