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Depiction of Feministic Perspectives in G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*

Shekhar Vispute

Director, Target Academy
Dhule (M.S.) India.

The present research paper is made to discuss the different traits of Feministic perspectives in accordance with G.B.Shaw's Problem Play 'Pygmalion'. It throws light upon the women problems universally. Shaw being the realistic English Dramatist, depicted the real pictures of women's sufferings and their oppressions falling victim to the patriarchal society in his other popular plays like 'Mrs. Warren's Profession', 'Candida' and 'Philanderer' as well. The women have been undergoing through the continuous oppression of patriarchal society in every field of the world at different levels. They have been looking for their separate identities but they are still being compelled to be under the domain and ideology of patriarchy. They have to face the miserable conditions and compromise with the predicament and situation reluctantly.

The present research paper is a sincere effort to depict the feministic perspectives through the problem play "Pygmalion" written by G.B.Shaw. It deals with many modern problems like those of education, poverty, and middle class morality especially of women. The story of this play is based on the legend of Pygmalion from Greek myth and the title is Pygmalion but Shaw changes the end of the story. Here is a realistic picture of a cockney flower girl, Miss Eliza Doolittle who is a common cockney flower girl. She is very poor so she sells flowers for her livelihood. She longs to be a lady with accurate language which is unfortunately accomplished through the selfish motives by a linguist and his friend. At last she becomes a transformed lady. But her transformation from a common girl into a lady is the emblem of her loss of identity. It is the embodiment of feministic criticism. The researcher intends to bring out the predicament of all women and the extreme impact of the patriarchal society through the feministic perspectives of the protagonist, Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl who loses her identity as a common girl and reluctantly compromises with the strange world.

Feministic approach towards the play:-

Feminism is a recent modern theory which emerged as a revolutionary literary tradition focusing on the different problems of women in literature in male dominated world. It is a serious attempt to formulate the issues and find solutions to gender problems. Feministic approach is the significant tool of manifesting feminism and its essential aspects applied to any literary works. In all traditions women have always been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking, irrespective of religion, country, race, the period in which they live, more or less the same perception and sex-stereotyping is seen in language and literature.

Feministic approach towards this play is considered as an eminent part of feministic perspectives. This approach is applied to the female protagonist who is the victim of

transformation from a common girl into a lady. It shows her journey from one place to another place for searching her identity. The play has different traits of feministic perspectives. It shows the extreme impact of the male dominated society and female's helplessness in the patriarchal society. As the woman is regarded as the third world woman who is equally and biologically liable to be called as a human being, yet she is underestimated and neglected in terms of education, poverty and morality. This play is the realistic presentation of the feministic criticism in which the female is nothing but an endless journey of loss of identity. So there is feministic approach towards this play in order to study the many prominent aspects of feminism. This approach is accompanied with the analytical study of the female and men characters in the play as well.

Pygmalion as a Problem Play:-

Pygmalion is basically a problem play focusing on many important modern issues regarding women and their exploitation in different ways.

“problem Play is a kind of play, in which the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as a representative instance of a contemporary social problems; often the dramatist manages by the use of a character who speaks for the author, or by the evolution of the plot, or both- to propose a solution to the problem which is odds with prevailing opinion.” (Abraham, 317)

In simple words, a problem play is a play in which a number of problems are pressed and analyzed thoroughly but no solutions to these problems are provided by the dramatist. It is a thought provoking. The present play deals with the basic problems of women regarding education, poverty and loss of identity. The problems are presented and analyzed. However, no solutions are provided. Such a play is realistic and quite provoking.

The problem of education is raised through the protagonist in the play, Miss Eliza Doolittle who is a common and poor flower girl. She is an illiterate but willing to learn the aristocratic language. At last, she falls victim to the bet of Prof. Higgins and Colonel Pickering. Luckily she becomes lady due to the teaching of Prof. Higgins but she loses her identity and undergoes in search of her another identity. Her fate is shaped by the male characters in the play. Her problems of education and loss of identity remains unsolved.

Feministic perspectives depicted through the problem play “Pygmalion”:-

The present play has the different traits of feministic perspectives which can be studied through the ample illustrations and male- female characters. This play is the manifestation of the women's various problems and their struggles to create their identity. So feministic perspectives are especially revealed through the protagonist of the play as following-

Eliza Doolittle as an illiterate, an ordinary and poor female character:

Eliza Doolittle is the most sympathetic character in the play. She is the protagonist of the play who is shown as an illiterate and common cockney girl. She has only a father who is the man

of loose character. She has no her own mother. So she has to sell flowers and earn money for livelihood. She looks so simple and her appearance is described in the play as following

“She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady’s right. She is not at all a romantic figure. She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly older. She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly: its mousy color can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to her waist. She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron. Her boots are much the worse for wear. She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than theirs; but their condition leaves something to be desired; and she needs the services of a dentist”. (Pygmalion, 03).

Eliza being cockney flower girl speaks cockney language which is not usually regarded as a proper dialect but is more often condemned as defect or disease of speech; arising from ignorance or vulgarity or carelessness, or all of these. Therefore she is not happy with this life of having disregard. Nobody gives her respect due to her lower dialect and poverty. Though she is a cockney flower girl yet she also possesses the womanly feelings like other women. So when she sees the ladies in shop then she also wants to be like them. Being illiterate, ordinary and poor, she suffers a lot due to the inferiority complex. It comes to her naturally through the class and gender discrimination.

Her simplicity and ordinariness wins the sympathy of the readers. Though she is ill-treated by the male characters in the play, yet one may have a lot of compassion for her simplicity and her wishes in life. Every girl whether poor or rich, has the right to see the dreams and fulfill them. Though she is poor and illiterate yet she is hard worker because she sells flowers and earns money for living. She is not dependent upon her father who does not care for her. Moreover she gets ready to pay the fees to MR. Higgins, the professor of Phonetics for teaching her. It shows her as a responsible and industrious girl.

Impact of Patriarchal society through the male characters:-

In this play, there are two major male characters whose role can be considered as prominent towards the theme of the play. They represent the patriarchal views and the dominance towards women through their treatment to Eliza. These two male characters are Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering. Henry Higgins is a linguist who likes to study the difficult dialects of languages. He is a professor of Phonetics. Colonel Pickering has also interest in Phonetics. He has come from India to meet Higgins.

One can simply find the impact of patriarchal society by observing these male characters. When both Higgins and Pickering encountered Eliza, they laugh at her due to her defect of speech and strange dialect. Being the professor of Phonetics Higgins tells Pickering that he could pass off the flower girl as a duchess merely by teaching her to speak properly. Pickering becomes curious and responses to it. When Eliza comes to meet Higgins for learning proper language and manners, at that time Pickering bets with Higgins. In the whole play, the bet has been considered as the most significant factor, because it shows their

patriarchal impact as well as negligence towards women. They don't think that what will happen to her. They just play their business. But in real sense, they play with Eliza's future and check their manly ability to prove their dominance over women. So the betting leads to the misfortune of Eliza and makes her to lose her identity at last. Here is a dialogue between Pickering and Higgins regarding a bet:

“HIGGINS: I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you're the greatest teacher alive if you make that good. I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can do it. And I'll pay for the lessons”. (Pygmalion, 22).

Higgins happily accepts this bet due to the manly attitude. They both do not think for a while that what will happen to her? Is she really able to compromise in the new world atmosphere? They have just interest in betting and proving themselves. When they talk to her, they humiliate her and laugh at her to discourage. It shows disregard and inferiority towards women.

Higgins rudely talks with Eliza. He hurts her by laughing at her ordinary nature and language. He does not show any sympathy for her. Moreover he ill-treats her. She is nothing for him except an object of experiment. He puts some condition before her that show his practicality.

“ELIZA: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots of money to buy chocolates and if you are idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with a broomstick. At the end six months you shall go to Buckingham palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the king finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven and sixpence to start life with a lady in a shop. If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you.” (Pygmalion, 29).

Thus, he seems to be so practical and heartless person who does not show compassion for Eliza. Even he talks Mrs. Pearce that when he will do her experiment, these can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again. These two major characters such as Higgins and Pickering who show the dominance of patriarchal society over women through their treatment to the female characters like Eliza and Mrs. Pearce. So the play has been greatly affected by the male characters which prevail over the women through their transformation with the impact of patriarchal domain and tradition. So the feminist approach helps to understand the impact of patriarchal society. It can be clearly seen in the play the dominance of male characters who shaped to a common girl for their selfishness and let her to live on her own way with transformation. It creates the feminist perspectives to undergo through the women critical situation and their nature of compromise to the survival.

Transformation of a common girl into a lady:-

It is the most prominent aspect in the play that reveals the realistic and true picture of many common women who live in miserable conditions. They are deprived of many things by the male dominated society. In this play, the transformation of Eliza, a common cockney girl into a lady is the most seminal element which enlightens her journey from one place to another in search of her identity.

Eliza being a common flower girl, she has to work for getting bread and butter. She sells flowers and earns money for livelihood. So naturally she feels envy of other women who are called Ladies. In this society, those women who travel in taxies, having a lot of money, eating chocolates and good language and manners are called Ladies. They are given more important than common and illiterate women. So she also has some desires to be a lady. So when she encounters Mr. Higgins, the professor of Phonetics at first time, she develops a hope that she can also improve herself with the help of Higgins. She is so enthusiastic towards her desires and she meets Higgins and expresses her wish to be a lady. But her desire of becoming a lady is a kind of imaginative dream that she cannot realize its reality.

Mr. Higgins and Colonel Pickering both have a bet regarding Eliza's transformation from a common girl into a lady. They know the result that what problems will arise after her transformation. But they don't tell her and make her aware with its effects. They just take care of their business. They consider her as an object for experiment. Hence, at last Higgins trains her for six months and changes her from a common flower girl into a lady.

Here Eliza realizes herself being a lady and the selfishness of Higgins and Pickering. Her transformation does not please her but leads her in search of her identity. She blames to Higgins for changing her. She shows her concerns in the following dialogue.-

“LIZA: (pulling herself together in desperation) what am I fit for? What have you left me for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me? (Pygmalion, 80).

It shows her concerns for future because she is now a lady and she has gone away from her common life. So now she thinks that what would happen to her? What she would do now? She cannot go back to her previous life. Because nobody is there who would accept her. For whom would she go to her previous life? Here the female problems are shown whose lives are shaped by males as per their selfish motives and business. She falls victim to the patriarchal society like other women. It is the society which employs women for the sake of their selfishness and shapes their lives in wrong way.

Other victims of patriarchy in the play:-

There are two more female characters like Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins who play very significant role in leading to the feministic perspectives. They are nothing but the victim of patriarchal society.

Mrs. Pearce is one of the prominent female characters who enlightens to the central theme of the play. She is Mr. Higgins's housekeeper who is quite old. She performs her

duties very well. She respects Mr. Higgins because he is her owner. So she always tries to make him happy through her work. Here one can see the two important aspects of common woman through Mrs. Pearce character. She has the great regard for her owner. When Eliza comes to meet Mr. Higgins at first time. Then Eliza tells him that she will offer him money if he teaches her language and make her lady. At that time Mrs. Pearce gets angry with her and scolds her that she is just a common flower girl. She is an ignorant girl and how she can think that she could afford to pay Mr. Higgins. Her anger for Eliza shows her respect for her owner. It is her one aspect of womanly nature. At the same time, she reveals her other aspect of womanly nature.

She being woman has the womanly feelings as well. So she also respects women. She knows that Mr. Higgins is her owner so she respects him. She also knows Mr. Higgins's practical and shrewd nature. But she cannot oppose him. Here is a dialogue between Higgins and Mrs. Pearce which shows her extreme concerns for Eliza and her womanly feelings.

“HIGGINS: [deftly retrieving the handkerchief and intercepting her on her reluctant way to the door] You're an ungrateful wicked girl. This is my return for offering to take you out of the gutter and dress you beautifully and make a lady of you.

MRS. PEARCE: Stop, Mr. Higgins. I won't allow it. It's you that are wicked. Go home to your parents, girl; and tell them to take better care of you. (Pygmalion, 25)

It shows her protest to Mr. Higgins and concerns for Eliza. Thus Mrs. Pearce is also the victim of patriarchal society in which she works.

Mrs. Higgins is also a woman character whose role shows the feministic perspectives. She is Mr. Higgins's mother. She is an old woman of good nature. She has been very much familiar with the men's world. She is the witness of the patriarchal society. She knows her son, Mr. Higgins who is still unmarried though he is of 45 years old. She knows that he possesses manly practical and shrewd nature. Yet she loves him and neglects to his selfish attitude because of her motherly feelings.

When Mr. Higgins comes to meet his mother and tells her about Eliza's transformation from a common flower girl into a lady by him. She opposes it and expresses her concerns for Eliza that what will happen to her after transformation. It shows her feministic perspectives towards other women. She has the extreme hatred for the men because of their selfish motives and tendency. When Higgins and Pickering clarify their views about Eliza's transformation that it would be good for her to live her life freely and she can do as she wants. They would also look for a good job for her. But they are ready to do for their selfish purpose of winning the bet and keeping their manly respect. Mrs. Higgins gets very angry with them after listening their clarifications. She blames to them that they can never understand woman's problems. Here she exclaims her anger for men in the following dialogue-

“Oh, men! men!! men!!!” (Pygmalion, 68)

Her utterance of the above dialogue indicates many things. She openly expresses her anger for the men who are most selfish giants on the earth who can do anything for their selfishness. She protests not only Higgins and Pickering but also to the all men who consider woman inferior and shape them as per their selfish motives.

The compromise of all women in the play is the emblem of women's helplessness:-

Though compromise is the important feature of modern era which is applicable to all human beings. But in real sense women have to compromise on a large scale for everything such as education, morality and especially for survival. The present play is the best example of feministic perspectives. They have to compromise for their survival. They are transformed at different levels by the patriarchal society. Here is an account of women's problems and how they are underestimated and neglected by the male dominated society.

Eliza Doolittle is the protagonist of the play. Being a poor flower seller she struggles for her livelihood. She falls victim to the stylish and aristocratic lives of other ladies. At last she is transformed from a common girl into a lady. Yet the problem of sense of belonging remains same. In fact she is the victim not only of being a common girl but also a lady. She becomes helpless because she is a lady now and she cannot go back to her previous life. Nobody will accept her. So at last she has to compromise with her transformation of being a lady for her survival. She has no mother. She has a father who is of no important. Nobody is there for whom she can go back. So she compromises with the changing life. She realizes that whether she is a common girl or a lady, but she is just a victim of this patriarchal society.

"Higgins and Pickering have lost all interest in her. She was merely the object of their experiment and the experiment being over, their interest in her come to an end. They ignore her completely, and her despair and frustration is forcefully expressed, when she throws the slippers of Higgins into his face, divests herself of all the jewellery that has been given to her and forthwith leaves this house. She must work out her own salvation, and by her own efforts carve out a place for herself in society. She has been alienated from her earlier social environment and now her quest is for identity and belongingness in the higher social environment to which she has been raised."(Tilak, p.247-48)

Mrs. Pearce who is Higgins's housekeeper, she has the great experience of men's nature. She has to work for livelihood. She shows her regard for men like Higgins though she dislikes them. But she too compromises with her life. Though she blames Higgins yet she works under him for her survival.

Mrs. Higgins who is Mr. Higgins's mother. She stills live under the pressure of patriarchal society. She is an old lady and she knows her son's manly nature she loves him. She gets sad and feels concerns of Eliza when she comes to know about her transformation by her son. She blames to men who are responsible for women's problems though she is a lady, not a common woman. Yet she too faces the problems in the patriarchal society. Though she protests to the men but she cannot do anything. She is too helpless like other women and has to compromise at every stage.

Thus, all the female characters in the play have to compromise with their transformation due to their helplessness which is caused by the patriarchal society.

Conclusion:-

In this way, the researcher has pointed out the feministic perspectives at different levels through the female characters and patriarchal dominance. The play is the emblem of women's problems such as education, suffering, morality and survival. The researcher intends to bring out the true and drastic aspects of feminism and the nature of patriarchal society in which women are shaped by them for their selfish and shrewd motives. There are many women like Eliza Doolittle who are transformed by patriarchal society with selfish motives. They reluctantly have to compromise for their survival. They belong neither to the old lives nor to the new way of lives. The researcher has revealed not only the women's problems but also their strong passions and ability to survive in any circumstances through the female character in the play through feministic perspectives.

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