

THE INFLUENCE OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW ON DR. MU.VA

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George Bernard Shaw, who at the beginning of his career was regarded in literary circles as a writer without a serious moral purpose, is today looked upon not only as a brilliant wit but also as a profound thinker. He saw the truth and revealed it through art which in his opinion is the best vehicle of teaching. This great dramatic and literary giant who influenced the English scene for over half a century had annexed the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925. "Perhaps Nehru of India most nearly succeeded when he said, 'Shaw was not only one of the greatest figures of the age but one who influenced the thought of vast number of human beings during two generations.' [1]

The term Shavian is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as 'characteristic of Bernard Shaw.' It is a unique way of looking at life and the universe. Shaw's way of life has been followed not only by men whose mother tongue is English but also by others to whom English is a foreign tongue. "Among Western authors Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, C.E.M. Joad, H.G.Wells, Peral S.Buck and Somerset Maugham have influenced him (M.Vardarajan) to a great extent in his social thinking. [2]

M.Varadarajan, [3] a novelist, essayist, short story writer, dramatist, letter writer, literary critic, linguist, biographer, historian of Tamil literature, educationist and above all a savant and humanist, was deeply influenced by Shavian thought. This most talked of man of modern Tamil literature was surprisingly modest and gentle and at the same time profoundly ethical. Muva was born in Triuppattur in the North Arcot District of Tamilnadu in the year 1912, when George Bernard Shaw had already reached his fifty-sixth year. Muva had his regular education only up to the tenth standard. He learned Tamil first at the feet of one Murugaiya Mudaliar. Afterwards he did not join either a school or a College to pursue his studies. He was a striking example of an autodidact and he knew thoroughly what he had learnt.

By dint of his hard work and self education he was the first to secure the highest degree of Ph.D. in Tamil of the University of Madras. Later on the Vooster University of America conferred on him the D.Litt. Degree, a rare honour to be conferred on a Tamil scholar by a foreign University.

Muva came out successfully in the S.S.L.C. Examination in 1928 and in the same year entered service as a clerk at the Taluk Office, Tiruppattur. He married in 1935 and in the same year he joined the well known Pachaiyappa's College, Madras as Lecturer in Tamil. In 1945 he secured his M.O.L. degree and became the Head of the Department of Tamil of that College. The year 1948 brought him the Doctorate degree and the Government of Madras honoured him in 1957 for his service to Tamil literature. Muva left the Pachaiyappa's College in 1961 to occupy the Professor's chair in the department of Tamil, University of Madras. In 1971 he was made the Vice-Chancellor of the Madurai University.

T.S.Eliot in his Tradition and the Individual Talent offering his views on the importance of tradition and poetic process makes a reference to the common tendency of praising those parts of the poet's work in which he least resembles any one else. Eliot condemns this tendency and says "not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." [4] A careful study of Muva's novels, short

stories and letters throws abundant light on how in addition to classical writers like Tiruvalluvar, modern writers like Gandhi, Tagore, Somerset Maugham and Bernard Shaw 'assert their immortality' in his writings. Though he had drawn upon the ideas of these great men he never endorsed them blindly in his writings, but subjected them to the test of logical and common sense and rendered them in their true spirit to the Tamil reading public.

Muva was a close associate of Thiru.Vi.Ka. About the promising young Muva, Thiru.Vi.Ka. in his Autobiographical Notes [5] says that Bernard Shaw's thoughts are sprinkled here and there in Varadarajanar's writings and speeches. It is not an exaggeration to say that by a deep study of Bernard Shaw Muva has become a Benard Shaw of Tamilnad. Thiru.Vi.Ka. feels that in one aspect Varadarajanar outshines Bernard Shaw. Only at a ripe old age the ugly picture of modern warfare brought home to Shaw the necessity of Christ and the Bible for our survival. But Varadarajan had realised this at a very early age. Young Varadarajan wrote and spoke: 'Life requires religion: Life requires God.' Here, says Thiru.Vi.Ka, the Oriental youth has excelled the Occidental sage.

Apart from Shaw, Muva's other favourites were H.G.Wells and P.B. Shelley. He was well conversant with novels of Kandekar of Maharashtra and made a thorough study of the Kural and songs of Tayumanavar. "The works of such great men guided Muva's literary clarity and research capability." [6] Professor A.M. Paramasivanandam who was a colleague of Muva at the Pachaiyappa's College, Madras, says [7] that Muva not only exhausted reading all the books of Shaw available at the College Library but also very often made others teachers and students to read Shaw.

The following are some of the books by / on Shaw borrowed by Muva from the Pachaiyappa's College Library: [8]

Sl. No.	Books	Date of issue	Date of return
1	Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant (Show)	11-09-1945	14-09-1945
2	Everybody's Political What's What (G.B. Shaw)	21-01-1946	26-02-1946
3	Androcles and the Lion (Show)	31-01-1946	24-07-1946
4	Mrs. Warren's Profession (Show)	26-06-1946	22-07-1946
5	Dramatic Opinions and Essays (Show)	07-04-1948	02-06-1948
6	Shaw (J.S. Collins)	07-04-1948	29-06-1948
7	Shaw (E.Bentley)	30-07-1954	29-10-1954
8	The Real Bernard Shaw (M.Collbourne)	09-03-1956	02-04-1957
9	Sixteen self-sketches (Shaw)	09-03-1956	02-04-1957
10	Bernard Shaw (St. John Ervine)	13-03-1956	25-03-1957

It is obvious now that Muva was a voracious reader of Shaw and he had been eagerly borrowing Shaw's works from the College Library for more than a decade – 1945 to 1957. During one of his visits to Muva, Dr. Dhandayutham of the University of Malaya found Muva browsing Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*. Muva read out certain passages to Dr. Dhandayutham and said, "among the works of Shaw this books finds a unique place." [9] Dr. Dhandayutham is of the opinion that "Muva's literary lige was profoundly influenced by the Irish dramatist Bernard Shaw." [10]

Muva was drawn more towards Shaw than towards any other writer of the west and his writings were most often conditioned by the Shavian thought. His understanding as well as admiration of Shaw was so great that he wrote Arignar Bernard Shaw " a lively introductory essay in Tamil, a mixture of biography and criticisms." [11] In his introduction to Arignar Bernard Shaw Muva says, "I admire Shaw because he tried to solve the problems of life not at the superficial level, but penetrated deep into the roots of such problems and prescribed valuable solution in his writing." [12] In this book Muva as an unbiased critic analysis Shaw's life from various angles: There may be some difference of opinion about Shaw, but there are no two opinions about his wisdom and scholarship. We may not take what all he said as it is because it is possible to find certain flaws here and there is Shaw. There are a few unacceptable views of Shaw on love and virtue. But he expressed boldly what all he felt in his heart. He was so conscientious that he was incapable of hypocrisy and praised his own books because he genuinely felt that they were the products of a wise thinker.

Though Shaw ignored a few individuals and never allowed beggars to come any way near him, he lived with high ideals and was one of the greatest men who promoted the welfare of the world. Shaw felt that people valued meaningless customs and sacrificed the fundamental values and were misled and ruined by not shedding their ignorance. Hence Shaw ignored giving alms to beggars because he felt that our charity to them may satisfy their temporary needs, but begging will go on for ever. Therefore he advised us to eradicate poverty once for all, Poverty, according to Shaw, was the deadliest of all sins.

Shaw's mind was trained in conceiving every problem in dramatic scenes. So whenever he wanted to say something he put them in the form of a one-act play. While analysing a social or ethical problem Shaw thrilled the world by his wisdom, but in private life he was simple, sweet, clam and courteous. He was very kind towards his friends and moved with them in such a way that when they parted it was with a sigh in their heart. Because Shaw was an interesting conversationalist on a variety of subjects. He was a welcome guest in many families who took him to be their real friend, philosopher and guide.

There was not only complete simplicity but also novelty in the food that Shaw ate and the dress he wore. He never applied soap to his body and was a staunch vegetarian. Vegetables, fruits and bread were his daily food. Invariably he used the vegetables from his own garden. He hated tobacco completely and never touched alcohol. He never drank bottled fruit juice because of their chemical contents. He believed that vegetarian food is the only food proper to poets and philosophers.

Shaw was magnanimous. But many, feels Muva, did not fully appreciate this quality. His wit and humor concealed his magnanimous nature. He was considered to be arrogant because he used satanic means- irony and sarcasm – to puncture a host of social institutions and conventions. Ever since childhood it was Shaw's nature to turn

tears into joy and laugh at his own sorrows. Sorrows never moved him, but an artistic play or a melodious song melted Shaw to tears. Life's sorrow could not leave its scars on him. Instead it kindled his sense of duty and inspired his humorous conversation.

Saint Joan brought Shaw great admiration for the first time. Though he was already recognised as a great dramatist, this play brought him recognition as well as admiration. From that time onward every word uttered by Shaw was valued by all the people of the world. Every syllable uttered by him, says Muva, became worthy to be propagated through the wireless to every nook and corner of the world. Even if his next play were to be titled 'Sage Shaw' people were ready to willingly welcome it.

Shaw did not like the pomp and glory with which the Christmas festival is celebrated. He never liked to take part in ceremonies like marriage. Once he refused an invitation from his friend to attend a marriage. Since time was very precious to Shaw he worked tirelessly even on Sundays.

Muva says that money according to Shaw was the first thing to be acquired in life. Saint Joan brought Shaw money and fame. With the income he earned out of long years of hard labour he could have taken complete rest for the rest of his life. But he continued writing his next book *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*. After tireless hard work he finished writing this book. It was not in the nature of Shaw, says Muva, to drown himself in the world of books and renounce worldly life. He was a pastmaster in making wealth too. He knew laws and economics better than book publishers and dramatic companies. When he signed contracts with them he always had in mind not only his personal benefits but also their interest. As an efficient salesman he saw to it that his literary works were paid for according to their true value. He never sold his writing for low price nor did he sell his right on them.

From this it is wrong to conclude, argues Muva, that to Shaw money is life; money is happiness. Happiness depends not on money alone, but on one's own mind. Money could remove only hunger, but it could not bring the desired peace for life. Shaw never believed in doctors. He was throughout his life never afraid of death. But at the same time he was not prepared to sacrifice his life blindly. He considered his life to be very precious.

Fearlessness, freedom from worries, artistic sensibility and mental resilience- these constituted the unique make-up of Shaw, concludes Muva his Arignar Bernard Shaw.

Most of the qualities which Muva attributes to Shaw may be found in Muva himself. In his younger days Muva was very much interested in public speaking. He spoke on innumerable platforms and in the end ruined his health. Only then did he understand the futility of public speeches and turned to writing. "This realisation came to him only after reading the books of Shaw." [13] Though Shaw was an artist and a dramatist he was alive to the problems of society. Similarly Muva was deeply involved in novel writing and research work and at the same time never forgot his duty to society. He analysed various problems of society and wrote *Aramum Arasiyalum, Araciyal Alaikal, Nattupparru* and *Ulakapperetu*.

The quintessence of Shaw's work is to be found in My Dear Dorothea. In this open letter we watch him thinking aloud and feeling his way to an intimacy with the reader. In order to express his thoughts in the simplest language he pretends to be addressing himself to a girl of five for whom he feels 'the romantic affection of a parent, tempered by the rational interest of an experimental philosopher.' " In fact this piece is the very quintessence of all his work and may well be regarded as the germinating ground of his genius." [14] Muva, like Shaw, addresses himself to imaginary characters in his open letters Annaikku , Tampikku, Tankaikku and Nanparakku. In these letters we observe Muva thinking aloud, on the lines of Shaw, and expounding his philosophy of life.

Simplicity was a Shavian virtue that Muva practised in his food, dress and other habits. During his last days he ate only vegetables without salt and chappathi. Like Shaw he disbelieved in doctors and even when he was seriously ill he refused to take medicine from them. Another influence that Shaw exercised on Muva was on the imposition of vaccination. "My study of vaccination has convinced me that it is an ignorant delusion, and its imposition often a shocking tyranny." [15] Muva had similar views on vaccination and his Yan Kanta Ilankai bears testimony to this. [16] A man who lived such a simple life was astonishingly wealthy. He was practical like Shaw in making money. He believed in tireless work and time was very precious to him. Therefore he did not hesitate avoiding certain formalities in life; he did not relish giving send off parties and attending function like marriages.

"Muva, like Bernard Shaw, has always preserved a high degree of honour and respect for the living force in human body. That force should be properly maintained, organised, developed and channelized through different aspects of knowledge and wisdom... That is why he accepts that it is the greatest of all sins to spoil the living force of man, by putting him in a jail." [17]

To sum up Shaw and Muva were Simple Lifers who shunned luxury of every kind, and for whom the best recreation was work. Their tastes were simple. They did not require the stimulants, which other men take to endure life or to forget their worries; they were vegetarians and non-smokers. Their exercises were limited to walking and swimming.

Above all they were writers with a purpose. Animated with a crusading zeal Shaw wrote dramas and Muva wrote novels. Though they differed in choosing their respective literary forms, their purpose and goal were the same – to reform the world. Both Shaw and Muva are dead but the message they left behind them will continue to inspire mankind for ever.

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