

## G. B. SHAW'S ANDROGYNOUS WOMEN: A Reading from Indian Perspective

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**Abstract:** Some of the women characters of George Bernard Shaw are a blend of heterogeneous elements, which finally culminate in androgyny. Shaw's creative world is full of strong, self-complacent women, who take androgynous position instead of exchanging places with men. His heroines overturn customs and emphatically demand for their status as human beings. It is interesting to note that Shaw departed from the Victorian standards of morality and presented woman as a manifestation of 'Life Force' (presented in plays such as, *Candida*, *Back to Methuselah*; and in "The New Theology", a sermon delivered in 1907 in London) which carries echoes of the 'Cosmic Force of Nature' as found in the Indian philosophical tradition. 'Androgyny' in Indian tradition is highly plural and conceptually complex. The ungendered 'Brahman', 'Purusha-Prakrti', 'Siva-Sakti', and 'Ardhanarisvara' are different concepts from different ancient Indian scriptures that signify Wholeness, completion, Unity, androgyny. Shaw firmly believed in elimination of social, economic and political differences between sexes and strived for bringing about a state of social unity in which principles of distributive social justice are lived to the core by each and all members of the society. With this vision, he provided full spectrum of experiences and feelings to his women characters. The Shavian women come out of the confines of gendered boundaries and move toward plurality by taking androgynous position. The paper examines some of the women

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characters of Shaw in the light of the concept of androgyny as found in the Indian tradition.

**Keywords:** Androgyny, Cosmic Force of Nature, George Bernard Shaw, Life Force, Shaw's Women.

## 1. Introduction

Androgyny is the state of totality, a spirit of reconciliation in one: "I am she: I am he,"<sup>1</sup> which represents the highest ideal of human nature. It is "an archaic and universal formula for the expression of *wholeness*, the co-existence of the contraries, or *coincidentia oppositorum*. More than a state of sexual completeness and autarchy, androgyny symbolizes the perfection of a primordial non-conditioned state."<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Vedic religious philosophy and Buddhism<sup>3</sup> possess the concepts of the ungendered self. The *Upaniṣads* stress the spiritual essence, called *Brahman*,<sup>4</sup> which is

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<sup>1</sup>Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, New York: WW Norton and Company Inc., 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, 174-175.

<sup>3</sup>In Buddhism there is an emphasis on all-pervasive emptiness as there are no fixed immutable essences anywhere and no immanent qualities in any object. The *ātman* (self) in the Buddha is based on the idea of impermanence, which is understood in the light of the five aggregates ('I' (*aḥam*), 'mine' (*mama*), 'you' (*tumhe*), 'yours' (*tumhākaṃ*) and 'self' (*atta*)) and twelve spheres (also called *Āyatana* that comprises the six sense organs and the object of sense), i.e., 'gate of experiences', which are impermanent. As the individuated stream of consciousness is not permanent the feeling of individuality of self contracts and expands according to the context. It is fluid and changing. Similarly, gender is also fluid as it contains nothing fixed and inherent. Since nothing has permanent, fixed traits one cannot define gender traits. David J. Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, Delhi: Indian Books Centre, 1992, 22-37.

<sup>4</sup>*Brahmā* (nominative singular), *brahman* (stem) (neuter gender) means the concept of the transcendent and immanent ultimate reality, which is supreme cosmic spirit in Hinduism. The concept is central to Hindu philosophy, especially Vedanta.

considered as the One unifying essence present in all manifest creation, including all humans; while the individual, eternal, essence is referred to as *ātman*, a personal enduring spirit or soul. It is assumed that *ātman* does not possess any female or male form. In fact, it is without sexual distinction.<sup>5</sup> The *Isidasi sutra* and the *Mahayana sex-change sutras*<sup>6</sup> provide us with an insight into the fact that, in addition to the early Vedic culture, the early Buddhist cultures also recognized the concept of the ungendered self. It is noteworthy that these texts encompass the concept of the inherent androgyny of being, which can be inferred as one's enduring identity that is without gender distinction. There is no essential difference between being incarnated as female or male, as the *ātman* is not gendered. And the one who has the knowledge of *ātman* would interpret male/female as essentially the same. Thus androgyny is innate but it is thwarted by socialization and striving towards a just and compassionate society can be the only way to achieve a truly whole and androgynous state.

The idea of the inherent androgyny of being (*Śiva-Śakti*) is central to *Tantra's* teachings. *Śiva* stands for Cosmic consciousness while *Śakti* for its creative power. Both are eternally conjoined and cannot be separated from each other. This indivisible Whole is bestowed with the essential potential of self-evolution and self-involution. It is only in the relative plane that *Śiva-Śakti* is looked upon as separate entities.

All manifestation, according to *Tantra*, is based upon a male principle known as *Puruṣa* (Cosmic Consciousness) and a female principle known as *Prakṛti* (Cosmic Force of Nature). Thus *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are the Cosmicized versions of the earthly phenomenal male and female; they are inseparable since they are essentially two aspects of one principle.

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<sup>5</sup>Ruth Vanita, "The Self Is Not Gendered: Sulabha's Debate with King Janaka," *NWSA Journal* 15, 2 (2003), 76, <[http://scholarworks.umt.edu/libstudies\\_pubs/1/](http://scholarworks.umt.edu/libstudies_pubs/1/)> (2 November 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, 67-68.

Moreover, in *Tantra*, the female force stands significant, as it offers the key to a creative life. In order to experience the basic sensation of 'being' in its totality, it is essential to equilibrate the two opposites, masculinity and femininity. In *tantric* terms, it is a synthesis, a development of femininity within each one of us. Even the hermaphrodite image of Siva and Parvati as *Ardhanarisvara* (half male and half female) illustrates the dual principles in harmonious unity. It represents the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies (*Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*) of the universe. In reality, the entire manifold of experiences is *Śiva* and *Śakti*, *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, Male and Female. Thus the fundamental idea of these concepts derived from different ancient Indian scriptures – the Vedas, Puranas, Upaniṣads – are about wholeness and unity which can be materialized in the corporeal world through partnership/synthesis of the feminine and the masculine.

Some of the prominent feminists came to believe that the genital differences should not be the criterion to determine one's potential. Both the sexes should have access to the full range of experiences, feelings and opportunities that the world offers and that negating sexual stereotyping will yield androgynous society, which is equitable both socially and psychically. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf offers androgyny as a way to reconcile the sexes. She views androgyny as a "full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements"<sup>7</sup> and by taking Coleridge's claim into account, that the great mind is androgynous, she insists that the mind of the artist should be a unified whole:

If one is a man, still the woman part of brain must have effect, and a woman also must intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps

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<sup>7</sup>Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Criticism*, London: Longman, 1991, 29.

a mind that is purely masculine cannot create any more than a mind that is purely feminine.<sup>8</sup>

A tone of impersonality pervades in the lines that brings Woolf in association with T. S. Eliot, who believed that a poet's mind should be "amalgamating disparate experience" which would result in "forming new wholes."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir advocates a balance between masculinity and femininity. She demolishes the biological myth as fancied by Aristotle<sup>10</sup> (the male principle as force, activity, movement, life and women as only passive matter) and takes a masculine paradigm in describing the cultural values when she states that in all societies men are defined as subject, while women have always been the 'Other'. She rejects woman's passivity on the biological level and argues that the new life is born from the union of the two gametes and therefore it may not be appropriate to value one and relegate the other. She explicates her point from various angles-biological, psychological, historical and social. It is only when she says that women must transcend the condition of being women, that she takes a masculine posture.

Shaw had an unflagging intellectual commitment to feminism. He advocated equality for women in intellectual, artistic, political and occupational spheres. He believed that the nature of a human being was neither masculine nor feminine exclusively, but a mixture of the two. The attribute of womanliness and manliness owe more to the environmental and conventional pressures and thus gendered attributes cannot be considered as natural deep-rooted traits of personality. His concept of sexual equality is an expression of his vision of a society where there are just opportunities to human beings without regard to propriety or custom. He disapproved sexual polarity and believed in social unity. His

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<sup>8</sup>Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Criticism*, 174.

<sup>9</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, 3rd ed., London: Faber & Faber, 1999, 287.

<sup>10</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans., H. M. Parshley, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987, 37-40.

intellectual commitment to feminism is basically his realization that the goal of life is to achieve harmony. Shaw's androgynous consciousness compels him to take the woman question in his writings. His women characters are an expression of his androgynous ideology, which somehow coincides with the Indian concept of androgyny.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw viewed women as equal to men and was of the opinion that, "sexes wear different boots and bonnets not different souls."<sup>12</sup> In saying so he recognized the idea of the inherent androgyny of being, which is a seminal concept in Indian philosophy. Since androgyny is innate in one, physiological differences between the sexes should not be the determining ground for the distribution of role and opportunities. In his plays he has presented masculinity and femininity as positive domains of behaviour and stressed that the masculine and feminine responses to reality need to be balanced and harmonized within one and in society to achieve wholeness and compassion. The Shavian world is a construct of a new social order in which both men and women are involved in the inception and construction. The women rarely tend to exchange places with men, rather they take androgynous position which is an invitation for power in public by both men and women.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Shaw was close to Annie Besant, who was a theosophist, had a great admiration for Hinduism. He was actively involved in the campaigning of democracy in India from 1907 to 1917, and met Mahatma Gandhi. Even though there are no direct influences of Indian philosophy on Shaw, he was aware about the Indian religions as his *Collected Letters* provide evidences of his acquaintance with Hinduism. Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1926-1950*, vol. 4, London: Max Reinhardt, 1988, 305.

<sup>12</sup>Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw*, London: Routledge, 1993, 161.

<sup>13</sup>Shaw created plays in which "the political message was integral to plot" (David Edgar, "Introduction" in *Plays Unpleasant*, George Bernard Shaw, ed., Dan H. Laurence, London: Penguin Books, 2000, xi). He intended to diffuse the straight gender boundaries by fundamentally focussing on his female characters.

The paper does not delve into the metaphysical aspects of the concept of androgyny for analysis. The comparisons that follow are made on the basis of the urgencies created by the characters in Shaw and their field of interplay within the liturgies of the self.

## 2. Shaw's Androgynous Vision

G. B. Shaw was an ardent follower of Ibsen and was influenced by the feminists<sup>14</sup> of his time, including his mother.<sup>15</sup> All these influences helped him to create the 'new race' of women. The image of 'womanly woman' as depicted in the Victorian literature does not exist in Shaw's creative world. He observed, "men in their writing were perpetually making the feminine creature more feminine than she wants to be."<sup>16</sup> Like a progressive thinker,<sup>17</sup> he believed that women should be treated intellectually and morally on the same footing as men, and this why he did not create his heroines as

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<sup>14</sup>Shaw had ambivalent personal relations with the most advanced women-actresses, artists, and intellectuals, including, Jane Patterson, Elanor Marx (daughter of Karl Marx), Annie Besant, Edith Bland, Kate Salt, Florence Farr, and Mary Morris (daughter of William Morris), and these influences kept on working on his mind and art.

<sup>15</sup>Shaw was influenced by his mother, Bessie Shaw. His "mother's assertion of female power and her defiance of assigned female roles concerning sexuality, respectability, and career fulfillment that most affected Shaw" (Christopher Innes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 6).

<sup>16</sup>Barbara Bellow Watson, *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1964, 14.

<sup>17</sup>Shaw's participation in different societies fashioned him into a political and social activist. In 1912 Shaw spoke for equal rights for professional women in the Three Arts Club and also contributed "A Manifesto," *Fabian Tract* no. 2 in which he declared, "Man need no special political privileges to protect them against Women, and that the sexes should henceforth enjoy equal political rights" (Innes, *The Cambridge Companion*, 8). He also suggested the need of 'coupled vote' to suffragettes so that there would be an equal number of representation of both the sexes in the elected body.

meekest and yielding creatures. He broke the Victorian societal framework that advocated distinctively separate roles for men and women that Tennyson describes in 'The Princess':

Man for the field and woman for the Hearth  
 Man for the sword and for the needle she  
 Man with the head and woman with the heart  
 Man to command and woman to obey?<sup>18</sup>

Shaw turned satiric to the Victorian morality and praised women who placed their professional identities prior to their stereotyped gender roles. He criticized the prevalent concept of 'ideal wife' and refuted the romantic notion of self submission as a requisite for womanly love: "Love loses its charms when it is not free...the successful wooer, in both sexes alike, is the one who can stand out for honourable conditions, and, failing them, go without."<sup>19</sup> Shaw felt that submissiveness and subjugation have no place in love, and if it exists, love would not. Talking about the subjection of women, John Stuart Mill points out that "the moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation."<sup>20</sup> He also added, "women cannot be expected to devote themselves to the emancipation of women, until men in considerable number are prepared to join with them in the undertaking."<sup>21</sup> Although Shaw harboured no qualms in asserting a strong feminism, he maintained, with the profoundest conviction, that if women were to free themselves, they had to voice for their rights.

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<sup>18</sup>M. H. Abrams, et al. eds., *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 2, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, 1056.

<sup>19</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, London: Constable & Co. 1913, 32-33.

<sup>20</sup>John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869, 177.

<sup>21</sup>Mill, *The Subjection*, 145.



When Shaw insisted that women should speak for themselves, he possibly carried the idea of the androgynous potential that is always present in each person. He made his characters tap that source of energy to claim for their space. While opening the social shackles of woman in his plays, he created high-spirited and intelligent women who possessed a blend of feminine as well as masculine virtues and gave them their own individualities.

### **3. Shaw's Androgynous Heroines**

Candida, in the play *Candida* (and as qualified by Shaw, 'The Mother Play'), is a woman of strength, intelligence and grace. She is presented as a driving force: "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..."<sup>22</sup> She prudently counsels her husband, Morell and the visitor, Eugene. Despite her maternal indulgence with them she perceives facts with objectivity. In the penultimate scene, she confidently states that things are settled. Her assertiveness is sensed by Eugene, who states that she belongs to herself. By asserting her will on the two men, Candida deconstructs the man/woman binary of the Victorian household. The subversion takes place through Morell's becoming the 'doll' of the house and Candida, the real master. The ideas about marriage that Morell advocates, or, the ideas about love that Marchbanks possesses are dismissed as being childish in contrast to Candida's hardcore practicality. Her decision of staying with Morell owes to the financial and social security of a married life that she is afraid of risking. Although Candida looks after Morell's needs and equally comes to Marchbanks's rescue, she stands above the two men in terms of her executive capacities and prudence.

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<sup>22</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Candida*, ed., S. Sengupta, New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 1980, 20.

Shaw's ideas about women stand significant in *Candida*. To him, woman is primarily a manifestation of 'Life Force'<sup>23</sup> whose basic function is biological continuity of the race. He considered 'Life Force' as a mysterious power, which is present in all living beings and is instrumental in evolution. He considered the power as a formless deity struggling to actualize itself in organisms. Shaw reified 'Life Force' as the cosmic energy behind the universe that has "...no executive power of its own, wanting instruments, something to carry out its will in the world, making all manner of experiments ... trying one thing after another, rising higher and higher..."<sup>24</sup>

In the play, *Candida's* identity as a mother is more fundamental than that of a woman. Her decision to stay with Morell is a part of the creative selection. It is the energy of 'Life-Force' that directs mother-woman to hunt for a suitable father for the procreation of a superhuman: a better progeny than forefathers and in accomplishing this task of nature, man and woman are the key players.

Shaw's concept of 'Life-Force' has affinities with *Tantra* which considers woman as a cosmic force. In *Tantra*, the female, i.e., *Śakti* is graced with all aspects of life, creative to

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<sup>23</sup>Shaw's idea of 'Life Force' is influenced by Henri Bergson's *elan vital* and Nietzsche's *übermensch* and it found expression in his sermon, "The New Theology" delivered on 16 May 1907 in London. He believed that life is about the creative selection and that mankind is evolving through the process of natural selection and woman plays a vital role in the evolutionary process. Plays such as *Candida*, *Man and Superman*, *Arms and the Man*, *Back to Methuselah* deal with the concept of 'Life Force'.

<sup>24</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *George Bernard Shaw: Collected Articles, Lectures, Essays and Letters: Thoughts and Studies from the Renowned Dramaturge and Author of Mrs. Warren's Profession, Arms and the Man and Saint Joan*, Google Books Edition, 2015, <[https://books.google.co.in/books?id=dVooCQAAQBAJ&pg=PT420&lpg=PT420&dq=the+new+theology+by+g+b+shaw&source=bl&ots=YxDq6rFJD4&sig=gLLF\\_sAwkmr6KnVbvLOAXAk15OE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi9wtXt24zQAhWKP08KHh67DnwQ6AEIODAF#v=onepage&q=the%20new%20theology&f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=dVooCQAAQBAJ&pg=PT420&lpg=PT420&dq=the+new+theology+by+g+b+shaw&source=bl&ots=YxDq6rFJD4&sig=gLLF_sAwkmr6KnVbvLOAXAk15OE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi9wtXt24zQAhWKP08KHh67DnwQ6AEIODAF#v=onepage&q=the%20new%20theology&f=false)> (02 November 2015).

dissolutive, sensual to sublime, benign to horrific. *Śakti* is the prime mover and mother-womb of the recurring cycles of the universe, and as such reflects the procreative powers of eternal substance.<sup>25</sup> She symbolizes total life-affirmation and is a source of all polarities, differentiation and distinction of elements.

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw depicts Joan as a spiritual heroine, dressed in man's garb.<sup>26</sup> She expresses her need for unfettered freedom, even at the cost of her life. Her manliness and militarism makes her the unwomanly woman, a trait which probably delayed her canonization. Her will for an unfettered freedom, for the freedom of France holds an inclusive purpose of evolution. This supreme power manifests itself in all individual and is utilized by them for fulfilling different purposes in which each of them is involved. She is an

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<sup>25</sup>Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual*, Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977, 15.

<sup>26</sup>In the "Preface" to the play, Shaw remarks, "But it is not necessary to wear trousers and smoke big cigars to live a man's life any more than it is necessary to wear petticoats to live a woman's. There are plenty of gowned and bodiced women in ordinary civil life who manage their own affairs and other people's, including those of their menfolk, and are entirely masculine in their tastes and pursuits." Shaw condemned those women who shed their femininity for their assertion. He endorses both feminine and masculine traits for balance in an individual. (Dan H. Laurence, ed., *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with Their Prefaces*, vol. 6, London: Max Reinhardt, The Bodley Head, 1970-74, 35). Shaw did not find any sense in the extremist stand of the suffragettes, of the idea of burning bra and wearing trousers. Shaw's differences with the suffragettes are viewed as his fear of female power and of feminization, but it is difficult to refute his vehemence for women's rights in his political and social participations. Shaw wished that women should have the freedom of expression and choice, instead of having a marginal existence. Katherine E. Kelly, "Shaw on Woman Suffrage: A Minor Player on the Petticoat Platform" (*The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 14: 1992: *Shaw and the Last Hundred Years*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, 67-81).

androgynous model as she is capable of integrating both the feminine and masculine traits in her. She takes the armour and wears soldier's clothes with a determination to drive away the Englishmen from France and to liberate Orleans. In *Saint Joan* 'Life Force' takes the form of celibacy and sainthood. It guides her actions with an evolutionary vision of creating a better future for her country and her people: "Praised be God! now is fair France a province in heaven."<sup>27</sup>

Another example of Shavian woman is Lady Britomart, who upholds her conduct by following the path of righteousness, and yet, administers her family on her own terms. Like her mother, Barbara Undershaft, is a self-complacent woman. She is a 'Major', 'romantic heroine', 'instrument of Divine Will', 'ideal of sexual equality', 'salvationist and reformer', and a 'woman of conscience'; her mother says: "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 is not lady like...."<sup>28</sup> This shows Barbara's will power, individuality, self-control and persistence. She firmly believes that she has the potential to serve as a saviour to everyone. She serves the Salvation Army as a Major and is convinced of her mission to redeem humanity through Christian dogma. But her father, a manufacturer of armaments forces her to reassess her beliefs that instead of God, it is the wealthy who hold the world and its salvation is in their hands. Barbara's faith is unshaken, she pronounces: "I want to make power for the world too; but it must be spiritual power."<sup>29</sup> Barbara's professionalism, eloquence and her will to reinvent herself equate her to full personhood.

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<sup>27</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan*, Project Gutenberg of Australia, 2002, 92 <[http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/joan\\_of\\_arc/olr/07\\_saintjoan\\_gbshaw.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/joan_of_arc/olr/07_saintjoan_gbshaw.pdf)> (2.11.2015).

<sup>28</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Major Barbara*, Sandroid, 85. <[http://www.sandroid.org/GutenMark/wasftp.GutenMark/MarkedTexts/pmbrb10\\_mjbrb10.pdf](http://www.sandroid.org/GutenMark/wasftp.GutenMark/MarkedTexts/pmbrb10_mjbrb10.pdf)> (2.11.2015).

<sup>29</sup> Shaw, *Major Barbara*, 225.

In *Misalliance*, Lina Szczepanowska proclaims in a tone that is typical of Shavian Feminism:

I am an honest woman: I earn my living, I am a free woman: I live in my own house. I am a woman of the world ... I am strong: I am skillful: I am brave: I am independent: I am unbought: I am all that a woman ought to be...<sup>30</sup>

Lina, the acrobat, wears male garb and successfully eschews female roles – especially bourgeois marriage, affirming her independent womanhood; while Hypatia is on a perpetual quest for her Mr. Perfect: "I can imagine all sorts of men I could fall in love with; but I never seem to meet them. The real ones are too small, like Bunny, or too silly like Jerry."<sup>31</sup> Hypatia's quest for brain and body together in one man reminds one of the *Swayamvar* system of the Vedic period, where women had the right to choose their ideal life-partner rather than taking things as a matter of destiny. Hypatia experiences that social conventions bind a woman and crush her sensibilities:

I'm fed up with nice things: with respectability, with propriety! When a woman has nothing to do, money and respectability mean that nothing is even allowed to happen to her. I don't want to be good; and I don't want to be bothered about either good or bad: I want to be an active verb.<sup>32</sup>

Hypatia's desire to be "an active verb" ascertains her being. Her desire for socialization, for selection of traits (it is important to mention here that the one to be entrusted with the task of selecting and what is to be selected is the prerogative of patriarchy) is an outcome of the innate androgyny in her. She is capable of behaving in integrative feminine and masculine ways; she is assertive and yielding. Her desire for an individuated self, which is expressive and instrumental, sets her apart from the ideal woman image. She

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<sup>30</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Misalliance*, Fairfield: 1st World Library-Literary Studies, 2004, 139.

<sup>31</sup>Shaw, *Misalliance*, 28.

<sup>32</sup>Shaw, *Misalliance*, 51.

stands in juxtaposition to the passive female figures of the Victorian age whose activities were restricted in the name of modesty.

Shaw never wanted women to be consenting parties and therefore his women appear to be in consonance with the Shavian doctrine and step forward for their own choice of their mates. Ann Whitefield in *Man and Superman*, is a representative of those women who hunt for the superior men. She has two potential marriage partners: Octavius Robinson and John Tanner.<sup>33</sup> Ann's refusal to Octavius indicates that a Shavian woman never believes in romantic ideals. Anne is referred to as the 'Life Force' and represents Shaw's view that in every culture, it is the women who force the men to marry them rather than the men who take the initiative. Also, the pursuing woman and the retreating philosophical Don Juan are inversions that reverse the cultural stereotype of passive women and active men.

Likewise, Vivie, in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, is an educated, professionally-trained, independent woman, who vehemently says: "People are always blaming their circumstances ... 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."<sup>34</sup> She is the first 'unwomanly woman' who emerges in Shavian drama: an unprecedented contrast to the conventional womanly woman of contemporary drama. On the suggestion of Beatrice Webb to create a play with a real, modern, unromantic, hard-working woman as a protagonist, Shaw paints Vivie as a sensible, capable, highly educated young middle class English woman.

Shaw turned revolutionary while admitting in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in 1898, that "a new woman was already

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<sup>33</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, ed. S. Sengupta, New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2000, 18.

<sup>34</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, in *Bernard Shaw: Complete Plays with Prefaces*, vols. I-IV, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962, 65.

arriving, one who was determined to make a decent living without angling for a husband or otherwise selling her charms. She could now do so because at last a few professional opportunities were becoming open to women."<sup>35</sup> The play reveals Shaw's feminist stance, as from Mrs. Warren's view point, marriage is prostitution: "The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she can't expect it."<sup>36</sup>

Louka in *Arms and the Man* represents professional women, competent and conscious enough to turn the situation in their favour and take everything in their stride:

Look at me! How much am I allowed to have my own will? I have to get your room ready for you: to sweep and dust, to fetch and carry ... If I were Empress of Russia, above everyone in the world, then! ... I would marry the man I loved which no other queen in Europe has the courage to do ...<sup>37</sup>

Louka knows how to raise her social standards. She rebukes Nicola for his advances and combats him, "You'll never put the soul of a servant into me."<sup>38</sup> Louka's conduct, gait, and intelligence show the least of a servant's conforming attitude.

Shaw's longing for a bodiless ethereal realm takes a vent in *Back to Methuselah* (1921). Lilith is the one in whom father and mother are one, as she says:

Of Life only is there no end; and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed

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<sup>35</sup>Dan H. Laurence, ed., *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with Their Prefaces*, vol. 1, London: Max Reinhardt, The Bodley Head, 1970-74, 314.

<sup>36</sup>Lawrence, *The Bodley: Collected Plays*, Vol. I, 314.

<sup>37</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man: An Anti-Romantic Comedy in Three Acts*, ed. A. C. Ward, Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd., 1995, 60.

<sup>38</sup>Shaw, *Arms*, Act III.

shall one day fill it and master its matter to its uttermost confines.<sup>39</sup>

Her last words hint at male and female being one. Shaw valued Hinduism<sup>40</sup> because of its idea of One unified essence<sup>41</sup> and through this play, he expresses his desire to attain freedom from all binaries. The theme of *Back to Methuselah* is

not longevity as an idea itself, but longevity as a means of transcending the present period of short aims and disbelief in the future. So far as it is possible to the vision of the future into a play, Shaw perhaps does it.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Shaw and Androgyny

Woman in relation to man is central in Shaw. The dramatist, in order to give power and freedom to his woman characters, puts them in the centre. It is the woman, through whom the other relations get defined. Interestingly, at the surface level it appears as if Shaw has overturned the Victorian binary of opposition, i.e., man/woman to woman/man; but in fact the women are not brought in opposition to men, rather, both strive for a harmonious co-existence. This harmony in duality is a perennial Oriental philosophy. Man-Woman relationship is regarded as the eternal truth of life. According to the *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad*, *Iswar* and *Śakti* are regarded as the parents of the Universe: "Only when united with *Śakti* has *Śiva* power to manifest; but without her, the God cannot even

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<sup>39</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, Portland: The Floating Press, 2010, 548.

<sup>40</sup>About Hinduism, Shaw said: "The apparent multiplicity of Gods is bewildering at the first glance; but you presently discover that they are all the same one God in different aspects and functions and even sexes. There is always one uttermost God who defies personification. This makes Hinduism the most tolerant religion in the world, because its one transcendent God includes all possible Gods... Hinduism is so elastic and so subtle that the profoundest Methodist and the crudest idolater are equally at home in it." Laurence, *Collected Letters*, 305.

<sup>41</sup>Laurence, *Collected Letters*, 322.

<sup>42</sup>C. B. Purdon, *A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw*, London: Methuen, 1963, 270.



stir."<sup>43</sup> The truth of the universe, symbolized through the essential *Puruṣa-Prakṛti* principle of the Indian philosophy, is basic to creation. The two symbolize an indispensable aspect of creation, growth and evolution and it is the *Śakti*, i.e., woman who is the key player in the entire act.

Shaw distanced himself from his contemporaries who were engaged in moulding their heroines into womanly frames and chose to create women who were just like men<sup>44</sup> or rather 'unsexed women'. He created women in the interest of political egalitarianism because he thought "a woman is really only a man in petticoats and man is a woman without petticoats."<sup>45</sup> Through this aphorism he conferred on women the signifying power of gender, thereby reversing the way gender was determined in his phallogocentric society. He preferred women to govern in the interest of 'national housekeeping' because he believed that women were the same as men, equally potential provided they were given an opportunity to prove themselves.

## 5. Conclusion

Candida, Saint Joan, Lady Britomart, Barbara Undershaft, Lina, Hypatia, Ann Whitefield, Vivie, and Louka show that they are no less than men in their intellectual abilities. These women characters are powerfully instrumental in inducing Shaw's take on androgyny. Regardless of the gender, these women demonstrate to be close to knowledge and are involved in the inception and construction of social order. Their androgynous position is for a new form of social order where the two sexes live together in concordance. The same qualities that inform Shaw's vital women also appear in his

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<sup>43</sup>S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Principal Upaniṣads*, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953, 734.

<sup>44</sup>When Sir Almroth Wright countered Shaw for positing a feminine mind, Shaw's immediate response to it was that "Woman's Mind Is Exactly Like Man's Mind," Weintraub, *Fabian Feminist*, 244.

<sup>45</sup>Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Bernard Shaw: Platform and Pulpit*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1961, 174.

masculine geniuses who are presented as fathers or father-figures or husbands or lovers. Often these male characters carry a certain verve – an androgynous consciousness never clouded by the conventional masculine traits like aggression, vengefulness or violence, just as conventional feminine traits never dominate the vital woman. Thus, in various guises, the dramatist ponders male/female relations and the Shavian world represents full potential of the sexes, a perfect representation of androgynous society.