

George Bernard Shaw: Ideas & Views

George Bernard Shaw(1856-1950) is an Irish dramatist, a literary critic, a socialist spokesman and a leading figure in the twentieth century theatre. He is a freethinker, a defender of woman's rights and an supporter of equality of income. Shaw distrusts science, technology, and materialism because he believes that these figures will turn people into machines. He allows himself to be controlled by the intellectual climate of his time, which calls for strong leaders to bring the uncontrollable mass of humanity under control and accepts that the weak, the inferior, and the corrupt should be murdered in the name of progress.

Both as a man and as a writer Shaw is sympathizer with the poor. The sight of poverty hurts his sensitive soul so much that he becomes a most determined enemy of poverty. Once he said "Do not waste time on social questions. What is the matter with the poor is poverty. What is the matter with the rich is uselessness". A unique thing about him is that he would offer help even before it was demanded.

The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen has a great influence upon Shaw's thinking. Ibsen is the pioneer in the problem play. Usually, Ibsen limits his problem to relations within the family. And the solution lies in freeing the individual from the confining traditions. By following quite different methods, Bernard Shaw has achieved the same end. He creates a dramatic form which is highly suited for the distribution of his ideas. The prevailing element is that of comedy but the purpose is seriously earnest.

Shaw is a dramatist of ideas, and it is true that his plays are essentially ideological debates. The great dramatist creates living characters, who, through the action, bombard the mind of the audience with ideas; Shaw reverses the process: it is the ideas which are the center of his plays and the characters are just their vehicles.

Shaw is essentially a satirist, and never writes for the sake of art, but for the sake of society. He has tried to unmask hypocrisy, conventional morality, sentimentality, foolishness, and blind worship of certain religious conventions. Therefore, he has made drama a platform not to teach the gospel of Christ but to set right mankind. He has dedicated his drama for the people to look at the weakness of customs, conventions and institutions and correct them.

Through his intellect and reason, he has made an attempt to correct life and provide it with a proper guidance. Shaw aspires to build a new society and a new social order after completely demolishing the old ones. He believes that the existing social institutions and conventions are unnatural and deceptive. Thus, he has entirely lost his faith in them and he used to explain their defects publically.

Shaw has established a new technique in writing problem play or the play of idea. Once he said, " I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my

opinion on sexual and social matters. I have no other incentive to write plays as I am not dependent on it for my livelihood.” He is concerned with the problem play in which he intends to reveal some social problems, like alcoholism or prostitution.

The characters are used as examples of the general problem. Always the playwright sees the problem and its solution in a way that challenges or rejects the conventional point of view. A problem simply needed to be understood correctly. Shaw said, “ drama is fable of the conflict between man’s will and his environment”.

Shaw attacked the well-made plays, he considered them merely mechanical rabbits leading the audience like dogs on a merry chase, but no lasting or significant purpose. He believed that plays should grow organically, from character and situation rather than have a ready- made plot imposed on them.

Shaw’s views have played an important role in enriching the theatre with bold ideas and foreshadowing to other writers to say the truth without caring for the consequences. Both playwrights Ibsen and Shaw believed that the field of drama is more influential in changing the world than the battlefields.

Shaw has provided his audience with great sayings and advices. He expresses his thought in a manner that suit the audience moods. He says:

“Success does not consist in never making mistakes but in never making the same one a second time”.

“People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it”.

“Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance”.

“Get married, but never to a man who is home all day”.

“Life is a disease; and the only difference between one another is the stage of disease at which he lives”.

“If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance”.

“It shows how dangerous it is to be too good”.

“Kings are not born: they are made by universal hallucination”.

“I assume that to prevent illness in later life, you should never have been born at all”.

Finally, his words are memorable and stay outstanding since his time to present.