

## Shaw's Career Heroine: An Analysis of Mrs. Warren's Profession and 'Major Barbara'

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While making woman the active participant in the love chase and the agent of Life Force, Shaw discarded the idea of her being dependent on men. The ideal of womanhood as expressed by Tennyson in his dictum 'Man for the field, woman for the hearth' appeared to Shaw as being shallow and unsound. Economic independence is the keynote of Shavian Feminism. As a social reformer, he worked for the emancipation of woman from the four walls of the 'Prison - Homes' and advocated a life of economic independence. He appreciated the feminist movement which had started with the object of making women march out of the homes and share the labour of life with men. Women were not to remain any more confined to the hearth and home but walk shoulder to shoulder with men in the economic activities outside the home. He mentions the point in his lecture to Fabian Society:

Woman's duty to herself is no duty at all, therefore woman has repudiated altogether. In that repudiation lays her freedom: for it is false to say that woman is now directly the slave of man: she is immediate slave to duty and as man's pass to freedom is strewn with the wreckage of duty and ideals he has trampled on, so must hers be.  
(56)

Even before Shaw, Edward Lytton in his play *Money* had expressed the view that economic independence of woman is indispensable for a healthy society. Evelyn, the heroine makes a passing remark to Clara: "She is no more a dependent. No one can insult her now" (55).

Lytton could only make a passing reference to the fact that woman was the target of insults because she was dependent on man financially. Shaw argued that, "the more the woman gets for it (her labour) the better off she is" (185). She will have her own individuality and it won't be submerged in man. Shaw claimed that no self respect between husband and wife is possible if one supports the other financially. Shaw depicted independent workwoman - a woman who is working for her livelihood and who no longer bears insults.

Shaw has portrayed the dilemma of professional women realistically. For all the working women, their work is of prime importance. Some of them smoke and drink; all the relations that demand self sacrifice are meager and trivial to them. They have the ability and capacity to rise to any occasion. They confront the social conventions set for women and prove themselves to be self-made and self-driven. His professional women do not care about societal conventions. They are physically well built and give strong handshakes. They can lift men on their shoulders and make them learn exercise. They study mathematics, business and participate in politics and family business; men run after them but uselessly. Shaw was much impressed by all those women who took initiative in work and were proactive in their life. His women characters are charming and good professionals, not worn out drudges. They are loved

and admired for their role in life. Watson has described Shavian professional woman in these words:

The Shavian career woman is many things nested in one, like a Russian wooden doll. Each of these stout painted women contains her smaller twin... (She) is an image of the great hidden potential of woman who is pregnant of her grown up self.. (She) is criticism of society, is an embodiment of the divine spark, is a Bernard Shaw, is a dominant protective mother, is a virtual virgin to whom sex is given for safekeeping. (149)

Vivie Warren in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is the first career heroine of Shaw, the new woman of the twentieth century. She is an earnest and scornful college graduate who has no patience with the conventions of the older generation. She is delicately cultured young lady who works for the sordid motive of winning \$ 50.

Vivie is introduced in the play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* as 'reading and making notes'. Again in the stage directions Shaw says, "She is an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly educated, young middle class woman" (10). The stage directions describe Vivie as physically able bodied, athletic and enthusiastic girl. She 'shuts the gate with a vigorous slam' and 'brings the chair forward with one swing'. Her handshake numbs her mother's friend and her squeeze makes Croft confess 'She has a powerful fist'. Her recreation is also mannish: whenever she is exhausted she needs 'a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky and a novel with a good detective story'. Vivie has never been portrayed as a sentimental, fashionable and chic girl unlike ordinary girls. Her ambition of life explicates the ambition of a real career woman. Barbara Watson has rightly remarked:

.... Shavian career woman is a melting pot who possesses her grown up self. This Shavian career woman is an incarnation of criticism of societal norms and assumptions about protective mother, virgin womanly woman. Her education, belief in conscience and her self confidence in driving her own life on the less travelled path of being a single woman illustrate her right to a 'self' uncommon in those days.(127)

Vivie Warren is no Jane of Philip Johnson (*Little Glass Houses*), no Susan of Douglas Jerrold (*Black Ey'd Susan*), no Clara of Edward Bulwer Lytton (*Money*) to sit workless. None of them has any real business of life except to brood over the rules of society about the moral conduct or weep over the injustice of society. Vivie does not care for either. She is "the devotee of the Gospel of getting on" (87).

At the outset it appears that Vivie is not on good terms with her mother. Her mother has informed her neither of her own arrival nor of Mr. Praed and when Praed arrives; Vivie is not pleased in the least.

Vivie Warren is not like six Miss Huxtables of Henley Granville Barker who are treated like children by their mother. They are all very silent. Laura's destination lies in her being the housekeeper: it is a solid power that of ordering the dinner. Emma, her sister wants to join the office to work for thirty shillings a week, but the Huxtables don't want thirty shillings a week and she is left to cry. Their mother Mrs.

Huxtable does always ask her daughters where they were going when they leave the room and where they have been when they enter it and she never drops the habit. They resent it only by the extreme patience of their replies. Again and again their father Mr. Huxtable introduces them to Thomas. With slight resentment and 'nervousness' they retort: "We have been introduced father..." (15). Mrs. Huxtable disapproves any self assertion and descends upon the culprit.

Vivie's own life matters most to her. She does not allow anybody to do anything concerning her life without consulting her. She is an individual and she has a world of thoughts and feelings of which she is the sole ruler. She can't let her individuality be ignored. She is angry because her mother Mrs. Warren comes with Praed to introduce him to her without consulting Vivie, without informing her about it and without caring for her wish or inclination that way. Praed is taken aback by her assertiveness but he appreciates her unconventional attitude. She behaves quite frankly and boldly with strangers. Unlike six Miss Huxtables she is not 'silent with strangers'.

On Vivie's question whether she has been behaving unconventionally, Praed remembers that in his young age there was no good fellowship between men and women. And people were shy to express themselves. Having a business oriented mind, Vivie has no interest in the wonderful world of art, which Praed finds difficult to believe as he has never seen a woman without aesthetic sense. She is devoid of the sense of beauty and romance. She discloses it herself, "I would not go through that experience again for anything you could offer me. I held for civility's sake.... I couldn't stand any more of it" (64). In her long conversation with Mr. Praed, she talks only of mathematics and money:

VIVIE. .... I'm supposed to know something about science: but I know nothing except the mathematics it involves. I can make calculations for engineers, electricians, insurance companies and so on; but I know next to nothing about engineering or electricity or insurance. I don't even know arithmetic well. Outside mathematics, lawn tennis, eating, sleeping, cycling and walking. I'm a more ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who had not gone in for the tripos. (63)

To Mr. Praed all this appears to be 'destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful'. On Praed's question, 'Have you no romance and beauty in your life?' She replies, 'I don't care for either I assure you' (63). At the age of twenty-two, she exhibits immense courage in all the things she does, startling those around her whether through her physical gestures and gesticulations or her explosive, outspoken, candid, matter of fact attitude even in the most sentimental situations. She is not scared of the consequences of going against her mother's supposed ideal of being little Vivie. Vivie works at Honorias Chamber in Chancery Lane at actuarial calculations for her. She never enjoys herself more in her life than when she is involved in mathematical calculations. She cannot enjoy the opera and the band. Having no time and taste for music and dance, she only remains busy in earning money.

In Vivie, we find a typical adolescent urge for questioning and the satisfaction derived out of it. She revolts against her mother because she is not satisfied by little answers. Her mother cares not to see that she is 'a grown up woman' (70). She objects

to her going to the hill in the dark alone with Praed. She is reproached but she does not care. Mrs. Warren's reproach goes unheeded. Vivie hates the circle in which her mother is living. She is deeply interested in the meaning of life. For her a man that has not worked in life is a worthless man:

It is her conviction that a person has to work in order to survive. In her mother's circle as there is none of that nature, she is full of contempt for all. Vivie here echoes Shakespearean idealism: "What is a man if his chief good and motive of his time, Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more" (32-34). The critical moment comes in the play when Mrs. Warren is left alone with Vivie in the night to be questioned and criticized. Her dislike of Sir George Crofts - a workless, lazy man and other men of her mother's group causes an explosion.

It is for certain that Vivie does not like to be governed by her mother's wishes. She has an independent identity and she is bent upon making the world feel the same. The following dialogue between the two expresses her personality trait i.e. she is assertive.

Vivie Warren takes her mother Mrs. Warren in her grip by questioning and Mrs. Warren is quite puzzled by her independence in decisions. Her reproaches fail to satisfy her. Had Vivie been a Victorian girl, she would have stopped arguing and questioning without being satisfied, but Vivie's mind overflows with questions. She dislikes the idea that she has the blood of Crofts - 'the contaminated blood of that brutal waster in her veins' (74).

Vivie wants to ensure that she does not have the contaminated blood of that brutal waster in her veins. As the mother fails to convince her, she keeps on repeating the questions and expects a convincing answer. Her talk and arguments take away her mother's sleep.

Vivie succeeds at last in knowing her mother's profession. Mrs. Warren tried to crush the queries in the mind of Vivie by remonstrance like this 'shame on you for a bad daughter and a stuck up prude' or 'what right have you to set yourself up above me like this'? Vivie is not ready to accept the plan of her mother that she had to choose the profession of prostitute. Her contention is:

Everybody has some choice. The poorest girl alive may not be able to choose between being queen of England or Principal of Newham; but she can choose between rag picking and flower selling, according to her taste. People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them. (85)

To Mrs. Warren all this appears to be a shallow talk because she knows the reality of life and knows also that words are easy like the winds. She tells Vivie that her two sisters could get nothing by their respectability. One of them worked in a Whiteland factory twelve hours a day and for nine shillings a week and died of lead poisoning. The other married a government laborer and kept her room and three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week. Her third sister Lizzie could no longer pay any tribute to respectability so she gave up these rough hard jobs. In order to escape from the gutter, from the coal mines where Ann Jane 'got poisoned', she

embraced that profession. Poverty led to such wretchedness but she never wanted Vivie to be what she is now because she has no such circumstances leading to that wretchedness. Mrs. Warren explains how difficult and tiresome her profession had been.

MRS WARREN..... I am sure I have often pitied a poor girl tired out and in low spirits having to try to please some man that she does not care two straws for some half drunkard fool that thinks he's making himself agreeable when he is teasing and worrying and disgusting a woman so that hardly any money could pay her for putting up with it. But she has to bear with disagreeable and take the rough with the smooth, just like a nurse in a hospital or anyone else. It's not work that any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses. (76)

Martin Meisel writes:

Mrs. Warren chooses prostitution not out of weakness, but through strength of mind, and she is successful because of shrewd native abilities..... Mrs. Warren represents prostitution as social and economic phenomenon rather than prostitution as forbidden fruit, personal temptation and fall. There is no pathetic effort to 'get back' because Mrs. Warren knows that as long as poverty makes virtue hideous and spare - pocket money of rich bachelordom makes vice dazzling, the daily hand to hand fight against prostitution with prayer and persuasion, shelters and scanty alms will be a losing one. (279-280)

Vivie has correctly diagnosed the life of her mother and she will never allow anyone to laugh at her mother. She must be venerated by each and everybody. She can't be deserted by the entire world because 'she's what you call a bad lot' (60). This is Shaw's outburst but it is also Vivie's sentiment of value which has the idea of self at its core. She has hated her mother so long as she did not know of the circumstances leading to such wretchedness. In her exchange of words with Crofts, she expresses her hatred for him. Crofts think that she is reluctant and finally she will yield herself to his offer but she is an exception to the reluctant but finally yielding woman. She is a Shavian heroine and before choosing a mate, she will observe him perfectly well. She is determined not to make Crofts a companion of her life. "Vivie: (sharply) My no is final. I would not go back from it". Vivie is a proof against inducements.

In the middle of the third act, Vivie becomes conscience stricken when the realization dawns upon her that the nauseating business shared by her mother and sir George Crofts is still going on and that she has always lived on the money from it. She thinks that she is as damned as Crofts because she herself never asked from where the money has come.

The third realization that comes to Vivie is that she and Frank Gardener are half sister and brother. Her utter agony, restlessness and struggle are how to bring herself quite separate and away from the society of her mother. She decides to work at Honoria Fraser's chamber and earn her livelihood. For her the sources from where money comes must be pure and chaste.

Vivie develops a hatred for beauty and romance. She thinks that both these things lead men and women to wretchedness, where her mother, Crofts and gardener are. She turns her back on her mother not because of what she did in her utter poverty but because of what she is still doing, having lumps of money. She can't live with 'Crofts' philosophy of life'. Vivie bids goodbye to the supporters of it, Frank, Gardner, Crofts and mother too. Purdom comments, "Her outlook is unsentimental: She says good bye to false happiness for she is wholly competent and has planned life" (155).

She has travelled a great distance from the girls who are quite dependent on their parents and ready to have every wish crushed by men. In Vivie, we find a striking change from the girls reading *English Women's Domestic Magazine* to the girls working for mathematical trips.

In one of the letters to Janet Achurch Shaw says:

You suggested that I should put on the stage a great modern lady of the governing class, I did and the result was Miss Vivie Warren. I have made daughter the heroine and the mother a deplorable rip (saving your presence). The great scene will be the crushing of the mother by the daughter. (32)

Homer E. Woodbridge remarks:

Vivie is almost incredibly hard and at the same time capable of descending to baby talk in love making. Her inconsistencies, however, make her a more human and likeable figure than the earlier heroines, and unlike them she is capable of a kind of idealism. (27)

Vivie Warren is of course hard with her mother as she can't keep her pace with old conventions and evil actions. She descends to baby talk in making love with Frank but she is also capable of a kind of idealism i.e. she is not to sit idle and she must work to get money.

Shaw's next career heroine is a Major of the Salvation Army-Barbara Undershaft. Her character is revealed to us through the dialogue between Lady Britomart and Stephen. While all the children of Lady Britomart, Stephen and other young ones are ready to face their father who is returning after long years, Lady Britomart is suspicious as Barbara may refuse to face him up as she is more obstinate and aggressive than other children. Lady Britomart makes a comment about the aggressive, highly determined attitude of her daughter. She says:

LADY BRITOMART. .... I don't know how Barbara will take it. Ever since they made her a major in the Salvation Army, she has developed a propensity to have her own way and order people about which quite crows me sometimes. It's not lady-like. I am sure I don't know where she picked it up. Anyhow Barbara shan't bully me; but still it's just as well that your father should be here before she has time to refuse to meet him or make a fuss.... (464)

When Major Barbara enters the play, she is in Salvation Army uniform. She knows that there are neither good men nor scoundrels; there are just children of one father. They are all just the same sort of sinners and there is the same salvation ready for them all. She has good faith in her Salvation Army of which she is the major and is devoted to her work. Barbara carries the stamp of her profession. She easily forgives Bill for hitting at Jenny and Rummy. She has saved scoundrels, criminals, infidels, philanthropists, missionaries, country councilors but she has not saved the maker of cannons- Andrew Undershaft . She makes a bargain with Andrew Undershaft who comes to visit her Salvation Army that she too would go to visit his cannon foundry:

The climax is based on the same bargain and the defeat and disillusionment of Major Barbara. From here onwards Shaw emphasizes the evils of poverty more than Barbara's works and duties as the Major of the army. So far as Barbara remains in the army, she has a faith that will shake even the mountains.

There is a clash of convictions between Barbara and Undershaft - one holding the cross, the other taking the sword, between a saviour of souls and a millionaire. Undershaft feels that her Salvation army will one day yield itself to the cannon foundry as all religious organization exist by selling themselves to the rich. With the reversal of fortunes, the army gets defeated. When Undershaft comes to visit the army, he notices the frightful plight:

BARBARA. How did you make that two pence?

UNDERSHAFT. As usual, by selling cannons, torpedoes, submarines and my new patent Grand Duke hand grenade.

BARBARA. Put it back in your pocket. You can't buy your Salvation here for two pence: you must work it out. (481)

On Undershaft's plea for more money Barbara replies:

BARBARA. Two million would not be enough. There is bad blood on your hands and nothing but good blood can cleanse them. Money is no use. Take it away (She turns to Cousins) Dolly: You must write another letter for me to the papers (he makes a wry face) Yes: I know but you don't like it; but it must be done. The starvation, this winter is beating us: everybody is unemployed. The General says we must close this shelter if we can't get more money. I force the collections at the meetings until I am ashamed: Don't I Snobby? (481)

Barbara is at her wits end not knowing what to do. She is unable to save the souls of the people as they die of hunger on the streets. Her trouble is:"I can't talk religion to a man with bodily hunger in his eyes (482)."

Her heart breaks down with the sale of the Army to Horace Bodger- the whisky man and Undershaft, the cannon businessman. As she can't get money by any other means by prayers or anything else, her faith breaks up. She is to combat a battle, not with the devil but with Bodger, the whisky man. Mrs. Baines is ready to accept the money because heaven has found the way for him to make a good use of his

money. Barbara's contention is that he is going to be wicked as ever. Barbara says: "I can't pray now. Perhaps I shall never pray again" (485).

Barbara, the devotee of god, the worshipper and Major of Salvation Army is puzzled to see the power of money.

Barbara is dejected to see that in her salvation army there is poverty, misery, cold and hunger - the things that one can't love and the things that can't lead to salvation. On the contrary, Undershaft's cannon factory actually saves men, saves from seven deadly sins- 'food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability and children.' (503)

Shaw's Barbara has to accept that poverty can do no good and that drinking and gambling can only be controlled if people are fed properly. No good can be derived even from Salvation Army which can't avoid poverty. None can perform 'knee drill' when one is hungry. It is with the power of money that 'ought' is turned into 'shall' in the cannon foundry. Upto the end of the play, she is helpless to decide what power means. Cusins tells her the varied aspect of power. Barbara is embittered as she can't escape from the clutches of Bodger and Undershaft i.e. Money. Yet she does not lose courage.

Barbara Bellow Watson writes,

She (Major Barbara) like all the career women who take Shaw's interest, need not work to earn her bread but does so to spread her ideas, her daring and the energy bounding in her veins. Like Florence Nightingale, she finds the boredom and stagnation of the drawing room more terrible than the battlefields of the crime. (149)

Shaw's career women are thus what Shaw wanted women to be - women sailing not with but against the currents of time. Time was reluctant in giving women any social or legal right for which Florence Nightingale and other women had to struggle a lot. The range of Shaw's career heroines is however very limited; he could not present lady doctors, professors, administrators. The explanation consists not in what he did, but when he did it. Shaw started his efforts when various women's movements were going on. The career reserved for women was the career of a governess but that too was forced by circumstances.

James Budie points out in his essay *Shaw as a Dramatist*, "Moliere was the first dramatist to show young women as individual creatures with souls to be dammed and not as decorative appendages to the male sex" (90).

Like Moliere, Shaw had sympathy with the emancipation of women. On economic questions, Shaw's ideas were inspired by Henry George and Jevons. While in his denunciation of capitalist property and of income from that property, Shaw took inspiration from Karl Marx. He denounced capitalist exploitation in an uncompromising manner. In his *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, he says, "Private property with its boast of the great accumulation of the so called wealth... as the result of its power to scourge men and women daily to prolonged and intense toil turns out to be a simulacrum" (230).



Shaw in his plays *Widower's House* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* exposed the social abuses. He presents these abuses as the products of a system and not the immorality or inhumanity of individuals. Shaw wrote in the *Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession*:

The alternative offered by society collectively to poor women is a miserable life, starved, over worked, fatigue ailing, ugly..... starvation, overwork, dirt and diseases are as antisocial as prostitution. They are the vices and crimes of a nation and not merely its misfortunes. (232)

Shaw was influenced by Carlyle, Ruskin and Dickens in his views on Socialism. Dickens in his *Hard Times* expressed that the whole framework of society was wrong. He also showed the effects of bad political and social institutions on the lives of individuals. Julian B Kaye has observed, "This picture of the moral and psychological effect on men and women of a society based on self interest and mercantile calculation is similar to that found in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*" (27).

Shaw has also been inspired by Comte, Hellamy and Webb's. In the preface to *Getting Married*, Shaw affirms much more passionately than Bellamy the necessity for women to be economically independent of men. In the III act of *Man and Superman*, Don Juan talking about the economic slavery of men says 'What is virtue but the trade unionism of the married? (382). In the preface to *Getting Married* Shaw says: "the truth is that family life will never be decent, much less ennobling, until this central horror of the dependence of women on men is done away with"(23).

In the social world of the Victorians not only the marriageable girls but also the mistresses of the house looked around for somebody to occupy their vacant hours. Shaw has portrayed women with conviction and courage. A notable thing about his career heroines Vivie, Barbara, Louka is that their professions are not at all forced, rather they follow them willingly. They don't embrace the profession out of a sense of failure in life but to seek its fulfillment.

In the nineteenth century, it became a matter of course that women should be paid less than men and when any female rebel claimed to be paid as much as a man for the same work, the employer shut her mouth with two arguments; first 'if you don't like the lower wage there are plenty of others who will' and second 'If I have to pay the man's wages, I will get a man to do the work' (103). Shaw never presented his workwomen as subordinates but as bosses so that they may not be degraded like women working in coalmines and factories. A critic rightly says,

Shaw's women in profession are involved in their work only for two reasons: to get money and to be successful. By their eminence and achievement they prove that high accomplishment and professionalism are almost inextricable and indistinguishable. These women exchange the fripperies of feminist for the armor of feminism.. (105)

Shaw's workingwomen do not stay at home as writers and actresses rather they are acrobats, mathematicians, social achievers and remorseless heads. Shaw does not portray a secretary, a research assistant, dieticians as his characters because these

designations represent a new kind of female subjugation. His successful women are possessed with strong 'will' which strengthens their soul to get what they want. They are represented as bosses fit to rule, rather than as subordinates to be ruled. Infact Shaw's originality lies in showing what a career woman is like - a woman who believes in the worship of work and not of romance and whose principle is 'Life is work and work is worship.'

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