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Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee
Assistant Professor, Department of English
St Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand



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An Overview of Joan's Mindset in Bernard Shaw's "St. Joan"

Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy
M. Venkateswar Reddy
&

C. Sankar Gowd

Assistant Professor in English,
Rajeev Gandhi Memorial College of Engineering & Technology,
Nandyal, Andhra Pradesh
Corresponding Author Email: kiran.mokshita@gmail.com

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Abstract: Literature reflects happenings in and around us. Gender bias is a universal phenomenon. Irrespective of culture, woman is regarded as inferior to men. Many writers explored gender discrimination through their works. This paper aims to highlight gender equality. Gender equality characteristics have existed in society for decades. Society has always tried to keep women within the periphery of domestic life and was marginalized to the role of looking after the home and heart. It aims at the portrayal of literature in the human life, mindset and struggle of St. Joan. It focuses on the transformation of the protagonist St. Joan who wishes to exhibit her identity as a brave woman soldier in the play, shows the dark side of the human male mindset, and the negative implications of the way masculinity has defined success over Joan's endeavours in the play.

Keywords: Discrimination, identity, mindset, sacrifice.

What is mindset? Do we need a mindset? According to numerous psychologists, mindset is a process of thinking, judging, outlook, mentality etc., and making decisions when there is a crucial moment. We should contemplate whether mindset influences people or not. If there is any impact of mindset on our lives, then decision-making would play a vital role.

Static mindset means confining to old ideology, traditional beliefs and whatnot. A growth mindset



refers to a change in behaviour. People change their mood depending upon the situation. Does St. Joan have a devised mindset or a static mindset? According to the Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary, the definition of Mindset runs or changes therefore it is said "a person's way of thinking and his or her opinions."

George Bernard Shaw, the renowned English dramatist composed a chronicle play, based on the life of Joan of Arc, shortly after her proclamation as a saint. St. Joan has been regarded as intellectually exciting and admired for illustrating important themes of nationalism and war.

A famous dialogue in St. Joan reflects the mindset of Archbishop and La Tremouille, It runs thus:

"The purpose and nature of miracles, may seem very wonderful to the people who witness them, and very simple to those who perform them. That does not matter, whether they confirm or create faith, they are true miracles. "1

" La Tremouille poses sarcastic remarks, defends that there is no difference between a miracle and a fraud, the Archbishop that all government relies on fraud: well, the church has to rule men for the good of their souls as well as for the good of their bodies. To do that, the church must do as you do: nourish their faith by poetry." 2

Joan of Arc is the heroine of Shaw's high tragedy Saint Joan. The entire action centres around her life and career. The first five scenes deal with her romantic rise where as Scene VI deals with trial and burning at the stake. The Epilogue depicts the rehabilitation of her reputation twenty-five years after her martyrdom.

St John's importance in the play is further brought out by the fact that a considerable part of the lengthy preface to the play is devoted to an exposition of her character and personality. She embodies Shaw's conception of a saint.

Joan of Arc was a French girl with a peasant's family background. She began to see visions and to hear supernatural voices under divine inspiration. She became convinced that they were the voices of saints and angels. She believed that they were messages from God and that she must obey them. This



belief finally brought her into conflict with the church. Her mission was to free her country from the British control. She set out to convince the army officers, the priests and the king, about her divine mission.

Joan points out to Robert that the French soldiers are always defeated by the English for one fundamental reason. They do not fight with any conviction or inspiration. All that they want to do is to save their own lives. Naturally, in order to save their lives, they ran away for the earliest available opportunity. So French soldiers ran away whenever they could, without caring least for the fate of the battle. In Scene II, Dauphin asks Joan to mind her own business and leave him at peace without the thought of war. Joan sharply criticizes the timid and passive attitude of Dauphin. Joan tries to stir up Dauphin to fight against the English.

Joan tells Dunois pointedly that she is essentially a soldier. She is no doubt a woman. But she has no fondness for anything as a woman. She does not like to dress as a woman and will never do so with love or money. All that she cares for is soldierly duties. She feels immense delight to think of leading an operation and dictating the strategy of a big war. Joan reminds Dunois of the urgent function of the French soldiers to protect Orleans. But this cannot be achieved without any hard fight.

Her patriotism was intense. She was a born leader with a strong will and dauntless faith. She donned the dress of soldiers. She revived their drooping spirits. She led them to drive out the dreadful English soldiers occupying France. After her historic victory at Orleans, she crowned Dauphin. Then she wanted to liberate Paris. But fate was against her. Her own countrymen turned into her enemies. She was captured and given up English. She was tried and burnt at the stake. She was barely twenty years old then. She chose to die rather than suffer lifelong imprisonment.

Though illiterate, she had a quick grasp of things. She was a girl of extraordinary strength of mind, hardihood of body and a keen sense of humour. She talked to and dealt with people of all classes from labourers to kings without embarrassment or affectation and got them to do what she wanted. Her tongue had a soft side as well as a sharp edge. Her successful meetings with captain Baudricourt, Dauphin and



Dunois, and her conduct at her trial illustrate this. She was an inspired soldier with amazing courage and unbending will. Though unwilling to see her at first, captain Baudri's court was prevailed upon to send her at last to Dauphin. Dauphin gave her the command of the French army and Dunois followed her lead to capture Orleans. Every day that came in contact with her fell under her magic personality. Her courage did not leave her even when she was threatened with death and burnt as a heretic.

She was highly religious and had a firm faith in God. Even in dangerous situations, she had a strong conviction that God would shield her from her enemies. Even in her trial and in the face of being burnt at the stake, she did not swerve from this faith. She believed that her judgment was right, though the church opposed it. While in the flames, she took up a cross, looked up to heaven and perished with the name of Jesus on her lips. People looked upon her as a miracle maid. Till she was allowed to see him, Captain Baudricourt had no eggs and milk. At the royal court, she could find out the real Dauphin who hid himself and was unknown to her before. When she took up the lead to raise the siege of Orleans, the long-awaited west wind blew across the plains, to the wonder of Dunois. But all this she passed on the glory of god. Her humility and dignity were mistaken to be pride and her countrymen turned against her. Her inexperience and ignorance of the ways of the world led her to a tragic end.

Joan of Arc was made a saint in 1920 five centuries after her death. She was one of the first protestant martyrs and a great champion of Nationalism. Her name was held in special reverence in France. Her story gave new courage and hope to all freedom-loving people over the centuries since her death.

The trial scene of Saint Joan is the most romantic and emotional part of the play and it has done most to make the play popular. "Here, a young girl, alone is seen and heard fighting for her life against the mightiest powers in the world", says A.C. Ward.

The Inquisitor advises his fellow judges to proceed with calmness, reason and justice in their assessment of Joan's offence. He forbids them to bear any anger for Joan because of vicious habit and leads one astray from the path of reason and justice. The Inquisitor also implores Joan's judges to act with no undue pity for her. He reminds them of the importance of justice.



The Bishop's court with the Inquisition, participated in the constituted trial court. Bishop Pierre Cauchon and the Inquisitor were the judges. There were assessors including the English Chaplain and a French Canon.

The charge against Joan was the crime of heresy. She wanted to follow the divine voices and her own judgment and not the dictates of the church authorities. That was the crime she committed. The English chaplain and the Earl of Warwick were angry with Joan because they were defeated by her. So they convinced Bishop Cauchon that Joan was inspired by the devil and not by God and that she was a witch. She was already examined fifteen times by the Bishop's court. The Inquisitor participated in two of them and concluded that she must be tried for heresy.

In Scene VI , Joan asserts that she is capable of doing perfectly any sort of domestic work. Nevertheless, she had no mind to do the same. She knows that many women can carry on those domestic duties. But there is no one to come forward and undertake the great task of the deliverance of the soil of France from the presence of the English command. There is no other woman who can do her great work. Joan has therefore to leave those domestic duties although her proficiency in them is not least. Her words strike the very keynote of her role in France. She did for France what others could not and there, lies the historic importance of her performance.

She was asked to swear by the Gospels to tell the whole truth. But she refused as she had already sworn many times. Then the French canon suggested that she should be put to the torture. However, the court overruled it. The English Chaplain and the French canon tried to question Joan in order to prove that she was a witch. But she was steady and contended that she acted under divine inspiration. Then Cauchon asked her whether she would accept the judgment and interpretation of the church. Joan replied that she would obey provided whatever god says in the church. She would mind God and always follow his command first. The promoter then charged her with two very horrible and blasphemous crimes which she did not deny. First she had intercourse with evil spirits and was therefore a sorceress. Second, she wore men's clothes, which was indecent, unnatural and awful. Joan refused to accept the instruction of the church that the apparitions she saw in her visions were really devils seeking her soul's perdition for she



needed a soldier's dress in the circumstances. Ladvenu, a sympathetic priest tried his utmost to save her. He showed the executioner behind her and told her that she was going to be burnt at the stake shortly. Eight hundred English soldiers were waiting to take her there. Joan was horrified at this. She despaired that her voices deceived her and there was no rescue.

Ladvenu drew up her recantation and got it signed by her. She thought that she would be set free. But the judges said that she was free from excommunication. She would be imprisoned for life given her great sins against God and the Holy Church. Joan was very angry; she tore her confession into pieces. She said that she was ready to go to the fire. The Judges pronounced their verdict of excommunication.

Joan faces the cruel sentence that was passed against her by the judges, with faith and fearlessness. All her weaknesses are no more. She regains her firm faith in God and in his just and merciful dealings with men. She reminds her judges that God is much greater and kinder than all human beings. His judgment is much more perfect than all the learned and laboured sentences of mortal beings. She is certain that God desires her to face the awful fire at the stake. It is through this fire that she will return to his bosom and find his full blessing. Joan confidently asserts that she is the daughter of God and that her faithless and foolish judges are quite unfit for her company. With these last words, she spiritedly makes herself ready for the fire. Immediately the English soldiers led her away from the fire. Soon she was burnt to ashes with the name of Jesus on her lips. Joan here displays her unique faith and indomitable courage. She is not afraid of her judges, but quite ready to defy them for she knows that God's blessing is ever with her.

St. Joan was not afraid to tackle competition and her detractors from the beginning of the play had gone head to head with superiors traded words. Joan jumped at the opportunity and became famous. Joan's association was a breath of fresh air to the soldiers. Joan restructured France's fame with her endeavours. Without any doubt, John was tremendously successful and professionally admired by her soldiers and lieutenants but she was not always popular. She was a strict perfectionist and always wished to be one step ahead of the game. She followed her principles and accordingly approached.



Joan was not afraid to speak out about her truth. God, though she faced false allegations from her enemies, she had always shown heed to her inner voice. She courageously pursued her heart and intuition. Joan was stubborn as a young girl, believed in her values, and wished to be seen as a rebel, and a maverick. She became a model for soldiers, exuded confidence and was able to endure others. Although Joan was attracting and persuading, she was also disorganized and erratic in her management style. She was rigid in the discipline of soldiers. She created a completely new war strategic culture to improve the sense of community during the war. St. Joan emphasized the point her army was not soldiers but members of her team. Joan became the public mouthpiece of France, a passionate woman who believed in a hundred per cent result of her warfare. She didn't let her down. She learnt important lessons for the future. Her actions did not support her rhetoric. Her creation of ethos and striving nature drove her to the desirable post. She believed in the coinage that without changing her mindset, there is no room to improve.

Benjamin Barber, a political theorist asserted, "I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong the successes and the failures ... I divide the world into the learners and non-learners."

If John had logical thinking, she could have thought too much logic is suicide. If we deeply ponder over this, it leads to something. When Joan keeps her thinking in a limited way, she could have become something like other human beings. Mind is a miraculous instrument of liberation. If she is aware of her death or mental awareness, her life could have been different. It lies in the mindset.

Thus, Saint Joan is a story of conflict, between good and evil, between ignorance and knowledge, between Christ and Anti Christ. Really all the important characters in the play refer to symbolic significance. Who's right? Today most critics consider that it is not nature or nurture, genes or environment.

As Gilbert Gottlieb, an eminent neuroscientist, put it, "Not only do genes and environment cooperate as we develop, but genes require input from the environment to work properly."

Normally tragedies end with the death of the heroes but the play Saint Joan continues to be powerful even after her death. Some critics think that the play should have ended with the execution of Joan. They argue that the dream epilogue is not necessary to the play at all. But it has been a theatrical success which no



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production would like to omit.

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