



HUMANITY AND RELIGION IN THE SHADE OF GB SHAW'S *THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE*

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ABSTRACT

As Christopher Hitchens has rightly said that "Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it."ⁱ Humanity is worthier than religion. Religion is a signboard that confirms the way to altar and makes an individual follow the regulations set within the boundaries by that particular religious channel. But it takes a life time for an individual to ascertain humanity in oneself and preach the gospel of humanity to its extreme. Shaw is poetic in narration about life with his pendent tongue that never gets tired in articulating the gist and existence of human race as the supreme doctrine in exuberance to each other. He elucidates the art of elaborating and limitations of the trifle life of human beings on the earth. He even exemplifies the true colour of existing; as human being lives in ascertaining the splendid avalanche of love and modesty within heart and soul to teach and serve mankind about humility. Many of us despise such sycophant due to lack of search for truth in ourselves and end in a rut of complicated fallacies that surround our lives. Gang says, "The reader or spectator recognizes, as he does at the end of *Candida*, that contradictory Shavian necessities are being dealt with, through different characters. The requirement that one earns one's salvation by performing the necessary work of the world, ... is met by Morell and Anderson, while a more esoteric need to retreat from the world's tangle of social, familial, and erotic demands – is met by those who, like Marchbanks and Richard, owe their allegiance to a more exalted ideal: a mission as artist-philosopher or exemplar of a high morality."ⁱⁱ

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The play *The Devil's Disciple* is set at the background of The American Revolutionary War during 1775-1783 under the shadow of The Battles of Saratoga, USA. The 'Rebels' uprooted the British Colonies in America for their independence from the British. The British lost the battle and the Americans gained power over Thirteen American Colonies leading to the declaration of independence on July 4, 1776 from the clutches of the British rule. General John Burgoyne was a British who from Canada attacked with his army in Saratoga to rescue British

soldiers and the city of Saratoga from the authority of American revolutionists. The Americans defeated General Burgoyne in the year 1777 and he surrendered and lost the battle of Saratoga. Shaw has portrayed the same character of General Burgoyne in his play from the pages of the American history that was under the administration of England. George Bernard Shaw read Robert Williams Buchanan's *The Devil's Case* written in 1896 in which the devil is a kind-hearted hero in the poem and Buchanan's work influenced Shaw: devil being the

protector and helper of mankind. This stirred Shaw to write *The Devil's Disciple* in 1897, a play to give a new twist to the late seventeenth century audience as well as to the present generation. The reversed diabolonian context in Shaw's present play can be best seen in susceptibility under Shavian ruffian. Shaw advocates true humanism that sparks in the wake of the true puritan's heart. This play is a melodrama in three acts with an excellent exaggeration of emotional and sentimental images of human confinements that leads to a versatile climax of humility set in New Hampshire, a state in New England in America. Shaw thought to have The American Revolutionary War as the backdrop and the influence of Buchanan's poem made him to write this exciting play to show humanity to the world through his play. Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry, a British Stage actress and a good friend of Shaw that "a good melodrama is a more difficult thing to write than all this clever-clever comedy: one must go straight to the core of humanity to get it..."ⁱⁱⁱ This play was first stage performed at Hermanus Bleecker Hall in Albany, New York on October 1, 1897 and was published in 1901. In 1899, this play was staged in Kennington London, in 1923 by the Theatre Guild in Canada, and in 1996 at the Shaw Festival.

The major theme in this play is humanity along with self-realisation and humility that provide a moral support to strengthen the plot of the play. This play is about sacrifice and believing in oneself for a pure bliss of godliness that preaches humanity rather than religion. Shaw's technique in *The Devil's Disciple* is authorial and a tinge of novelisation can be seen in this play. It majorly discusses humanity to enthral the audience that human emotions gets transcended and vulnerable to deadlock of human psyche. The picturesque background of human tendencies that cater the need of evolution is organic that it proliferate the essence of humanism. Richard becomes the mouthpiece of Shaw to discuss the verily concepts of humanity. The omniscient morality of Shaw induces his audience with a greater satisfaction of tuning one's own soul towards repartee in human thinking. This jurisdiction over the tremendous edification often makes Shaw the man of every age.

The bare truth of 'The Fall' from the Paradise led to the 'Fall of Humanity' among human beings. Shaw wants his readers to perceive knowledge and wisdom through his play *The Devil's Disciple* that Man has reconciled humanity in the world fighting for a noble and eternal cause for himself to show and prove God that Man is regretting for the sin that has been endeared by Adam and Eve, and is existing as a sole representative of humanity through humility, love and sacrifice. This is very much evident from Shaw's play *The Devil's Disciple*. Through it one can realise the core value of treating a human as a human. The creation of Adam and Eve in Heaven were happy to relish the freedom as other Angels had but on one condition that they are forbidden to eat fruits from the two trees namely "Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life,"^{iv} as stated by Ruth Mitchell.

Satan otherwise called as Lucifer, the Prince of Hell was a devoted believer of God who served Him with sheer dedication and sincerity. Lucifer is considered as the archangel and the most benevolent crusader of God. God loved Lucifer as His best disciple in the whole universe. But Lucifer could not recognise that he is being put to test by God in the event of the creation of Adam in Heaven. God asked Lucifer and all other Angels in Heaven to bow before Adam who is made of clay. Lucifer is made of fire who thought that it is insolence for him to do the act of bowing before the clay doll, as it is against his nature. Lucifer is then sent to Hell along with the one-third of Angels in Heaven who rebelled against God.

Beelzebub is one among the fallen angels whom Lucifer becomes a good friend to him. This whole dramatisation to send Lucifer to Hell was predestined even before the creation of Adam in Heaven by God. At this instance God wants us to know why He has manipulated the show that was going on smoothly, and that it was, all of a sudden the disaster occurred.

"Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our
woe,
With loss of Eden..."^v

God knows that Lucifer will not prostrate before Adam and disobey His command. Doesn't God know that Lucifer enters Heaven in guise of a snake to tempt Eve? Doesn't God know that Lucifer in guise of a snake will approach Eve to tempt her to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and Eve will get tempted by Lucifer? God also knows that Adam too will commit the sin for the sake of Eve and their downfall from Paradise to Earth. God very well knows the actions that will happen in future and surely there was a tremendous plot by God against Lucifer, and Adam and Eve to send Lucifer to Hell, and Adam and Eve to Earth. What is that God wanted in the game played by Him? What were/are His intentions?

Spiritualism begins where the Scientific World ends. Shaw in one way can be aspired as the disciple of Milton. In *The Paradise Lost* (1667) John Milton (1608 - 1674) puts his point of treason by Lucifer where he wants to compare himself with God and equal Him on all terms as Lucifer desires to become supreme.

“...What time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his
Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers,
He trusted to have equal'd the most
High, [40] If he oppos'd; and with ambitious
aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of
God...”^{vi}

Through this act of Lucifer and the punishment by God has made Sin and Death enter the Earth to shatter peace and humanity among humankind. But Man is struggling hard to recover the past glory of Man with sincere efforts to endure ethics and values for pristine beauty of togetherness. Shaw has exemplified in his play through Richard Dudgeon, the act of humanness to uproot the indecency of narrow-mindedness and shrewd attitude in humans completely. Shaw's anti-puritan tendencies are embodied in Richard Dudgeon in *The Devil's Disciple*. Since he has been brought up in a puritan atmosphere, he mistakes this joyless hate for religion and the service to God. But he goes to the

extent of sacrificing his life for the sake of Mr. Anderson.

Eventually, as Anderson appears at the right time, Richard Dudgeon is freed from the punishment. Mrs. Dudgeon exhibits her hardness by ill-treating Essie, whose father has just been hanged for his rebellious activity. In the meantime Christy, her younger son, enters and tries to silence his mother as he talks contemptuously about Essie. Christy clumsily breaks the news that his father has died while he was away from home to attend the hanging of his brother as a rebel by the English. Both the brothers die: one as a rebellion and the other a mournful death on his brother Peter, the father of Essie.

Richard Dudgeon, the protagonist of the play embodies a breakthrough in splashing Shaw's inner thoughts of provocation on religion and humanism. He is a puritan first in guise of libertine. Richard Dudgeon also called as Dick in the play is an ineptitude sycophant to his family in the beginning but relishes his magnanimous humanity towards his cousin Essie who is tortured by his mother Mrs. Dudgeon and also towards Mr. Anderson, a minister and pastor of the Church. Dick is the direct representative of Shaw to project the essential qualities of humanism such as humility, love, and sacrifice. Dick's character enlightens and instructs us about the impudent triumph over the bleakest prejudices of human beings.

Dick is sole responsible for his enigmatic persuasions that he promises to his master, Devil, and lays upon his life to follow him till his death. But it is the other way round in dissimulating his duties towards his own conscience and gathering the light of humanity in its truest docile possible. This perception of humanity is in his attitude that comes along as the play furthers to a diversified amalgamation of human capabilities and tender sacrifices. He is definitely a Shavian prodigy who twists the plot into a cheerful resorbence to exemplify his true puritan nature rather than devilish in action. This devilish insignia transforms into godliness where the astute implication is evident in his contemplation. Richard Dudgeon mocks at the insatiable preachers of every religion who at the triumph of their own dominion

channelize advocacy of authority over God and symbolise their actions as the conduct of God and resort to inhuman tendencies.

Shaw's avant-gardism mind-set technique of creating characters like Richard Dudgeon is a master piece with which Shaw attacks the world with queer distinction between good and bad, human and inhuman, religion and humility. The humanism among humanity is attained through self-realisation and learning the art of retaining the fundamental typhoon of sacrifice and humility through our own species humankind. Dick is such a character created by Shaw who teaches us the religion of humanity in guise of a fanatic spiritualist of devil. Shaw observes devil through Richard Dudgeon not as a snobbish insipid and reluctant fallen angel from the paradise but a devoted and sensible advocate of humanity who is an advanced thinker and archangel on the earth. At the climax of the play the positions have been reversed with a diabolonian tinge where Anderson becomes the devil's disciple with a good heart and Richard, a true Christian. This shows the tangible touch of humanity by both the characters. They are right in their own realms as their masters have been changed to a different sort but with one religion, i.e. humanity.

As Mother Teresa has rightly said that "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."^{vii} Peace plays a pivotal role in the coordination of a successful humanistic life in a family and society. But it is taken away by Lucifer and from all possible ways sketches a situation to enthrall himself. He takes pleasure in the inhuman acts of seven deadly sins like lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. These seven sins are the hurdles that scintillate darkness into the life of people. Among these seven sins pride is the first enemy that populates other six sins around it. Being arrogant symbolises vanity that encroaches the hidden devil to channelize insolate pathetic complications and engulf righteousness that breeds inhumanity. The popular context Shaw has put forward is the cynosure of allegiance with eternal divinity that transforms humanity into a perfect specimen of a human. The tremendous insatiable legacy of solitude in desolation is a work of an artist who either despises the lagoon of

scriptural manuscripts or blemishes the adversities of his own horizon of beliefs. It is true that a religious novice debunks the certainties of his religion and undergoes a traumatic transformation of fear that haunts like a dragon of Satan if he is not comforted with the know-how of humanity. Shaw mesmerises his audience with a puritan play *The Devil's Disciple* to enthrall and instructs us to pass on the message of humanity with a splendid aroma of love and humility.

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