

SUBJECT : ENGLISH

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TOPIC – **PROBLEM PLAYS**

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PROBLEM PLAYS

Towards the end of the 19th century the English society started feeling the need of something new and refreshing on the stage .The existing Victorian play was failing to cater the taste of the new spectator. The Problem Play came up to revitalize the drama from all dimensions . As the title suggests, a Problem play or a play of ideas deals with a particular social or moral problem related to love, marriage, sex, war, peace, justice or crime etc. and tries to suggest a solution to it. It profusely takes the recourse of wit, intellect, materialism and realism. A problem play finally opposes and rejects all types of narrowness, confusion and falsehood, and adheres to the principles of equality, freedom or justice .

The playwrights got inspiration from the great Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen(1828-1906). The earliest disciples of Ibsen were H. A. Jones(1851-1929) and Pinero (1855-1934) . Pinero in his plays written under the Ibsenian influence such as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Thunderbolt* makes a serious effort to deal with real intriguing situations of life. Jones' problem plays like *Mrs. Dane's Defence* and *Saints and Sinners*, though remarkable in variety and more natural in dialogue and comic effect, reveal a lack of intellectual power without which drama of this type could not go far.

Following the Ibsenian trail of Pinero and Jones and of the early works of Shaw, came a group of talented playwrights many of whom distinguished themselves in other fields too. H. Granville (1877-1986), a prominent member of this group, showed a brave trenchant realism in exploring the contemporary problems of society. His best plays *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Waste* are not unworthy of being studied along with those of Shaw .Arnold Bennett's milestones written in collaboration with Edward Knowblack, on the other hand brings out the sad futility of earlier social and moral standards amidst modern life. John Galsworthy too brought moving representations of the most harrowing spectacles of social injustice on the stage in his plays like, *Strife*, *Justice* and *Loyalties*. John Irvine , John Masefield and many others dealt with the themes related to social problems.

G.B.Shaw(1856-1950),born in Dublin of Irish Protestant stock ,followed the example of Ibsen in his problem plays. Ibsen's social plays contained the ideas which suited Shaw's own ideas of the function of the drama. In his plays, Shaw makes a satirical treatment of the radical ills of the contemporary society. His plays, *Widowers' Houses*,*Mrs.Warren's Profession* ,*Arms and the Man* and many other plays are concerned ,as the writer saw it, less with the crimes of society, and more with its romantic follies and with the struggles of the individuals against these follies. In his other plays like, *Candida*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and *Saint Joan* etc Shaw tries to express his struggle for a socially engaged and realistic art. According to Edward Albert, Shaw believed that the ideas of his plays were their most important feature. He saw the stage as a platform for his views and reluctantly adopted the role of 'entertainer' only when his three 'unpleasant' plays ,namely, *Widower's Houses*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *the Philander*- failed. Scoffing at the romantic view of life he examined the social institutions with intellectual

courage shrewd eyes and relevant insight. Slum landlords, prostitution, marriage conventions ,social prejudices, romanticized soldier, glamorous historical figure, medical profession, critics, religion- these are but some of the people and things which come under the microscope of his rationalism. His early work were emphatically socialist and socialism, later in a more moderate form he retained his hope for the humanity at large.
