

RATIONALISM IN THE PLAYS OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) belonged to poor middle class Protestant family of Dublin, which boasted of some vague aristocratic connections. He received desultory education in school, but his best asset was the training in music which he received from his mother, a music teacher. After serving as clerk in office he came to London at the age of 20 to seek his fortune. Very little is known of early years in London, except that he subsisted by his music. Having imbibed socialistic opinions from Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, Shaw joined the Fabian society where he shone as a powerful debater and soon won influential friends including Sidney Webb. In epistemology rationalism is the view that "regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge" or "any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification" More formally, rationalism is defined as a methodology or a theory "In which the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive.

George Bernard Shaw is regarded as a great rationalist writer as his plays express deep concern about human predicament based on rational thinking. He is never moved away by religious, sect or regional emotions. He evaluates human affairs on the basis of rationalism.

In *Arms and the Man* Shaw does the is the denounce the as he is not Tolstoy an in the least. What he does is the denounce the sentimental illusion that gathers around war. "Fight if you will", says he, "but for goodness' sake do not strike picturesque attitudes in the limelight about it, view it as one of the desperately irrational things of life that may, however, in certain circumstances be a brutal necessity".¹ In *Candida* he does not attack love. Here is another irrational thing, he says.....well it can be avoided, so let us make it, as matter of fact, as rational in short as possible.

Candida is deliberately electing to remain with her self – confident husband because he is more likely to sustain and help he economically and financially, and reverse is the case of her poet-lover who is almost good for nothing from the worldly and practical point of view. But on the other side, the doctrinaire views of Gloria on love in *You Never Can Tell* crumble way at the first stirring of impulsive passion, and in a flash the romance of love shines through.

With his ascetic instincts Shaw attempted to rationalize existence and thus started a crusade in life but Life in no way guided by logic. So he concluded that task to be an impossible one. Whatever the reason he is only a half-hearted rationalist. Shaw a man with a keen, cold and intellectual wit combated all the illusions that spring from the irrationality as he had imagined. He thought later on even foolish illusion are sometimes bungling effort on men's part to explain mystical realities. Any by mystical realities' Compton Rickett means all great primal qualities:

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

love, courage, endurance, faith, hope, Anne's pursuit of Tanner is treated with irony throughout the play until we come to the final scene i.e. comedy of Life Force.

Shaw starts by glorifying intellectuality and deriding sentiment, later on finds sentiment rooted in instinct, and that instinct rules life. Shaw ends by glorifying instinct.

He is rationalize in his hatred of sentimentality and all that blurred the realities of life. Romanticism bred illusions – that must go. He surprises us by his hostility of Darwin and the theory of natural selection; he declares himself as 'implacably anti-ritualistic and anti-materialist'.

In fact there are the contrary strains in Shaw's temperament – an intensely practical and utilitarian strain and a fantastic, imaginative and semi-mystical strain.

The most valuable parts in his plays are where he challenges the current moral and social values of the time; because his extravagant wits and keen observation so agreeably sugar the critical pill.

Shaw tried to clear plays of theatre of emotion to make room for thought. Shaw distrusts romance as it, swallow it whole. People may mistake it for reality, and believing it, shallow it whole. People must not be misled for they are on a pilgrimage. They should not be tempted away from the path of truth. Shaw promises to show that a gallant soldier is an arrant coward at heart. In reality, he say, a human being is composed of many saints and sinners, of many strengths and many weaknesses.

Shaw says " A man can no more be completely original in that sense than a tree can grow out of air".² He is original because he has given fresh interpretation to the old conceptions and values.

Shaw, the great realist, remains permanently unromantic, permanently unsentimental. The problems of the world are in the ultimate analysis of only two kinds; biological and economic; and it is silly to think that they can be solved by sentimental hysterics.

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