

Candida as New Woman

The word new was often applied to denote a change of attitude and ideas. In the closing years of 19th century and early 20th century the new woman meant the woman who wanted to vote at parliamentary elections and to earn their own living in business or as doctors or lawyers or teachers, instead of staying at home in idleness.

The new drama was the general title which was given to the plays which dealt with the changing opinions about the new woman, the new man, the new morality, and all other new social and political ideas. The new drama was therefore the intellectual drama of which Shaw was the pioneer in Britain, as Ibsen had been in Norway, where the new drama began. Towards the end of the 19th century, numerous women were expressing in various ways their discontent with an inferior status and were agitating for equality with men. This unrest became known as the woman question and anyone who declared her right to be given an independent place in the community was called a new woman.

G.B Shaw was among the limited number of men who supported the principle of equality of the two sex and most of his heroines have the characteristics of the new woman. They are independent in spirit, self confident, clear headed, morally courageous, and emotionally well controlled. The new woman at that time was often reluctant to marry, she preferred to take up a professional career, but most of Shaw's women believe marriage and motherhood to be their proper duty and lifework. Shaw was convinced as his play, *Man and Superman* shows that human beings were created to carry out the divine purpose of raising mankind to a progressively higher level. For the achievement of this purpose, woman is of primary importance. Women are he believed, unconsciously guided by the Life Force, (the divine spirit working in us), they have superior rank and active control.

Candida, the female protagonist of Shaw is not only a faithful wife, she is also the strongest character in the play and is guided by common sense, not by emotion or passion. Candida is bored with her husband, Mr. Morell's sermons and engagements and flirts openly with the young poet, Marchbanks, who is rescued from a life on the streets by her husband. Candida might have been swayed away by the romantic fantasies for a short period of time, she is basically a practical minded woman. Marchbanks's poetry does not hold her attention. Instead of accepting the old theatrical role of a woman who allows herself to be quarreled

over by two men and passively disposed of to either the one or the other, Candida takes the situation under her own control, brings their dispute to an immediate end, and imposes her own will upon both men. Candida has enough of the nature of every woman of her class and country to have survived many changes of fashion in ideas and attitudes. She has a heart as well as a mind and in any competition for the naming of the favorite heroine in Shaw's plays, Candida would probably come second only to Saint Joan. Candida works on the idea of the new woman of the 19th to the 20th century and presents the falseness inherent in a movement which loses sight of the main realities of life. A whole world of foolishness awaits Candida in the person of Marchbanks, but at the end, she chooses sense and sensibility in the face of romance and foolishness. She chooses the stability of a home and family and life with Morell. The play is an address to reason and an assertion of the intelligence of the practical human being who can openly condemn and shirk the fancies of and an unreal existence.

The new woman symbolized the feminist ideal that emerged in the late 19th century. The women question became the subject that was widely written about. Shaw presents women characters who were independent in spirit and strong and single minded in their approach to life. Candida is G.B Shaw's new woman, who while attending to all her domestic duties, is able to judge the nature of the two men who bid for her love. She does not allow them to manipulate her. Rather, she analyses their strength and weaknesses and calmly makes her decision as to whom she will remain with. She chooses stability with Morell after letting him know that she is the strength in his life. Morell admits that he owes everything to Candida and that it was she who made him what he was. Shaw introduces her to the reader by drawing attention to her largeness of mind and dignity of character. Candida is also a woman of head and intellect, she is a child of reason. G.B Shaw has attributed to her charm, grace and elegance along with all her solid qualities. No wonder Candida remains the most womanly and lovable of female character. Candida represents the ideal woman. She is a modern woman at heart, yet she has the charm and dutifulness of old type. It is through her that G.B Shaw voices his philosophies about women and their problems. Candida is the best creation of Shaw. She is a remarkable woman indeed.