
Unit-3 □ George Bernard Shaw: ‘Freedom’ George Orwell: ‘Shooting an Elephant’

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3.3.0 Introduction

In this Unit you will read two non-fictional prose pieces by two of the greatest thinking writers and critics of different aspects of British modernity – George Bernard Shaw and George Orwell. Both the pieces date around the same time – 1936, which, if you see in the history section in Module 1, was the period just before the 2nd World War, when England’s colonial domination had reached its zenith. While Shaw’s work is a critique of the very notion of freedom from an epistemological stand-point that will make you think of the plight of the common man in England, Orwell presents a picture of the coloniser in the colony that is worth pondering over.

3.3.1 George Bernard Shaw: Non-Dramatic Literary Career

George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July 1856, in Dublin to Protestant parents

George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elisabeth Shaw. He had a troubled childhood. His father was a drunkard, there was little money for his education, so Shaw had to quit his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day school at the age of fourteen. At the age of fifteen, he started to work as a junior clerk. In 1876, he went to London to join his mother and sister. In London, his mother was trying to eke out a living giving music lessons. In 1884, Shaw joined the Fabian Society, a middle-class socialist group. The Fabian Society wanted to reconstruct 'society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities'. Shaw wrote many of their pamphlets including *The Fabian Manifesto* (1884), *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (1893), *Fabianism and the Empire* (1900) and *Socialism for Millionaires* (1901).

In 1895, Shaw became the drama critic of the Saturday review. In 1898, he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend and settled at Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire. In 1892 he wrote *Widower's Houses*. The unpleasant plays were followed by 'Pleasant Plays' like *Candida*, *John Bull's Other Island*. Other plays like *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1898) *Man and Superman* (1902) *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), and *Pygmalion* (1913). In 1914 he wrote *Common Sense About War*. His other plays include *Heartbreak House* (1919) and *Saint Joan* (1923). In his own words he was less an artist than 'a social reformer and doctrinaire first, last, and all the time'. He fascinated and delighted his audience by his astounding vitality and abounding comic sense. His plays made people think by compelling them to laugh. He was awarded Nobel Prize in 1952. He accepted the honour but refused the money. For this Unit however, it is his non-dramatic career that we are more interested about.

His later writings included *The Crime of Imprisonment* (1902), *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* (1928) and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944). His ironic wit and endowed language made him not only a household name in Britain, but also a world figure. Apart from writing plays Shaw gave a number of talks and wrote essays on political and social topics. In the present piece "Freedom" which is actually a radio talk delivered in 1935, he takes recourse to the typical hard-hitting 'sermons' he gave at every opportunity throughout his life. It is however, incorrect to describe the speech as a sermon, a religious homily to the people. The speech is a witty exposition of what freedom means and a humorous exposure of the deceit and hypocrisy that underline the conception of freedom both in capitalistic and socialistic countries. Shaw insists: 'My conscience is the genuine pulpit article: it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to bring them to a conviction

of sin'. In *Freedom* he keeps his sting camouflaged behind a sly, impudent wit. He leaves no stone unturned to 'Find the right thing to say,' and he then says 'it with the utmost levity'. In a way "Freedom" echoes Rousseau's 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality'. Whereas Rousseau begins by distinguishing between two kinds of inequality, natural and artificial, Shaw in "Freedom" speaks of the same inequality caused by the society. He asserts that the English people were never free. From time immemorial the master class has enforced slavery upon the common people and has patronizingly called it freedom. He goes out of his way and asks the people of Britain to stop singing 'Rule Britannia', as Britons have for ever been slaves in the sense that the will of the ruling class has always been imposed upon them. Thus Shaw says with scathing humour that people better "call freedom by its old English name of leisure, and keep clamoring for more leisure and more money to enjoy it in return for an honest share of work".

3.3.2 Text of Freedom

(One of a series of B.B.C. radio talks, delivered 18 June 1935. *The Listener*, 26 June 1935. Reprinted in *Freedom*, London, 1936)

What is perfectly free person? Evidently a person who can do what he likes, when he likes and where he likes, or do nothing at all if he prefers it. Well there is no such person; and there never can be any such person. Whether we like it or not, we must all sleep for one-third of our lifetime; wash and dress and undress; we must spend a couple of hours eating and drinking; we must spend nearly as much in getting about from place to place. For half the day we are slaves to necessities which we cannot shirk, whether we are monarchs with a thousand servant or humble labourers with no servants but their wives. And the wives must undertake the additional heavy slavery of child-bearing if the world is still to be peopled.

These natural jobs cannot be shirked. But they involve other jobs which can. As we must eat we must first provide food; as we must sleep we must have beds and bedding in houses with fireplaces and coals; as we must walk through the streets we must have clothes to cover our nakedness. Now, food and houses and clothes can be produced by human labor. But when they are produced they can be stolen. If you like honey you can let the bees produce it by their labour, and then steal it from them. If you are too lazy to get about from place to place on your own legs you can make a slave of a horse. And what you do to a horse or a bee you can also do to a man

or woman or a child if you can get the upper hand of them by force or fraud or trickery of any sort, or even by teaching them that it is their religious duty to sacrifice their freedom to yours.

So beware! If you allow any person, or class of persons, to get the upper hand of you, they will shift all that part of their slavery to Nature that can be shifted on to your shoulders; and you will find yourself working from eight to fourteen hours a day when, if you had only yourself and your family to provide for, you could do it quite comfortably in half the time or less. The object of all honest Governments should be to prevent your being imposed on in this way. But the object of most actual Governments, I regret to say, is exactly the opposite. They enforce your slavery and call it freedom. But they also regulate your slavery, keeping the greed of your masters within certain bounds. When chattel slavery of the negro sort costs more than wage slavery, they abolish chattel slavery and make you free to choose between one employment, or one master, and another; and this they call a glorious triumph for freedom, though for you it is merely the key of the street.¹ When you complain, they promise that in future you shall govern the country for yourself. They redeem this promise by giving you a vote, and having a general election every five years or so.

At the election, two of their rich friends ask for your vote; and you are free to choose which of them you will vote for to spite the other—a choice which leaves you no freer than you were before, as it does not reduce your hours of labour by a single minute. But the newspapers assure you that your vote has decided the election, and that this constitutes you a free citizen in a democratic country. The amazing thing about it is that you are fool enough to believe them.

Now mark another big difference between the natural slavery of man to Nature and the unnatural slavery of man to man. Nature is kind to her slaves. If she forces you to eat and drink, she makes eating and drinking so pleasant that when we can afford it we eat and drink too much. We must sleep or go mad: but then sleep is so pleasant that we have great difficulty in getting up in the morning. And firesides and families seem so pleasant to the young that they get married and join building societies² to realize their dreams. Thus, instead of resenting our natural wants as slavery, we take the greatest pleasure in their satisfaction. We write sentimental songs in praise of them. A tramp can earn his supper by singing "Home, Sweet Home."³

The slavery of man to man is the very opposite of this. It is hateful to the body and to the spirit. Our poets do not praise it: they proclaim that no man is good enough to be another man's master. The latest of the great Jewish prophets, a gentleman named Marx, spent his life in proving that there is no extremity of selfish cruelty at which the slavery of man to man will stop if it be not stopped by law. You can see for yourself that it produces a state of continual civil war—called the class war—between the slaves and their masters, organized as trade unions on one side and employers' federations on the other. Saint Thomas More⁴, who has just been canonized, held that we shall never have a peaceful and stable society until this struggle is ended by the abolition of slavery altogether and the compulsion of every one to do his share of the world's work with his own hands and brains, and not to attempt to put it on anyone else.

Naturally the master class, through its Parliaments, schools and newspapers, makes the most desperate efforts to prevent us from realizing our slavery. From our earliest years we are taught that our country is the land of the free, and that our freedom was won for us forever by our forefathers when they made King John sign Magna Charta⁵—when they defeated the Spanish Armada⁶—when they cut off King Charles's head—when they made King William accept the Bill of Rights—when they issued and made good the American Declaration of Independence—when they won the battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar on the playing fields of Eton—and when, only the other day, they quite unintentionally changed the German, Austrian, Russian and Ottoman empires into republics.⁷

When we grumble, we are told that all our miseries are our own doing because we have the vote. When we say: "What good is the vote?" we are told that we have the Factory Acts, and the Wages Board, and free education, and the New Deal⁸, and the dole; and what more could any reasonable man ask for? We are reminded that the rich are taxed a quarter, a third, or even a half and more, of their incomes; but the poor are never reminded that they have to pay that much of their wages as rent in addition to having to work twice as long every day as they would need if they were free.

Whenever famous writers protest against this imposture—say, Voltaire and Rousseau and Tom Paine in the eighteenth century, or Cobbett and Shelley, Karl Marx and Lasselle in the nineteenth, or atheists and libertines, murderers and scoundrels; and often it is made a criminal offence to buy or sell their books. If their

disciples make a revolution, England immediately makes war on them and lends money to the other Powers to join her in forcing the revolutionists to restore the slave order. When this combination was successful at Waterloo, the victory was advertised as another triumph for British freedom; and the British wage slaves, instead of going into mourning like Lord Byron, believed it all and cheered enthusiastically. When the revolution wins, as it did in Russia in 1922, the fighting stops; but the abuse, the calumnies, the lies, continue until the revolutionized State grows into a first-rate military Power. Then our diplomatists, after having for years denounced the revolutionary leaders as the most abominable villains and tyrants, have to do a right turn and invite them to dinner.

Now though this prodigious mass of humbug is meant to delude the enslaved class only, it ends in deluding the master class much more completely. A gentleman whose mind has been formed at a preparatory school for the sons of gentlemen, followed by a public school and university course⁹, is much more thoroughly taken in by the falsified history and dishonest political economy and snobbery taught in these places than any worker can possibly be, because the gentleman's education teaches him that he is a very fine fellow, superior to the common run of men whose duty it is to brush his clothes, carry his parcels, and earn his income for him; and as he thoroughly agrees with this view of himself, he honestly believes that the system which has placed him in such an agreeable situation and done such justice to his merits is the best of all possible systems and that he should shed his blood, and yours, to the last drop in its defence. But the great mass of our rack-rented, underpaid, treated-as-inferiors, cast-off-on-the-dole workers cannot feel so sure about it as the gentleman. The facts are too harshly against it. In hard times, such as we are now passing through, their disgust and despair sometimes lead them to kick over the traces, upset everything, and have to be rescued from mere gangsterism by some Napoleonic genius who has a fancy for being an emperor, and who has the courage and brains and energy to jump at the chance. But the slaves who give three cheers for the emperor might just as well have made a cross on a British or American ballot paper as far as their freedom is concerned.

So far I have mentioned nothing but plain, natural and historical facts. I draw no conclusion, for that would lead me into controversy; and controversy would not be fair when you cannot answer me back. I am never controversial over the wireless. I do not even ask you to draw your own conclusions, for you might draw some very dangerous ones unless you have the right sort of head for it. Always remember that

though nobody likes to be called a slave, it does not follow that slavery is a bad thing. Great men, like Aristotle, have held that law and order and government would be impossible unless the persons, the people have to obey are beautifully dressed and decorated, robed and uniformed, speaking with a special accent, travelling in first-class carriages or the most expensive cars or on the best-groomed and best-bred horses, and never cleaning their own boots or doing anything for some common person to do it. And this means, of course, that they must be made very rich without any other obligation than to produce an impression of almost godlike superiority on the minds of common people. In short, it is contended, you must make men ignorant idolaters before they will become obedient workers and law-abiding citizens.

To prove this, we are reminded that although nine out of ten voters are common workers, it is with the greatest difficulty that a few of them can be persuaded to vote for members of their own class. When women were enfranchised and given the right to sit in Parliament, the first use they made of their votes was to defeat all the women candidates who stood for the freedom of the workers and had given them years of devoted and distinguished service. They elected only one woman—a titled lady of great wealth and exceptionally fascinating personality.¹⁰

Now this, it is said, is human nature; and you cannot change human nature. On the other hand, it is maintained that human nature is the easiest thing in the world to change if you catch it young enough, and that the idolatry of the slave class and the arrogance of the master class are themselves entirely artificial products of education and of a propaganda that plays upon our infants long before they have left their cradles. An opposite mentality could, it is argued, be produced by a contrary education and propaganda. You can turn the point over in your mind for yourself; do not let me prejudice you one way or the other.

The practical question at the bottom of it all is how the income of the whole country can best be distributed from day to day. If the earth is cultivated agriculturally in vast farms with motor ploughs and chemical fertilizers, and industrially in huge electrified factories full of machinery that a girl can handle, the product may be so great that an equal distribution of it would provide enough to give the unskilled labourers as much as the managers and the men of the scientific staff. But do not forget that when you hear tales of modern machinery enabling one girl to produce as much as a thousand men could produce in the reign of good Queen Anne, that this marvellous increase includes things like needles and steel pens, and matches, which we can neither eat nor drink nor wear. Very young children will eat

needles and matches eagerly—but the diet is not a nourishing one. And though we can now cultivate the sky as well as earth, by drawing nitrogen from it to increase and improve the quality of our grass—and, consequently, of our cattle and milk and butter and eggs—Nature may have tricks up her sleeve to check us if the chemists exploit her too greedily.

And now to sum up. Wipe out from your dreams of freedom the hope of being able to do as you please all the time. For at least twelve hours of your day Nature orders you to do certain things, and will kill you if you don't do them. This leaves twelve hours for working; and here again Nature will kill you unless you either earn your living or get somebody else to earn it for you. If you live in a civilized country your freedom is restricted by the laws of the land, enforced by the police, who oblige you to do this, and not to do that, and to pay rates and taxes. If you do not obey these laws the courts will imprison you and, if you go too far, kill you. If the laws are reasonable and are impartially administered you have no reason to complain, because they increase your freedom by protecting you against assault, highway robbery, and disorder generally.

But as society is constituted at present, there is another far more intimate compulsion on you: that of your landlord and that of your employers. Your landlord may refuse to let you live on his estate if you go to chapel instead of to church, or if you vote for anybody but his nominee, or if you practice osteopathy, or if you open a shop. Your employer may dictate the cut, colour and condition of your clothes, as well as your hours of work. He can turn you into the street at any moment to join the melancholy band of lost spirits called the unemployed. In short, his power over you is far greater than that of any political dictator could possibly be. Your only remedy at present is the trade union weapon of the strike, which is only the old Oriental device of starving on your enemy's doorstep until he does you justice. Now, as the police in this country will not allow you to starve on your employer's doorstep, you must starve on your own—if you have one. The extreme form of the strike—the general strike of all workers at the same moment—is also the extreme form of human folly, as, if completely carried out, it would extinguish the human race in a week. And the workers would be the first to perish. The general strike is trade unionism gone mad. Sane trade unionism would never sanction more than one big strike at a time, with all the other trades working overtime to support it.

Now let us put the case in figures. If you have to work for twelve hours a day, you have no freedom at all. If you work eight hours a day, you have four hours a day to do what you like with, subject to the laws of the land and your possession of money enough to buy an interesting book or pay for a seat at the pictures, or, on a half holiday, at a football match, or whatever your fancy may be. But even here Nature will interfere a good deal; for if your eight hours work has been of a hard physical kind, and when you get home you want to spend your four hours in reading my books to improve your mind, you will find yourself fast asleep in half a minute, and your mind will remain in its present benighted condition.

I take it, then, that nine out of ten of us desire more freedom, and that this is why we listen to wireless talks about it. As long as we go on as we are—content with a vote and a dole—the only advice we can give one another is that of Shakespeare's Jago: "Put money in thy purse." But as we get very little money into our purses on pay day, and all the rest of the week other people are taking money out of it, Jago's advice is not very practical. We must change our politics before we can get what we want; and meanwhile we must stop gassing about freedom, because the people of England in the lump don't know what freedom is—never having had any. Always call freedom by its old English name of leisure; and keep clamouring for more leisure and more money to enjoy it in return for an honest share of work. And let us stop singing "Rule, Britannia,"¹¹ until we make it true. Until we do, let us never vote for a parliamentary candidate who talks about our freedom and our love of liberty; for whatever political name he may give himself, he is sure to be at bottom an anarchist who wants to live on our labour without being taken up by the police for it as he deserves.

And now suppose we at last win a lot more leisure and a lot more money than we are accustomed to. What are we going to do with them? I was taught in my childhood that Satan will find mischief still for idle hands to do.¹² I have seen men come into a fortune and lose their happiness, their health, and finally, their lives by it as certainly as if they had taken daily doses of rat poison instead of champagne and cigars. It is not at all easy to know what to do with leisure unless we have been brought up to it.

I will, therefore, leave you with a conundrum to think over. If you had your choice, would you work for eight hours a day and retire with a full pension at forty-five, or would you rather work four hours a day and keep on working until you are seventy? Now, don't send the answer to me, please: talk it over with your wife.

3.3.3 Annotations

1. This is a variant of the phrase ‘key of the door’, which means the right to come and go as one pleases, after one has come of age. By making a subtle change to the phrase, Shaw perhaps implies the limited freedom that the ordinary worker has, of choosing between one employer or another. The inner meaning conveyed by the cryptic tone of his comment, is however that such change hardly makes any significant impact in the life of the worker.
2. Refers to organisations which advance loans at high rates of interest, so much so that it often takes a lifetime to repay. This makes it an aspect of ‘slavery’ or the lack of freedom, caused by the desire to set up homes without understanding its long-term implications.
3. The original lyrics of a very popular song which run like this:

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there
Which seek thro’ the world, is ne’er met elsewhere
Home! Home!
Sweet, sweet home!
There’s no place like home
There’s no place like home!

The lyrics of the song are by the 19th century American actor and dramatist John Howard Payne, set to melody by the Englishman Sir Henry Bishop. As an interesting trivia, you might keep in mind that during the American Civil War, playing of the song was banned in Union Army camps, for it was too redolent of home and hearth and might therefore incite desertions.

4. Shaw’s reference here is to one of the basic ideas voiced by Thomas More (1478-1535) in his *Utopia*, which was originally written in Latin and translated into English only after his death.
5. The Magna Carta (The Great Charter in English) was a charter of liberties that King John of England was forced to accede to under threat of Civil War in 1215 AD. While it has undergone several alterations, the common Englishman is wont to believe that it remains one of the basic foundations

of jurisprudence in the land. For more on this, see the web link <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Magna-Carta>.

6. The outright defeat of the 'invincible' Spanish Armada in 1588 at the hands of the British naval forces led by Lord Charles Howard and Sir Francis Drake gave the England of Queen Elizabeth a world-wide name. It has hence remained a watershed not just in British military history, but also in the sense of national pride. For more details, log in to <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/spanish-armada-defeated>. In the present context however, Shaw's critique of such achievements is directed at how it has fostered a kind of demagogic rhetoric in the English national character, that is used by those in power to subdue the disempowered.
7. The reference here is to the consequences of the First World War (1914-18). While the UK and her allies won the war, and the countries Shaw mentions, did manage to overthrow monarchies, yet the reality is that such a development was neither intended. Nor approved by the victors – at least in cases of Russia and Turkey. However, the same demagoguery of the rhetoric of liberty that was pervasive, points to the element of hypocrisy in the character of England as a nation. You will need to assess Shaw's views on freedom in the light of these international developments to which he alludes time and again.
8. The factory Acts were designed to ensure proper working conditions, the Wages Boards to set up fair rates of pay and commensurate with working hours, while the Dole was a common term for Unemployment Pay. The New Deal was originally an American term that was applied to US President Roosevelt's schemes for social reconstruction in the 1930s. In the period of post-war reconstruction, similar social reforms were in vogue in England as well.
9. The reference here is to the system of paid education available in the private sector. It would be a costly affair afforded only by the wealthy, and was in sharp contrast with the system of state education that was more often than not, meant for the masses. Naturally, the approach to life as imparted through education, would be different in each sector. Shaw is here tracing the origins of the mental proclivity of imposing slavery and denying freedom in the very system of education.
10. The reference here is to Lady Astor, who was the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons in 1919. She took the Unionist seat of her

husband who had moved up to an inherited seat in the House of Lords. For more on the Astors, you may log in to <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lady-astor-becomes-mp>. It follows therefore that while the master class has this instinct of enforcing slavery and consequently withholding freedom, the working class too can often be its own obstacle in the path of freedom. The point here is that both the giving and the enjoying of freedom is more a state of the mind – whether of the individual, or of the collective unconscious.

11. This is the title of a ‘patriotic’ song, the refrain of which says that “Britons never, never, never will be slaves”.
12. Shaw is here referring to the poet Isaac Watts’ (1674-1748) verses and psalms that were popular among children of Shaw’s generation. His famous work *Divine Songs for Children* has this verse xxi “Against Idleness and Mischief” which runs:

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all day
From every opening flower!

In works of labour or of still
I would be busy too:
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.

You may also recall the saying, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop”.

➤ **The who’s who that Shaw mentions in “Freedom”:**

Karl Marx (1818-1883): Economist, sociologist, historian and a revolutionary. He along with Friedrich Engels Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*. He also wrote *Das Kapital*.

Voltaire (1694-1778): The greatest of all French writers.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778): French philosopher, writer and political theorist. He inspired the leaders of the French Revolution.

Thomas (Tom) Paine (1737-1809): English American writer and political pamphleteer.

William Cobbett (1763-1835): English, popular journalist, played an important political in the Industrial revolution.

Ferdinand Lassale (1825-1864): One of the founders of the German Labour movement.

Vladimir Illich Lenin (1870-1924): The leader of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and the architect and first head (1917-1924) of the Soviet state.

Leo Trotsky (1879-1940): An important leader in Russia's October Revolution in 1917.

Iago: The villain in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

(Compiled from 'Notes' to *Modern Prose* edited by Michael Thorpe and internet sources as mentioned)

3.3.4 Critical Analysis

Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style" says Bernard Shaw in his Preface to *Man and Superman*. His chief aim is to rouse the consciousness of the people about the situations in which they are placed. He exposes the sham and hypocrisy of the so-called democratic and socialistic professions in the basically capitalistic class structure of the society. Common people are lulled into a fond belief in the conventional morality and traditional values: "it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable", he says. In 'Freedom', he combines seriousness with laughter, philosophy with fun. Shaw is devastatingly frank and realistic as he goes along puncturing illusions and prejudices with fun and frolic.

He begins his essay in a light hearted manner. Men are slaves to necessities— they must sleep, wash, dress and women bear children. Men make slaves of others. Bees produce honey for us and horse is used for taking us from place to place. Men are cheated and made to work for eight to fourteen hours a day to provide for the family. The Governments, instead of checking this deceit, only collude to enforce slavery. Shaw builds up his arguments in a coherent structure. He preaches with exaggeration and overstatement, but these are meant for fun and irony. Shaw's irony is devastating when he says that men are made to believe that they are free because they have the right to vote. Democracy is the greatest irony. The master class through propaganda keeps the people in ignorance. They have been taught from childhood that England is a land of freedom. They refer to Magna Charta, Bill of Rights, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the execution of Charles I, the victories at Waterloo and Trafalgar. Factory Acts, Wages Boards, Free education and the New deal that

have been introduced to ensure the economic, political and cultural security of the people. However, the workers are made to pay rent from their wages, and they have to work more than they need.

The master class are also deluded—A gentleman who is educated at a public school and the university thinks that he is a superior man and the common men would serve him, he is satisfied with the status quo. Sometimes the agitated workers try to destroy the system. But then, they are coaxed back and they again surrender to the shrewd genius of the ruling class and finally end up accepting as their hero a leader who has histrionic skills. Shaw points out that the idolatry of the common people is at the root of their slavery and the dominance of the master class. Shaw gives one example of the idolatry of the common men. When women were given the right to vote, they defeated the women candidates who championed the cause of the workers. It is a matter of debate whether a different system of education and propaganda would change this arrogance of the aristocrats and the idolatry of the people. Moreover, there is the economic exploitation. Consumer goods are manufactured and basic needs of food and clothing are neglected. Consumer goods are enjoyed by the rich and the poor are deprived. Shaw humorously says that machines produce needles and needles are not eaten.

There is another restriction on freedom. The power of the landlord and that of the employer are dominant in a feudal capitalistic society. Common people have to live according to their wishes and whims. The general strike is not a very helpful weapon for obtaining the rights of the common people. Shaw indicates this in his characteristic paradoxical style.

So freedom according to Shaw is an illusion in the modern society. Man in the industrial age gets little or no leisure to enjoy books or other pastimes. Money is a prerequisite to enjoy leisure. Even if money is granted to workers, they would spend it in wine and other wayward activities. So men should think if he would work for eight hours a day and retire with a full pension, or he would work for four hours a day and go on working till seventy. The point is that in the modern socio-economic system, freedom is a dream. Common men have to think in terms of leisure which they can profitably utilize for intellectual pleasure.

➤ **Let us now try to grasp Shaw's points in a nutshell**

Let us now sum it up:

- Who is a free person?

A free person is one who can do what one likes. But there is no such person. Men are slaves to necessities. Women have the additional burden child-bearing.

- Jobs which men can shirk and how Governments make men slaves: Democracy i.e. the government by the people is the greatest hypocrisy.

- Slavery to nature and slavery to man:

Men are slaves to nature. Nature is kind. Man takes pleasure in slavery to Nature. But slavery of man to man is unpleasant. Man's domination over others is often cruel—it leads to class war between slaves and the masters.

- The master class deludes the people:

The master class through Parliament, schools, and newspapers tries to prevent men from realizing the slavery.

- Revolution is checked:

Great writers who champion the cause of the poor are described as atheists and libertines and scoundrels.

- The division between two classes in the society: This effort to delude the mass ultimately deludes the master class.

- Idolatry of the slave class and the arrogance of the masters:

The idolatry of the common people and the arrogance of the master class are the artificial products of education and propaganda.

- Freedom does not mean to do what one pleases; Man will have to do things at least for twelve hours a day to earn his living or to make others earn it for him.

- Individual liberty checked:

Shaw states further restrictions on liberty. The power of the landlord and the employer checks the individual liberty. Again, an employer may ask his employees to dress and work according to his wishes.

- Most people desire freedom:

The advice that Shaw gives is to keep money in the purse. But most of the people do not have enough money.

3.3.5 Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Why according to Shaw is any kind of freedom an anathema to modern society?
2. Comment on the style and structure of the essay Freedom

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. “They enforce your slavery and call it freedom”. Who are they? Show how Shaw brings out the paradox with his characteristic wit and humour.
2. “Though this prodigious mass of humbug is meant to delude the masses, it ends in deluding the master class much more completely.” What is the humbug referred to? How does it delude the master class?
3. How does Shaw indicate the idolatry of the slave class and arrogance of the master class? Can this be changed by country’s education and propaganda?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What does Shaw mean by “the key of the street” in his essay Freedom?
2. What are the choices before the workers today?
3. What are the different kinds of slavery that Shaw talks about in “Freedom”?
4. Why does Shaw ask the Britons to stop singing ‘Rule Britannia’?

3.3.6 George Orwell: A Literary Bio-Brief

George Orwell, whose real name was Eric Hugh Blair, was born in Motihari which was in the Bengal Presidency of India in 1903. His mother, Ida Mabel Blair spent her childhood in Moulmein Burma – the locale for this piece, where her father had certain ventures. Orwell was however taken to England when still a very small child, though in 1922 he came back at a mature age to serve as part of the imperial administration in Burma for five years. In 1929, he returned to England, took up diverse jobs of a teacher, a bookseller’s assistant and even as a tramp – all of which perhaps gave him the makings of the writer that he was to become in due course. Prior to this of course, he went to Eton in 1916 where he had the privilege of being taught by the likes of A. S. F Gow, Aldous Huxley and Steven Runciman. While Orwell made a mark with his linguistic flair, he never showed much interest in

academic studies and finally left Eton in 1921. It was his romantic ideas about the East that made the family decide upon a career in the Imperial Police for Orwell, and that is how he landed in Burma.

Orwell's first full length work of non-fiction, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), a record of 'low-life' based on first-hand experience, clearly shows his socialist tendencies voiced with strong moral authority. His next work *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) was a similarly moving account of the lives of miners in Northern England. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is a record of Orwell's disillusionments with Communist factions, acquired during his own experience of the Spanish Civil War in which he participated as a fighter on the Republican side.

Apart from his early works of fiction like *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspistras Flying* (1936) and *Coming Up for Air* (1939), Orwell is mostly remembered for his later works *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). An admirer of Jonathan Swift that he was, Orwell's mature work shows the use of a sharp and clean prose style which cuts deep. Though strongly committed to the Communist cause, the writer in him rose above party bias to make a mark as "a writer of exceptional integrity". (Michael Thorpe). The essence of Orwell's writing finds expression in his own words – "To write in plain, vigorous language, one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox". (qtd. In Michael Thorpe: 190)

3.3.7 Text of "Shooting an Elephant"

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people — the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.

*All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically — and secretly, of course — I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that, you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos — all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in *saecula saeculorum*¹, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.*

*One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism — the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful *in terrorem*.² Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone 'must'. It had been chained up, as tame elephants always are when their attack of 'must' is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout, the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had*

suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy, stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of 'Go away, child! Go away this instant!' and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie, almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelt the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and

meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant — I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary — and it is always unnerwing to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eight yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant — it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery — and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of 'must' was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes-faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I

should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd — seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives', and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing — no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a

toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives'; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim.

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole, actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick — one never does when a shot goes home — but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time — it might have been five seconds, I dare say — he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open — I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally, I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dash and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee³ coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

1936

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George Orwell: 'Shooting an Elephant'

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— 'Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays'. — 1950.

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- ‘Collected Essays’. — 1961.
- ‘The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell’. — 1968.

➤ **Annotations**

1. Meaning for generation after generation. The reference is obviously to prolonged colonial rule.
2. As a warning. Orwell’s initial response was to find a way that could frighten the elephant into leaving the locality where it was said to be on a rampage.
3. A colloquial term used to refer to Indians, mainly people from South India.

3.3.8 Critical Analysis

On reading the essay, you realize it is an account of an imperial officer in the British colony of Burma. For the historical record, the British conquered Burma over a period of sixty-two years (1823-1886) during which time there were as many as three Anglo-Burmese wars. It was initially incorporated into the Indian Empire and continued to be administered as a province of India, till as late as 1937. You find evidence of this in the reference to Indians in Burma in Orwell’s essay. Post 1937, Burma became a separate, self-governing colony and remained so till it attained independence in 1948. You have learnt from the earlier section on Orwell’s life that he held the position of Assistant Superintendent in the British Indian Imperial Police in Burma in the 1920s, though this is not adequate proof to substantiate that the account of the shooting of the elephant is an autobiographical one. What is however sure is that it is a terse account of the nature of the colonial mission from an insider’s perspective.

More than the events described in “Shooting an Elephant”, it is the workings of the mind of the author, and the candid conversational style of narration that give the essay abiding importance. From the textual point of view, you can sum up the drift of happenings in the following way:

- The narrator, a colonial officer in Moulmein, a place in lower Burma that was known for the use of elephants for hauling logs in timber firms, receives report of an elephant having run wild and causing rampage.
- The narrator reaches the bazaar, armed with his paltry rifle, but the very sight of him with his ammunition raises hopes in the minds of the assembled natives that the elephant would now be undone.

- The elephant is sighted in the paddy fields, and the mob that enthusiastically follows the narrator is expectant that the animal will now be shot. More than the damage it has caused to human life and property, it is the expectation of the spectacle that seems to drive the Burmese locals.
- The narrator realizes that it is gradually becoming incumbent upon him to kill the animal, though he knows full well that no sanity warrants such an act.
- He shoots the elephant again and again, and the animal dies a painful death well after the last shot has been fired.
- It is reported that by end of day, the dead elephant has been skinned and its flesh done with – all that is left is the skeleton.
- Opinion was divided on the rightness of the act of killing, but in the face of an action taken by an imperial officer, there was little that the Indian owner could have done.

Having read the point-wise details above, if you go back to the text of the essay, you will find that this is only one half of what Orwell has written. The other half, and the more important one, is the account of the constantly running interiorized thoughts of the narrator – and these are thought of an individual instead of the narrator's public pose as an imperial officer.

From this second and more pervasive point of view, "Shooting an Elephant" is actually a modernist critique of the entire imperial mission from an insider's point of view. If you notice the very opening lines of the essay, you will find that Orwell is clearly demarcating the dividing lines between the narrator as an individual and as a part of the imperial machinery. So he knows full well the hatred that "large numbers of people" in Moulmein have for him, in his capacity as sub-divisional police officer of the town. The hatred of the coloured for the white skinned is a basic aspect – manifest in the treatment that a native dishes out to a European woman in the bazaars when she is alone. And when it is a government official like the narrator is, the obvious increase in the degree of hatred is understandable.

The split between the narrator's private and public selves is evident in Orwell's essay. As one who sees the workings of the imperial machinery from close quarters, the narrator realizes both the futility and the inhumanity of it all. You can find a similar introspective narration in the words of Marlow in Joseph Conrad's novella

Heart of Darkness, as he sees the workings of the colonial project in his journey up the Congo river.

In Orwell however, we have a clear picture of how the imperial venture destroys not just the conquered, but the conqueror as well. The entire essay is one long exposition of the fact of the inherent problem of hegemony – far from being in absolute control of situations, the conqueror is actually subject to the will of the conquered people in that the former’s actions are, more often than not, a violation of self-reason and performed with the only objective of saving face.

Once you understand this paradox, you will see that it is hardly the shooting of the elephant that is the main subject of the essay. Rather, it is possible to read “Shooting an Elephant” as an extended dialogue with the self, undertaken by an individual who is self-critical of the culture that he represents. It is also one long attempt at justifying the very cause of his existence, his profession, and the hollow sham of appearing as the representative of authority in the public eye.

With these pointers, and with help from your counselor, you should now be able to identify the double layer on which Orwell’s text operates. Notice particularly, the closing lines of the essay where the narrator, despite official sanction, is at pains to justify the act of cruelty to himself. It goes to such an extent that the fact of the elephant having killed a native, becomes a veritable instrument of ratifying the act of having shot the elephant.

3.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

1. Show how Orwell formulates a critique of imperialism in “Shooting an Elephant”.
2. How does Orwell’s narrative art become a rhetorical device in “Shooting an Elephant”?

● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

1. Give an account of the narrator’s impression of how the mob builds up psychological pressure to shoot the elephant.
2. How does the narrator balance his inherent questioning self with his justifying self on the issue of shooting the elephant?

3. “A white man mustn’t be frightened in front of ‘natives’; and so, in general, he isn’t frightened.” How does this statement become the key issue in “Shooting an Elephant”?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Give some instances from the text that show the general hatred of the native Burmese towards their European masters.
2. What actual damage had the elephant caused?
3. What do you think are the reasons behind the narrator’s thoughts that it was actually not necessary to kill the elephant?
4. What were the different reactions to the shooting of the elephant?

3.3.10 Summing Up

In the two non-fictional prose pieces you have read in this unit, you will have noticed that the common element is that of discursive thoughts on the part of the writers – their ideas in the main question dominant ideas and value systems. While Shaw in “Freedom” questions the very existence of freedom among different sections of society, Orwell in “Shooting an Elephant” exposes the hollowness of the imperial enterprise. The interesting aspect in both these texts is that the criticisms are from writers who are themselves part of the society they are critiquing. This is one significant aspect of the modernist enterprise. In this sense of course, major novelists and poets of the Victorian period too have insistently questioned the dominant trends of the period. In the present context, what matters is the spirit of a genuine desire for the liberty and equality of all people – whether the master class or the governed, that drives both Shaw and Orwell.

3.3.11 Activity for the Learner

If texts like these interest you, try reading other works of George Bernard Shaw and George Orwell. Consider particularly the fact that while Shaw was of Irish origin, Orwell was born in India and spent a part of his life in active service of British imperial interests. Consider if these facts have had some bearings on the way these writers thought and wrote out their iconoclastic works during their entire literary career.

3.3.12 Comprehensive Reading

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