



The Theme of Metamorphosis in Shaw's *Pygmalion*

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ABSTRACT

Human beings can grow and progress under a good trainer. Metamorphosis happens under the nurture and care of a tutor. This evolution takes place in college. It is possible to blossom and flower and learn the aspects to successful living, when in college. It is the duty of the ward to be subservient in his understanding. There happens an internal and external change. The inadequacies get sealed and knowledge gets topped. The teacher becomes an artist in shaping a good future for the student and thus his personality. This paper presents *Pygmalion* as a drama which advocates such recognition of metamorphosis for the betterment of the coming generations of the student community.

Key words: sculpture, molding, transformation, training, fundamental, refinement, dedication, knowledge, metamorphosis etc.

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Literature is a reflection of life. Particularly drama gives immediate response to analyze and realize the self. So drama is the best media to present the profoundly meaningful aspects of human nature. The tragedies, the triumphs, sometimes which are futuristic, sometimes sensational; are best brought to light from critical aspects for public understanding to gain and attain philosophy hidden in the action and drama of humans. The enactment of real or imaginative events enables individuals to understand the self. The fundamental behavior of humans is explored. Drama is a unique tool to criticize human activity, hence that which is

seen is right from the very lives of mankind. Rightly the comparison of the world to a stage and people to actors by Shakespeare has also been accepted by ancient sages and scholars, who feel that people adorn the costumes of particular characters in birth and discard it in death.

The Pygmalion myth comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Pygmalion is a sculptor who creates a sculpture of a woman so perfectly and falls in love with it. Aphrodite is moved by his love and touches the statue to life so that she becomes Galatea, and he experiences happiness with his own creation. Shaw uses the aspects of theater to make a greatest impression that is the transformation of Eliza Doolittle in his play *Pygmalion*. It is the normal story of a less privileged human being climbing to the top with ambition, but the heroine changes drastically in the most external ways with the expert and strict training of Higgins.. However, while Eliza certainly changes in the external, this change also serves as a development of self-respect. Higgins transforms her appearance and improves her communication to the standard of the elite. She also gets refined in manners and shines in personality.

In this paper presentation the drama, *Pygmalion* is taken up, to present the facts of life existent in the action of Shaw's play. George Bernard Shaw, second greatest playwright next to Shakespeare, has tackled a simple theme of training a street girl who is a flower vendor, to make her perfect in her language and etiquette and present her as a Duchess. This theme is applied to the master – student relationship in schools and colleges. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the hero Pygmalion, disgusted by the loose lives of the women of his era, creates a beautiful statue more perfect than any living woman. Goddess Venus blesses and he is delighted to find that she is human, warm and alive. Every student is a sculpture of the master.

Such an allegory in Victorian England was what George Bernard Shaw did in his version of the *Pygmalion*. He brought about a metamorphosis in shaping a coarse woman of the streets, who is a flower seller, to a genteel and high class lady and presented her in an aristocratic party. She carries it off with flying colors. The same metamorphosis takes place in the master – student relationship in the college life. The students get their training under a master. Everything is new and they are bewildered at the beginning. English is Greek to them. The

master takes it upon himself to transform his wards. He starts his patient training. Training is the most important part of college. If practice makes perfect the training has to be perfect. A human is trained from infancy. An animal is trained by a ring master in zoo. The animal is taught to be obedient and subservient to the ring master. There lies the success of the show. All these are basic trainings. The real discipline is to be trained in the youth days especially the period of the UG studies. That is the critical part of life when one gets molded for achievement and if not, become a failure. It makes or breaks a youth.

It is common to assume that a characteristic personality is only through an upbringing by birth or virtue. The status and social standing has to be inculcated from childhood days. Shaw in this drama breaks the English belief that culture and manners are attained only by good grooming from a young age. The playwright focuses on the importance of training and how a good trainer can achieve best results because of his involvement for perfection. An illiterate lady is groomed and nurtured, taught mannerisms, excellent communication, and given classic attire. She transforms into an elegant lady and a good human being.

This drama reflects that aspect of life situation of college life, where a student enters college to do his UG from rural. In *Pygmalion* Eliza Doolittle is a flower girl with a slang dialect of English. Her standards are very poor and she wishes to improve for sake of becoming a florist in a shop. Her ambition is her future progress. In a college when a student gets entry his goal is his future. When a pupil joins college from the suburban area he has to transform. The college scene is very different for his comprehension. It is at this instance the master adorns the character of a trainer similar to the hero Higgins in the play. First of all the whole atmosphere is concerned with the visible speech as in *Pygmalion*. This life offers distinct change and the grasping power is very less by the pupil due to the many distractions of the college life. The ward comes with restricted knowledge of education. He is very simple from the country side. To mold him becomes the duty of the teacher. This training becomes very significant. He has to impart what is vital for society. Like *Pygmalion* is a drama which brings out the rags-to-riches story so also the students grow their wings and learn to fly the skies. In that the heroine changes drastically in the most external ways, here the students refine and mature. However, while Eliza certainly changes externally there is also fundamental development of self-respect that she undergoes. Training gives other aspects of growth. There is internal and external change, and appearance alone does not get molded.

The wards get such kind of transformation, on the inside and outside and walk out with heads held high on graduation day. Every student becomes a sculpture of the master.

Pygmalion is not a play about turning a flower girl into a duchess, but turning a simple woman into a wonderful, elegant human being. Similarly a student enters college wanting in manners and maturity. Some of the students those who are still uncultured in schools and colleges are trained under the guidance of the master. The less privileged get certain benefits but do not realize the value of an institution. It is here the master adopts the individual trainee like Higgins adopts Eliza. Eliza has basic knowledge but no refinement of the upper-class. The student also gets admission from remote places and is intimidated by the syllabus. His behavior is coarse. The system makes him to react negatively. If Eliza had “dreadful accent” the rural pupil lacks in communication and accent. UG studies have lot of attractions apart from studies. If let free the learner who has come without knowledge, manners and etiquette, is likely to be a failure and let go his goal and the very purpose of his college life. Eliza was “deliciously low” according to the opinion of the master. Then Eliza’s Master Higgins trained and gave her what the society expects from a well bred lady. The new admission comes with lower levels of intellect and knowledge in college. And the college master gives the student what the society expects from him. He molds him to the needs of the society. Eliza got transformed in six months and the UG studies transform the student in three years. “You can’t be a good girl inside if you are dirty outside”, says the master’s housekeeper Mrs. Pearce, to Eliza while taking her for a wash. The external cleanliness, internal realization, attitude development and social commitment added to the academics, all make the student a wonderfully matured human being. So there is internal and external molding.

From Shaw’s biography it is seen that as a boy, Shaw's mother was an accomplished singer who dedicated herself to the perfection of the method of phonetics. Her teacher had yoga-like approach to voice training. He wanted perfection, which helped her to set up a shop and stand on her own feet and also train her daughters. Shaw was impressed and influenced by this courageous move on the part of his mother to strike out on her own and to create an independent life for herself. The college masters wish such confidence to be instilled in their students. They desire the wards to become achievers. The students from the villages see new urban life. They have grown up as first generation learners. They come shy with dreams of freedom and are taken up by the fancies of teenage. At this point the responsibility of training

and nurture is squarely on the shoulders of the masters. In *Pygmalion* Shaw shows a lot of sympathy for the flower girl who wants a higher station in life; he is even more concerned with the unloved, neglected woman who decides to make a better life for her. The play has the determination to have Eliza grow into a full human being with her own mind with perfect training from a master. The molding starts from the external. The house keeper Mrs. Pearce works on the girl's appearance and manners, Higgins is the strict and demanding master while his colleague Mr. Pickering works, albeit unknowingly, on her self-respect and dignity. Thus Eliza Doolittle becomes a whole duchess-like personality. When Eliza is announced she makes quite an impact on everyone with her studied grace and pedantic speech. The treatment of her master taught her not only phonetics, but also self-respect. "I care for life, for humanity; and you are a part of it that has come my way and been built into my house. What more can you or anyone ask?" Henry Higgins has this to say to Eliza. This is the most important transformation, and Shaw indicates this as a valuable lesson. That value is realized and every effort is made by the master in the college to instill the values for the future social standing of the student. It is a matter of nurture where practice makes perfect. In the drama when Eliza enters, clean and pretty in a blue kimono, everyone is amazed by the difference. Even her father has failed to recognize her. Such is the experience of the parent on the graduation day. They are amazed and proud of their loved ones.

In this way, Shaw draws our attention to his art, his ability to create through the medium of speech, a successful outcome of powerful ideal that is reflected in the lives of all that education offers in institutions under honored masters. It is the divine will of breathing life into ward characters. The relentless training and dedication, and the honesty humanizes these future generation. In the process a big drama is enacted. And art takes shape to a more contemporarily relevant and human level. In *Pygmalion* the great truth is that Eliza does not have bad manners or good manners or any other sort of manners, but has the same manner of all human souls. The students also behave as if they are in Heaven and the masters realize that one soul is as good as another. The master adopts a trainer's attitude. It becomes a matter of nurture, not nature. It is also absolute compassion as the examination is done and the sun starts to shine in their lives.

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