

VI SEMESTER

UNIT-3, Chapter -1

Essay: George Bernard Shaw- 'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay'

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Introduction

G B Shaw (1856-1950) was an Irish-born dramatist, essayist, critic, novelist, short story writer, and poet. Shaw is regarded as the greatest English dramatist of the modern age, and his contribution to British theater is considered second only to that of William Shakespeare. By rejecting outmoded theatrical conventions and championing realism and social commentary in his work, critics contend Shaw succeeded in revolutionizing British drama. He has been credited with creating the "theater of ideas," in which plays explore such issues as sexism, sexual equality, socioeconomic divisions, the effects of poverty, and philosophical and religious theories. Moreover, his innovative dramas are thought to have paved the way for later Symbolist drama and the Theater of the Absurd. He won Nobel prize for literature. His well known plays are: 'Arms and the Man', 'Man and Superman', St. Joan, Applecart etc. He was a socialist by conviction but did not believe in revolutions. He maintained that the desired changes in the life of a man and in the conditions of society could be brought about by 'Life Force'. 'Life Force' in his view was the power that seeks to raise mankind with their cooperation to a higher and better existence.

'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay' has been taken from the 'The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism' published in 1928. It is a scathing comment on the socio-economic condition of the world. The author in a cogent manner has brought out the most glaring defect of the Capitalist system that is it creates alienation of men from his environment. The workers have no control over what they produce. Thus people feel alienated from the mode of production. The individuals do not have a sense of dignity as useful members of society. Rather they feel they are cogs in the great wheels of juggernaut. According to Shaw the loss of identity of man has led to colonialism, imperialism, wars and other crisis of our time. At the base of these chronic ailments is the relentless pursuit of profit motive which has destroyed all our human values.

Main Idea of the Essay

In this essay Shaw elaborates his view with two examples one that of a pin maker and the trade of clothes. In both the cases the worker had no knowledge of buying raw material, making and selling the product. Though his production output was less, yet his knowledge and skill was absolute.

The modern worker in comparison maybe involved in the production of millions of pins with the help of machines but his own knowledge of those machines is next to nothing. Same is the case with those involved with trade of clothes .Earlier all this was done by people in the rural areas and they had whole knowledge of how to produce clothes right from the shearing of the sheep. Today's worker is totally dependent on the machines for the entire task pertaining to production of clothes. Thus a modern worker is no better than a wage earner for his family. He is even devoid of the satisfaction of making anything substantial by himself. Therefore the capitalist system breeds ignorance by only aiming to make profit through the use of machines and keeping the common people out of the way of knowledge.

Question & Answers

Q 1. How does Capitalism spread Universal ignorance?

Answer: 'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay' has been written by G B Shaw (1856-1950) an Irish man. He is ranked one of the greatest dramatist of English Literature/. His well known plays are: 'Arms and the Man', 'Man and Superman', St. Joan, Applearc etc. He was a socialist by conviction but did not believe in revolutions. This essay is taken from the 'The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism' published in 1928. The author in a cogent manner has brought out the most glaring defect of the Capitalist system that is it creates alienation of men from his environment. The workers have no control over what they produce. Thus people feel alienated from the mode of production.

Industrial revolution gave the world a new economic system called Capitalism. Under this system industry is controlled by a few individuals whose sole aim is to earn more and more profit. It implies competition in his desire to earn more profit. The Capitalists tries to replace human labour with machines, Human beings are reduced to the status of button –pushers. Their jobs do not require any skill. In this essay Shaw elaborates his view with two examples one that of a pin maker and the trade of clothes. In both the cases the worker had no knowledge of buying raw material, making and selling the product. Though his production output was less, yet his knowledge and skill was absolute.

The modern worker in comparison maybe involved in the production of millions of pins with the help of machines but his own knowledge of those machines is next to nothing. Same is the case with those involved with trade of clothes .Earlier all this was done by people in the rural areas and they had whole knowledge of how to produce clothes right from the shearing of the sheep. Today's worker is totally dependent on the machines for the entire task pertaining to production of clothes. Thus a modern worker is no better than a wage earner for his family. He is even devoid of the satisfaction of making anything substantial by himself. Therefore the capitalist system breeds

ignorance by only aiming to make profit through the use of machines and keeping the common people out of the way of knowledge.

Q2. Justify the title of the essay 'How Wealth Accumulates and men decay.'

Answer: 'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay' has been written by G B Shaw (1856-1950) an Irish man. He is ranked one of the greatest dramatist of English Literature/. His well known plays are: 'Arms and the Man', 'Man and Superman', St. Joan, Applegarth etc. He was a socialist by conviction but did not believe in revolutions. This essay is taken from the poem 'The Deserted Village' in 'The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism' published in 1928. The author in a cogent manner has brought out the most glaring defect of the Capitalist system that is it creates alienation of men from his environment. The workers have no control over what they produce. Thus people feel alienated from the mode of production.

In his poem 'The Deserted Village' Shaw described the havoc wrought in the countryside in England by the Industrial revolution. Prior to Industrial revolution the craftsmen were self dependent. They purchased the raw material themselves, fashioned into consumable articles and sold them direct to the consumer. This is why even new people in the remote villages are more knowledgeable than the city dwellers . Unlike these craftsman modern industrial worker is dependent on the Capitalist. It is he who provides him with the raw material and tells him what to make on the machines which work automatically producing huge quantities of things at very cheap rates. The worker has paid heavily because he himself has been turned into a mindless ignorant living machine with no sense of participation .In order to prove his point, Shaw gives the example of pin making and cloth making .Unlike the old craftsmen modern worker does not know about how things are made. The worker has lost self respect and the feeling of being useful citizen. He has no firsthand knowledge of things we depend on books written by other people who themselves have second hand knowledge conveyed to them by others.

Thus to conclude that whereas use of machines has facilitated bulk production of goods thereby increasing profits but at the same time it has eroded knowledge and skills from the domain of common citizens. Heaps of wealth has yielded only robotic individuals in the modern world. Hence the title 'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay' is apt and justified.

