

(A Minor Research Project was sanctioned by the UGC to Ms. Shaheen Patel, Asst. Prof. Department of English, AISC. from 2012-2014. The following is an executive summary of the report.)

A Comparative Study of Women Characters in selected Plays of Ibsen and Shaw

Summary of MRP Report:

Shaw has been an admirer of Ibsen for his technical novelties as well as for the fact that he brought to the stage a discussion of contemporary social problems. Although Shaw produced a highly individualistic public explication of Ibsen, primarily in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, in his own works Shaw echoes his great predecessor in subtle and quite different ways. A comparison of the heroines and major characters of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* and Shaw's *Candida* and *St. Joan* reveals their similarities and differences.

Shaw himself stated that *Candida* was meant to be a "counterblast" to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Shaw wanted to point out how it is the man who is the doll. While in Ibsen's play *Nora* is the anguished wife who has to leave behind her home, husband and children, Shaw's *Candida* does not leave home but continues to stay with her husband. She chooses to make her husband master of the household. Mrs. Alving is similar to *Candida* in her modern and unconventional thoughts, but it must be remembered that Ibsen's purpose behind writing the bitter story of Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* was to respond to the fact that he was forced to write an alternative ending to *A Doll's House*. There are marked similarities and differences in the characters of *Torvald Helmer* and *James Morell*, *Dr. Rank* and *Eugene Marchbanks*, *Pastor Manders* and *James Morell*. Shaw's ambiguous handling of *Candida* calling her "Virgin Mother" as well as "unscrupulous" leads to our understanding of the fact that both *Morell* and *Marchbanks*, who claim to love her, have

not understood her correctly. However, the most striking feature of the three plays is the way in which the conventional love triangle with the woman at the center is handled. This analysis reveals Shaw's iconoclastic way of dealing with time-worn theatrical conventions.

In *St. Joan* we find Shaw using 20th-century ideas to interpret a 15th-century martyr's life. The anachronistic Joan is made out to be a pioneer of Nationalism, Protestantism and Feminism in her fight against Feudalism, the Roman Catholic Church and gender stereotyping. Shaw depicts the incinerated Joan as well as the canonised Joan to reveal that her martyrdom was not in vain, though the Epilogue reveals that even in the 20th century Joan would not be accepted if she were to return alive.

The emergence of the "New Woman" in the 1890's as a woman representing a reversal of gender roles and a kind of rebellion is described and seen as an important development not just in Europe, but more particularly in the London theatre scene of the 1890's. With the coming of the actress-manageress also came roles of these actresses which broke the conventional ideals of womanliness. It is in this respect that we find the most notable similarities between Ibsen and Shaw and in their remarkable heroines - Nora, Mrs. Alving, Candida and Joan. Though their handling of characters, themes and theatrical conventions is different, a subtle relationship between the practical man and the idealist represented in the persons of Marchbanks and Morell, is perhaps a telling reminder of a theme that recurs at the heart of many of Ibsen's and Shaw's plays.

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