
EDUCATIONAL EVOLUTION: THOUGH THE PLAY AND MYTH OF PYGMALION BY G.B. SHAW

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Abstract :

Pygmalion is a play by George Bernard Shaw, named after a Greek mythological figure. There have been many Academic discussions, Critical analysis, and evaluation of various aspects of the play over the past many years. This paper intends to investigate the play from the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's essay "The Organization of the Education and Culture" and analyzing the perspectives of Education, Feminism, Marxism, and Life force theories with the concept. Antonio Gramsci advocates the idea that the education system can help all members of the society equally. Education system targets to engrave, govern, Intellectual, analytical and Ruminative qualities in the citizens with basic generosity. Education is a systematic and a theoretical process, students of different "classes" will come out of this system. We can't propound idea of an education system that prescribes linear education to the participants of various classes. This linear education system will assist the 'elite class' with the skill to govern and other classes to 'earn'. Thus 'Curriculum and policy' are the soul for attaining the goal of education system, that must encourage all the students to discover the skills to 'govern and earn', within the same education system.

Gramsci in his essays, does not support the idea that education can be the tool to bring changes in the culture, but he prescribed the notion that the education system can help in enhancing a culture, towards its growth in the modern world. This notion is prominently used in G .B. Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, where Professor Higgins provide ' vocational schooling' that can assist Elizza to have the job of flower selling in any shop of the town.

Gramsci further emphasizes that the education system should focuses on to discover the elementary ethics and values of 'humanism' and to attain 'humanism', moral independence and self-mastery is necessary. Professor Higgins via his self-mastery over phonetics was able to assist Elizza to enhance her culture.

Keywords: education, myth, Marxism, modernism, schooling, culture.

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"Education must be not only a transmission
Of culture but also a provider of Alternative
Views of world and strengthener of the
Will to explore them."¹

*Pygmalion*² is a play by George Bernard Shaw, named after a Greek mythological figure. It was first presented on stage to the public in 1913. There have been many Academic discussions, Critical analysis, and evaluation of various aspects of the play over the past many years. This paper intends to investigate the play from the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's essay "The Organization of the Education and Culture" and analyzing the

1. From Jerome Burner

² From Greek Myth

perspectives of Education, Feminism, Marxism, Male Gaze and Life force theories with the concept. Antonio Gramsci advocates the idea to formulate the education system that can help all members of the society equally. Education system targets to engrave, govern, Intellectual, analytical and Ruminative qualities in the citizens with basic generosity. Education is a systematic and a theoretical process, students of different “classes” will come out of this system. We can't propound idea of an education system that prescribes linear education to the participants of various classes. This linear education system will assist the 'elite class' with the skill to govern and other classes to 'earn'. Thus 'Curriculum and policy' are the soul for attaining the goal of education system, that must encourage all the students to discover the skills to 'govern and earn', within the same education system.

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A common basic education system creates a proper balance in society and to formulate growth in a society and culture. Imparting of vocational skill is must not only for the elite class but for all classes. Through this vocationalisation of education women can have their own identity; it also supports the idea of feminism.

Gramsci's system envisions the future as does the Life Force theory. An educational system proclaims the idea to develop an atmosphere for the future generation with parity. This parity is in co-relation with prosperity of the united society.

The myth of Pygmalion and statue is derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 10. It was penned down in 10A.D. in *Metamorphoses*, Ovid introduced the sculptor named Pygmalion, who could sculpt anything with such perfection that seems to be real. His surroundings was his only flaw, prostitutes who had no morals used there. Disgusted by their shameful behavior, he decided to sculpt the ideal figure of a woman. Out of irony, with the only features of her beauty, he named the statue Galatea. Anyone who eyed the statue could not believe that it was not real. The statue was the first example of complete perfection. Numerous people saw the statue just to have a glance of the marvelous piece of beauty. Pygmalion himself was very ecstatic by his creation that he could not resist himself to fall in love with his own perfect piece of art. He prays to Aphrodite (Venus) to convert his creation into a living being and the Goddess of Love and Beauty granted him his wish and gave his creation Galatea a life. After which both Pygmalion and Galatea wedded happily. This Greek mythological story is taken into consideration by G.B. Shaw in his play titled 'Pygmalion'. In Shaw's play the character of Professor Higgins molded a flower girl, Elizza to a high class lady with the necessary accent, value of ethics with the help of his knowledge of phonetics. The transformed Elizza is the creation of the Professor, who is symbolize the sculptor of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* i.e. Pygmalion here. Higgins used all his knowledge of phonetics and education to prove that with 'proper education, culture can be enhanced'. Here emphasis is given over education by G. B. Shaw who makes clear interpretation for readers, education can be a basic systematic tool to govern, run, direct and transform the society towards betterment.

Antonio Gramsci emphasises in his essay, "The Organization of Education and of Culture", about education, education system and culture and the effects thereof. These elements enable the formation of ruminative society which is not based on unethical paradoxical norms and orthodox ideology. Elizza the girl of cockney was molded into a lady of the Elite class with all the manners required so that she can pass off as one. Education here is the major factor of her new enumeration. This assisted her to pursue any field she wants to go to. Education gave her the confidence to deal with society and how to make an argument for herself and most importantly education gave her confidence to flaunt her beauty. The personality of that girl was enhanced that's what Gramsci seeks in an education system. A linear education system which allows to learn how to 'govern and earn' at the same time it also enhances the culture and improves the morals of the individual in particular and the society in general. G. B. Shaw justifies the ideas of Gramsci with his character of Professor Higgins, who achieved great results by his dedicated teaching to Elizza. Shaw is the creator of Theatre of Idea. Among his sixty plays, Pygmalion is one of the most admired play which supports the idea of evaluation of society. The admiration of public indicates that readers too agree that changes are needed. Change through education can be the life setting instrument to fill all the left over gaps of life. The education system should be on common grounds that lead all strata of society and can facilitate them with utmost faith.

"A Woman who utters depressing and disgusting sounds
Has no right to be anywhere – no right to live. Remember that
You are human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate
Speech : that your native language is the language of Shakespeare
And Milton and Bible, and do not sit there coming like
A Billion Pigeon."³(Act 1, 206).

From the above statement, we can infer that phonetic transformation is the basis of social transformation. Evolution and progress of women is frame work of the plot without any argument i.e. evolution as a Duchess from a lower class flower seller. Professor Higgins stands as a God, father or creator, and the woman as a pupil needs to be corrected. The woman in this play is shown inferior in comparison to man. In the very first act, it can easily be inferred that Note taker man and Pickering belong to high class society due to their apparel, body language and way of talking. In contrast to this, Elizza, the flower girl shown in dilapidated condition with the cockney slang. Inferior behavior towards Elizza shows the ideology of man that lacks the sense of equality and equal rights. Elizza is treated as a slave or object by both the men, making their 'bet' more important than the emotions of a girl. Professor Higgins treats Elizza like a criminal. He tortures her emotionally, mentally and physically. Just to make his words proven that he has given to Pickering, during the bragging of his self-mastery over phonetics. After all the tormenting experiences Elizza does not lose her heart and 'kept learning to enhance' her personality and culture. It sets an example among the society, that woman from a lower class can become a Duchess or can inculcate the standard and features of a Duchess. Elizza after acquiring all the features of high class, came out of the ball without being recognized by anyone there. This annoyed Higgins and he loses his interest over his emotions. This ignorance shook Elizza's score but her determined nature made her bold enough to "scold Higgins". Her behavior Higgins only goes to determine Gramsci's theory of Education where she develops the skill of 'govern and earn'. Thus education can be the key factor to bring a new hope in society that indulges

³ Pygmalion, G. B. Shaw 1913.

a perspective that a formula can also be the representation of society and it does not make any complications but resolves it.

Thus both Gramsci's concept of linear education system and G. B. Shaw's idea of enhancing culture through proper education can work together towards women empowerment. To give equal honor, respect and acceptance that can boost up the men's perspective that knowledge and education can be a tool to new possible statistical growth to evolve. Education being the major cause for statistic growth of Elizza, who was reborn as a different character at the end of the play. Her mindset was awakened and felt she deserves the acceptance and happiness. Elizza's dedication helps her succeed and being taught by Higgins, lead to her maturity and great fortune and happiness.

“ But you have no idea how frightfully interesting
It is like a human being and change her quite a different
Human being by creating a new speech for her.
It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class
From class and soul from soul.”⁴ (Higgins, act 3)

Karl Mark and Fredrick Engels propounded the philosophy of politics and manners which is based upon the ideas of the 'class struggles are guidelines to understand the evitable development from bourgeois to classless section of the society.

Karl Marx and Engels are the propounders of the Marxist concept, and both classified the society into bourgeois and labor class. Bourgeois is the minority class which is dominant and they are the ones who formulate the rules and regulations. Labor classes were the minorities. In between both, these classes are specimen also exists which is the middle class. They are an amalgamation of both bourgeois class and labor class. Shaw's Pygmalion is a good example of all these classes, where a flower girl of the lower class and noble man of high class meets and creates a middle class girl by reforming Elizza.

The characters of the play can be categorized according to these three classes – Higgins, Pickering, Freddy and Mrs. Higgins can be taken into the upper class or high class. Mrs. Pierce in middle class and Eliza and Alfred Doolittle are low class. Higgins represents the ideal Marxist character, who was very comfortable in exploiting the lower classes, whereas Pickering is a very gentle and kind character who gave respect to Elizza by calling her 'Miss'. Higgins was totally opposite or the ideal figure of Marxist stereotype of hedonism, greed and manipulation, who exploit lower classes like Elizza. He was not bothered about the emotions of Elizza and he was not even aware of the fact that in what condition he was putting the fate of Elizza.

“Well when i have done with her, we can threw her back into gutter,
and then it will be her own business again.”⁵ (act 2)

What future holds to Elizza after the last party, does not bother Higgins, which shows Higgins as avaricious, heartless and Marxist bourgeoisie.

“you are no gentleman , you are not, to talk of such things. I am a good girl; and i know what the like of you are, i do.”⁶ (act 2)

⁴From speech of Higgins, Pygmalion, play by G. B. Shaw, Act 3.

⁵ Act 2, Pygmalion, G. B. Shaw.

⁶ Act 2, Pygmalion, G. B. Shaw.

Throughout the play Elizza tries to be very polite, humble and well mannered. she does not want to give any chance to anyone where she could be exploited which is surely a lower class trait. They are always conscious about their behavior among the people of higher classes. She always seeks sympathy and extra attention from people which Higgins does not like and calls her sympathy gaining attitude a “poppy-trick”.

‘Appearance’ also is an important characteristic in “Pygmalion”. Man can be identified with a single glance by his appearance. High class people do cover themselves with formal apparel, extra attentive mannerism on the table and the body language. Pickering is one who is always polite and is the typical stereotype genre of high class society.

Elizza in the horse race scene was not good with her language and accent, she was not in control over her selection of words. But nobody gets the clue that Elizza is from the lower class because she was well dressed. It is a trait found in high class people that they judge people through external appearances not with internal qualities.

Alfred Doolittle belongs to the lower class category, but he acts and talks like a middle class person. But his ‘Appearance’ lets him down. At the end of the play Higgins was shocked with Alfred’s dress because he was not looking like a lower class person. The above mentioned description about Elizza and Alfred, indicate that appearances matter, which happens to be a ‘Marxist attitude’.

Language is used as a tool to separate classes, similar to how appearances are used. Language and accent help us create a mental image of a person. In order to show Elizza as a lower class girl, she has given a ‘Cockney accent’ and one who is not blessed with mannerism and acceptance in society. Pickering and Higgins had a very calm and polite way of talking which shows that they belong to the higher class. Higgins act of note taking assures the readers that he is an educated person or a person of high rank. In the play he talks rudely with Elizza and torture her emotionally and physically. He always mocks her that she does not deserve to be the part of his society.

Appearance, body-language, education, knowledge, accent, behavior and variation in thoughts, all these elements were being used by Shaw to differentiate between these classes and he calls it a “Love story in five acts” which is a mocking comment. Higgins is shown heartless, hedonist and a fearless person which is typically bourgeois. In the beginning, Elizza is shown as a lower class girl with an accent to match along with low mannerism but in the end she turns the situation and starts behaving like a high class woman and scolds Higgins for his brutal behavior that gives an image of a bold and robust woman.

Gramsci’s essay “The organization of education and of culture” and Shaw’s ‘Pygmalion’ both proposed the debatable concept that education may lead to social change. There are two ideologies, one which thinks that a person from a particular section of the society will always belong to it, and second believes that education can transform a person and he/she can behave like a member of the higher class of society; Characters of Elizza and Alfred showcase both of these ideologies. Both the characters were changed specially Elizza with her dedication for learning. The education system should be flexible and easy to access that can assist persons every class of society, gender, and there should not be any restriction to education, it should be open for everyone.

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