UNIT 4 *ARMS AND THE MAN*: THEMES AND CONCERNS

Structure

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first Unitof this block, we discussed the life and work of George Bernard Shaw, and in the next two Units we read andfamiliarised ourselves with Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*, its characters and some of its themes. In this final Unit of the block, we will be discussing the major themes and concerns of this play in detail. Before proceeding to study this Unit, you should definitely read the original play. Also try to watch a good production of the play on the internet.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you should be able to:

1. Identify and critically analyse the major themes of the play
2. Explain why *Arms and the Man* is considered to be an 'anti-romantic comedy.'

4.3 THE RECEPTION OF *ARMS AND THE MAN*

Arms and the Man was written between 26th November, 1893 and 30th March, 1894, and first performed on 21st April, 1894.The play is set against the background of the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885.

Michael O'Hara assesses the significance of this play thus: among Shaw's plays, *Arms and the Man* was the first play to be performed in the famous West End of London (where some of London's leading theatres are located), the first to be performed in both the United States and Germany, the first to inspire a musical version (with the title 'The Chocolate Soldier'), the first to become a full-length film, and the first to be directed by Shaw himself (145). It is clear that the play made Shaw a noted figure not just in British theatre but also on the international scene – it thereforemarked an important stage in Shaw's career as a playwright.

When the play was first performed in London, it created a huge sensation. However, a large section of the audience also found the play somewhat confusing.The actor Yorke Stephens,

who played the role of Bluntschli, the Swiss captain in the playon the opening night (21st April, 1894) writes,

> "As for the first night of *Arms and the Man* - who will ever forget it? The whole house was bewildered. They didn't know when to laugh, or where, or how. … every evening was a still more puzzling ordeal. The play created a certain sensation, there is no doubt about that, but the great outer public simply couldn't understand - or didn't take the trouble to understand - what it was driving at"(130).

After the first performance of the play, Shaw was requested to make a speech to the audience. When someone greeted him with disrespectful shouts, he remarked with characteristic wit, "I assure the gentleman in the gallery that he and I are of exactly the same opinion, but what can we do against a whole house who are of the contrary opinion?" (Quoted in Satran 12) According to the famous poet W.B. Yeats, the first performance of *Arms and the Man*was sensational: "from that moment,"writes Yeats, "Bernard Shaw became the most formidable man in modern letters"(127-28).What Yeats emphasises here is that with this performance of *Arms and the Man,* Shaw was acknowledged as one of the most powerful voices in the literary world of his time.

What Shaw himself writes in one of his letters, about the opening performance shows how he realised that the audience had failed to arrive at his message in the play: "I had the curious experience of witnessing an apparently insane success … and of going before the curtain to tremendous applause, the only person in the theatre who knew that the whole thing was a ghastly failure" (*Collected Letters 1874-1897*, p 462).

Many critics wrote against the play after its first performance; some of them felt that it was mocking soldiers and the military. In the July 1894 issue of the '*New Review*', Shaw wrote a long article titled 'A Dramatic Realist to his Critics', in which he countered the criticisms raised by theatre enthusiasts and critics, against the play.*Arms and the Man,* is not as complex as many of Shaw's later plays, such as *Man and Superman,Back to Methuselah* or *Saint Joan*. Why then did the first performance of this play create mixed reactions among its viewers? Also, why did the playwright, who also directed the first production, view it as a "ghastly failure"?

Critics offer several explanations: according to David Satran, although Shaw intended the play to depict the harsh reality of war and soldiering through the experiences of Bluntschli, he immediately realized that "the play and its hero had been misread as farce."Many members of the audience failed to understand that characters like Bluntschli were meant to force them to rethink their false ideals of love and war. Instead they ridiculed such characters for falling short of their romantic expectations and idealizations. Therefore, "the play failed in its critique of the romanticizing oflove and war"(Satran 12).Thus, many people in the audience mistakenly saw the place as a farce, and Bluntschli as a comic character. They failed to see that through a down-to-earth character like Bluntschli, Shaw was presenting an anti-romantic view of war. Another critic David Sauer expresses the view that the play failed in evoking the expected response from the audience, because of the complexity of Raina's character, which "makes difficult both acting the play and responding to it." (Sauer 163).

Thus, even though *Arms and the Man* proved to be Shaw's first commercial success on the London stage, Shaw was concerned that a large section of the audience failed to understand

its message. This also created in him a new awareness of his role on the London theatre scenario. David Satran points out that Shaw's aim as a playwright and director, was to transform the theatre, " a popular, middle and upper-class venue into a site for social dialogue and political action" (Satran 13).However the reception of *Arms and the Man*, continues Satran, made it clear that he faced a huge challenge in bringing about such a transformation. The London theatre goers, Shaw realised , were not yet prepared for bringing about such a transformation, mainly because the kind of plays that they watched, did not encourage such abilities in them. Shaw felt that the public would have to be trained in such skills by playwrights like himself. He felt that the conventional drama, with its conveniences of plot and fondness for exaggeration, could never succeed in helping his audience free itself from its belief in false ideals. "His audience having been spoon-fed on little else other than farce and "well-made" plays, has come to demand little more than much of the same." He therefore sets out to improve the taste of his audience (Satran 13 -18).

Here Satran emphasises Shaw's general dissatisfaction with the kind of plays that were being presented on the London stage, and his conviction that a new kind of drama had to be introduced. You may remember that in Unit 1 we had discussed how Shaw was extremely critical of nineteenth century British drama, especially of the well-made play and the farce, whixh were the most popular forms of dramatic entertainment. Shaw focused in the rest of his writing career, on the task of educating the London theatre audiences, and in creating in them the capacity to fully exploit the political potential of theatre.

Check Your Progress 1

Write a short note in your own words on the reception of the first performance of Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*in London.

4.4 BERNARD SHAW'S VIEWS ON WAR

Shaw held strong views on war and military leadership, which he constantly expressed through his letters, speeches, pamphlets and plays. His view, as expressed in these different media, was basically that all war is a"crime based on the determination of the soldier to stick at nothing to bring it to an end and get out of the daily danger of being shot" ('The Human Review', 1901, January). As theatre critic Christopher Innes notes, in the early years of the twentieth century, in response to the Boer war, Shaw wrote a number of essays for periodicals, as well as public letters to newspapers, and delivered several major lectures, attacking jingoistic militarism. In the years before the First World War, he published several essays on disarmament, arguing for an international agreement to outlaw war. Shaw published his thoughts about war, especially in the context of World War I, in his pamphlet "Common Sense about the War" as a supplement to the 'New Statesman' on November14, 1914 (Innes 203). In fact, his pacifist views made him extremely unpopular and nearly got him arrested during the years of World War I (Sternlicht 4).

4.5 THE THEME OF WAR

Arms and the Man (1894) was probably the earliest play in which Shaw expressed his anti-war position – in later plays like *The Man of Destiny* (1895), *The Devil's Disciple* (1896), *Major Barbara* (1907), and *Saint Joan* (1924), he continued to critique war and the military.

As Mendelsohn points out in the essay 'Shaw's Soldiers', Shaw's deep interest in military matters, appears in a number of his plays in which he constantly examines questions of bravery, cowardice, military genius, romantic glory, and death on the battlefield (30).

Apart from popular plays by Shaw, such as *Arms and the Man, Major Barbara, The Man of Destiny*, and *Saint Joan*, some of his lesser known plays also engage with themes of war and military glory. An example is the play *O'Flaherty VC* (1915), set against the background of Ireland during the First World War. In a study comparing *O'Flaherty VC* with Sean O'Casey's play. *The Silver Tassie*, Heinz Kosok points out how both these plays, are critiques of all wars:

> "… both plays go beyond the specific situation of Ireland in that they are uncompromising anti-war plays which use the front-line experience of the First World War to call into question any type of war, conducted for any imaginable reason. Although in each case one character is awarded the Victoria Cross, such concepts as "courage" and "heroism" are revealed to be myths created for obvious propaganda purposes, while the dominant emotion of the front-line soldier is shown to be fear…. In this final aspect, the universal appeal against war, any war, these two plays go beyond the attitude revealed in most plays that were written in England. Perhaps it needed the authors' specific Irish perspective to unmask the complete futility of war." (Heinz 25).

Here the critic rightly points out how, in many of his plays, Shaw tried to show 'courage' and 'heroism' as myths, since the soldier on the front-line, like Bluntschli in this play, would be primarily interested in saving his own life. In fact, in many of his plays, we find Shaw, the committed pacifist, working to "unmask the complete futility of war" and trying to show the world, how meaningless and terrible it is.(Refer Unit 1 to see how in the play *Heartbreak House* Shaw expresses his frustration with the intellectuals of Europe, for failing to prevent the catastrophe of World War I)

Check Your progress 2

What were Shaw's views on war? How does Shaw express his views on war in plays other than *Arms and the Man*? Write your answer in your own words.

4.5.1 The Title of the Play

As we discussed in the previous Unit, the title of the play is an ironic reference to the opening lines of Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aenid*:

"Arms and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate,
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan Shore."

As W.H. Semple, points out, at the beginning of the *Aenid*, Virgil makes it clear that war will be his main theme (*Armavirumquecano*), and gives hints of all the battles to follow in the various Books of this great epic. Ultimately, he condemns war in scathing language and shows his awareness of the pathetic futility of war ("War and Peace in Virgil's *Aenid*"). Shaw uses the first few words of the *Aenid* in an ironic sense – his play also focuses on "arms and

the man", but it is not a glorification of man's heroic exploits and military valour, but an attempt to reveal the harsh reality of war, its essential meaninglessness and brutality. We also have to remember that, despite the fact that the *Aenid*is largely devoted to the theme of war, Virgil also expresses his awareness of the horror of war.

4.5.2 De-romanticising war in *Arms and the Man*:

Christopher Innes sees *Arms and the Man*, as an inversionor parody of the 'military melodrama' which was very popular in the nineteenth century (207). How does Shaw create such a parody of military melodrama in *Arms and the Man*? He does this by making the play a satire of romantic notions of love and war, which were the typical characteristics of military melodrama. His satire of romanticised views of war is created by contrasting the indiscreet Sergius Saranoff, who is very theatrical in his displays of military valour, with the cautious and down-to-earth Bluntschli. Sergius Saranoff himself acknowledges that Bluntschli, despite his lack of valorous pretensions and bravado, is an excellent fighter and leader. The play forces the thinking members of the audience to revise their views about the ideal soldier.

David Satran explains how in *Arms and the Man*, Shaw gradually builds up his satire of theatrical, "romanticized notions of war", and examines what it means to actually be a soldier on the battlefield.

> "To achieve this end, he offers his viewers a Swiss captain to portray the reality of a professional soldier's experience both on and off the battlefield. Shaw casts Bluntschli as a mercenary in service to the Serbians during their November 1885 invasion of Bulgaria. *Arms and the Man* opens with a Bulgarian cavalry charge that compels him to scale Raina Petkoff's window and hide in her bedchamber. Once there, he disappoints the young woman's every expectation of how a soldier should behave. Instead of behaving nobly and heroically – as she believes her beloved Sergius Saranoff did, by leading the charge against the Serbs – Bluntschli cowers in her bedchamber, making every effort not to be found." (Satran 13)

This contrast between the heroic, gallant Sergius, who successfully led a charge against the Bulgarians, and the Swiss captain Bluntschli, who tries to hide in a lady's bedroom so that his enemies do not discover him, is presented through the reactions of the young Raina.It is only later in the play that we learn that the Bulgarian charge led by the impetuous Sergius, had won their victory merely through a stroke of luck, since the Serbs led by Bluntschli had accidentally been sent the wrong-sized cartridges. The description of Sergius's charge that Bluntschli gives, unaware that Raina is betrothed to him, is one of the comic highlights of the play:

> He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills. We nearly burst with laughter at him…. And there was Don Quixote flourishing like a drum major, thinking he'd done the cleverest thing ever known, whereas he ought to be court-martialled for it. Of all the fools ever let loose on a field of battle, that man must be the very maddest. He and his regiment simply committed suicide—only the pistol missed fire, that's all.
> (Act 1, *Arms and the Man*)

Raina is furious to hear her hero being mocked in this manner, and makes it known that she is betrothed to Sergius. Bluntschli is apologetic for having spoken disrespectfully about her fiancé and remarks "(shamefacedly, but still greatly tickled)… But when I think of him, charging the windmills and thinking he was doing the finest thing … (chokes with suppressed laughter)."

From Bluntschli's report of Sergius's "gallant charge", it is clear that if the Serbs had received the right cartridges, the outcome of the battle could have been very different; Sergius's "heroism" is thus built on very shaky grounds. Raina herself does have an uneasy sense of self doubt about Sergius's heroism at one point, when she says:

> "Raina: Well, it came into my head just as he was holding me in his arms and looking into my eyes that perhaps we only had our heroic ideas because we are so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest….I wondered whether all his heroic qualities and his soldier ship might not prove mere imagination when he went into a real battle. I had an uneasy fear that he might cut a poor figure there beside all those clever Russian officers."
> (Act 1 *Arms and the Man*)

On hearing about Sergius's triumph, she realises that she was wrong in having "doubted him", and that he is "just as splendid and noble as he looks."Raina worships her heroic Sergius and expresses her admiration for him in the most sublime language, while contemptuously referring to Bluntschli, as 'the choclate cream soldier'. As he hides in the young lady's bedroom, Bluntschli becomes, as Satran points out a 'foil' to the triumphant Sergius.

> "Though Bluntschli manages to evade the Bulgarians' charge, he unwittingly finds himself performing as Saran off 's foil. His sudden appearance presents everyone watching with an unplanned opportunity to rethink commonly accepted views on soldiering, war, and masculinity. For Raina these views had until then been informed in equal parts by Saranoff's posturing and a regular diet of romance novels and opera performances, while the audience, Shaw rightly suspected, was likely to have a similarly narrow set of influences. Together the two men offer Raina competing conceptions of what it means to be a soldier, and through them Shaw aims for the play to challenge the audience's ingrained beliefs." (Satran 15).

Satran here makes the very important point that the audience's and Raina's views about war and military glory are derived from "romance novels and opera performances", and are therefore not grounded in reality. Shaw's attempt is to highlight the absurdity of such romantic and unrealistic views of war, which for the soldier on the field who comes face-to-face with death is a traumatic experience. When he seeks refuge in Raina's room, Bluntschli is not only hungry and exhausted, he is also a nervous wreck; as he tells Raina, after facing constant shell attacks on the field, he is "as nervous as a mouse," and would start crying if she scolded him like a child. He represents the plight of the soldier who actually had to face the stresses and hardships of the battlefield. It is through the contrast between the vastly different soldering styles of the two men, Sergius and Bluntschli, that Shaw makes Raina, and through her, his audience, revise their romantic, theatrical ideas about what it actually means to fight it out on a battlefield.

However, it is only a discerning spectator who would realise what the playwright was demanding from his audience. The general mass of the audience fed, like Raina, on a diet of melodrama, would find Bluntschli to be, as Raina says, “a poor soldier”, a pathetic failure, a farcical character. This is why the audience at the early performances laughed over the play, making Shaw remark that the performance of *Arms and the Man* was “a ghastly failure”.

Probably, what made Bluntschli look even more like a farcical character, is his practice of carrying chocolate in his pockets, instead of cartridges. He tells Raina, "I have no ammunition," and immediately goes on to add, "What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead; and I finished the last cake of that hours ago." To an audience that expects a soldier to be a gallant, swashbuckling hero, a soldier who goes to battle with chocolate in his pockets, must have appeared truly comic.

Raina is "out- raged in her most cherished ideals of manhood" when she asks, "Do you stuff your pockets with sweets - like a schoolboy - even in the field?" (401). Bluntschli humorously points out that an experienced soldier could be identified by what he carried in his pockets: “you can always tell an old soldier by the insides of his holsters and cartridge boxes. The young ones carry pistols and cartridges, the old ones grub.”

Raina fails to understand the practical wisdom of Bluntschli’ sremark. Satran explains that though the play's audience may not have known it, soldiers like Bluntschli did in fact carry chocolate on the battlefield to provide themselves with ready nourishment. “Altogether caught up in idealized notions of war, soldiering and masculinity, Raina dubs Bluntschli a “chocolate cream soldier” to signify his supposed immaturity, lack of character and failure to fulfil her ideals: “Oh, you are a very poor soldier, a chocolate cream soldier.” (15-16). Raina realises only much later that the ‘chocolate cream soldier’ is actually the true fighter and military leader as compared to her supposedly valorous hero, who is as Bluntschli says as foolish as Don Quixote on the battlefield.

One of the issues raised by critics against the play was that it deliberately mocked soldiers and brave men who went to war by portraying them as comic “chocolate cream soldiers”. To such critics Shaw responded in the following manner in his essay ‘A Dramatic Realist to His Critics’: “The notion that there could be any limit to a soldier's courage, or any preference on his part for life and a whole skin over a glorious death in the service of his country, was inexpressibly revolting to them.” Shaw emphasises here that his critics had a very unrealistic view of war and soldiers, since they could not accept the fact that any soldier would prefer life to a “glorious death in the service of his country.”

Shaw argues that the difference between real warfare and warfare on the stage lies in the fact that in real warfare, there is real personal danger, the sense of which is constantly present to the mind of the soldier, whereas in the article warfare there is nothing but glory. “Hence Captain Bluntschli who thinks of a battlefield as a very busy and very dangerous place, is incredible to the critic who thinks of it only as a theatre in which to enjoy the luxurious excitements of patriotism, victory and bloodshed without risk or retribution.” (‘Dramatic Realist’35,). In *Arms and the Man* as well as many other plays, Shaw attempts to compel his readers to accept the reality that the battlefield is “ a very busy and very dangerous place” and definitely not a theatre for “patriotism, victory and bloodshed.”

In his study 'Shaw's Soldiers,' Mendelsohn explains that Shaw's criticism of the military establishment was based on his belief that with generally, any soldier is unaware of anything beyond fear and self preservation, often commanded by incapable, inefficient, and indifferent officers, and blindly guided by outdated or inadequate regulations (Mendelsohn 31).

> "*Arms and the Man* is the early comedy in which Shaw has the most fun with this perception of the military. Using as his principal targets the foolish Major Petkoff and the romantic blunderer Sergius, Shaw tweaks the noses of the Army establishment of his - or any other - day. Petkoff and Sergius, drawn away from the high society, abandon the comforts and luxuries of home life in a self-centered attempt to cover themselves with glory; what happens to their troops is of no great consequence. (Mendelsohn 31-32)

Though Shaw was generally critical of the military, most critics agree that in *Arms and the Man*, he does not satirise the real soldier. He attacks "romanticism and pomposity, but the careful reader also perceives that he is not denigrating bravery and strength" (Mendelsohn 29). In the same spirit, David Satran says, "Bluntschli, with his daring escape and chocolate eating, does not satirize the soldiering profession; rather, he satirizes its romanticization. The play is not against soldiers, nor does it ever speak ill of them"(Satran23).

Thus, we have to remember that in this play, Shaw does not ridicule the profession of the soldier, he satirises the romantic views of war that were prevalent among some sections of his audience, and formed the theme of military melodramas. In fact, Shaw projects a realistic view of the extreme dangers and trauma of the life of the soldier on the actual battlefield.

4.6 THE THEME OF LOVE

Arms and the Man questions highly idealised expressions of love, just as it questions romanticised views of war; as David Satran points out, in the play Shaw "sets out to challenge conventional beliefs of sacrosanct subjects, love and war foremost among them" (Satran 16). From the beginning of the play, Raina is constantly expressing her 'pure' and 'sublime' feelings for Sergius, addressing him as "my hero." Raina even declares, "My relation to him is the one really beautiful and noble part of my life."

> (*Raina, left alone, goes to the chest of drawers, and adores the portrait there with feelings that are beyond all expression. She does not kiss it or press it to her breast, or shew it any mark of bodily affection; but she takes it in her hands and elevates it like a priestess.*)

RAINA.
(*looking up at the picture with worship.*) Oh, I shall never be unworthy of you any more, my hero—never, never, never.

(*She replaces it reverently*

When Sergius returns after the battle, they greet each other rapturously:

SERGIUS.
(*hastening to her, but refraining from touching her without express permission*). Am I forgiven?
RAINA.
(*placing her hands on his shoulder as she looks up at him with admiration and worship*). My hero! My king.
SERGIUS.
My queen! (*He kisses her on the forehead with holy awe.*)

The critic David Sauer says that when Raina speaks to Sergius of the higher love, she conforms to Shaw's definition of the "Womanly Woman" in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Such a woman, says Shaw, deceives herself in the idealist fashion by denying that the love which her suitor offers her has any tinge of physical attraction. It is, she declares, "a beautiful, disinterested, pure, sublime devotion by which a man's life is exalted and purified, and a woman's rendered blest." (Sauer 159).

The interactions between Raina and Sergius are entirely defined by such conventions:

SERGIUS.
Dearest, all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him!
RAINA.
And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. (*Very solemnly.*)
Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.
SERGIUS.
My lady, and my saint! (*Clasping her reverently.*)

Almost immediately after this exchange of sublime feelings, it is ironical that we find Sergius flirting with the servant girl Louka and trying to embrace her.

Sergius: Louka, do you know what the higher love is?
LOUKA.
(*astonished*). No, sir.
SERGIUS.
Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it.

Sergius's words express his difficulty in maintaining the affected pose of 'higher love.' Sergius also seems to realise the emptiness of some of his cherished ideals and exclaims at the end: "Oh! War! War! The dream of patriots and heroes! A fraud Bluntschli, a hollow sham, like love." Later in the play, we find Raina, asking herself, "Oh, what sort of god is this, that I have been worshipping?" when she finds out that Segius has been flirting with Louka. Now that Bluntschli has "found her out", she has discarded her affectation of a "noble attitude and a thrilling voice". She also gets rid of her romantic illusion of 'higher love', which like her views about war and soldiers, is probably derived from her reading of romances. Raina learns to shed such deceptions, and to be honest to herself. She changes and grows to adopt a more mature view of love based on honest, mutual understanding. The audience grows and matures with her and learns "that love requires honesty and respect more than romance; that soldiering is an awful and deadly business;" (Satran 30).

4.7 CLASS DISTINCTIONS IN THE PLAY

Most of the characters in this play, aspire to move to a superior social class, and thus class distinctions and mobility between social classes becomes a major concern of the play. Throughout the play, the entire Petkoff family is seen to be very conscious of the need to appear "genteel'' and cultivated. Both Raina and her mother take utmost care to be well dressed, according to the latest Viennese fashions. In the very first Act, Catherine is introduced as someone who is "determined to be a Viennese lady and to that end wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions." Raina boastfully tells Bluntschli that the Petkoffs, are "civilised people", not "ignorant country folk" and adds, so that Bluntschli gets a clear picture of how genteel they are: "We go to Bucharest every year for the opera season, and I have spent a whole month in Vienna." Like her parents, Raina is aware of the superior social standing of her family; she boasts to Bluntschli that her house is equipped with all amenities like an inside staircase. However it is their library that is the Petkoffs greatest claim to culture and refinement – all of them are constantly boasting about it, though eventually, it turns out to be a "single fixed shelf stocked with old paper-covered novels". When Bluntschli asks Petkoff to accept him as Raina's suitor, Catherine politely turns him down, as the Petkoff family is one of the finest families in Bulgaria, while Bluntschli is only a common soldier. However, when they learn how wealthy he is, they are willing to overlook this difference in social status.

The servant girl Louka has ambitions to move above her station; she is naturally rebellious and does not show the servility expected of her class. She despises Nicola for having the soul of a servant, and shows her independent nature by declaring that no one could put the soul of a servant into her. Nicola warns Louka about the kind of power that the rich have when the lower classes "try to rise out of their poverty." Louka taunts Sergius that he dare not marry her, as she is a servant, and he is afraid of what society would think of such a marriage. Such taunts provoke Sergius to eventually declare his love for her. Louka, who is naturally rebellious, has been questioning the rigidities of the class system from the beginning, and her proposed marriage to Sergius gives her the opportunity to move to a higher station. As a socialist, Shaw was preoccupied with class and class divisions. In this play, he depicts the complications arising due to strict class divisions in nineteenth century Europe and the problems encountered while trying to overcome them.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit by looking at the reception of the play *Arms and the Man* and discussed the issues which made it difficult for large sections of the audience to understand the message of the play. In the next sections we discussed Shaw's views on war and the satire of romantic views of war in *Arms and the Man*. We also saw how this play challenges idealised expressions of love and came to understand how, by challenging romanticised and idealised views of love and war, this play is truly an anti-romantic comedy. The unit also briefly discusses the issue of class and class distinctions in this play.

4.9 GLOSSARY

1. Ghastly: unpleasant.

2. Farce: a funny play based on ridiculous and unlikely situations.
3. Critique : to express your opinions about a work or idea; an assessment.
4. Denouement: the final part of a play in which all matters are explained or complications resolved.
5. Jingoistic: having an attitude that one's own country is best.
6. Disarmament: reducing the size of the army or the number of weapons of a country.
7. Pacifist: a person who believes that war and violence are wrong.
8. Parody: a piece of writing, acting etc. that deliberately copies the style of some other work in order to amuse or ridicule.
9. Melodrama: a play in which the characters and events are so exaggerated that they do not seem real.
10. Bravado: confident behaviour that is intended to impress.
11. Foil: a person whose qualities contrast with the qualities of another person.
12. Swashbuckling: full of action and adventure.

Unit End Questions

1. Justify the title of *Arms and the Man.*
2. Explain why *Arms and the Man* is considered to be an "anti-romantic comedy"?
3. Read any other play that deals with the theme of war, written by a playwright of your choice. Attempt a comparative study of that play and *Arms and the Man.*

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