

# AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER ROLES: A STUDY IN BERNARD SHAW'S *PYGMALION*

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## ABSTRACT

Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin, 1856. His approach towards drama was completely different. In Shaw's hands the drama became, not an artistic creation for aesthetic enjoyment, but a medium of social criticism. He is a man who firmly believes in anti-romanticism. His plays mostly cover social issues and problems. He is a rationalist who can't think anything beyond practical possibilities. He is well known for his philosophical works which give energy and a new path to a worn-out human. *Pygmalion* is a play which revolves around a small town flower girl Eliza, she is the main lead of the play who desires to learn phonetics. Her way of pronouncing words entirely differs from normal slang. She meets Professor Higgins who is a researcher in phonetics. Higgins challenges Pickering (another researcher) to make Eliza a Duchess within 6 months by teaching her phonetics. After many ups and downs he wins his challenge. But, in the process he breaks Eliza completely. His treatment towards her was entirely different. His hatred for women is very much reflected on Eliza. Much gender issues can be seen throughout the play.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender issues, Male domination.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was born in Dublin, as the son of a civil servant. His education was irregular, due to his dislike of any organized training. After working in an estate agent's office for a while he moved to London as a young man (1876), where he established himself as a leading music and theatre critic in the eighties and nineties and became a prominent member of the Fabian Society, for which he composed many pamphlets. He began his literary career as a novelist; as a fervent advocate of the new theatre of Ibsen (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 1891) he decided to write plays in order to illustrate his criticism of the English stage. His earliest dramas were called appropriately *Plays Pleasant and*

*Unpleasant* (1898). Among these, *Widower's Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* savagely attack social hypocrisy, while in plays such as *Arms and the Man* and *The Man of Destiny* the criticism is less fierce. Shaw's radical rationalism, his utter disregard of conventions, his keen dialectic interest and verbal wit often turn the stage into a forum of ideas.

In the beginning, the theme of the play, complications of human relations, is very much revealed to the readers. Human mentality is widely shown in words. The conflicts of the play starts with Professor Higgins and Eliza and ends with them. Eliza's emotions are completely ignored by Higgins whereas Higgins himself is very much confused with his emotions.

The gender equality is far from reach in the play *Pygmalion*, many actions and incidents proves this fact.

Eliza, the protagonist of the play, was under the control of professor Higgins. Mrs Pearce is Higgins' maid and submits to his will without any objection. Eliza is basically owned by him. Even after she asks Higgins for her release, he refuses to let her go and sends cops after her. Eliza has no power over Higgins whereas he has complete control over her.

Throughout the novel, the men are treated differently than women. Women constantly have things done for them. A lot of task are seen as a 'mans job' and are unfit for women to perform.

The women in play are considered unequal to men. Male domination over the female characters depicts the reality. They rule over them not minding the consequences or the damage done to their feelings.

In the opening scene of the play Freddy's mother asks him to get a cab but in the modern times women herself wouldn't be unfeminine. In the time of the play women hailing a cab herself doesn't seem to be a normal things. She finds it unbelievable when Freddy thought she would do it herself. If women does this kind of man's job, it is not acceptable, some non-written rules scream.

Throughout this novel, men are allowed to act differently from women. They are more privileged and have more of a voice than women. Their actions are usually not questioned whereas women are constantly watched on their behaviour and while they speak.

Women are assumed inferior to men. Within the narrative, women are seen simply as assets to their male counterparts. Men legally own a woman once they accept his marriage proposal. Eliza is in a conflict situation when she is asked to leave the Winpole street; she was unsure with her life. All this dilemma is a result of the brainwashing of Higgins and pickering.

Her father sold her for five pounds without asking Eliza for her opinion. Higgins regards women as nuisances. Higgins wish not to get married because his dislike towards women. Marriage is not out of love, but rather for social status.

There are many scenes where Higgins scolds Eliza but when Eliza resorts back Mrs pearce stops her saying “you must not speak to the gentleman like that “as if Higgins was behaving like a gentleman. Similar situation continue in the modern time also. Women are not allowed to voice out against wrong doings. Their voice are mostly suppressed and dissipated air.

**HIGGINS:(continuing). She offers me two-fifths of her day’s income for a lesson. Two-fifths of a millionarie’s income for a day would be somewhere about 60 pounds. It’s handsome. By George, it’s enormous! It’s the biggest offer I ever had.**

**LISA:(rising, terrified) Sixty pounds! What are you talking about? I never offered you sixty. Where would I get ---**

**HIGGINS: Hold you tongue.**

Higgins treatment towards women is always rude and no where does he show a gesture of gentleman. Higgins keeps on insulting Eliza throughout the play. He never leaves off any chance of mocking her for her appearance, her attitude, her livelihood. Eliza never opposes him in this oppression. The tension between these lead characters highlights the contrasting roles and the male dominations.

**DOOLITTLE: Of course, they are sir. If I thought they were not, I would have asked for fifty pounds instead of only five.**

**HIGGINS:(with disgust). Do you mean to say that you would sell your daughter for 50 pounds?**

**DOOLITTLE: In a general way, I would not: but to oblige a gentleman like you, i can do much. I do assure you.**

No one can own another person. Eliza’s father who never cared about her well being suddenly came into the scene when he came to know about Eliza living in Higgins’ place calling out Eliza as his daughter for the first time just to extort money from Higgins.

Higgins was much focused on winning his challenge of making Eliza a Duchess but he does not think about her future after this six months. He was determined to win the bet he had with col. Pickering.

After the party Higgins and colonel were very much enjoying their victory but they never thought about Eliza who was fighting a conflict within herself. she felt like an object. She felt she was used for an experiment. She kept on arguing with Higgins about the things she had. Higgins was not a bad man but a rude man. And quite dominating. Its his nature to think and do what he wants. He wants everything to happen according to his will which he think is always correct and the best. He was hurt when Eliza argued with him stating some shocking issues. He never expected her to think something like this about him. He never had a intention to hurt her but he did it unwittingly which is his nature. Eliza who felt that she is being used as an object thought of leaving the place .

Towards the end Eliza fell in love with Freddy who was very much in love with Eliza. He had genuine feeling for her. Higgins who disapproved this sent cops behind her. Higgins kept on interfering her life as if he owns her. He wanted to makedecision about her life himself without her opinion. But at the end Eliza made everything clear. She said she would teach girls like her and would make them a Duchess like he made her. She would live her life peacefully with her love.

Throughout the novel the vivid picture of gender domination is very loud. No one can refute the fact how Higgins was rude and unkind to Eliza and other women. These characters and incidents shows the insensitive side of male towards female.

Shaw has exploded many of the accepted values, and shows what they are worth in real life. Many of the normally accepted notions have been turned upside down. Indeed, such topsy-turvydom contributes much to the enterainment value of the play. It also shows that Shaw is an original thinker, who states truths which are hard to contradict.

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