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Exploring the Theory of Creative Evolution in G. B. Shaw's *Man and Superman*

Shweta Chaudhary

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Abstract:

G.B. Shaw was an Irish dramatist born in Dublin in 1856. With his realistic plays Shaw set his own genre in the dramas of modern age. His plays such as *Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* criticized the evils of the contemporary society. For his contribution in literature, Shaw was awarded Nobel Prize in 1925. He criticized the concept of 'art for the art's sake' and said adamantly "for art's sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence" (Tilak, 50). Shaw was against the marriage institution and considered it a mere societal domain for public satisfaction of love and marriage. He attacked marriage on the ground that it cages women; he called it worse than prostitution in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. This paper seeks to analyze Shaw's one more prolific contribution to literature, *Man and Superman* which contoured around his philosophy of Creative Evolution.

Keywords: creative evolution, consciousness, meditation, marriage, anti-Darwinism, life force.

Discussion

Shaw's dramas were a breakdown from the earlier age; introducing a new tone to some of his dramas through his philosophy of 'Creative Evolution'. Shaw wrote to put forward the social, economic and political evils of the then society. In *Widower's House*, the dramatist is putting in front bluntly the havocs of slum landlordism, in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, he is dealing with prostitution, in *The Philanderer* with the excessive idealism of scientist and doctors who are more concerned with the sickness rather than the patient. Shaw in his drama has always tried to put down the truth nakedly to his audience and therefore, he was often called a realistic. Shaw held strong views on equality of women and considered them at par with men. C.E.M Joad has said in Shaw's praise "Shaw not only gave women the freedom to do as men did, but gave men the freedom to treat women as if they were men." (Tilak 38). But it was only when his play, *Man and Superman*, stepped onto the stage in 1903, Shaw attained the stature of a prodigal and profound dramatist in the field of plays. He sat the stage on fire with his play *Man and Superman*, setting and propounding his theory of creative evolution in his play.

Shaw derived his theory of creative evolution from Samuel Butler, famous for his book *Erewhon*, who adhered to presence of a life force or will in evolution of man. Shaw regarded him as "the greatest writer of the late half of the 19th century" (46-47). Butler was the first one to deny Charles Darwin theory of 'survival of the fittest'. Shaw further expanded Butler's view and

explored it in his own possible ways and detached it entirely from Charles Darwin's survival of fittest in his famous work, *The Origin of Species*. In his book, Darwin did chalk out the concept of evolution of man and difference in species but called it a mere coincidence and denied the presence of any supernatural power, life force or will. Shaw became an anti-Darwinism as through his philosophy of creative evolution he concluded the presence of life force in matter that propels in human beings in the form of will and further that will is present in each one of them in conscious or unconscious way. A man who is guided by a conscious life force subsides to the will of the life force while a man who is unconscious; in him the will thrives in a wild manner to find its purpose. He confirmed "you *imagine* what you *desire*, and at last you *create* what you *will*" (48).

Shaw's creative evolution rests on the concept of life force and matter. He articulated that life force and matter; are both enemy. Human beings dwell in matter therefore life force came into human to fulfill its purpose. Life force cannot attain its purpose until and unless it comes into matter in the form of living organisms. The life force he propounded has two purpose; one is to gain higher intelligence and faculties which can be accomplished only when it dwells in matter in the form of living organisms and secondly, the necessity to pass beyond matter and become eternal or immortal which is considered as the state of pure-enlightenment where human being is well aware of his purpose in life and is not bound by the materialism of life on earth. We examine Shaw explaining the purpose of life force through Don Juan in the act Three of Hell scene in *Man and Superman*:

...life: the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself. What made this brain of mine, do you think? Not the need to move my limbs; for a rat with half my brains moves as well as i. not merely the need to do, but the need to know what I do, lest in my blind efforts to live I should be slaying myself.(Man and Superman.Act III.339).

This life force dwells in human beings in the form of will; the will to achieve, attain or create anything. When a being is fully conscious of his will he acts accordingly, otherwise he turns into the passive reflector of the will. In the latter situation a person loses the moral purpose of his life and therefore fails to earn self- respect. In the play, *Man and Superman*, Don Juan speaks how the will works hand in hand with the self respect:

...It is the success with which you have diverted the attention of men from their real purpose, which in one degree or another is the same as mine, to yours, that has earned you(devil) the name of the Tempter. It is the fact that they are doing your will, or rather drifting with your want of will, instead of doing their own, that makes them the comfortable, false, restless, artificial, petulant, wretched creature they are.(MS III.355)

The term 'will' was first used by German philosopher Schopenhauer. He called this life force by the name of will. Therefore, man is an instrument of life force where his increased

intelligence and faculties would establish the ground for a higher level of intelligence for the next generation and therefore lead to evolution of man to the highest purpose ultimately.

Shaw set his age on storm when he projected women superior to men through his theory of creative evolution. He proposed that the life force came into existence through women who was created to achieve the goal of life force through procreation. We are exposed to his idea through the famous Hell scene in *Man and Superman* where Don Juan says:

...Women is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, man is woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutionary process she invented him, differentiated him, created him in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce....(MS III.372)

Therefore, Shaw emphasized that woman are biologically superior to men as they are able to lure men in romance, love and marriage in order to attain the purpose of life force; a better evolution of mankind. She makes him a bearer of her children by trapping him in sexual bait. Woman is able to win over ninety-nine men out of hundred. The hundredth man according to Shaw is a 'genius' who is well aware of woman's trap and therefore they both stand at clash with each other. Joad has summarized this 'genius' by saying "in the genius Life's purpose is to carry life itself to heights consciousness not previously achieved; in the woman, to safeguard and maintain the level which has already been attained"(49). Such a men is never dominated by a woman even if he surrenders to the snares of a woman he does that purposely. Joad rightly observed that and said:

but love for him a holiday and woman essentially a plaything. To be taken up during the interval between the real business of life, but not to be allowed to divert attention when serious work is afoot. (68).

Man and Superman was published in 1903 and was first enacted in 1905 by the Royal Court Theatre. Until 1915 the play was enacted without the Act Three 'Don Juan in Hell' as the act was considered monotonous and philosophical; failing to catch heart of the audiences. But Colbourne praised the Act three for its musical resonance and said "...it is the fact that whenever the hell scene is included in man and superman, the box-office takings increase appreciably. I, therefore, declare it a music-drama for four voices: tenor, soprano, baritone, and bass" (69). The play paved new grounds for the genre of Shaw's drama as earlier he was writing on social issues but with *Man and Superman* he emphasized on a broader aspect of human life that held all other issues and aspects of life as a tiny miniature in it. It was Shaw's masterpiece as it not only reflected his theory of creative evolution but also ridiculed the institution of marriage and the atrocious hypocrisy and sham surrounding it. His sharp attacks on societal institution appealed and fascinated to the youth of his times. The play bagged the subtitle of 'comedy and philosophy'.

The play is a comedy till act three is kept segregated from the rest of the play. *Man and Superman* revolves around the life of two main characters Ann and Tanner. While Ann is Shaw's life force's unconscious instrument to fulfill nature's desire in the most economical way, Tanner is Shaw's Genius who tries to escape from Ann's trap. The play turns all the 20th century typical ideas of man snaring woman topsy-turvy when we see Ann actually leaving no stone unturned to lure Tanner. Shaw redefined the sexual roles of men and women through his play; holding steadily his reader's attention. Tanner calls her admiration and proposals a meaningless trap:

Tanner:... it is the tame elephants who enjoy capturing the wild ones.

Ann: I am getting on. Yesterday I was a boa constrictor: today I am an elephant.

Tanner: yes. So pack your trunk and begone: I have no more to say to you. (MS II.144-146).

Therefore, the comic spirit is seen hovering all over the dialogues of Tanner and Ann. Comedy is also inflicted in the play through the character of Violet; Octavious's sister. Violet is pregnant without the blessings of Church. She hides her marriage with Hector from everyone as the latter was threatened by his father who is a millionaire that Hector would be disinherited if he dares to marry anyone except a British royalty. So Violet plays her card safe by not only following her heart in the matter of love but at the same time protecting Hector in regard to his wealth. Ramsden, Octavious, Tanner are shocked when they hear news of her pregnancy while, Ann is fully aware of her legitimate marriage with Hector. Humor is also drizzled very well in the play through Ann and Tanner. Tanner keeps on refusing to the snares of Ann as he is well aware of her instincts and knows that she is kept on purpose by the life force driving in her which would aim her to do anything that the purpose of her motive would demand. On the other hand, Ann keeps on refusing Octavious's snares, who is madly in love with her, and keeps on following her pursuit of Tanner impatiently. It is only in the later part of the play that he surrenders to traps of lovelorn Ann:

Ann (*suddenly losing her courage, with an anguish that she does not conceal*): ..And you have said no: that is all.

Tanner (*brutally*): Well?

Ann: Well, I made a mistake: you do not love me.

Tanner: (*seizing her in his arms*) : It is false. I love you. The life force enchants me. I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you. But I am fighting for my freedom, for my honor, For myself, one and indivisible. (MS IV.333-336).

Tanner is Shaw's Genius with the authorship of the book "revolutionist handbook" (382). Therefore, imprint of Shaw's creative evolution are exalted not only in the act three but also distributed subtly in other parts as well. Tanner is Shaw's revolutionist as he opposes the gloomy

institution of marriage, the romantic exaggeration of woman, which he considers all as vague and meaningless. Tanner enchants the audience with his boldness and modesty when Ramsden, Octavious are shocked by Violet's pregnancy while he takes a step forward and praises her action of following her instincts irrespective of worldly morality:

Tanner: Oh, they know it in their hearts, though they think themselves bound to blame you by their silly superstitions about morality and propriety and so forth. But I know, and the whole world really knows, though it dare not say so, that you were right to follow your instinct; that vitality and bravery are the greatest qualities a woman can have, and motherhood her solemn initiation into womanhood; and that the fact of your not being legally married matters not one scrape either to your own worth or to our real regard for you. (MS I.428)

A.C. Ward said about Tanner "when John Tanner suddenly opened the door and appeared in Shaw's *Man and Superman*, an invigorating wind blew through the western world" (381). The play is a comedy excluding act three. Act three thoroughly explores the theory of creative evolution and hence it's philosophy through the words of Don Juan.

Shaw recreated the arch typical character of Don Juan through his play *Man and Superman*. Don Juan was first built by a Spanish monk in 16th century. The character was associated with libertinism and debauchery. The character fascinated many European writers from 16th to 17th century. The concept of debauchery in relation to Don Juan was first popularized by Baron. But Shaw through his play *Man and Superman* reciprocated the character of Don Juan. He projected Don Juan as a revolutionist in Act three of his play, *Man and Superman* and as an opponent to all decadent and commonplace qualities throttled on him earlier by his authors. Shaw popularized him as a man of wit, intellect. His views were unconventional and were totally against the so called moral conduct of the society and its institutions. Shaw revealed Don Juan as a social rebel. Fuller praised the freshness brought by Shaw to Don Juan:

gave the most original and challenging variation of all. He is a man gifted enough to be exceptionally capable of distinguishing between good and evil, follows his own instincts without regard to the common statue or cannon law, therefore, whilst gaining the ardent sympathy of our rebellious instincts, finds himself in moral conflict with existing institutions. (384).

Don Juan is Shaw's another genius breathing through Act three of his play. He is seen criticizing the moral ethics of society, the institution of marriage. Through him Shaw differentiates between heaven and hell, the conscious and unconscious life force and the need for contemplation and meditation for attaining the highest purpose of life.

Shaw through his play, *Man and Superman* also throws lights on the institution of marriage. He considers it rational as long as it is meant to fulfill life force purpose of procreation in the most appropriate way. The sanctity of marriage has survived for many centuries only

because there had been no any other institution more apt than marriage for sexual intercourse and procreation. Shaw criticized marriage on the grounds that it leads to gender inequality and oppression of women. He conveyed through Mrs. Warren's Profession that a woman is reduced into a slave for men; clutched in the four walls of the house. It robs the women of their rights. The use of word such as 'licentious' and 'mantrap' for the institution of marriage in the play reflect the orthodoxy Shaw sees marriage with. We find Don Juan talking in length on marriage and how the so-called morality of the world functions in a narrow and rigid way:

Don Juan:twelve lawful children borne by one highly respectable lady to three different fathers is not impossible not condemned by public opinion. That such a lady may be more law abiding than the poor girl whom we used to spurn into the gutter for bearing one unlawful infant is no doubt true; but dare you say she is less self-indulgent? (MS III.431).

Similarly, we see Tanner refuting to Ann's love proposal as he feels marriage is a prison where he would be robbed of his independence, desires and motives in the life. But at the same time, he is fully aware of the power of life force functioning through Ann which he cannot summon. He is enchanted to Ann naturally even if his mind restraints and force him back to pragmatism. Therefore, at the end he surrenders to the life force and says to Mrs. Whitefield:

Tanner: it seems to me that I shall presently be married to Ann whether I like it myself or not. (MS IV.240).

In the Act three, we also notice Shaw highlighting on heaven and hell by putting words in the mouth of Don Juan. Don Juan describes hell as eternal life on earth. There is no difference between hell and earth except that in hell a man is ageless, immortal according to him. Even in hell, a man is in pursuit of worldly happiness just like on earth. He is caged in anger, jealousy and other epitome of his emotions. Heaven he describes as the state of self-consciousness where man gives up all his worldly pursuits and comes in parallel to the life force. The ultimate purpose of life in heaven is to develop to highest faculties:

Don Juan: ...but heaven cannot be described by metaphor. Thither I shall go presently, because there I hope to escape at last from lies and from the tedious, vulgar pursuit of happiness, to spend my eons in contemplation. (MSIII.337).

Man and Superman is Shaw's masterpiece as it cuts through his theme of social problems of the society and embarks towards his broader philosophical theory of creative evolution. We see his theory of creative evolution well knit in every character and aspect of his drama, *Man and Superman*. Though the act three of the drama is neglected many times but the act has actually strengthened and upheld the motive of the drama. Meanwhile, comedy is Shaw's another instrument; pleasantly breathing through dialogues of his character who are well incorporated suiting to his theory of creative evolution.

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