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Dept. of English Studies & Research,
Govt. KRG (PG) Autonomous College,
Gwalior, MP

Editorial Office

204- Motiramani Complex, Naya Bazar,
Lashkar, Gwalior - 474 009 (MP) INDIA
Cell. +91 97531 30161
email- dr.lata.mishra@gmail.com

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G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* and P.L. Deshpande's *Tee Phulrani: A Comparative Study*

ADITI BARVE

ABSTRACT

The paper compares G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* and its Marathi adaptation – P.L. Deshpande's *Tee Phulrani*. Both the plays are written in two different languages, at two different times, in two different cultures and of course in two different languages. This comparative study fascinates and invites a postmodern critic to take it as a topic of deep post-modern cultural research.

Key words: *Pygmalion*, *Tee Phulrani*, adaptation, Phonetics

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, (2007: Peacock Books) named after a Greek mythological figure, was first staged in 1913. According to Greek mythology, *Pygmalion* the sculptor fell in love with one of his sculptures. The sculpture came to life. This myth formed a popular source material in Victorian era as well. A Victorian playwright W.S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion* and *Galatea* was first presented in 1871. Gilbert had a strong influence on Shaw.

Pygmalion remains Shaw's most popular play. The widest audiences of *Pygmalion* know it as the inspiration for the highly romanticised 1956 musical and 1964 film *My Fair Lady*. *Pygmalion* has transcended cultural and language barriers, political boundaries since its first production. The British Museum contains "images of the Polish production, a series of shots of a wonderfully Gallicised Higgins and Eliza in the first French production in Paris in 1923; a fascinating set for a Russian production of the 1930s. (Wikipedia) There was no country

which didn't have its own 'take' on the subjects of class division and social mobility, and it's as enjoyable to view these subtle differences in settings and costumes as it is to imagine translators wracking their brains for their own equivalent of phrases like 'Not bloody likely'.

In India also, P.L. Deshpande is not the only writer to be enchanted by '*Pygmalion*'. In 1956 in London, when Allan J. Learner was making a musical version of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Begum Qudsia Zaidi was making an Urdu adaptation in Delhi. *Azar Ka Khwab* is Begum Qudsia Zaidi's adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. It was produced in 1970 by Indian People's Theatre Association. Vidyadhar Gokhale brought a musical '*Swarasamradni* in 1972 whereas Madhu Rai's '*Santu Rangili* appeared on stage in 1973.

P.L. Deshpande, one of the most successful Marathi writers of the twentieth century adapted *Pygmalion* into Marathi language. The title was '*Tee Phulrani*', first presented on stage on 29th January 1975 in Ravindra Natya Mandir in Mumbai. (*Tee Phulrani*; 1994) The play soon earned popularity and had more than thousand stage shows to its credit. The first edition of '*Tee Phulrani*' was published on 12th June 1994. The book has also been so popular that it has already published its 13th edition. The play earned positive reviews from the critics as well.

Why is it so pertinent for a postmodern critic to study an English play and its Marathi adaptation?

It is pertinent not because the English play and the Marathi adaptation, both have made it to one of the most successful plays of their times, but because the plays exhibit minute intricacies of various aspects which are significant from the point of view of a linguist, and a social scientist. Some of the aspects touched upon are language, culture, interpersonal relations and social standards.

Shaw's Higgins does share Pygmalion's misogyny but that is the only resemblance with mythological *Pygmalion*. Higgins never falls in love with Eliza. Similarly, unlike Galatea, Eliza is not in love with Higgins, rather she learns to talk back to Higgins, to resist and to register her protest, as her lessons progress and her mind is 'refined'. Extremely blatant and commendable verity is that both the authors do not lose their plot or their humour. *Pygmalion* and *Tee Phulrani* objectively deal with innumerable social idiosyncrasies without instigating turbulence of hatred in the mind of the reader.

Shaw was conscious of the difficulties involved in staging a complete representation of the play. Acknowledging in a "note for technicians" that such a thing would only be possible "on the cinema screen or on stages furnished with exceptionally elaborate machinery", he marked some scenes as candidates for omission if necessary. Whereas, while making an adaptation, P.L. Deshpande has done it so wholesome, so flawless that it does not need any introduction at the beginning or notes in between. Shaw calls his *Pygmalion* – a Romance in five acts, whereas Deshpande's *Tee Phulrani* is a play comprising of three acts.

Professor of phonetics Henry Higgins makes a bet that he can train the Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. He feels that he can get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. He also challenges Eliza that he could pass her off as the Queen of Sheba. He intends to do that by teaching her better English. The play is a serrated satire of the rigid British class system of the day and a commentary on women's independence. Deshpande's Professor Ashok Jahagirdar makes a bet that he can pass Manjula as a princess and can make her speak on 'Mardhekar and His aestheticism' at Marathi Sahitya Sannam. (Marathi Literary festival)

Shaw's Eliza not only shimmers even in her drab dress and with her dirty dress. Her ambition and audacity is splendid, she

longs for that which is precisely so difficult in British society: self-improvement, thus pushing the acceptable bounds of social mobility. So is Deshpande's Manjula, who sells flowers in Mumbai.

Eliza and Manjula, both have hidden talents. Not just their 'fine ear' as Higgins and Jahagirdar believe. The potential lies in their inner drive, their ability and readiness to dive and the daring to visualise. In those days when women merely subjected to make the best of whatever came their way. Strict code of conduct chained the dreams and aspirations of women in those times. 1913 in England and 1970 in India, there was not much difference in the plight of women. Eliza and Manjula crossed the boundaries to create their own identity and they went across the shackles of society to find their own way.

The acumen behind the choice made by Eliza and Manjula can form the basis for further research on the texts, because there are some disadvantages of the new incarnation, which both Eliza and Manjula face. Eliza and Manjula, both are intelligent. They may be nervous, but their sixth sense functions well. That is necessary because that helps them become their own masters. They are not mere dolls with an ability to speak fluently.

Colonel Pickering becomes Doctor Vishwanath Joshi and Mrs. Pearce becomes Shamabai. The art of adaptation is seen vibrantly active when such transformations are involved. Dr. Vishwanath is called as Visubhau to fit the character role in Marathi. Shamabai cannot be possibly termed as Mrs. Shama. Shaw and Deshpande have done justice to both of them. These characters sometimes become pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, without whom, the picture is incomplete.

Alfred Doolittle becomes Dagadoba Salunke. Shaw's Doolittle whiplashes the customs and traditions but Deshpande's Dagdoba seems to be against women's emancipation. Just a translation of what he says to Professor Jahagirdar – "Women

get ready, they drape saris, they plat their hair, and they apply powder, but is it their luxury? They apply makeup but not for their satisfaction. Men use them for pleasure." He also says that "a shepherd who grazes cattle and a man, who looks after a woman, should possess baton." It is surprising that in spite of having such male dominated thoughts, how he was called to give lectures on morality.

There is a major contrast in the title of the play as well. Shaw belonged to the Fabien society, was a feminist and he believed that his plays were didactic. But he titled his play as 'Pygmalion', on the male protagonist. But Deshpande on the other hand, portrayed Dagadoba Salunke as a male chauvinist, but the title of the play is 'Tee Phulrani' which gives justice to Manjula. Phul means flower. The title is not given because she used to sell flowers on streets, but because Deshpande had picked up the title of a poem he liked. The poem Phulrani was written by one of the most famous poets in Marathi-Baalkavi. It elucidates the beauty of a village girl whom poet refers to as phulrani.

Some questions which *Pygmalion* answers but *Tee Phulrani* raises are:

1. A Marathi man of blue blood earns his livelihood by teaching correct Marathi. Is it possible in Maharashtra? In the original play *Pygmalion*, Professor Henry Higgins teaches phonetics to earn a living. He could definitely survive not only in 1913, but in today's England also. But what about Deshpande's Professor Ashok Jahagirdar? Is it possible to earn a livelihood with Marathi phonetics?
2. Shaw's Eliza lives in Higgins' house, Deshpande's Manjula lives Professor Jahagirdar's house. How did Deshpande allow that to happen? Indian society is quite rigid about who can live in whose house. An unmarried man keeping an unmarried young girl in his house is a

taboo in Indian society. But in *Tee Phularani* none of the characters raise any doubts about this. Should we consider Deshpande to be a feminist?

3. In ancient India, people could change their 'Varna' that is caste by putting in efforts. There are examples of sages who were not born to Brahmin parents, but achieved Brahmin hood after acquiring knowledge. Today, it is the birth that determines one's caste. Deshpande has failed to mention this aspect in *Tee Phulrani*. He has totally focused on the literary, that to spoke skills. If that is the situation in India, we could easily curb out caste system by teaching correct (?) Marathi.
4. There are questions raised about standard language and dialects. Today, Marathi films like 'Sairat' enroll their name in one crore club. The dialogues and lyrics in Sairat are totally in a dialect of Marathi. There are some daily soaps which telecaste characters speaking in different dialects and not the standard (?) Marathi. Where does 'Tee Phulrani' stand in such a scenario?

To conclude, G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* remains one of the most liked, adapted and successful plays. P.L. Deshpande's Marathi version 'Tee Phulrani' though raises some questions, is also one of the most successful Marathi plays. Deshpande has poured his soul into sowing it as an Indian sapling thereby making it completely Indianising it. Many are till date unaware that it is not Deshpande's own creation. This can be the basis of future research in the field of postmodern criticism.

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