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Character Sketch of Eliza Doolittle

Like Candida, Raina and Ann Whitefield , Eliza Doolittle is also one of the most favourite character of G.B.Shaw, the greatest dramatist of modern age. She is the leading female character of Shaw’s ‘Pygmalion’. In the beginning of the play, she is a typical working class woman who manages her livelihood by selling flowers near Covent Garden but later she transforms herself as a new person through Higgin’s experiment that she seems to belong to upper class. Shaw has portrait her as self confident, ambitious, emotional, hard working girl who has courage to face the difficulties of life.

Physical appearance : In the beginning of the play, Eliza Doolittle is presented as a rustic, sub human flower girl who is unattractive, and has horrible speech of cockney dialect. She is twenty years old daughter of Alfred Doolittle, a dust cleaner. She first appears in the very beginning of the play when people try to save themselves from rain under the portico of St. Paul’s Church. In due course of saving herself from rain, She collides with Freddy, a young boy, who knocks over her basket of flower. In a Cockney accent, she tells him to watch where he is going. She mumbles to herself about the carelessness of such people who knocks others about. She wears a

sailor's hat which is full of dust. Her boots are very old and worn out. Due to her dusty appearance, she is unable to attract the attention of other people. Regarding her physical appearance, Shaw writes :

“She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady's right. She is not at all an attractive person. 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.p.14)

Thus, Shaw has presented her as an unattractive girl of about twenty years who wears a little sailor's hat which is full of dust. She is the real image of poor people .

An ambitious girl : In spite of being a poor girl of twenty years, Eliza Doolittle is full of ambitions. Shaw has portrait her as an intelligent girl who wants to progress in her life. Although she is born in a poor family but she wants to change her fortune with hard labour. At the beginning of the play, she has the modest ambition to work in a florist's shop rather than selling flowers from a basket in the street. To fulfil this ambition, she comes to the house of Mr. Higgins, professor of Phonetics, in a taxi to learn standard English so that she may become a part of middle class society. She reveals that she wants to obtain a job as a lady in flower shop

but she won't be hired unless she can speak in a genteel, lady like fashion. She even offers an amount of a shilling an hour. She boldly presents her offer to Mr. Higgins :

“ A lady friend of mine gets French lessons for eighteen pence an hour from a real French gentleman well, you wouldn't have the face to ask me the same for teaching me my own language as you would for French; So I wont give more than a shilling. Take it or leave it.”

Higgins calculates that Eliza's offer is a certain amount of her daily income so represents, for her, a large amount. He was not interested to accept her as her student but on the persuasion of Colonel Pickering, he accepts the challenge to train her as a lady of good pronunciation in six months.

A hard labour girl : George Bernard Shaw has portrait 'Eliza Doolittle' as a girl of hard labour. She does hard labour to fulfil her dream . She has a quick ear. She learns everything immediately. Her accent becomes excellent. She speaks English with pedantic correctness of pronunciation.

A Sensible and Practical girl : Shaw has portrayed Eliza as a sensible and practical girl. She is full of emotions. In the very beginning of the play, when Eliza Doolittle comes to Mr. Higgins for training of phonetics, she does not want to throw her sailor's hat of black straw. Later after taking training from Mr. Higgins, she becomes restless for her future. She does not want to return to her previous life of selling flower nor she can live in the house of Mr. Higgins. She feels that she is just an object for the experiment of mr. Higgins and now when it is successfully completed, there is no use of her in that house. When Mr. Higgins and Colonel Pickering congratulate each other for the success of the experiment , she becomes sad due to their

ignorance of her efforts of it. She does not want to live in that house for a moment . She tells Higgins boldly – *“I sold flowers, I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me. I’m not fit to sell anything else. I wish you’d left me where you found me.”* Thus, Eliza Doolittle is a sensible girl.

Relation with Mr. Higgins and Colonel : Eliza Doolittle is a sensible girl. Her relation with Mr. Higgins and Colonel Pickering is more than that of teacher and student. She wants proper treatment from them. But the nature of Mr. Higgins always shock her. In course of all his experiments and exhibitions, Professor Higgins only thinks of his own skill, his own success and failure, but never stops to consider how Eliza feels. She wants affection . She hates Prof. Higgins, because he always considers her as a flower girl and appreciates himself to transform a dusty girl into a fashionable lady. So, in anger she throws slipper towards Mr. Higgins. But she has a warm affection for Colonel Pickering, for he calls her “Miss Doolittle”. It was Colonel Pickering who becomes ready to carry the expenditure of Eliza’ training , in spite of being unknown to her . He gives proper care and respect to her. Regarding Colonel Pickering, Eliza tells , *“Your calling me , Miss Doolittle that day when I first came the Wimple Street. That was the beginning of self respect for me.”* Thus, Eliza’s relation with Mr. Higgins is different from Colonel Pickering . She wants to extricate herself from the clutches of Prof. Higgins when he says that she can go back to the gutter, it is here that Eliza finds her salvation, she had believed herself unfitted for selling flowers in the gutter and untrained for anything except selling herself in marriag. Thus Eliza has found both her independence and her place in the world.

Thus, Shaw has presented Eliza as a bold girl who has practical approach to live successfully with much honour in the society. In brief, like Candida, Eliza is a fine product of G.B.Shaw.