

ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

NIRAJA SARASWAT

Reader, Swami Keshvanand Institute of Technology, Management & Gramothan, Jaipur, India

ABSTRACT

My research paper entitled as ‘Angel in the House’ discusses motherly heroines in Shaw’s plays. Throughout his career Shaw served as a vigorous exponent of women’s freedom to be themselves, to liberate them from their traditional roles and traditional subservience. Women in this category are working women as well as agents of Life Force. They have the moral attributes of devotion and self sacrifice for the common good of society.

KEYWORDS: Motherhood, 'Feminine Warmth', Harshness and Aggressive Manners of the Modern Feminists

INTRODUCTION

Shaw always reposed his strong faith in the intrinsic goodness of women. His optimistic views about women as saviours are personified in this category. The term ‘Driving Force’ is a modernized form of nineteenth century traditional women who were characterized as “prigs... artificially constructed without selfishness, without animal instincts, without the weakness of common humanity” (164). Shaw in his preface to *Major Barbara* writes, “I violate the romantic conventions that all women are angels when they are not devils: they are better looking than man: their part in courtship is entirely passive. Human female form is the most beautiful object in nature” (12).

Shaw firmly believed that in woman the desire to become a mother is intense, continuous and practically universal. He writes to Ellen Terry, “No man ever does anything for a woman's sake. From our birth to our death we are women's babies, always wanting something from them, never giving them anything except something to keep for us” (28). Further: “They (Women) pity a man, mother him, and delight in making him love them” (28).

Impelled by the motherly instinct, Shaw's women pursue men not for their pleasure only but for the betterment of the species. These women are more universal than women in love and women in profession as both the other categories present only two extremes, absolute acceptance of love and the absolute negation of love. Women in this category are working women as well as agents of Life Force. They have the moral attributes of devotion and self sacrifice for the common good of society.

In the delineation of the motherly heroines, Shaw has propounded the theory that “a woman thinks of a man in whom she is interested both as a warrior who must fight his way and as a child who has lost his way”(109). In her first capacity, her instinct is to strengthen and encourage him so that he may go out in the world, make his way and earn bread for her and her children; in the second, she feels impelled by her protective instinct to comfort him and to keep little vulgar cares away from him.

Candida is one of the powerful emancipated mothers created by Shaw. As Morgan comments:

The conventionality of Candida is more striking than the revolt it contains.... it presents a view antithetical to that of Ibsen's *Doll's House*, instead of woman as the immature plaything of man, Shaw

emphasizes her maternal aspect, her influence over men and their dependence on her strength. (65-66)

Candida's lot is that of perpetual motherhood. Writing to Ellen Terry, Shaw says, "It is all very well for you to say that you want a mother play; but why didn't you tell me that in time? I have written the Mother play *Candida* and I can not repeat a masterpiece, nor can I take away Janet's one ewe lamb from her" (642).

Candida's most conspicuous trait emphasized by Shaw several times is her maternal instinct. When Candida enters the scene of action, she is introduced as 'looking at them (Morell and Burgess) with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression.' (Act I) She is a woman with the double charm of youth and motherhood. In her relations with men folk including her father and her husband, she appears like a true mother managing her children for their good. She says to Morell: "My boy shall not be worried; I will protect him" (147). And the same to Marchbanks: "Poor boy! Have I been cruel! Did I make it slice hasty little red onions?" (142)

Freud considers the mothering of a husband or a lover by the wife very important for conjugal bliss as he writes in *Femininity*:

A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships..... Even a marriage is not made secure until the wife has succeeded in making her husband her child as well and in acting as a mother to him. (187)

As a mother figure, Candida is identified with the Virgin Mary - an embodiment of ideal motherhood. Shaw describes Candida as "the poetry of the wife and mother-the virgin mother in the true sense" (198). As Candida enters the play for the first time, Shaw's directions specify her as "A wise hearted observer, looking at her (Candida), would at once guess that whoever had placed the Virgin of the Assumption over her hearth did so because he fancied some spiritual resemblance between them" (20).

Candida "builds a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for Morell and stands sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out" (22). With his delineation, Shaw revolutionized the nineteenth century concept of woman being protected by man. Now we see Candida protecting Morell and doing all the drudgery of the household in order that he may keep himself fit and may get leisure for 'his mission of preaching Christianity and socialism' (46). Ibsen's hero is so much taken up with his own pose of a father protector figure that he has a doll of a wife. Nora is always 'Poor little girl of Helmer', 'little lark', 'little skylark', 'little squirrel', 'little spendthrift'. Helmer is a commander who takes care of her:

HELMER. You are an old little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know, where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood: for indeed it is true that you inherit these things, Nora. (6)

The husband sketched by Shaw poses as the strong man. To him "Candida is his greatest treasure on earth" (73). But Candida is not a doll. Unlike Nora, she is depicted as the supporter not only of her children but also of her husband. It is she who shoulders all the veritable burden of household worries and duties. She serves Morell and leaves his talent free to expand. Marchbanks, the poet, realizes the kind of debt Morell owes to her.

Candida is an antithesis to the conventional foolish romantic wife of the 19th century Domestic Comedy, but she

combines in herself the qualities of the best Victorian woman with those of best of modern woman. She has feminine charm and domestic virtues of the old fashioned woman. Audrey Williamson writes that there is 'feminine warmth' (115) in Candida. She is thoroughly domesticated but at the same time, she possesses the broad mindedness and freedom from conventions of the modern woman. And yet she avoids the extreme defects of both these types viz. the unquestioning slavery to the husband, the loss of individuality of the Victorian woman and the harshness and aggressive manners of the modern feminists.

Candida is a practical realist, with no illusions about herself, her husband or her poetical lover. Unlike Nora, she shatters the illusion of Morell- about his popularity and his superiority. Candida is in complete knowledge of the faults of Morell but her love for him remains unaffected. She calls the sermons of Morell 'mere phrases' with which 'he cheats himself and others everyday.'

Her practical genius helps her to perceive that people prefer St. Dominics to worse places on Sundays solely due to the fact that James is good at preaching. In spite of Morell's continuous insurances on the fact that people have become ritualistic and religious, Candida presents the real picture which might not appear true to Morell, nevertheless the audience agree with Candida. Candida has raised herself above worn out conventions and false prejudices such as the superiority of men, the importance of preaching and of clergyman and she has got rid of the traditional traits of goodness and physical purity of women.

Candida's conviction and faith in herself gives her courage and she pursues an independent code morality for she has her own sense of values which she bases on reality and life. Morell fashions Candida after Ibsen's Nora and forgets that she reserves the right to think for herself. Eric Bentley writes, "the axis about which Candida revolves is that of strength and weakness, not love and hate..... instead of the little woman reaching up towards the arms of the strong man, we have the strong woman reaching down to pick up her child" (71).

When Eugene declares his love for her, she acts only in the way possible for her, or can be expected from a woman like her. She takes his love as seriously as it deserves to be taken. She puts herself up for auction and asks Morell and Marchbanks to bid for her. Morell offers his 'strength' for her 'defense', his 'honesty' for her 'surety,' his 'ability' and 'industry' for her 'livelihood' and his authority and position for her 'dignity'. For Morell that is all that a man can offer to woman. Eugene offers his 'weakness', his 'desolation', 'his heart's need'. Candida knows how to make a choice. Candida is no Mrs. Mildmay, the shallow young woman, with romantic yearnings, seeking romance with Captain Hawksley, a great villain who cultivates a romantic exterior. In the last act, when everyone else is powerless, Candida takes command and defeats the villain with great dash and practicality, while Mrs. Mildmay is quite helpless. Candida is also no lady Jessica who has by herself no strong will and determination. Lady Jessica finds herself in the same position as Candida does. She is loved by Falkner who intrudes upon the domestic life of Jessica and Gilbert. Candida plays the role of an accomplished housewife and an intelligent woman where Jessica is a woman with no definite ideals. Jessica hesitates when she is asked to desert her lover Falkner whereas Candida sets by herself that she would stay with the weaker of the two. She accepts Morell whose life would have been ruined without her and rejects Marchbanks, leaving him to pursue high ideals of which he is capable.

Her love is a love tinged with motherhood. In the words of Augustin Hamon, "She does not care a bit about the voice of duty for she is a realist, without prejudices, and free from all conventions. In her view duty, purity and virtue are prejudices" (141). She stays with her husband because she loves him more than she does Eugene and knows that he can't

live without her. Writing to Hunekar, Shaw says:

... She (Candida) is straight for natural reasons, not for conventional, ethical ones. Nothing can be colder bloodedly reasonable than her farewell to Eugene: all very well my lad; but I don't quite see myself as fifty with a husband of thirty five. It is just this freedom from emotional slop, this unerring wisdom on the domestic plane that makes her so completely mistress of the situation. (18)

There is a remarkable difference between Candida and Ibsen's heroines. Ibsen's heroines were trying to find themselves, women seeking emancipation. Candida is an emancipated woman, one who has found herself. Ellida in *The Lady from Sea* has nothing to do but dream. Even the housekeeping is done by her stepdaughter. She has no responsibility, no care and no trouble. When her only child dies and leaves her without the work of mother, she yields wholly to her longing. She no longer cares for her husband. Her husband begins to think that Ellida is going mad. When a seaman appears and claims her as his wife, Ellida wants to fly with him. Her husband threatens to keep her under lock and key, he claims his law made and church made bargain. Ellida demands her freedom. Then her husband, with heavy responsibility for her actions throws the responsibility on her by giving the freedom to choose. Candida is altogether different from her. She has all the housekeeping to do. She is neither idle nor selfish. She does not betray the love of her husband. Candida gives Marchbanks a maternal love neither sentimental nor sexual. H.C. Duffin has observed that "Candida is a Shavian intellectual woman, full fledged, not an Ibsenite womanly woman on the point of being reborn" (77). William Irvine has rightly put it, "Candida is to be regarded primarily as the mother woman" (173).

Candida is succeeded by Lady Cicely of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*; she succeeds in converting Captain Brassbound, saving both his soul and his skin. Like Candida, she is superior in intelligence to all the men, benevolent, complete mistress of every situation and very right handedly she manages the men for their good. Unlike Candida, she is a great lady by birth and she is more adventurous. She is capable of managing the servants and the situation without the least assistance from anyone else.

She takes over the management of Brassbound's party, discusses the terms of the party and tour with Brassbound. Her speech shows that she is a born mother and that she has a genius for motherhood. Lady Cicely considers all men as children in the nursery. She is sympathetic enough to realize from Mr. Drinkwater's complexion that he needs some medicines. She gives an eloquent expression to her motherly feelings when she says:

LADY CICELY. (With unanswerable conviction) Captain Brassbound, all men are children in the nursery. I see that you don't notice things. The poor Italian had only one proper bootlace: the other was a bit of string. And I am sure from Mr. Drinkwater's complexion that he ought to have some medicines. (30)

With her keen maternal feelings, she nurses Marzo, settles his bed, gives him comfort and provides him with ease and rest of which Johnson informs Brassbound:

JOHNSON. Well: Marzo's in your bed. Lady wants to make a kitchen of the Sheikh's audience chamber, and to put me and the kid handy in his bedroom in case Marzo breaks out violent. From what I can make out, she means to make herself matron of this institution. I suppose it's all right, isn't it. (31)

Brassbound is so overwhelmed by the commanding nature and hold of Lady Cicely that he ceases to forbid her

interference in his arrangement. She is able to tame savages with her voice and to overawe the ruffians with her kindness and confidence. She is always telling people what pleasant faces they have and how much she likes them; and this is how she genuinely feels towards all she happens to meet. Sir Howard says, "You must not suppose Mr. Rankin that my sister in law talks nonsense on purpose. She will continue to believe in your friend until he steals her watch, and even then she will find excuses for him" (32).

Lady Cicely possesses a most consummate tact to rouse the conscience of men by making them feel that they are morally guilty. Captain Brassbound does not treat Hallam well. He entangles him in a plot in order to take revenge for his dead mother. Then we see an interchange of sharp and bitter words between Hallam and Brassbound. She takes over Brassbound with such ingenuity that he repents afterwards, and he is persuaded to spare Hallam. Lady Cicely ignores the dangerous intentions of Brassbound and his band as childish naughtiness and treats everyone of them as though they are amiable fellows.

Her power springs from her absolute fearlessness and her wide sympathies which is not in her an irregular or interrupted impulse but a constant feeling. She is impelled by her motherly feelings not to act against her children (men) and takes ill of nothing. According to her, people get killed by savages because instead of being polite to them, they aim pistols at them and keep them at the point of the sword.

At the end of the play, Lady Cicely is able to 'convert' Captain Brassbound and she makes him a much better man. She succeeds in persuading Brassbound to see free his captive and even protect him from a Moorish onset. Brassbound as is customary, thereupon proposes to Lady Cicely. But Shaw thinks even more contemptuously of the ideal which regards marriage as the only culmination of friendship between men and women than of any other and so Brassbound is refused. MacCarthy says:

She (Lady Cicely) is a gentle, humorous, cheerful, naturally domesticated person but a very persistent immovable one. To borrow a metaphor there is in her nature a quality which answers to the fly wheel in a mill, which distributes the motion equally over all the wheels. (176)

Thus Lady Cicely is 'no leisured woman' (171) whom Shaw criticizes and who has got nothing to do at all. Unlike a leisure woman, she is neither a menace to herself, nor to anyone else. As a mother, she knows her duties and works accordingly.

Candida and Lady Cicely are the masterpieces of Shaw's motherly heroines. Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry that he could paint no better woman than Candida. Candida and Cicely are born mothers who have a genius for motherhood. Shaw must have come in contact with such mothers. He wrote in *Platform and Pulpit*:

I have known fair number of women in my time. Some of them produced children and were totally unfitted to have charge of them in any way. Others were born mothers; they had a genius for it. Between them come a certain number of people who with a little assistance and guidance, can get on fairly well. (86)

In his delineation of these heroines, Shaw has brought to light the hidden fact that the very nature of a woman is to 'mother' someone and maternal aspect is the characteristic aspect of all women. Helene Deutson has observed, "Maternal instinct and Maternal love are differentiated of motherliness ingredients as a whole" (15). He says further that motherliness is related to a definite quality of character that stamps the woman's whole personality and it is also an emotional

phenomenon that seems to be related to the child's helplessness and need for care. Explaining maternal love he has written that maternal love is the direct affective expression of the positive relationship to the child. Its chief characteristic is 'tenderness'. All the aggressiveness and sexual sensuality in the woman's personality are suppressed and diverted by this central emotional expression of motherliness. That is the reason why Shaw's motherly heroines are less aggressive and harsh in comparison with his 'huntresses'. Sometimes aggressiveness is discernable in maternal love but it is diverted from the child to the environment, often in defense of the child and in his favour as in the case of Lady Cicely.

A rather disproportionate amount of space has been devoted to *Candida* because *Candida* is the heroine of Shaw's major Mother play. Shaw himself said that he could not sketch another *Candida*. As far as Lady Cicely is concerned, her role is destructive rather than suggestive.

REFERENCES

1. Stanton, Stephen. *A Casebook on Candida*. New York: Crowell, 1963. Print.
2. Gibbs, A.M. *The Art and Mind of Shaw: Essays in Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1983. Print.
3. Watson, Barbara Bellow. *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Women*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1964. Print.
4. Sengupta, S. *Candida*. Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 1980. Print.
5. Shaw, Bernard. *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Web. 12 June 09. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3418>.
6. Lawrence, D.H. *Collected Letters 1898-1910*. Ed. London: Max Reinhardt, 1972. Print.
7. Duffin H.C. *The Quintessence of Bernard Shaw*. Delhi: General Book Publisher, 1939. Print.
8. Christopher, St. John. *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw. A Correspondence*. Ed. London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1931. Print.
9. Bentley, Eric. *The Making of a Dramatist*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965. Print.
10. Finney, Gail. *Women in Modern Drama: Freud Feminism and European Theatre at the Turn of the Century*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. Print.
11. Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Web. Google Book Search. 24 June 2008.
12. Irvine, William. *The Universe of G.B.S.* New York: Russell and Russell, 1968. Print.
13. Joad C.E.M. *Shaw*. London: Odhams, 1949. Print.
14. Jones, H.A. *The Liars*. General Books LLC, 2009. Web. Google Book Search. 24 August, 2009
15. Duffin, H.C. *Letters to Hunker in The Quintessence of Shaw*. G Allen & Unwin. Web. Google Book Search, 3 July, 2009.
16. Maccarthy, Desmond. *Shaw*. London: Macgibbon and Lee, 1951. Print.
17. Sengupta, S. *Major Barbara*, ed. Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 1979. Print.
18. Morgan, Margery M. *The Shavian Playground. An Exploration of the Art of George Bernard Shaw*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1974. Print.

19. Shaw, Bernard. *Platform & Pulpit* .New York: R. Hart Davis, 1961. Print.
20. Taylor, Tom. *Still Waters Run Deep: A Comedy in Three Acts* .London:1867.Web.Google Book Search. 21 August, 2009.
21. Deutsch, Helene. *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Grune & Stratton, 2008.Web. Google Book Search.26 Sep.2009.
22. Williamson, Audrey. *Bernard Shaw: Man and Writer*. Collier: Macmillan, 1963.Print.

