



REPRESENTATION OF POVERTY AND VALUE OF MONEY IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S MAJOR BARBARA

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Abstract:

Major Barbara is a play about money. It is passionate denunciation of poverty. It reveals the materialistic permission of Shaw. He depicts poverty as the epitome of all vices. People say that poverty is no crime: Shaw says that poverty is a crime. It is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it that it is the mother of all crimes, of brutality, corruption and fear. Shaw shows that even the nobles enthusiasm of the girl, who becomes a Salvation Army officer, fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist.

Keywords: Money, Poverty, Brutality, Corruption, Fear and Capitalist, etc.

Major Barbara is one of the most notable plays written for the Royal Court Theatre under the verdant-Barker Management of 1904-1907. It was written by George Bernard Shaw in 1905, It has remained a deservedly popular and frequently performed play. Intellectually, it is a robust, challenging play which decisively and memorably defines the dilemma which perennially confronts reforming idealists when they come to grips with the realities of power in society. Barbara is a sermon in drama. The drama is completely opposed to the lesson taught by Christian ethics. Shaw believes that the poor are unblessed since poverty is the source of sin. No poor man can possibly hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. Poverty leads to all sorts of crime. Hence, to eliminate poverty is a social and moral imperative. The drama focuses on the conflict between the forces of conventionality and the power of superior being-the Shavian hero. Poverty breeds social discontent and thus constitutes a threat to socialism. Poverty can be eradicated from society by a combined attack of force, morality and intelligence. Shaw finally brings us to the conduction that capitalists have captured everything- the individual, public, state morality and religion. There is nothing outside their reach. That is why the abolition of capitalism and flourishing of socialism are worthy efforts.

The play reveals the sources of inspiration in dealing with the tragicomic irony of the conflict between real life and the romantic imagination. Butter lent him the belief that poverty is the greatest evil and the worst-crime. He tells in detail how society can be reformed. Major Barbara is a play of happy marriage of intellectual sophisticated and broadly popular ingredients. The romantic heroine cum Salvation Army Major Barbara epitomizes a type and has become part of the folk mythology of the Twentieth century. Her successors in real life joined the Aldermaston rallies, or protested against the Vietnam War and apartheid in Africa,



or left upper middle class homes to serve in organizations for the relief of suffering in the Third world war. "Major Barbara is a play which once read or seen, permanently affects the landscape of the mind" (Gibbs,152).

Major Barbara is a didactic play. It has several matters to preach. The basic theme of the play is the interrelation between economics and religion through superficially one may find it to be poverty and its bearing upon religion. Poverty has been made the target of concentrated attack in the play. The preface and the play have waged equal attack against poverty. The ills of poverty and the importance of money have been movingly discussed in the preface under the sub-heading the Gospel of St. Andrew Undershaft. He has been called a saint and his message has been called 'a gospel. Sir Andrew Undershaft attitude about poverty "poverty is the greatest of our evils and the worst of our crimes and the first duty to which all other considerations should be sacrificed is not being poor" (Paul, 466).

In the preface Shaw condemns the attempts of the traditional religions to uphold poverty as a virtue. According to Shaw, the things that should be given to most priority in life is the acquisition of money. Shaw declares: "The universal regards for money is one hopeful fact of our civilization" (Riaz, 91). Money represents health, strength, stamina, enterprise, education, and largeness of heart and all other good things of life. As against poverty, poverty represents squalor, dirt, disease, cowardice and numerous such evils. Sir Andrew under shaft says: Money is the first need of human life and poverty should be hated as 'vilest sin of man and society (Paul, 467).

Sir Andrew Undershaft has made a strong care for acquisition of money and power as the basis of religion. He believes that poverty is an enemy to both life and religion. It is this belief that goods him on to become the greatest financial magnate in England. Under shaft and his partner Lazarus virtually control the economic reins of Europe. It is under shaft's firm belief that it is not a weak man but a powerful man that can be really religious. He wants every English man to struggle in to riches like him. A poor man cannot be religious, as his mind is exclusively occupied with the problem of food and livelihood. Poverty destroys characters; it turns men into liars and hypocrites. The profession of Salvation Army personnel tries salvation on two poor characters namely, Rummy Mitchen and Snobby Prince. They exaggerate their guilt's in order to give the Army personnel bigger illusion of success with them. They do in expectation of getting some extra help from the Army shelter.

The poor people cannot maintain the integrity of character. Under shaft charges the Salvation Army with bribing the poor and hungry people with bread and trade for their salvation? Undershaft maintains that it is he who saved the soul of his daughter Major Barbara by making a rich provision for her upbringing and saved her soul from the seven deadly sins. He challenges Major Barbara to stop the cheap business of saving the should of the poor people in the Army shelters, and instead, take to salvation work among the happy, well fed, well clothed, well, housed workers of his model town of Perivale St. Andrews. Barbara and Adolphus casing get converted to the religion of Undershaft. It is brought home to them that. A real experiment of salvation of souls can be made only with the economically liberated people.

Major Barbara leaves off her job and decided to work among the financially well-off people of her father model town, instead of working among the financially work off people as



she did in the past, with new hope, vision and inspiration. She says, “My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God’s work be done. For its own sake” (Paul, 490).

In capitalistic economy all money is bound up with some kind of exploitation. The idea of pure money in an exploitative capitalistic set-up is a sheer illusion when Stephen says that he will not hear the government of his country insulted. Undershaft snubs him saying that he and Lazarus are the government of England. Under shaft tells. Cousins that “All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich” (Paul, 498). The Salvation Army has to be saved with the money of the two worst exploiters of the country. Barbara learns the truth that religion is directly connected with the economic system. She speaks as a convert, “Turning our backs on Bodger and under shaft is turning our back on life” (Paul, 502).

The concept of the link of the religious organization with a country's economy has been elaborately dealt with in the prefaces. Practically all the spare money in the country consists of a mass of rent, interest and profit, every penny of which is bound up with crime, drink, prostitution, disease and all the evil fruits of poverty, as inextricably as with enterprise wealth, commercial probate and national prosperity. All respectable people of the society depend on tainted money. Some young clergymen may have the illusion of accepting pure money from sweet old ladies with independent incomes and gentle and lovely ways of life. Shaw says suggesting such a clergymen, He has only to follow up the income of sweet ladies to its industrial source, and there he will find Mrs. Warren's Profession and the poisonous canned meat and all the rest of it. His own stipend has the same root. “He must either share the world's guilt or go to another planet” (Riaz, 97).

There is no escape from the 'tainted money except through complete social organization. There is no salvation through 'personal righteousness, but only through the redemption of the whole nation from its vicious, lazy, competitive anarchy. The play, Major Barbara, preaches the morality of militarism and acquisition of power for the sake of human right. One cannot defend or assert one's rights unless one has strength or power. A people cannot reorganize a society unless one has the strength or power to fight against the evil forces. The Salvation Army's choice of Blood and fire for its emblem and their substitution of the drum for the organ only suggest one thing that they have to fight the devil instead of praying at him.

In the play, Undershaft preaches the faith of an Armorer which means giving arms to all person who offer an honest price for them without respect of persons or principles. Sir Andrew under shaft believes that acquisition of might is extremely necessary for all persons who are conscious about their individual right and for those who sincerely seek change of society under shaft says that one's preparedness to kill is the ultimate test of one's conviction. He says Barbara “Killing is the final test of conviction, the only lever strong enough to overturn a social system, the only way of saying must” (Paul, 515). According to him the so-called Democracy choosing its leaders with ballot papers is dependent on night. Cousins finds in under shaft's outlook on life a new religion combination of acquisition of power with a worship of creation. The religion of Dionysus which keeps pace with the everlasting pace of creation is called by Bergson: a dynamic religion. Undershaft calls causing and Barbara to do salvation work among the economically well-placed workers' of his model town. Cousins sees



the hope of a new religion that will combine Nietzschean acquisition of power with conquests of spiritual heights so there was no difficult on the port of causing and Barbara to accept the challenging invitation from St. Undershaft. He made a strong case for the doctrine of militarism. He is not willing to subscribe to the prevalent belief that the French Revolution was caused by the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire and the encyclopedists. It was caused by those people who were prepared to use force against the agents of oppression.

The play attacks the system of confession conducted by the Salvation Army. Snobby price and Rummy matchers deliberately exaggerate their guilt in order to give the Army personnel the satisfaction of a bigger success of soul saving in return they expected greater consideration in respect of relief from the Army shelter. Snobby price stole one pound from the drum which was left there by Bill Walker Barbara refused to accept the same as the price of expiation for his guilt. The confessions of people like snobby price and Rummy richens do not Sean any change of heart. They are just theatricalities- external rituals. They just pass through the ritual of confession only to get same material assistance. The penal system has also been a subject of attack in both the play and the preface. "Punishment is only pretense of cancelling on crime by another" (Shaw, 25).

Punishment is only a legalized revenge. The guiding principle of penal system should be the mending of human characters. The conventional system of punishment as legalized revenge has been theoretically attacked in the play. Bill walker assaults Jenny Hills on charge of taking away his girl to another shelter and slaps Rummy matches. She is an elderly woman. She tries to interfere in his violence. Jenny Hill forgives him, blesses him and prays for him, but Rummy Matches retains her revengeful attitude towards him. Bill walker feels remorse for his action against Jenny Hill. He wants to make up for his guilt by paying one pound to the Army.

Major Barbara is a great work of art. Barbara's character underwent a gradual process of evolution. The characters symbolize the different stages in the evolution of his genius. She believes that social justice could be brought about and the world could be saved by preaching and lecturing. Shaw is a socialist. He wrote at length on socialism, social justice, equality and equitable distribution of wealth. He influences the people and covert them in to his their opinion by preaching.

This optimistic self of Shaw is symbolized by Barbara. Barbara is a young heroic soul and optimistic. She is enthusiastic in her devotion to the cause which she has made her own. Barbara does her best for the uplift of the poor. She thinks about the poor people. She tries to provide basic things to the poor people mentioned in the play. She preaches them about moral things. She makes them self-dependent and thinks about the burning problems of society. She wants to try for destroying poverty from the society. But she herself declares that she could not do anything without the support of the people. Shaw and Barbara both are same in such things. Shaw collects donations in his hat after the lecture and young Barbara does so in the tambourine. Barbara is treated in the play as cherished and loved.

Sir Andrew Undershaft thinks about money. He came in contact with the rich and the powerful people. Shaw realized that the lot of the poor can be ameliorated only through money. The power of money gives them strength. They can be saved not by preaching but by money. Andrew under shaft is an admirable figure. He speaks so forcefully because he speaks



from convictions and in this respect he represents the force and eloquence of Shaw. AdolpusCusin is a genius. He is a philosopher and spectator in the play. He is mature and loves Barbara He is hypnotized by Andrew under shaft. His philosophic intellectual can get outside of time and space. He is the fundamental contemplative provisional activities.

In the play, Major Barbara, there are some minor characters that are playing very important role and presented poverty. The play, Major Barbara is not a crowd led one by canvass. There three principal characters in the play and they are Barbara, Sir Andrew Undershaft and Adolphus. Besides, these major characters, there are also number of minor characters like Jenny Hill, Walker and Snobby Price. These minor characters come amazingly in the play. These minor characters Snobby Price, Peter Shirley, Jenny Hill and Bill Walker show the misery and wretchedness of London's poor. It gives us an idea of the day to day working of the Salvation Army. Snobby price and old woman Rummy are from down trodden society. They are poor. Their poverty has crushed and degraded them. They are down-trodden so they have no means of livelihood except the charity provided by religious organizations like the Salvation Army. Because of poverty, they became dishonest and hypocritical for butter and bread they make false confessions and pretend to have been converted.

These characters exposed the hollowness of the work done by religious organizations and the central weakness of the Army. The show that there can be no religion and no morality till poverty is eradicated and the poor are well-fed and well-clothed. They behave like corrupted persons in the society. They do not have to do anything with people. Hey want money for livelihood. They do not want to do anything with religion and morality. Their religion and morality is only money. Without money they cannot purchase, cannot eat or cannot buy cloth. Money is the basic need of them

Jenny Hill is another minor character presented in the play Major Barbara. She is a poor woman. She is shaved and now works a devoted soldier of the Salvation Army. She is fascinating and beautiful by her work. She handles other person's very tactfully. She is assaulted by Bill walker two times. Therefore also she forgives him. But Bill walker became very upset and accepted his guilt or mistake. He behaves with her rudely but later he tackles systematically by giving her money.

Peter Shirley is one of the poor presented in the play. He is a self-respecting painter. He became old. This employer wants young worker. By young workers he wants to take more work and become rich. Peter Shirley is thrown out of employment. He needs social security and old age pension. In his old age, he could not work properly and no one is ready to help Shirley provides an interesting contrast to under shaft.

Bill Walker is another character presented in the play 'Major Barbara.' He is from middle class family. He lives only for drinking. For wine, he can do anything. Bill is a typical drunken ruffian. He does not hesitate to strike helpless women like Jenny and Rammy. Barbara tries to make him good. She works upon him systematically and ruthlessly till his conscience is awakened. Because of wine, he could not stand, and talk properly. Barbara handles or treats hardened criminals very systematically.

Lady Britomart is the character in the play. She is good nature woman. She has a soft heart for others. Stephen is a poor guy. He is young. She wants that Stephen must settle in life. But he always curse of himself that he has not money to settle in life. Lady Britomart is trying



to arrange for a suitable match for him. She desires that he must get married. After marriage the money problem will occur for him. He has to set-up his own households. But it is very bad for Stephen to live in her home. She tells Stephen that her father was poor therefore he nourished all children properly. In this way, she inspires him to get married and love to life.

Major Barbara is an acute ironical observation of human contradiction. It shows how religious and charitable the Salvation Army into the dilemma of accepting money from a whisky, distiller and armament manufactured. Lady Britomart is the wife of Andrew Undershaft. She calls her sons and two daughters to meet their father. They have not seen their father since. Childhood under shaft meets his family. He is greatly attracted by Barbara who is his daughter. She is Major in the Salvation Army. He accepts Barbara's invitation to see the work of the Army at West Ham. He invites her in return to see how his workmen live in his model village. Major Barbara discovers that all religious organization is dependent on the charity of the rich who earn money by means, fair or foul. Andrew Undershaft will by the Salvation Army. He says: "All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich" (Paul, 479).

Barbara is shocked and she ends her connection with the Army. She goes to live in her father's model village. Her religious profession has been proved to be hollow. She resolves to work not for weak souls in starved bodies, prying with gratitude for a scrap of bread, but for fed, snobbish, apish creatures, all standing on the rights and dignities. Barbara's father, Andrew under shaft and other rich capitalist will not be able to throw it in her face that her converts are bribed with bread.

In Major Barbara, there are many characters, main as well as minor presented the Marxist elements. The minor character like Stephen, Peter, Bill Walker & Jenny are from poor class family. They struggle for becoming rich by hook or crook. It is a great problem play. It is also regarded as drama of ideas. In it a number of burning social problems are presented. These burning issues are the evil of poverty and its eradication, the value and significance of money, education, contemporary political and social organization and crime and punishment.

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