

**J.M.S. COLLEGE, MUNGER**  
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*Department of English*  
**B.A. Part-III, English (Hons.), Paper-VI**

**DRAMA OF IDEAS OR PROBLEM PLAYS OR  
PROPAGANDA PLAYS**  
**(Understanding the Concept for Reading G. B. Shaw's *Candida*)**

Drama of Ideas is a type of drama that was popularized by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen and then Shaw, Galsworthy and Granville Barker were the chief exponents of this realistic drama of ideas. In problem plays, the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as a representative instance of a contemporary social problem; often the dramatist manages—by the use of a character who speaks for the author, or by the evolution of the plot, or both—to propose a solution to the problem which is at odds with prevailing opinion. The issue may be the drastically inadequate autonomy, scope, and dignity allotted to women in the middle-class nineteenth-century family (Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, 1879); or the morality of prostitution, regarded as a typical product of the economic arrangements in a capitalist society (George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, 1898); or the crisis in racial and ethnic relations in present-day America (in numerous current dramas and films).

Drama of Ideas or Problem plays can also be compared with 'Social Conditions of England Novels' or 'Industrial Novels' simply for raising and projecting the issues that were deeply affecting the society. "Drama of Ideas", pioneered by George Bernard Shaw, is a type of discussion play in which the clash of ideas and hostile ideologies reveals the most acute problems of social and personal morality. In a Drama of Ideas there is a little action but discussion. Characters are only the vehicles of ideas. The conflict which is the essence of drama is reached through the opposing ideas of different characters. The aim of Drama of Ideas is to educate people through entertainment. *Arms and the Man* is an excellent example of the Drama of Ideas. Here very little happens except discussion. The plot is built up with dynamic and unconventional ideas regarding war and love. Shaw criticizes the romantic notion of war and love prevailing in the contemporary society. Unlike the conventional comedies, here characters are engaged in lengthy discussion and thus bring out ideas contrary to each other.

To Shaw, drama was pre-eminently a medium for articulating his own ideas and philosophy. He enunciated the philosophy of life force which he sought to disseminate through his plays. Thus Shawian plays are the vehicles for the transportation of ideas, however, propagandizing they may be. Shaw wanted to cast his ideas through discussions. Out of the discussions in the play *Arms and the Man*, Shaw breaks the idols of love and war.

A subtype of the modern problem play is the discussion play, in which the social issue is not incorporated into a plot but expounded in the give and take of a sustained debate among the characters. We can mention Shaw's *Getting Married*, and Act III of his *Man and Superman*; also his book on Ibsen's plays, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) in this regard. In a specialized application, the term problem plays is sometimes applied to a group of Shakespeare's plays, also called "bitter comedies"—especially *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well That Well*—which explore ignoble aspects of human nature, and in which the resolution of the plot seems to many readers to be problematic, in that it does not settle or solve, except superficially, the moral problems raised in the play. By extension, the term came to be applied also to other Shakespearean plays which explore the dark side of human nature, or which seem to leave unresolved the issues that arise in the course of the action.

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