



Concept of Goodness in Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuan

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Abstract

The concept of goodness is one the most generalized and also most celebrated human virtues. It has also been variously interpreted. Though we may have disagreement over what is good, we somehow tend to believe that good is good. One of the aims of the Brechtian Theater had been to make the audience question things they have been taking for granted. He wanted them to question the existing socio-economic order which religion and culture seek to reinforce and protect. The concept of universal human virtues is subtly woven into the religious cultural, socio-economic constructs but appears to be apolitical and natural. Brecht in his plays tries to lay bare the arbitrariness of these virtues. The paper seeks to explore how the concept of goodness is problematized in Brecht's play The Good woman of Setzuan and studies various complications and contradictions that are linked with seemingly innocent concept. The paper attempts to study the dilemma at the heart of this concept of goodness which is benevolent, sacrificing, hence often self destroying. The paper explores these issues mainly through the study of the character of Shen Te. The character of Shen Te has to split into two antithetical personalities for self preservation which ironically also seem self-destruction. Apart from the fact that goodness makes it difficult for the good person to survive, another significant aspect of the issue further problematizes and complicates the idea of goodness. Goodness does not serve the purpose of goodness. It does not breed or promote goodness rather ruins it, and promotes evil and cunningness. It encourages indifference, coldness and selfishness in those who are helped by her. Goodness in the play comes out as a kind of aesthetic pleasure indulged in. The audience realises the contradictions at the heart of the idea of goodness. The audience are forced to question traditional attitude towards goodness and ask how good 'good' is.

The concept of virtues has been inextricably linked with religious thought and faith. With secularization of ways of thinking many philosophers, thinkers, artists and writers time and again at various junctures in history felt the need to question the established modes of thoughts. Many of them did succeed in questioning the prevailing norms in their own way. But most of them ended up establishing another system of thought that accepts a different set of or new interpretation of virtues. There had always been some direct or indirect affirmation of certain virtues which are desired to be present in human beings to justify or affirm their humanity.

What Brecht liked about Marxism was its skepticism, its tendency to doubt and question everything. One of the aims of the Brechtian Theater had been to make the audience question things they have been taking for granted. He wanted them to question the existing socio-economic order which religion and culture seek to reinforce and protect. The concept of universal human virtues is subtly woven into the religious cultural, socio-economic constructs but it appears to be apolitical and natural. Brecht in his plays tries to lay bare the arbitrariness of these virtues and distorts one to one to one correspondence by using dissonances. These virtues are loaded with meanings and significances by a long history of political, social religious and literary tradition. Brecht explores and exposes the contradictions within these apparently apolitical universal human virtues. In a topsy-turvy world, where virtues are sign of something wrong and more than that virtues are not always virtues, or they do not remain



as meaningful as they should be or they do not mean what we think they should.

The concept of goodness is one the most generalised and celebrated human virtues. It has also been variously interpreted. Though we may have disagreement over what is good, we somehow tend to believe that good is good. The paper seeks to explore how the concept of goodness is problematized in Brecht's play *The Good woman of Setzuan* and studies various complications and contradictions that are linked with seemingly innocent concept of goodness.

The title of the play hints at the central problem of the play, that is goodness which is personified by the central character of the play, the good person Shen Te who also personifies the contradictions of the concept. The paper attempts to study the dilemma at the heart of this concept of goodness which is benevolent, sacrificing, hence often self destroying. The paper explores these issues mainly through the study of the character of Shen Te. The character of Shen Te has to split into two antithetical personalities for self preservation which ironically also seem self-destruction.

The play is about a young woman, a prostitute named Shen Te, as she struggles to lead a life that is "good". according to the terms of the morality that is taught by the gods, and to which lip service is paid by her fellow citizens of Setzuan without allowing herself to be abused and trod upon by those who would accept and more often than not abuse her goodness. Her neighbours and even her friends prove so brutal in the fulfilling of their own needs, that in order to protect herself, she invents an alter-ego, a male cousin Shui Ta who is cold and stern, a protector of Shen Te interests. Thus, the difficult theme of qualitative goodness which seemed so simple and obvious in the title of the play is rendered unstable. Brecht's strong belief in Marxist doctrine is made evident through the play as he attempts to redefine contemporary morality and altruism in strong economic terms. Absolute altruism that is a

moral code unconditional giving with no return is put in direct conflict with Shen Te's capitalist society of exploitation, the implication being that economic systems dictate morality.

Shen Te is the good woman of the play, hence its protagonist. Three gods descend on earth in search of a good person. They have wandered far and wide in search of only one good person. But they have failed to find even one good person so far. They come to the town of Setzuan with the same purpose. But people here are as hard hearted as anywhere else. Wang, water seller who anticipates their arrival tries to arrange lodgings for the gods. But all the doors are shut on his face. Nobody is ready to accommodate even gods for a single night, forget the human beings. In such desperate situation there is only one person, a woman, a prostitute who shows her willingness to accommodate gods. But she has her own problems that result from the prevalent socio-economic conditions. She is waiting for a customer. She has to entertain her customer in order to pay her rent. But still with a bit of reluctance, she agrees to take gods into her lodging so that they can spend their night. She willingly sacrifices a day's, rather a night's income, though that means a lot to her. Gods are pleased with her. They think they have found the person they were looking for. The gods are pleased with her hospitality which she shows in spite of her deprived economic condition. Being the good natured soul she is she tries to confess that she is not at all good or that good as perceived by the gods. She tells them that she sells her body in a vile way in order to survive economically. She also tells them that she has to break few of their commandments; even then she is living in poverty. But gods do not pay much attention as they are desperate to find one good person in order to justify and maintain the existing world order of which they are a part. But she keeps on asserting that it is impossible to retain or maintain goodness under deprived economic conditions.

Shen Te: Stop, illustrious ones! I'm not sure you're right. I'd like to be good, it's



true, but there's rent to pay. And that's not all: I sell myself for a living. Even so I can't make ends meet, there's too much competition. I'd like to honour my father and mother and speak nothing but the truth and not covet my neighbour's house. I should love to stay with one man But how? How is it done? Even breaking a few of your Commandments, I can hardly manage. (26)

She is the one good person on whom they can rest their hopes of rightness or justification of the existing world order. With the money gods gave her, Shen Te buys a tobacco shop in order to turn over a new leaf and do some good in the community she is now in. Mrs. Shin recognizes that goodness is Shen Te's weakness and she takes full advantage of that weakness. She deliberately use such language so that she feels guilty for depriving her children of their home so that she can claim rice from her as if it were her right than taking it as a kind of charity on part of Shen Te. Despite this Shen Te feeds her and cares for her and her children, when they are in 'need', sharing rice with them. Towards the end of the conversation between her and Mrs. Shin, it is Shen Te who should get angry but the case is otherwise. Rather it is Mrs. Shin who starts leaving in anger and Shen Te starts pleading

Mrs. Shin: (screeching): I've got to have it. Strip the clothes from my back and Then cut my throat? I know what I'll do: I'll dump my children on your Doorstep [she snatches the pot out of Shen Te's hands]

Shen Te: please don't be angry. You'll spill the rice. (29-30)

One is not impressed by her generosity. Rather her attempt to please her in spite of her rudeness and her arrogance irritates the audience. The Wife and Husband come to live with her. They are the people who took Shen Te into their care when she first came into the country. They sentimentally try to remind her that they offered her first home in the city.

But Shen Te informs that they let her stay with them as long as her money lasted and then threw her out in the street.

But she not only allows them and their long list of relatives to stay in her very small one room apartment, but allows them to bully her around in her own house. She desperately watches the never ending line of relatives arrive to live there as if it was their right. She meekly stands there half heartedly welcoming them.

When a Vagrant comes to the door begging she offers help and kindness, whereas the Husband and the Wife offer taunts and rejection. When she gives the beggar a cigarette free of charge, she is told if she is opening a shop today tomorrow it would be closed. This underlines for the audience that good deeds can often have negative repercussions for the deed doer.

The carpenter knows that it is not easy to extract money from Mrs. Shin. He sees that Shen Te is a soft person who is not too worldly wise and realizes that she is in a vulnerable position. So he wants his bill paid by her. She does not disregard the bill as Mrs. Shin does or as the Wife advises her. Wife advises her never to recognize a claim but she thinks generously that as the Carpenter has rendered a job, it should be paid for. By whom is not the question and why by her- she never asks the question. She only feels bad as she is not able to pay not even thinking that somebody else's responsibility is being thrust upon her. Her idealism in the wake of Mrs. Shin's dishonesty and Carpenter's rudeness and arrogance looks sentimentalism verging on foolishness.

She is unable to deal with people around her due to her lack of confidence that seems inevitably connected with her attempt to be good, her attempt to please and her lack of knowledge of practical affairs. This means ruin for her. Therefore people around her along with her and perhaps more than her feel the need for someone, who can save her, hence save them.



As she comes to have money she hopes to do lot of good with it. But she is not aware of the fact that it is not easy to maintain that level of money in the world that is full of competition and abounds in parasites, the people who are ready to live off other people, even to eat at their roots. She thought that by getting small amount of money from the gods as a gift and buying a small shop for herself she would be able to do as much good as she wants. But things are not so simple. It is not easy to survive in a competitive exploitative world. One either has to bend the rules for one's own benefit or get broken. As Shen Te stands in despair she realizes that her goodness has finally landed her in trouble.

Shen Te: The little lifeboat is swiftly sent down too many men too greedily. Hold on to it as they drown. (36)

Either she has to find a way to deal with the problem or she is going to sink along with those who cling to her small ship. For Shen Te wealth is more than a goal; it is an instrument of liberation. She would like to elevate herself, but in the moral sense of the word. She harbours no avarice in her. But possession is the prerequisite to giving.

Scene 1 brings out in detail her acts of charity, her submission to other people's will and her lack of assertion. Her inability to deal with practical problems and with the people who are deceitful is also revealed. She is meek, unable to assert herself. Rather than questioning the injustice being done to her, she meekly submits. She puts the blame of their indifference and coldness of those around her on their poverty and not their individual personalities or motives. Her goodness is an expression of natural goodness and kindness. But it lacks discipline of any thoughtful process. Being thoughtless it has inherent danger of being reckless threatening her own security. She is not acquainted with the ways of the world. Those around him also feel threatened as she fails to manage things. It is at the promptings of those around her that she is forced to invent a cousin in order to

deal with the people like the carpenter and Mrs. Mitzu.

Wife: Shen Te! Dear! Why don't let your....cousin settle this affair? [to Carpenter] put your claim in writing. Shen Te's cousin will see you get paid.

Carpenter:[derisively]: Cousin, eh?

Husband: Cousin, yes. (32)

The tone of those who live off her is more authoritative than her own. They live there as if they have certain claim on her lodgings. They sit drink around as if it were their own apartment. They take cigarettes from her stock; throw things around while Shen Te stands helplessly pleading in her own apartment. In brief to help others Shen Te must destroy herself. She must become hard and invent a cousin Shui Ta, a cold calculating man whom she is to charge with her defence against her own kindness.

Though at first Shen Te tries to live up the gods' expectations, her generosity quickly turns her small shop into a messy overcrowded poor house which attracts crime and police supervision. In a sense Shen Te quickly fails the test, as she is forced to introduce the invented cousin Shui Ta as overseer and protector of her interests. Shen Te dons a costume of male clothing, a mask, a forceful voice to take on the role of Shui Ta. Shui Ta arrives at the shop coldly explains that his cousin has gone out of town on a short trip, curtly turns out the hangers on, and quickly restores the order in the shop.

Shui Ta in the next scene turns up as that alternative, as exploration of the other. He represents qualities antithetical to Shen Te. He is confident, well composed, assertive practical man of affairs. People cannot fool around with him. Shui Ta displays the qualities that are just opposite to that of Shen Te, the qualities that Shen Te lacks and seems to need. He is confident, assertive, and authoritative and does not pay much attention to the interests of the others. He succeeds in solving the problems that Shen Te fails to deal with.



We observe how things have reversed. Shui Ta rudely treats the people who rudely treated Shen Te. He is immediately in command of things. He is quick to realize that these people are not only taking advantage of Shen Te, but also do not mind hurting her interests, for example, giving her shop bad name by stealing. He tactfully calls in the policeman and makes him stay till the boy comes back after stealing. In this way he gets rid of the parasite family as it refuse to leave otherwise. He skilfully deals with the carpenter. Shui Ta asks the carpenter to take away the shelves if his offer of twenty silver dollars is unacceptable to him. This immediately puts him on defensive. The shelves are made to measure and are of no use elsewhere. With only a minor argument the carpenter walks away with less money than he has first asked for.

Mrs. Mitzu comes back to ask Shui Ta for Shen Te's references. She raises moral questions regarding Shen Te's reputation only to bargain from an advantageous position. The policeman offers his suggestion- to marry Shen Te off to a wealthy man so she can spend his money. With a rush he sets of to put an advertisement in the newspaper. Her immoral background and reputation is a social issue and can be amended only through social remedies. The one suggested by him is marriage. She can only get rid of the stigma attached to her by getting married to a rich man. Interestingly the people who live off her or accept benefit from her including the policeman who accepts cigar from her shop, do not consider her past as much of an obstacle in dealing with her. But her past is used as an excuse to exploit her further.

Shen Te struggles to survive as a divided being. On the one hand she strives to save her little shop from being eaten up by the parasites and swallowed by the powerful people like Mrs. Mitzu so that she can survive economically and do not have to walk the streets again. On the other hand she tries to lead a life in accordance with the commandments and wishes of the gods and her own expectations from her own self that is

being good and kind to everybody. Though she feels that even in order to help others she needs to save the shop, yet saving the shop often involves at least not helping others and may involve exploiting others.

This conflict of interests is further intensified and complicated when Shen Te falls in love with a worthless unemployed pilot who is intent on exploiting her to the core without least moral scruples. Her own personal interests are further divided between her own self interests and those of her love that are as dear to her and sometimes more dear to her threatening not only her own material well being but also her moral well being. So Shen Te becomes a person divided against her own self. Her love like her goodness is spontaneous impulse. It is thoughtless, uncontrollable born out of weaker impulses of pity and of her physical and emotional vulnerability.

As Shen Te goes to meet a widower in a tea shop by the pond in the Municipal Park, she comes across a young man who is planning to hang himself. He is a mail pilot with no plane to fly. He is unemployed, hungry and thirsty. His frustration with life is obvious. Shen Te's soft heart melts at his condition. He narrates his dream of a flyer and describes what it means not to be able to fly in spite of being flyer. She is reminded of a crane with a clipped wing she had come across as a child and she starts crying. He is unemployed, a flyer who cannot fly and had been hungry and thirsty for long, situation enough to make anybody frustrated and angry. She pities him. She comes to know that he is thirsty. As Wang comes to sell water she buys a cup of water for him though it is raining. The act has been eulogized by many critics including Walter Weideli:

It is gratuitous act, but is too costly. No, for it reconciles men. It gives a meaning to their work, founds an economy of love, and clarifies the profound ramifications of commerce and exchange. For he who loves a glass of water is more than a glass of water and



an aviators record is more than just the record. Our acts are justified only if they found a human exchange, an exchange that the system disparages, obstructs and alienates. Immense is the call that man sends out to other men through the misery and murder. (Weideli 93)

But any human exchange involves at least two human beings. Love, kindness, and giving on the part of the one and selfishness and taking on the part of the other only turns such exchange into exploitative one. Traditional concepts of morality have eulogized such relationships and glorified the concept of giving in the name of sacrifice.

According to Weideli, Brecht knows that "kindness, although in conflict with the world exists, that it has a force of an instinct that it is contrary to effort and forced expression:

*I nailed a Japanese sculptor to the wall,
The mask of a wicked demon, lacquered
with gold
With compassion I see
The swollen veins of his forehead, proving
The effort it takes to be wicked." (Weideli,
93-94)*

For Shen Te and as Weideli puts it, for Brecht, kindness may be an instinct in human beings but it is just one of the instincts. It is not a natural instinct with all the human beings. In fact, it seems all most an alien feeling to people like Yang. But Shen Te, such faith in the naturalness of the instinct of goodness makes her trust people thoughtlessly. That is how she thoughtlessly falls in love with Yang.

It is his pitiable condition that makes her fall in love with him, not any admirable human quality. And it will remain so. His miserable conditions will continue to evoke her love for him though he proves to be more and more heartless, a totally selfish human being incapable of any tender feeling like love and affection.

Unequal equation between Shen Te and Yang Sun is visible from the very beginning

of their relationship. Though Shen Te is in better position than Yang Sun, yet Yang manages to have an upper hand. Yang Sun is unemployed. She owns a shop. He is frustrated, she is in good spirits. But when they start interacting, he proves to be more aggressive and arrogant. She tries to please him. He calls her bow legged, she tries to convince him that she is not. He says that she cannot understand his condition but she tries to prove that she can. She is all out to impress her. While Yang Sun's condition is miserable, it is she who starts crying and it is Yang Sun who tries to console her. He, in fact, rebukes her the way one rebukes a child.

Yang Sun does not evoke any feeling of admiration or respect. Her love for Yang Sun is born out of pity for him. Her own vulnerability as a woman adds to it. Yang himself notices it from the very beginning and plays upon it to the end. In the scene they meet he strokes her cheek and asks

Yang Sun [again without turning to look her, he strokes her cheek with his hand]:

You like that?

Shen Te: Yes.

Yang Sun [breaking off]: you're easily satisfied, I must say [pause] What a town! (50)

Her vulnerability is mixture of physical and emotional weakness that is so often mixed in human beings and so difficult to distinguish. But for Yang it is crudely physical as he later tells Shui Ta.

Shui ta: My cousin is devoted to youbecause...

Yang Sun: Because I have my hands on her breasts. Give me a cigar [he takes one for himself, stuffs a few more in his pocket then changes his mind and take the whole box] tell her I'll marry her, then bring me three hundred. Or let her bring it. One or the other. [Exit] (66)

Her love for Yang Sun is not a kind of love that elevates. Her love turns Yang more



dependent, self-centred and encourages him to be more and more unscrupulous, cheating others and Shen Te. So her love does no moral or material good to her or her lover.

But one thing that this love does is that she somewhat starts thinking about herself and her own happiness. Shen Te walking in the city before dawn finds the happy harmony that the poets have eulogized.

Shen Te: returning from the quarter where Sun his room I made a great detour has. With each step I was becoming more joyous. I saw the paper boys and men watering down the streets and the ox drawn carts loaded with vegetables. People have always told me that when you are in love you walk in the clouds, but what is really beautiful is to walk on the ground, on the asphalt. I tell you, you miss many things if you are not in love or if you don't see the city when it is sitting up in bed just like, or so the poets say, an old worker who inhales great gulfs of fresh morning air before picking up his tools.(54)

She wants to look beautiful. She buys a shawl for herself. Though the people around her are happy that they have got rid of Shui Ta, yet they lament the fact that she is totally lost in herself. They are irritated that she no longer seems to care about them. They find her no longer dependable.

Sister- in – law: She's been out all night again.

Mrs. Shin: No sooner did we get rid of that crazy cousin of hers than Shen Te herself starts carrying on! May be she does give us an ounce of rice now and then, but can you depend upon her? Can you depend upon her? (55)

But she is still soft hearted. As she is back to her feminine self, her weaknesses and goodness both assert back. Wang informs the gods about her acts of goodness and charity. She is known as 'angel of slums'. The family of eight is back with her. Shen Te is ready to

help Wang when nobody else is ready to do so. All those who witnessed the barber hit Wang refuse to act as witnesses. Nobody wants to antagonize the barber as he is a well to do person. Though she was not present at the scene, yet she is ready to tell a lie in order to help him. She is outraged at the indifference of the other people. Here again a contrast is brought out between her behaviour and that of Shui Ta. For Shen Te it is more important to be good and kind than follow the letter of the law. She is ready to break law in order to help a poor person while Shui Ta helps the establishment so that it helps him. He will later clearly tell Wang that she need not get involved with his problem as she has enough of her own. But her attempt to help Wang can land her in trouble as it means committing perjury. While Shui Ta wisely befriends the policeman who not only helps him to get rid of the good for nothing dependents but also honours him for being law abiding citizen. She is even ready to break law to help others.

She tries to help everybody. But Wang feels that she will not be able to survive for long in this way and feels the necessity of her cousin to conduct the business, bringing out the limitations of her goodness and its inability to survive own its own. He can clearly perceive that her goodness is costing her dear eating up her small earnings. Her goodness is too good to survive for long, hence need for her cousin Shui Ta.

Her goodness not only lends her in trouble but also gets good people around her into trouble. The old couple offers to help her. They are only good people apart from her in the play. But though unwittingly, she ends up treating them as others treat her. They understand that she is in love. Love has got her into trouble and they want to help her out. But love is as thoughtless a feeling with her as goodness. She seems under a kind of intoxication as she walks around. Everything seems beautiful. And as usual she loves to be thoughtless. The old couple lends her money so that she can save her little tobacco shop her only source of income. Mrs. Yang arrives and



informs Shen Te that Yang Sun can get a job of flyer if he can pay five hundred silver dollars and asks her to help him out. Shen Te who is too ready to help, thoughtlessly hands over the money to Mrs. Yang immediately. She seems to live in a dream world. She talks poetically of Yang's dream of flying. The dream seems dearer to her than to anybody else. She does not hesitate for a moment while giving money away. She neither thinks about her shop and herself nor about the old couple who have lent her the money and put so much trust in her. She is just thinking, rather dreaming of Yang's flight. She practically does not even consider how she is going to arrange the rest of the amount and what consequences it can lead to. Her act is not born of any genuine conflict. It is sheer thoughtlessness.

She just does what she wants to without paying much attention to practical side of things which is taken care of again and again by Shui Ta. In fact she lets Shui Ta handle the dirty things so that she herself can indulge in goodness and love. These qualities are not responsibilities for her. Rather they are luxuries she wants to enjoy. For her being free means, being free of burden of thinking or not paying attention to the practical side of things. She thinks that one has to wrack ones brains or do unpleasant things in order to earn ones living when one is poor. Money given by gods brings for her freedom from such shackles which force human beings to do evil things. As she equates wickedness with clumsiness, goodness or kindness is a kind of aesthetic pleasure for her.

Shen Te: I can play a zither a little. [Pause] And I can mimic men [pause] I got the shop, so the first thing I did was to give my zither away. I can be stupid as a fish now, I said to myself, and it won't matter.... (49-50)

Or later she says

Shen Te: Once, when I was a little girl, I fell with a load of brushwood. An old man picked me up. He gave me a penny too. Isn't it funny how people who

don't have very much like to give some it away? They must like to show what they can do, and how could they show better than by being kind? Being wicked is just like being clumsy. When we sing a song, or build a machine or plant some rice we're being kind. You're kind. (50-51)

In order to escape the consequences of her foolishness she needs Shui Ta. So the need felt for the presence of Shui Ta reveals again the limitations of Shen Te's character and her concept of goodness. Shui Ta's previous attempts to solve her problems have failed as all his attempts are undone by her. And now everything is in mess and she is on the verge of ruin again. Shui Ta appears again to settle things and this time the spectators know for sure that he is Shen Te disguised as man. Her disguise helps to expose the nature and intentions of the various people especially her lover Yang Sun. First thing one notices is that he does not love her. He even does not respect her. He has very low opinion of Shen Te. He thinks that she is an easily accessible woman to a man.

Yang Sun: Oh, she isn't a girl to keep a man waiting. For one thing or the other, if you take my meaning. (63)

She will do anything to please him. He plans to sell her tobacco shop without least consideration for her welfare. When Shui Ta insists that she may not like to do so as she is a human being and has faculty of reason. Yang thinks she is totally devoid of reason. But yang complacently remarks

Shui Ta [a slight outburst] : She is a human being, sir! And not devoid of common sense!

Yang Sun: Shen Te is a woman: she is devoid of common sense. I only have to lay my hand on her shoulder, and church bell rings. (66)

The callous manner in which Yang makes these observations about her hurts Shen Te under the mask of Shui Ta and outrage Shui Ta and the audience. But though one is



irritated by the remarks of this heartless selfish lover, his remarks and observations regarding her nature and behaviour ironically prove to be right.

Though yang Sun reveals his intentions, he has his way. Even Shui Ta lets him sell the stocks to Mrs. Mitsu. Why- we wonder. In fact audience can see that Shen Te survives all the time under the mask of Shui Ta. It is beautifully brought out in the beginning of the Scene 5 when Yang Sun arrives at the tobacco shop, she forgetting her mask for a moment runs towards the mirror, excited as she is on seeing her lover. Stage directions say

[Shui Ta runs to the mirror with the short, light steps of Shen Te, and is just about to start primping, when he realizes his mistake, and turns away, with a short laugh....] (63)

As Yang considers marrying her, Shen Te under the mask of Shui Ta is tempted, forgetting his remarks about her or his low opinion of her. Shui Ta's mask only helps her to be selfish as she dreams of finally getting married to a person whom she loves. But the mask does not lend its reason or hard sense of practicality to her. It shows that gullibility and vulnerability of Shen Te survive and promptings of her heart prove too strong to be resisted even by Shui Ta. This incident also brings the limitations of Shui Ta who is not able to tackle the situation with same hardness when it comes to one's own interests.

Yang Sun later reveals his true intentions that he plans to leave Shen Te behind after taking money. Shui Ta then tries to intervene and prevent the deal but Yang Sun tells him to mind his own business. He is cocksure that she will like to help him in spite of everything. His complacency and taken for granted attitude irritates the audience as well as Shui Ta. One expects Shen Te to get angrier than anybody else. But Yang Sun's predictions regarding her behaviour are proven right and expectations of an angry reaction are badly thwarted.

After Yang Sun leaves Shui Ta plans to rescue Shen Te's fortunes by arranging a match between her and well to do barber Shu Fu, who is smitten with her beauty. But as Shen Te comes back to her real self, Sun returns and seduces her by reminding her of the evening they first met. Her resistance to his seduction is too weak from the very beginning and finally she decides to go with him not counting the cost as she tells the audience directly addressing them

Shen Te: Please don't shout for my cousin, Mr. Shu Fu. He does not agree with me, I know, but he is wrong. [to the audience]

I want to go with the man I love

I don't want to count the cost

I don't want to consider if it's wise

I don't want to know if he loves me

I want to go with the man I love. (71)

The audience feels outraged as Ronald Gray puts it

'We are shocked at Shen Te's unreasoning devotion to her lover when he has already revealed to her, in her guise of Shui Ta, his unscrupulous intention to exploit her, and his total lack of any reciprocating love. We feel as Brecht intended astonished indignation at this blindness of hers.' (Gray 146)

Goodness itself creates confusion within her, her tenderness makes her vulnerable and in a moment of emotional and physical weakness she submits to the temptation of heart and body.

Shen Te:With my emotions in an uproar, I threw myself into Yang Sun's arms, I couldn't resist him. The thing he'd said to Shui Ta had taught Shen te nothing. Sinking into his arms, I said to myself: To let one perish, not even oneself To fill everyone with happiness, even oneself Is so good. (72)

She argues that to make one's own self happy is good too. But she is not even making herself happy for long. Her happiness is



elusive and momentary. But she is not able to see beyond the moment. She very easily and readily trusts Yang Sun. Brecht does not show how she has been persuaded. But it is clear that she trusts him not because he makes her trust him, but because she wants to trust him. She gives her own reason for loving him.

When I heard his cunning laugh, I was afraid

But when I saw the holes in his shoes, I loved him dearly. (80)

Shen Te's self interests become more complicated as she becomes pregnant. Now her attention is shifted to saving the future of her child to be born. Saving herself becomes essential for securing the future of her child. But she has learnt nothing from her experience with love and has not changed a bit. She is as euphoric about her pregnancy as she was about her love. Her attitude and reaction is conventional. She enacts anticipatory maternal enjoyment and her imaginary staging of the male hero's arrival;

Shen Te: o joy! A new human being is on the way. The world awaits him. In the cities the people say: he's got to be reckoned with, this human being! [she imagines a little boy to be present, and introduces him to the audience.] This is my son, the well known flyer!

Say: Welcome

To the conquer of unknown mountains and unreachable regions

Who brings us our mail across the impassable deserts!(80)

Elizabeth Wright observes:

Her male child is to be the romantic traveller and Imaginary colonizer of the earth's waste places, the possible utopian inheritor of a future undivided existence,(122)

Walter Wiedeli observes

But for the child to live, Shen Te (or rather Sui Ta) will have to tread heavily, exploiting other children. The gospel is converted into murder and love into

solitude. Yesterdays lovers have become cynical, cold, un pitying associates.(94)

As she dreams about her son she is confronted with reality that may threaten the happiness of his son. The system involves unequal distribution of resources. In order to safeguard the interests of her son she has to seek the help of Shui Ta. Shui Ta returns now for longer period. In order to protect interests of her own child, she has to protect her own interests. She must save her little tobacco shop so that she can survive economically. In this competitive world in order to survive one must thrive. Shui Ta who appears in the beginning to solve small financial, business and other worldly matters for the time being, but as things get complicated Shui Ta is required to stay for longer and longer period. Her awareness of Yang's treachery and deceit did not force her to change her decision to help him and think about her own welfare. But her love and concern for her son to be born, her anxiety about his survival forces her to stop thinking about Sun.

Interestingly she falls from one trap to another, from love for her lover to love for her son. Shen Te wants to help everybody even the carpenter who bullied her once as she comes to know that his children have been rendered homeless. But when she sees the carpenter's son eating from scrap, she feels the need to think of herself interests. In order to save her son from this cruel world she is ready to play tigress. But as she cannot play tigress as Shen Te, need for Shui Ta is felt again. As the need for Shui Ta is felt she again forgets about the old couple.

Shui Ta returns and tries to bring order to the chaotic surroundings. He makes people standing idle, work. As Shui Ta returns he tells everybody to leave. When they say that they have nowhere to go, he puts a proposition before them. He proposes to provide them employment if they want stay in the cabins. He tells the carpenter and the Unemployed man to drag the sacks. Similarly, other people are forced to accept his proposal



of working in his tobacco factory. In this way Shui Ta makes the idlers work. In scene eight Mrs. Yang makes it clear that how her good for nothing son has been turned into diligent worker by Mr. Shui Ta. He has lodged a complaint against him for breaching of promise of marriage and that he has come by two hundred dollars by improper means. But he has spent all the money. Shui Ta proposes to give him a job in his tobacco factory. When Yang responds in sarcastic way Shui Ta tells him firmly to make his choice. He has no other choice, he has to relent.

Shen Te's love and indiscriminate devotion to Yang Sun only helped him to spoil himself. Her readiness to help him under all circumstances only made him more and more dependent. Her simplicity and credulity only encouraged his treachery. Shui Ta's strictness and firmness turns him a new leaf. He starts working hard.

Though he does not become good or honest, but he does become businesslike. He is the same person who carelessly sold the stock of tobacco for three hundred silver dollars without thinking how much it was worth and ruins Shen Te. But now he helps Shui Ta to flourish his tobacco empire. He spies on his fellow workers and turns an informer. He is even ready to stroke Mrs. Mitsu's knees. Shui Ta's empire is based on exploitation and he helps him to exploit others.

There are both positive and negative aspects of attitude that Shui Ta and Shen Te represent. Shen Te's goodness and meekness makes those dependent upon him, idle and useless. Shui Ta's firmness does not have this drawback. It makes people work. But his selfishness does not just make them work but exploits them. So, neither of the two attitudes is self sufficient.

The audience is forced to debate the issue of goodness with its various implications and complications. Goodness with its conventional weaknesses or limitations is presented in the form of Shen Te, while its antithesis is presented in the form of Shui Ta

that has its own positive points throwing light on the limitations of traditional concept of goodness.

As the split of the personality of the protagonist is gendered, it also foregrounds the social stereotyping of the gender roles of man and woman. Though Brecht is well aware of the gender implications in the matter, but he sees it within the parameters of capitalist exploitation. According to Elizabeth Wright

Shen Te is placed in a subordinate position by a number of different systems and not just by a single mechanism- that of a woman with property within capitalism and its market economy. Her oppression is economic as a prostitute, psychic as a romantic beloved, social as a pregnant mother.

But as an audience we cannot help feeling the insufficiency of such gender discourse. Neither as a woman nor as a man Shen Te is able to find an identity that she can be comfortable with. Elizabeth Wright notes that

"Shen Te cannot find a signifier which is her own, she cannot say it 'all'p108, she cannot represent herself in the symbolic as either 'good' or 'bad', her sobbing a testimony to the failure of either Shen Te or Shui Ta to fill the lack with words. But the Other cannot fully symbolize itself either." (125)

Shen Te first identifies herself with conventional role of woman and of being a good person. Gods reassert this by selecting her to be the good person. She tries to live up to the promptings of her heart and commandments of the gods. But she finds it hard to do so. She breaks under the pressure. Then she takes up the other role of masculine, rational Shui Ta in order to survive.

But she fails to survive as Shui Ta for long and Shen Te continues to survive under the second masquerade. The audience is informed that there had been rice for the poor at her doorstep and Yang Sun hears her sobs.



People's suspicion that she has either been killed or put under arrest by him brings him to court. There is variety of causes and motives that make people take him to court. Wang is worried about the good woman gods selected as he knows that she was pregnant. Other people miss her charities. And as Yang comes to know that she was expecting his child, sees an opportunity to claim the tobacco empire Shui Ta has built. In the court in order to defend herself she is forced to shed her mask of Shui Ta and confess before the gods that Shen Te and Shui Ta are the same person. Elizabeth Wright feels that Shen Te breaks apart through trying to carry out the mandate of the gods. Wright feels that

"she can neither be the 'good person' producing Imaginary plenitude, nor can she stop trying to fill out the void in the Symbolic, the lack in the Other. When her second masquerade fails her hysterical position comes to the fore, for she resists the specified Symbolic identification of 'good person'" (Wright 125)

She perceives that in order to survive she must sustain a dual masquerade. But this creates a confusion and conflict within her.

"Shen Te is a hysterical subject by the end of the play, asking – Why me? Why do I have this mandate? What does the other want of me?" (Wright 125)

There is a genuine conflict present in her situation as she is torn by the contradicting demands that cannot be reconciled in the existing system.

*I cannot tell how it was
But to be good to others
And myself at the same time
I could not do it. (104)*

Everybody including gods, in fact, does not want to recognize the conflict and want to gloss over the contradiction that her situation represents. But the audience cannot help pondering over the questions she raises. For us she is neither wholly Shen Te nor Shui Ta. Gods may ignore her assertion that 'I 'm

telling you I'm the bad man who committed all those crimes!' (106)

But one cannot ignore this fact as one is well aware of both contradictory aspects of her personality.

Shen Te has only questions. Brecht provides no answer. One is left to think and resolve the problem in one's own individual way. It Ronald Gray in the conclusion of his Brecht: the dramatist refers the concept of complex seeing with reference to this play. He observes:

It is not fixed goodness against fixed badness morality-but goodness and badness in the act of being produced in the terms of an action, as coexistent possibilities. This genuinely complex seeing, and it is deeply integrated with the dramatic form. No resolution is imposed; the tension persists as it must, and the play ends with a formal invitation to consider it. The evasive responses, covering or weakening the tension, are expressed by other characters, so that we can see their inadequacy while the fact of Shen Te and Shui Ta is still evident. (Gray 176)

Apart from the fact that goodness makes it difficult for the good person to survive another significant question is raised which further problematizes and complicates the idea of goodness. Good has essentially been associated with the concept of benevolence and idea of larger good. But goodness indulged in by Shen Te does not contribute to larger good. Her goodness does not serve the purpose of goodness. It does not breed or promote goodness rather ruins it, and promotes evil and cunningness. It encourages indifference, coldness and selfishness in those who are helped by her. Good for nothing people are encouraged to become parasites, to cheat and deceive unscrupulously. Everybody tries to eat her away as if it was his or her own natural right. She rather than questioning or protesting against such attitude, encourages it by over sympathetic nature. She is neither able to protect herself nor those who are good

and gentle like her. People recognize that goodness is a weakness in her. Some of them threaten her, others blackmail her morally. Though she knows that they are insincere still she welcomes them. She tries to be nice to everybody, even to the people who had not been nice to her or who are not nice to others. She blindly follows the idea of goodness. She rather indulges in it. She takes pleasure in being good. For that pleasure she turns blind eye and deaf ear to all the subtle nuances and glaring incongruities that lie at the heart of human situation which is further complicated by the exploitative socio-economic structures. She just wants to enjoy the beauty of goodness which she takes to be the natural expression and desire of human heart. Her desire to do good in fact becomes a kind of selfish act of selflessness which prevents her from realising the larger repercussions of her actions and attitude. Though she herself seems bewildered towards end of the play, but the audience realises the contradictions at the heart of the idea of goodness. The audience, who have so far believed good is good, are forced to ask how good 'good' is.

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