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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**G.B Shaw's Pygmalion: Character Analysis of Eliza Doolittle as Representative of Class Struggle**

Aneela Anbar<sup>1</sup> Dr. Abdus Samad<sup>\*2</sup> Faryal Khan<sup>3</sup>

1. MS Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, KP, Pakistan
1. Associate Professor, Department of English, Kohsar University, Murree, Punjab, Pakistan
1. MS Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, KP, Pakistan

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**Corresponding Author\***

abdussamad@kum.edu.pk

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed at analyzing the character of Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion (by G.B Shaw) as a representative of class struggle in the Victorian society under Marxist literary perspective. George Bernard Shaw's five-act play Pygmalion, which depicts the socioeconomic state of British society at the height of capitalism, is regarded as one of the literary masterpieces of the early 20th century. This study was a qualitative research that evaluate the primary character of Pygmalion, Eliza Doolittle as a representation of the working class' unwavering fight for its rights, a fight the capitalists consciously choose to ignore, under Marxist perspective. According to the findings of this study, the practice of human exploitation in an industrial setting had a significant negative impact on social circumstances in England from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. The working class experienced severe hardship as a result and was severely dehumanized. The spirit of class struggles then emerged among the workers as a means of emancipating themselves from poverty, liberating them from the domination of the capitalists, and gaining the recognition that they are on an equal footing with other members of society.

**KEYWORDS** Class Struggle, Dehumanization, Marxism

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**Introduction**

A well-known playwright of the Victorian era, George Bernard Shaw is one of the realistic writers whose works expose the ugly sides of society, critique the hypocrisy of capitalists, and express sympathy for the poor. He rejects the aesthetic theory's "art for art's sake" and believes that art should address urgent societal issues. Because of the idealism and humanism in his writing, he was awarded the Nobile Prize in Literature. His plays, which illustrate his socialist and Marxist viewpoint, are highly renowned. One of his well-known plays is Pygmalion.

Living in poverty and battling every day can be a very challenging way to live. Most people would try to improve their lives and circumstances if given the chance. Shaw in his play Pygmalion (1912) portrays the story of Eliza Doolittle, a young woman from a lower class who dreams of becoming a duchess or lady after experiencing rejection from society because of her appearance and the accent she speaks. In order to elevate her social rank and move from a lower to a higher class, she learns to speak like a duchess when given the chance.

The play was written during Queen Victoria's reign. Social classes were considered to be fixed during this historical period, and no one moved between them. The entire play questions the idea of fixed social class. Shaw skilfully linked two themes in this play that were both fascinating to him: the issue of socioeconomic inequality and the issue with the classical English language. As a result, it looks into significant issues relating to socioeconomic class, behaviour, and interaction between sexes.

It portrays the tale of a flower girl's social transformation into a lady through linguistic retraining. Shaw's primary goal in writing this play is to show how one's behaviour, including how one speaks to others in a society, and how one dresses, can reveal their social status. This work reflects his understanding of his time, which is in some ways an indirect reflection of his personal maturation. According to Ellen Dolgin, vice president of the International Shaw Society., this play is mostly about language and the notion that through language one can advance one's social status is crucial for understanding that period. The pronunciation issue received major consideration as well. The author claims that this is the key reason that separates English society into social classes more sharply than any other.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Class**

It refers to a group of individuals that have the same socioeconomic level within a community. People who belong to the same socioeconomic class typically have same levels of wealth, educational attainment, employment status, and income. People in society are categorized into three different classes and they are:

- Upper Class
- Middle Class
- Lower Class

#### **Class Struggle:**

It is also known as class warfare, class war, and class conflict. According to Marxist theory, Capitalists--bourgeois and workers--proletariat continued to compete with one another for political and economic dominance. The class of people who exchange their work for money is known as the proletariat. The bourgeoisie is defined by the practise of paying others for their labour and employing that labour as a means of profit. According to Karl Marx, a conflict between the bourgeois and the proletariat is unavoidable and will lead to socialism's eventual victory over capitalism.

#### **Marxist View**

Marxists believe that literature has a direct relationship to reality. Every story reveals something about the world and the author's political stance. To ascertain what that is is the aim of the Marxist critic.

They therefore saw literature as a by-product of the economic and ideological factors unique to that time period rather than as a work produced in accordance with everlasting artistic standards. They hold that every area of life is influenced by the social and economic condition. As a result, it is the extrinsic approach to literature that enables us to understand the historical context of the age in which the piece was produced.

## **Related Studies**

Various researchers have studied and analyzed *Pygmalion* of G.B Shaw and its characters under various literary critical theories and perspectives. Lihua (2006) examine the play from perspective of feminism. The woman character in this play is seen only as an object of experiment. Suleiman (2009) copes with the notion of Metamorphosis as a dramatic technique used by Bernard Shaw in his play *Pygmalion*. Yohanes (2015) discusses in his study the class struggle as the reaction of working class to oppose the oppression done by the capitalist in the end of Industrial Revolution era". The study conducted by Ali in 2016 analyzes that the way of interaction of upper and middle class reveals the action of Eliza to change lower class people and her social class status. The thesis conducted by Saniyan in 2011 throws light on the social problem in the comedy "*Pygmalion*" by G.B Shaw. In all the above studies none of the researchers has analyzed the character of Eliza Doolittle from the Marxist perspective in detail. Hence the research gap found above will be filled by this study.

## **Material and Methods**

The nature of this investigation was qualitative. Qualitative research is a form of scientific observational methodology used to collect non-numerical data. The research was primarily exploratory. It was employed to comprehend the underlying causes, viewpoints, and motivations.

The primary data source of this research was the text of the play *Pygmalion* by G.B Shaw. The data was collected by close reading of the play *Pygmalion*. The data was analyzed by critical discussion. The theoretical framework of this study was Marxist literary perspective.

## **Data Analysis**

Critical analysis of the textual evidences regarding the evaluation of the character of Eliza Doolittle in the play *Pygmalion* by G.B Shaw is done under Marxist Perspective. Due to limitations of the study, the data was collected and the character was analyzed only under the headings: class struggle, economy as a driving force behind the society, exploitation of the lower classes by the upper classes, how the character undermines/maintains the status quo.

## **Class Struggle**

As under Marxist approach, there is always a class struggle between the upper class and lower class of the society, the upper class tries to maintain its superiority over the lower class and the lower class struggles to break the vicious circle and achieve equality with the upper class, the same kind of class conflict and struggle to maintain the status quo are to break it are witnessed in the play *Pygmalion* and are mainly represented by the character Eliza Doolittle.

Various kinds of constraints are exercised by the upper class to keep the lower class at distance like the use of language, not to mix up together, having (presumed) sharp differences in the sense of honor, importance of appearance, sharpness of feelings etc.

In a class-based society it is considered as a crime if a person from lower class speaks to someone from upper class. The same is shown in the case of Eliza Doolittle when she speaks to The Gentleman (Colonel Pickering) and asks him to buy flowers from her. The Bystander, representing the common men opinion in a class based society, warns her that someone is noticing her action of speaking to the gentleman and she may be punished

for that i.e., for speaking to someone from the upper class. All this symbolizes that the people from lower class do not have the right even to speak to the people from upper classes. But Eliza Doolittle tries to break this shell and come out of it. She says,

*.....I aint done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman.....(page 11)*

She defends her action of speaking to the man; thereby trying to assert that all humans are equal and the presumed privileges of the upper classes are baseless and deprivation of the lower classes in so many respects are baseless.

In the same place almost, she defends her right to live anywhere, though she is considered to have no right (as her language represents her to be a girl from lower class) to be present among people of the upper class. When Higgin asks her to leave the place and take shelter somewhere else, she replies

*..... I've a right to be here if I like, same as you....(page 15)*

Higgin representing the upper class believes that anyone who speaks like that girl i.e., the representative language of the lower class has got no right not only to live among them but also not even to live anywhere, in a way speaking the minds of the upper class. Higgin says to her,

*.....A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere--- no right to live..... (Page 15)*

The people from the upper class consider all the manners of the people from the lower class as unbearable and even disgusting and depressing. Higgins declares the same for Eliza's words.

But Eliza is not depressed by his reply. She believes that appearances like language, dressing etc. do not make your character or class; neither do they deprive you, she asserts, to speak to someone or to live somewhere.

In a class based society honor is considered to be a privilege of the people from the elite class. People from the lower classes are thought to be having no sense of honor, self-respect etc. most of the people from the lower class also possess the same image of themselves. Mrs. Pearce is shown to be such a typical lower class woman. She, representing a subdued woman from the lower class and considering the lower class as her eternal destiny, warns Eliza when she speaks in disrespectful and rough way to Higgins. She says to Eliza,

*.....You must not speak to the gentleman like that..... (Page 22)*

However, Eliza is not suppressed by her words and views. Eliza believes that sense of honor is a matter that is equally possessed by all human beings irrespective of status, class, etc. She proves her point of view, when she replies to Mrs. Pearce,

*.....Well, why wont he speak sensible to me..... (Page 22)*

She tells Mrs. Pearce, servant of Mr. Higgins, that she has equal sense of honor as is possessed by Mr. Higgin. She further elaborates that if her master does not speak to her in a polite and respectful manner, she has got every right to retaliate back in the same coin.

On another occasion in the play, Higgins warns her that she (Eliza) would be beheaded at The Tower of London, if she fails to pass the test of language, to speak like a duchess, to speak like a woman from the upper class, at the garden party. Higgins adds

that the king's action of beheading her will serve as an example for everyone else who try to change their class.

Eliza is not subdued by Higgins warning. She even refuses to go to the party and appear in the test. She believes that she has got the right to learn the language of the upper class, the standard language or what so ever that may be. She also thinks that no one is entitled to take her life for taking steps to improve her life. So she rejects going there to the garden party. She says that she has got the same feelings to improve her life as everyone in the upper class is believed to possess. She says,

*....I wont go near the king.....I have my feelings the same as anyone else..... (Page 28).*

The above textual evidences reveal that Eliza Doolittle is shown not believing in class distinction in society. Wherever and whenever she is faced with such like hindrances, she is found to be making constant struggles to overcome them. She is found to be a representative woman who has been working for achieving equal rights for everyone irrespective of class, societal conventions and traditions etc.

### **Economy as a driving force in Marxist Perspective**

In Marxist perspective, economy plays a pivotal role. It determines class, status, identity and power etc. of individuals in a society. In a Marxist society the protagonists are supposed to resist this force and to create a society based on equality of all individuals. In this play it is also shown that economy determines the fate of every character, i.e., his/her class, status, identity, power etc. it is on the basis of economy that the characters from the upper class consider all their privileges as their divine rights and are not ready to comprise on them; character from the lower class believes that all their deprivations are their fate; but the protagonist of the play Eliza is shown to believe that nothing is pre-written but everything depends on one's struggle and hard work i.e. she believes in free-will rather than predestined philosophy.

The value of an individual in a Marxist perspective is due to wealth he/she possesses. In Pygmalion Higgins considers Eliza as a 'baggage', a valueless being, because she is from the lower class and not materially well off. He represents the views of individuals from the upper class in a capitalist society. He says to Eliza

*.....shall we ask this baggage to sit down or shall we throw her out of the window... (Page 21)*

Whether someone deserves respect or not, to Higgins it all depends upon one's economic status. He considers that Eliza does not deserve to be seated honorably; rather she is considered dirt, something worth hatred that deserves to be thrown out of the room. All his views about Eliza are due to her weak economic position, not something intrinsic in nature. This very point in the play is expressed and elaborated sarcastically through the words of Eliza when she responds to Higgins' words about her. She says to him

*....I wont be called a baggage when Ive offered to pay like any lady..... (Page 21)*

She means by this that Higgins assigns value to an individual on the basis of his/her economic status. She says to him ironically that she would not be deemed as baggage if she pays him like a well off woman. That is, her value as individual to Higgins, is determined by the material possessions that she has got. Eliza, and hence the playwright, criticizes Higgins and all Higgins like people for this view.

It is reflected in the play that one's value is reflected with his/her wealth and social status. Before Higgins and Pickering go together at the end of the first act, Higgins gives

Eliza some coins. As she has money, she uses a cab to feel like an upper class as being able to afford a taxi meant Luxury at that time. Another important point is that the reader learns her name right after she gets some money. Before she has money she is just a "flower girl" but then she becomes Eliza. It refers to the situation of society. If people have money they have identity. Others are just flower girls or workers. Before, Eliza gets money. She does not have a name and identity. Higgins and Pickering name also right after they introduced their jobs. Before they are named is The Note-taker and The Gentlemen. So identity is related with wealth the title in the society. People are treated according to their social background and Profession.

### **Exploitation of the lower by the Upper class**

In a class based society the well-off people from the upper classes make misuse of the deprived ones from the lower classes for their material benefits and pleasures. They do not care about their careers, harms and benefits, their joys and glory etc. The same is shown in this play through the character of Eliza.

It is shown that Higgins and Mr. Pickering, representing the upper class, consider Eliza as an object of experiment and not individual having her own life. They use her as an object in their bit. What consequences their experiment on her life during this bet would have on her life, they are not altogether concerned with that. Though Higgins knows that if Eliza fails in the proposed language test at the garden party she would be beheaded by the king, even then Higgins is ready to proceed with his programs to carry out his bet with Colonel Pickering. He is least interested in what will happen to Eliza life.

The discussion between Mrs. Pearce and Higgins about the future of Eliza Life also reveals the above mentioned point. Mrs. Pearce inquires of Higgins what would become of Eliza after the completion of his teaching to Eliza and completion of their bet. To this Higgins replies that if he leaves her in gutter or lefts her up to the position of a lady, that would make no difference for her in her life. He means that she is a useless creature and in either case she would remain useless. Whatever Higgins and Pickering are doing is just to complete their bet and never do them to bring any positive change in her life. When Mrs. Pearce asks Higgins to think about Eliza future he replies,

*.....what to become of her if I leave her in the gutter..... (Page 27)*

Whatever Mrs. Higgins remarks about the experiment of Higgins and Pickering on Eliza in carrying out their bet that also shows exploitation of Eliza by both the individuals. Mrs. Higgins says

*.....you two infinitely stupid male creatures: the problem of what is to be done with her afterwards..... (Page 36)*

On the one hand Mrs. Higgins supports the cause of the upper class by declaring the two fellows as stupid creatures because she thinks that class change is something impossible as far as Eliza is concerned but on the other hand she expresses her sympathies with Eliza and shows her concern for the future of Eliza. She calls the two fellows as stupid creatures because they are playing with the life of a girl. She thinks that such inhumane treatment should not be meted out to her.

However, Eliza through her actions proves all their views as baseless and futile, especially through her performance in the garden party. At the party she performs better what is talked to her by Higgins or what the two betters expect of her. In a way not only she changes herself apparently, rather she undergoes complete inward transformation.

That is her real self undergoes a change. And all this proves her to be a better being than the two bitters and also negates their views about her.

The above textual evidence shows the exploitation of individuals from the lower class at the hand of those from the upper class. It also shows that the exploitation is resisted by Eliza and others.

### **How the character maintains status quo**

According to Marxism, society progresses through the struggle between opposing forces. It is this struggle between opposing classes that result in social transformation. The upper class tries to maintain its superiority over the lower class and the lower class tries to gain equality with the upper class by breaking the vicious bond that exists between them. This same kind of struggle to maintain the status quo in the play is mainly represented by the character Eliza Doolittle.

In the first act of the Eliza defends her right to live anywhere where she wants, though she is considered to have no right to be present among the people of upper class. When she was asked by Higgins to leave the place and take shelter somewhere else, she replies

*“.....I have a right to here if I like same as you.....” (Page 15)*

Higgins representing the upper class views that anyone who speaks like that girl has got no right not only to live among them but also not even to live anywhere, in a way speaking the minds of the upper class. Higgins says to her,

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The people from the upper class consider all the manners of the people from the lower class as unbearable and even disgusting and depressing. Higgins declares the same for Eliza's words.

But Eliza is not affected by his reply. She believes that appearances like language, dressing etc. do not make your character or class; neither do they deprive you from the basic rights of living.

In a class based society honor is considered to be a privilege of the people from the elite class. People from the lower classes are thought to be having no sense of honor, self-respect etc. However, Eliza in this play also resists this view by asserting that honor and respect is not something confined only to upper class but it is for all. When Mrs. Pearce warns her to speak in a respectful way to Higgins, she replies

*.....Well, why wont he speak sensible to me.... (Page 22).*

She tells Mrs. Pearce, servant of Mr. Higgins, that she has equal sense of honor as is possessed by Mr. Higgins. She further elaborates that if her master does not speak to her in a polite and respectful manner, she has got every right to pay back in the same coin.

The above textual evidences reveal that Eliza Doolittle is shown not believing in class distinction in society. Wherever and whenever she is faced with such hindrances, she is found to be making constant struggles to overcome them. She is found to be a representative woman who has been working for achieving equal rights for everyone irrespective of class, societal conventions and traditions etc.

Overall the text shows Eliza Doolittle a human being from the lower class in a capitalist society trying to overcome all the hazards faced by any member of her class in achieving equal rights for herself under Marxist philosophy in such a society.

### **Conclusion**

All the textual evidences taken from the play and analyzed in chapter IV reveal that class struggle emerges from the class conflict between the elite and working class. The conflict occurs whenever the interests of the two classes do not fit each other.

*Pygmalion* is one of Shaw's most popular plays. It portrays the social condition in England at the end of 19th century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflects class struggle as a collective reaction to the condition.

It is a story of the transformation of a flower girl from a lower to an elite class. It employs Eliza Doolittle's struggle, a flower girl, who wishes to be a lady to free herself from poverty and stupidity.

All the textual evidences in chapter IV regarding the analysis of the Eliza Doolittle under Marxist perspective prove her a dynamic character from the working class. Her character reflects the class struggle; how Eliza Doolittle faces resistance in the way of changing class, how upper classes looks at the lower classes as something devalued, how the values of upper and lower classes are represented.



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