

Pygmalion by Bernard Shaw :an analysis

It is prescribed in B.a.part three.

Bernard Shaw was an English playwright .He was born in the year 1856 and died in the year 1950.His father was a civil servant ,while his mother was inclined towards music. When Shaw became a little older,he was sent to Wesley College in Dublin to pursue education by one of his relatives. But he did not fare well in the college. He then was shifted into another college. But there also the story was same . Shaw later wrote in one of his diaries that the money that was sent by his father was so little that it used to get spent in the afternoon itself.Shaw's father gave up hope of his education and employment after this episode. Now Bernard Shaw came out of the school and started to write novels.But the novels were not acclaimed among the readers. He also used to play music to earn livelihood.

Meanwhile he read Henrik Ibsen(1828__1906) who was a Norwegian playwright. He was very much influenced by his plays.The two plays of Ibsen were a hit in the theatres entitled,"A Doll,'s House "and Ghosts". In both these plays Ibsen had raised a problem of society that were rampant at that time. The story of the play A Doll,'s House "moves round the central character Nora who is a housewife.Her husband the bread earner of the family.Nora spends all day at home and welcomes her husband with a cup of tea when he returns from the work in the evening. One fine day, Nora revolts against the system as she compares her status with a doll that were decorated on the shelf of the drawing room. She leaves the house and becomes a liberated woman . The play became a hit in the theatres as it was propagating a theory of life for a woman that was completely new and was not in practice at that time. Bernard Shaw followed Ibsen and made him his mentor. He decided to write plays on the pattern of Henrik Ibsen that was centralizing his plays around a rampant problem of the society. He also wrote an essay on the style of his mentor entitled"Quintessence of Ibsenism". He wrote a number of plays and all of them were based on one or the other problem of society that were relevant at that time .one can see instances in Arns and the Man where he is talking about the ills of war and its evil impact on society. In A Doctor's dilemma ,he is talking about a doctor whose actually a quack. In Widowers Houses ,he is talking about the problem of widows. In "pygmalion ",he is talking about the problem of language that was faced by the then England. In Man and Superman ,that happened to be his masterpiece, he is talking about the problem of Eugenics propounded by Francis Galton This Galton was the cousin of Charles Darwin who wrote "the origin Of Species". Shaw in Man and Superman has highlighted the fact that there is a eugenics or Life force in each and every woman that compels her to pursue the best man in life. She follows this life force as long as she does not get the guy. Sometimes she does it against the wishes of her Male counterpart. The moment she gets the perfect guy both physically and mentally,she gives up her quest. This Shaw terms as the meeting or mating of superman and superwoman. Shaw has beautifully depicted it through the story of the play "" Man and Superman" in yet another play ,Back to Methuselah ,he has raised the problem of christianity.

Now we will discuss the play "pygmalion "that is the prescribed in the syllabus. Pygmalion as has been said earlier deals with the problem of language or phonetics. It has been scientifically proved that a man 's language changes after every six yards.

The story of the play revolves around Eliza Doolittle who is a flower girl. Eliza speaks in cockney dialect. One fine day she meets prof. Higgins who is a professor of phonetics . Prof Higgins is accompanied by prof.Pickering who is a professor of Sanskrit. Prof .Higgins hears the cockney dialect of Eliza and decides to reform her. He invites Eliza at his residence . Eliza in the first encounter is terrified by Mr. Higgins as he takes her to be a policeman. But the confusion

gets cleared very soon and she reaches at the house of the professor where the professor leaves with his friend prof Pickering and an elderly lady Mrs. Clara. Prof .Higgins accepts Eliza in the house as an object of his experiment. He takes the challenge to turn Eliza into an elite lady within the time frame of six months. In six months time Eliza is metamorphosed as she turns into a sophisticated lady of refined manners and high taste. one fine day prof Higgins boasts of his success of his experiment .He says,,my experiment is over with Eliza.Eliza hears the conversation and throws the slipper on the face of prof. Higgins as she had developed soft corners for the professor. Prof .Higgins turns down the proposal and declares her not fit for it Number He asks her to marry Prof Pickering instead of her. But Eliza rejects it. Later, Mr. Freddy, the young guy comes to the rescue of Eliza as he is smitten by her charms. Freddy marries Eliza . later she becomes a teacher and lives happily ever after with Freddy . She also opens a big flower shop.

The play like all the plays of Shaw has been written in a witty manner. It is full with dialogues that is the constant source of laughter for the audience who is sitting in the gallery as well as the readers who are reading it. The language is very simple and is easily understood. This type of language has deliberately been used by Shaw.who wanted it to be light and witty.

Here he is different from William Shakespeare whose eloquent speeches make him distinctive. A Macbeth is philosophical when he says:

∴ Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Creeps in this pretty pace,

Life us a tale told by an idiot ,

Full of sound and fury , signifying nothing.

Or an Othello,who is enjoying the coziness of Desdemona "

If after every tempest come such calms

Let the tempest blow till they have awakened death. ""[Othello)

Shaw is simple and almost prosaic. There are no flights of fancy. He is on the ground and deals with the problems of society in a rational manner with a language that is spoken on today basis.

The play has a unique title that is said to be originated from a number of sources. The first source is said to be of Greek origin that tells about a sculptor named Pygmalion who made a beautiful statue He named it Galatea.. the statue was so much beautiful that he fell in love with this statue.he went into a temple and asked the goddess Aphrodite to give life to it. His prayer was answered by the Goddess and the statue became alive. Here prof .Higgins is the sculptor and Eliza is the statue.

The second source is said to be of Dr. Faustus that was written by Marlowe. The third source is said to be of Cinderella and her Prince charming .the fourth source is said to be of Adam and Eve I am not going to elaborate it in great detail as it will take a lot of space. So one can understand the significance of the title.

In the conclusion, it is a play by Shaw that is easy to read and understand. Its story is entertaining and the dialogues are full with wit and satire.

Questions:what is the significance of the title"pygmalion"? Illustrate it with the reference of the text you have read.

What is the theme of pygmalion? Discuss it with the reference of the text.