

# Feminine Sensibilities in G. B. Shaw's *Getting Married*

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## Abstract

The present paper concerns with women's experiences in the society, their emotions and interactions with other persons in G. B. Shaw's *Getting Married* (1988). The dramatist draws our attention towards the feminine voices against patriarchal system, male domination, gender inequality, traditional norms and established social values. However, feminism is divided into three phases. Each phase has its own value and important. The movement of feminism and its various phases are inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which laid foundation of feminism. It believes in equal rights, equal opportunity and gender equality. The first-wave feminism deals with the right to vote. The second-wave concerns with various issues of women like education, marriage and career. The third-wave feminism draws our attention towards individualism, transgender studies, problems of black women and rights of abortion. However, G. B. Shaw's *Getting Married* (1908) contains three main characters named Lesbia, Leo and Edith who are the ardent and staunch followers of feminism. Lesbia rejects male domination by denying the General's several marriage proposals. She jerks male chauvinism by expressing ultra modern views on marriage children and husband. Leo surpasses Lesbia's views by wishing two husbands at the same time. Having hated the domestic works like washing clothes and cleaning utensils, Edith wants to do job and makes her career. Even she wants remuneration for domestic works. All these three women characters try to break conventional values by creating their own identities as modern women.

**Keywords:** Feminism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, traditional norms, gender inequality etc.

## Introduction:

G. B. Shaw was the most miraculous and phenomenal playwright in the reign of English literature. There are few dramatists who enrich English drama. Among them, G.B. Shaw is the Pole Star of English drama, who wrote plenty of plays in his literary career. He was not only playwright but also novelist, orator, social reformer, literary critic, journalist and political activist. At the initial stage of his literary career, he wrote novels but after facing failure, he gave heed to the theatre and drama. Shaw wrote many arresting and enchanting plays throughout his literary career. Having written plays on various issues like marriage institution, divorce laws, landlordism, prostitution and capitalism, he used his plays as a vehicle of social reformation. He not only points out weakness and shortcomings of the society but also suggests solutions to the social problems through various discussion plays. His plays are influenced by the writings of Henrik Ibsen, Karl Marx and Henry George. Being social reformers and philosopher, his views and thoughts are scattered in his various plays. For his invaluable and inestimable contribution to the world literature, he got Nobel Prize in 1925. Being a member of the Fabian Society, he put forward various social, political and economic thoughts in his plays.

Feminism is an umbrella term which contains many aspects which are concerned with social, political and economic elements of the society. Feminism is a movement of women and for the women, which advocates equal rights and opportunity, gender equality on the basis of socio-economical and political field. Having believed in gender equality, feminism movement focuses on women's various issues like equal education, equal pay, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, rights concerning with reproduction and abortion. Mary Wollstonecraft laid foundation for the feminism movement. Having motivated by the French Revolution (1789), Mary Wollstonecraft advocated the various rights of women by penning *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

Having written down the book, she throws the light on education of women in contemporary society. She not only awakes women as human being but also gives new direction to women's social and political position. Manly Susan observes, "Wollstonecraft's writings reflected the urgency and excitement, and eventually the crushing despair, felt by all those who wished for, and acted to bring about, a brave new world." (Susan 46) However, the movement is divided into three phases. The first-wave feminism is 19<sup>th</sup> Century movement which advocates the political right of vote in the western world. The aim of the first-wave feminism is to get and protect the right of women.

It was influenced by Women's Rights Convention in 1848. In this year, American women Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott asserted the rights of women including women's right to vote. However, Simone de Beauvoir established background of the second-wave feminism with the publication of *The Second Sex* (1949). She points out that how women are treated in the patriarchal society. Having focused on various issues of women, she draws our attention towards the status of women in the past and present. The second-wave feminism started with Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which focuses on women and their marriage, education, housework and children. The writers and philosophers of second-wave feminism point out the issues concerning with sexual and domestic violence, spousal rape, marriage institution and divorce laws. However, the third-wave feminism was initiated in the decade of 1990s. This phase draws our attention towards the aspects like individualism, transgender studies, black feminism and postfeminism. The basic thread among these three phases is to resist patriarchal system and establish gender equality in the society. But patriarchal culture works through various wicked tentacles like marriage institution, childbearing and domestic work. As a result, a woman is trapped in these tentacles and unable to progress socially, politically and economically in the contemporary society. Hartmann accurately observes, "... patriarchy has its basis in male control of female labor power... asserted through a variety of institution including heterosexual, monogamous marriage, childbearing and rearing and domestic work." (Hartmann 202)

*Getting Married* (1908) is the most thought-provoking and captivating play of G. B. Shaw. In the present play, he draws our attention towards marriage institution and divorce laws. J.L. Wisenthal comments on *Getting Married* a "thesis play on the subject of marriage." (Wisenthal 214) In fact, it is discussion play in which action is replaced by discussion. The characters in the play discuss the issues and problems; and try to draw solutions. The wedding ceremony of Edith Bridgenorth and Cecil Sykes is going to occur in the beginning of the play. The relatives like the General Bridgenorth, Reginald, Leo, Lesbia, etc. are gathered to attend the marriage ceremony. Despite the rejection of the General's proposal, he loves Lesbia who is not interested in him. Being over-sentimental person, the General is rejected by Lesbia. She expresses her ultra modern views by saying that she wants children without the responsibility of husband. Leo and Reginald is another couple in the play. Leo wants to take divorce from Reginald and wishes to live life without any restriction. Leo expresses her modern views on marriage institution and divorce laws. Bertrand Russell accurately comments, "Divorce should be granted on more grounds than are admitted in English law, but I cannot recognize in easy divorce a solution of the trouble of marriage." (Russell 142) Having received unknown pamphlet, Edith is not ready for the marriage. As a result, Sykes is also not ready for marriage. According to him, it is his blunder to propose Edith. Mitchell Sally observes, "There are a great number of young women who could not expect to marry." (Mitchell 86) Having discussed merits and demerits of marriage, all the relatives force Edith and Sykes for marriage. At last, Edith is ready for marriage on some conditions which are accepted by Sykes.

Lesbia, Edith and Leo are the new women characters around whom the play revolves. Kerry Powell expresses his view on new woman, "Her clothing style may be defined as sober and masculine, which was a mean by which the New Woman wanted to challenge the stereotypes of femininity". (Powell 77) The existing the British marriage system and divorce law do not fulfill these women characters. The contemporary British law support patriarchal system. As a result, they ask questions to the existing marriage and divorce laws. The first couple in the play is the General and Lesbia Grantham who is younger sister of Mrs. Bridgenorth. The General proposes Lesbia plenty of time but he is denied by her each and every time. Being modern woman, she takes her personal decision without the interference of males like father and brothers. By doing so, she maintains her individuality and freedom. It means that she is assertive and firm woman. As far as marriage institution, children and husband are concerned, she expresses her ultra modern views. She rejects the traditional norms and conventional values concerning with marriage institution. Indian poetess Kamla Das also criticized marriage institution in her poems. Arun Kumar Mishra accurately comments on Kamla Das. He comments, "Kamla Das attacks in institution of marriage which gives a man a legal right to commit marital rape on his teenage bride." (Mishra 38) Lesbia wants to give birth to children without husband and his responsibility. It means that she doesn't want to trap in marriage institution and its obligations. Having known the root cause of woman's oppression, she rejects the sexuality. Rosemarie Tong accurately observes, "... sexuality is the root cause of women's oppression is vital to any woman seeking to understand her personal and political position in society." (Tong 137) Having challenged traditional values and orthodox norms, Lesbia expresses ultra modern views on marriage and children. She wants to be good mother of children, but doesn't want to take responsibility of husband. In fact, she doesn't want husband. Leo is another woman who expounds her views on marriage institution and the British law. She puts forward her opinion that a woman who marries is stupid. It means that she doesn't believe in marriage institution. Sally Ledger points out, "New Woman posed a threat to the institution of marriage." (Ledger 11) Leo loves Reginald and Sinjon at the same time. She wants to marry both persons. But the British law doesn't allow to marry both

men. As a result, Leo censures the British law. Like Lesbia and Leo, Edith also expresses her modern view on marriage and her career. Edith doesn't want to become housewife after marriage. She insists on to do job and earns money because she doesn't like cleaning utensils, washing clothes and bringing up children. She puts conditions that she is ready to work in the house but she wants remuneration from her husband. Shaw comments on an ideal wife. He says, "The ideal wife is one who does everything that the ideal husband likes, and nothing else." (Shaw 20)

#### **Conclusion:**

G. B. Shaw in *Getting Married* (1908) points out the shortcomings of the British marriage institution and divorce laws. He wants to expound that the need of reformation of the marriage and divorce laws which should be in favour of the British women. The dramatist raises doubts against marriage system which is censured by Lesbia, Leo and Edith. However, it is a problem of Leo who can't marry two males according to the British contemporary law. Edith is ready to marry Skyes but she wants to do housework only when she will get remuneration for it. Like traditional wife, she doesn't want to do housework with remuneration. Lesbia, Leo and Edith are modern women who break the traditional norms and orthodox values and raise their voices against patriarchal culture and established societal norms.

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