Chapter II

Shavian New Woman

The term ‘New Woman’ has been given to the first lot of women who broke the stereotypical images of what a woman ought to be; who had a personality that is fluid and which is unfit to remain contained within the water tight compartments of the patriarchal society. New women aren’t confined to domestic and pleasure roles; their horizon is expanded and their skills are manifold like the spectrum of the rainbow.

The first voice raising the woman question that ultimately led to the birth of fictional ‘New Woman’ was raised by Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Feminists since then identified the areas of women liberation in industrial as well as domestic spheres. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ‘New Woman’ ideology began to give momentum to the dormant social changes, ultimately leading to the re-evaluation and change in the comprehension of the gender roles, consolidation of women’s rights, and endeavours to overcome patriarchal supremacy. The discourse on gender relations gained more notice with increased feminisation of the labour force and poverty, divorce legislature, educational opportunities for women, single motherhood, spinsterhood, sanitation and epidemiology as well as female consumer culture. The so called ‘New Woman’ thus, soon found advocates amongst all the progressive lot.

Just as the stereotypical image of “woman” was imbedded in the minds of generations through literature, the breaking of that stereotype also started within the literature. ‘New Women’ were mostly fictional characters who gave a new role model to follow. Their
introduction gained momentum in an era of flux and thus their model though condemned at start was soon taken in vogue.

The origin of the term ‘New Woman’ is still in doubt but it is believed to be coined by the writer and public speaker Sarah Grand in her article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”, published in the North American Review in March 1894. British-American writer Henry James further popularized this term to describe the growth in the number of feminist, educated, independent career women in Europe and the United States. He represented ‘New Woman,’ as the heroines of his novels, such as Daisy Miller in the novella Daisy Miller, and Isabel Archer in Portrait of a Lady. The historian Ruth Bordin regards that ‘New Woman’ was “intended by him to characterize American expatriates living in Europe: women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own. The term ‘New Woman’ always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives may it be personal, social, or economic.”

The ‘New Woman’ goes beyond the thresholds set by male-dominated society. It soon became a popular catch-phrase in newspapers and books. The ‘New Woman’, a significant cultural icon of the fin de siècle, departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting. There was a sudden change in the outlook of woman towards themselves and society. Capturing this transformation of women’s ideas about themselves, critics and journalists coined the term “New Woman” which reflected a diversion from self-sacrificing “old woman”. Explaining this origin of the new concept of women, Gail Finney writes that she was “a product of combined forces—notably the drive for female suffrage, the influx of women into factory jobs and other kinds of work, and the
example of Ibsen’s heroines—"the New Woman was less a reality than a creation of fiction and the media."

The new women were not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers. As Sally Ledger wrote: “The New Woman was a very fin-de-siecle phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s.”

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg pointed out that bourgeois matrons bequeathed to their daughters the women's institutions—social and literary clubs, reform and suffrage groups—that demonstrated new possibilities for women outside the home. Thanks to the establishment of women's colleges, these young women received a higher education in the 1870s and 1880s and pursued careers as teachers, social reformers, health experts, writers, artists, and physicians in the years up to the First World War. These women, like their mothers, adhered to the values of community service rooted in small-town America and concentrated their efforts on social justice, world peace, and remedying the ills of industrializing cities. The enigmatic figure of the emerging ‘New Woman’ has also been described as under:

The New Woman was by turns: a mannish amazon and a Womanly woman; she was oversexed, undersexed, or same sex identified; she was anti-maternal, or a racial supermother; she was male-identified, or manhating and/or man-eating or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity; she was anti-domestic or she sought to make domestic values prevail; she was radical, socialist or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative; she was the agent of
social and/or racial regeneration, or symptom and agent of decline. (Richardson and Willis xii)

These new women were numbered in the society then and could be counted on fingertips. But their actualization of their intellectual potentials made the patriarchy look at them both with awe and condemnation. Patriarchal society was unsure with regard to the expansion of the abilities and domains of the new women against the set standards of conduct for women.

What made the ‘New Woman’ new was her defiance of set norms and extended involvement in the affairs of the real world. This extension in her role, gave the ‘New woman’ the powers her predecessors wouldn’t have thought of. Among her hazy grey colours, there were certain sure characteristics that distinctly point her away from other Victorian women. They were independent and educated, whether or not they were able to display their skills outside of domesticity. They were strong willed; held and challenged opinions; and were not afraid of entering the unconventional and virgin fields of interests for women. They took decisions for themselves rather than accepting orders; and followed their own choice. It is also important to note that most of the ‘New Women’ didn’t come from the elite class but from the middle and upper middle class of the society. It was this class which benefitted the most from the intellectual awakening that came from admitting women into universities and colleges.

Physically they were strong and followed masculine appearances. They were eras ahead of the women like Lady Macbeth for whom “feign to faint” was an essential. They may smoke and discuss ideas with men thereby challenging the set standards of conduct for Victorian Women. Expression of their sexuality was another characteristic of the ‘New Woman’ that was held scandalous in the then contemporary Victorian society where it was a punishable offence
without the regards to any law. Thus, they were the ones who first displayed attempts to sexual liberation. William Acton’s observation regarding female sexuality, published in 1862, summed up a medical man’s perception of the ideal woman’s sexual desires, or rather the lack of it: “as a general rule a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attention.”

Fiction during the *fin de siècle* thus reacted against these traditional ideas. Male writers portrayed the New Woman as either ‘a sexual predator’ or as an over-sensitive intellectual being who is unable to accept her nature as a sexual being. Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) is an example of the former, while Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* represents the latter. For Lucy Westenra the case is extreme. *Dracula* makes outstanding mention of the ‘New Woman’ in its pages, with its female protagonists; discussing the changing roles of women and the ‘New Woman’ in particular. Mina Harker goes on to embody several characteristics of the ‘New Woman’, employing skills such as typing and deductive reasoning, to the amusement of the older male characters. Lucy Westenra wonders if the ‘New Woman’ could marry several men at once in expressing a desire for three husbands (and thus, of course, three sexual partners).

The odyssey of New Woman is well traced in the following lines by Winnifred Harper Cooley in *The New Womanhood*:

> The finest achievement of the new woman has been personal liberty. This is the foundation of civilization; and as long as any one class is watched suspiciously, even fondly guarded, and protected, so long will that class not only be weak, and
treacherous, individually, but parasitic, and a collective danger to the community. Who has not heard wives commended for wheedling their husbands out of money, or joked [about] because they are hopelessly extravagant? As long as caprice and scheming are considered feminine virtues, as long as man is the only wage-earner, doling out sums of money, or scattering lavishly, so long will women be degraded, even if they are perfectly contented, and men are willing to labour to keep them in idleness!

Although individual women from pre-historic times have accomplished much, as a class they have been set aside to minister to men's comfort. But when once the higher has been tried, civilization repudiates the lower. Men have come to see that no advance can be made with one half-humanity set apart merely for the functions of sex; that children are quite liable to inherit from the mother, and should have opportunities to inherit the accumulated ability and culture and character that is produced only by intellectual and civil activity. The world has tried to move with men for dynamos, and "clinging" women impeding every step of progress, in arts, science, industry, professions, they have been a thousand years behind men because forced into seclusion. They have been over-sexed. They have naturally not been impressed with their duties to society, in its myriad needs, or with their own value as individuals.

The new woman, in the sense of the best woman, the flower of all the womanhood of past ages, has come to stay — if civilization is to endure. The sufferings of the past have but strengthened her, maternity has deepened her, education is broadening her — and she now knows that she must perfect herself if
she would perfect the race, and leave her imprint upon immortality, through her offspring or her works.

And the same Shaw considers as essential for his theory of Life-Force. ‘New woman’ being an evolved version of females in human species is the apt candidate for the maintenance of Shaw’s philosophy of Life-Force and for the furtherance of better evolution of humans into intellectually advanced beings.

However, spinsterhood and lack of maternal instincts and associations was another characteristic that the literature of these evolved species of women often showed. In fact, this practice among the women of later Victorian Age rose as the most important concern. It wasn’t a coincidence that middle and upper middle class women were remaining unmarried well past their expected marriageable age although they had suitors. These women on account of their expansion of knowledge preferred the pursuit of the same instead of being tied down by the society imposed knot of marriage. And this characteristic in the lot of “New Woman” thus kept at stake Shaw’s interests in eugenics for the production of a better race.

The crucial factor of the typical New Woman which differentiated her from the old woman was her rebellious attitude towards subservient ‘old woman’ who was described by one member of 1890s women’s club as “bounded on the north by servants, on the south by children, on the east by ailments and on the west by clothes.” Unlike conventional Victorian woman, the ‘New Woman’ was not accustomed to self sacrifice; she chose her career for a living and pursued self fulfilment and independence. She strove for equality in her relationship with men, discarding the double standards of the sexual mores of the time and was much more frank about physical relationships. Sometimes she selected living single instead of getting entangled in the
illusions of married life. She was well educated and an omnivorous reader, much interested in business and politics. She was physically well-built and energetic, preferring comfortable clothes than voluminous dresses of a Victorian woman. She could smoke, fly planes, ride bicycle, had short hair—all of which was considered to be quite daring at that time. This mushroomed in the late eighteen nineties literature; but she met fatal ends reflecting that the society is yet not ready to accommodate her. Many of these characteristics formed the features of Shavian women except the last one that Shaw’s women were winners, not losers. He was the first to bring the ‘New Woman’ on the stage who won what she desired.

According to a joke by Max Beerbohm, “The New Woman sprang fully armed from Ibsen's brain.” And though it may seem that Shaw has drawn inspiration from him in many of his plays, Shaw had anticipated, (as has been stated in the introduction), the ‘New Woman’ of English stage six years earlier to the creation of Henrik Ibsen's Nora Helmar in his novel The Irrational Knot in the character of Marian Lind. He had presented an equally rebellious yet more acceptable version of ‘New Woman’. Shavian Women are drawn very much in contrast with their Victorian Contemporaries and much akin to the ‘New Woman’ faces that were emerging in the then society. However, they were different from other fictional new women in that they did not preferably give up their femininity for becoming a mirror image of their male counterparts. And thus, they not only asserted their individuality but also didn’t lose their biological identity. They were not “unsexed” women but those who recognize their self, identify with their own sex and also who are well comfortable with their identity which was independent of male assistance and acceptance.

A low-bred flower girl with no education to support and make her destiny was hardly a figure noticeable enough leave alone her becoming a model ‘New Woman’ but Eliza Doolittle in
*Pygmalion* did that. Not only this, she brought laurels of fame to her creator G.B. Shaw by being the leading lady of “My fair Lady” whose screenplay won Shaw the Academy Award, making him the only person to have a Nobel in literature as well as an Oscar. The unprecedented popularity of this ‘New Woman’ figure can be assessed by the same.

The first characteristic of new women was displayed by Eliza in the very first Act in her recognition of self-worth and assertion of the same:

THE FLOWER GIRL. [still preoccupied with her wounded feelings] He’s no right to take away my character. My character is the same to me as any lady’s.

(Shaw 14)

Further she protests against the treatment Prof. Higgins met her with:

THE NOTE TAKER. [explosively] Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly; or else seek the shelter of some other place of worship.

THE FLOWER GIRL. [with feeble defiance] I’ve a right to be here if I like, same as you. (Shaw 16)

Eliza was earning her living independently and was well-trained in her vocation even at the young age of eighteen and ever since her step mother turned her out. She managed to make most advantage of the situation all were bound with and sold flowers to Mrs. Eynsford Hill, persuaded Colonel Pickering and psychologically tormented Higgins to make his benevolent donation. She could have utilized the generous amount given by Higgins into a luxury, suiting her own class or had it saved for future prospects. But instead she sought to improve her future
not through money but through education and this was the second characteristic of ‘New Woman’ that she had in herself:

THE FLOWER GIRL. I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of sellin at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they wont take me unless I can talk more genteel. He said he could teach me. Well, here I am ready to pay him- not asking any favour- and he treats me zif I was dirt. (Shaw 23)

Higgins in his outrageous boasting of his skills used her as an example of the subjects he could turn over in his linguistics experiments. Amidst all his bullying and dramatization of the same by the bystanders, all that hustle and bustle, all the abuses Higgins hurled at her, she managed to remember his proposal of training her which he blurted out just once. So eager was her desire to improve her station in life. Through the deductive analysis made by Higgins, it is quite obvious what amount of temptation Eliza had resisted and the determination she had for her purpose of being educated:

HIGGINS. [walking up and down the room, rattling his keys and his cash in his pockets] You know, Pickering, if you consider a shilling, not as a simple shilling, but as a percentage of this girl’s income, it works out as fully equivalent to sixty or seventy guineas from a millionaire.

PICKERING. How so?

HIGGINS. Figure it out. A millionaire has about £150 a day. She earns about half-a-crown.

LIZA. [haughtily] Who told you I only-
HIGGINS. [continuing] She offers me two-fifth of her day’s income for a lesson. Two-fifths of a millionaire’s income for a day would be somewhere about £60. It’s handsome. By George, it’s enormous! It’s the biggest offer I ever had. (Shaw 25)

Even though there were strict class distinctions and societal restrictions and norms regarding the interaction of upper and lower classes, Eliza never for once takes Higgins bullying of her without revolt. Instead she made Higgins realize his conduct as soon as she enters his Wimpole Street Laboratory in Act II:

THE FLOWER GIRL. Well if you was a gentleman, you might ask me to sit down, I think. Don’t I tell you I’m bringing you business?

HIGGINS. Pickering: shall we ask this baggage to sit down, or shall we throw her out of the window?

THE FLOWER GIRL. [running away in terror to the piano, where she turns at bay] Ah-ah-oh-ow-ow-oo! [Wounded and whimpering] I won’t be called a baggage when I’ve offered to pay like any lady. (Shaw 23)

Even repeated reminders from Mrs. Pearce about their class difference couldn’t refrain Eliza from speaking up for herself:

MRS. PEARCE. [Placing herself behind Eliza’s chair] You mustn’t speak to the gentleman like that.

LIZA. Well, why won’t he speak sensible to me? (Shaw 24)
She immediately shows her disapproval at Higgins’s calling her a “draggletailed guttersnipe” and reacts sharply at Higgins idea of manhandling her:

HIGGINS. We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You got to learn to behave like a duchess. Take her away, Mrs. Pearce. If she gives you trouble, wallop her.

LIZA. [springing up and running between Pickering and Mrs. Pearce for protection] No! I’ll call the police, I will. (Shaw 27)

She asserts firmly:

LIZA. [rising reluctantly and suspiciously] You’re a great bully, you are. I won’t stay here if I don’t like. I won’t let nobody wallop me. I never asked to go to Bucknam Palace, I didn’t. I was never in trouble with the police, not me. (Shaw 32)

In the process of educating her, Higgins forgot that Eliza’s purpose of seeking his help in pronunciation wasn’t any bet but her desire to raise her position as a lady in the florist shop. He trained Eliza as a robot feeding in her the data that suited him with instructions of not divulging from it. Thus, Eliza became more of the shadow of the two men than an independent soul that she once was. Shaw’s ‘New Woman’ wasn’t an independent soul on account of her education but it was something innate in her and her education actually became the reason of her bondage:

LIZA. 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. (Shaw 77)

Again in Act V, she craves for freedom:
LIZA. Oh! If I only could go back to my flower basket! I should be independent from you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I’m a slave now, for all my fine clothes. (Shaw 100)

Her disillusionment restored her independent self who then with the advantages of her education had much better prospects. This feeling of imprisonment did not last long for her education combined with her innate instinct of independent existence showed her new horizons to pursue in the above mentioned Act:

LIZA. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You cant take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! [Purposely dropping her aitches to annoy him] Thats done you, Enry Iggins, it az. Now I don’t care that [snapping her fingers] for your bullying and your big talk. I’ll advertise it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she’ll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself. (Shaw 103)

The crawling caterpillar that Eliza had been has fully metamorphosed into a beautiful butterfly that has extended her wings of education for the first time to soar into a flight which she plans to be even higher than her mentor. In the above lines, Eliza realizes the power she has gained upon her mentor and male contemporary and thus in these lines, Shaw’s ‘New Woman’ is in her full bloom.
Although in the sequel, this flight of hers didn’t actually materialize but she didn’t take to her crawling status again and continuously struggled and endeavoured to establish her independent and respectable existence without compromising with her femininity according to Higgins’s suggestion of spinsterhood. Eliza also expresses her sexual and marital preference assertively with all her new woman instincts. With her newly found love and comfort in Freddy’s arms she openly responds with kisses and embraces on the street itself. She was bold enough to make their love’s nest in the taxi for the time being to prevent being intruded by Policemen repeatedly:

LIZA. Oh Freddy, a taxi. The very thing.

FREDDY. But damn it, I’ve no money.

LIZA. I have plenty. The Colonel thinks you should never go out without ten pounds in your pocket. Listen. We’ll drive about all night; and in the morning I’ll call on old Mrs. Higgins and ask her what I ought to do. I’ll tell you all about it in the cab. And the police wont touch us there. (Shaw 82)

Not only she was bold in her public display of love but also she was equally undaunted in its acceptance and defence:

LIZA. You know well I couldn’t bear to live with a low common man after you two; and it’s wicked and cruel of you to insult me by pretending I could. You think I must go back to Wimpole Street because I have nowhere else to go but father’s. But don’t you be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down. I’ll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as I’m able to support him. (Shaw 103)
Thus, this Shavian woman instead of hunting down a husband to support her sustenance for sexual favour as Mrs. Warren stated, took the charge of the bread-earner. It was the supreme example of her independence as she not only was able to manage a living for herself but also support her husband without any grudge; and with the confidence to do so. She gave up the conventional roles of and distinctions between man and woman without giving upon her feminine disposition to love and reproduce; without giving upon her natural sexual needs that Higgins was suggesting to do; without giving up her dignity and self-respect.

Not only Eliza, but Clara Eynsford Hill in *Pygmalion* is also a ‘New Woman’ in making rather than a “Lady” in making. Though dressed up as a Lady, she displays none of the characteristics suiting a Lady’s disposition:

FREDDY. I shall simply get soaked for nothing.

THE DAUGHTER. And what about us? Are we to stay here all night in this draught, with next to nothing on? You selfish pig- (Shaw 8)

Although she appears to be a snob when compared to a Lady, her anger and opinion was practical enough. She strongly opined and goes against the norms to challenge the decision made by the man of the family with regard to her well being. In the third Act she is presented before the audience as a sorry figure, desperately trying to follow Eliza’s steps but her constant defiance of her mother brings out the rebel in her which is quite a characteristic of new women:

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I daresay I am very old-fashioned; but I do hope you wont begin using that expression, Clara. I have got accustomed to hear you talking about men as rotters, and calling everything filthy and beastly; though I do think it horrible and unladylike. But this last is really too much...
CLARA. [all smiles] Such nonsense, all this early Victorian prudery!

HIGGINS. [tempting her] Such damned nonsense!

CLARA. Such bloody nonsense!

MRS. EYNNSFORD HIL. [convulsively] Clara! (Shaw 61)

In the sequel, Clara finally gives up the pretentious air of high class society to settle for a job that could actually support her interests instead of just focussing on finding a worthy husband that was the Victorian role assigned to the women of her age.

However, Candida did follow this traditionally appointed role of women and yet she is placed in the lot of most powerful new women who appeared on stage. The introductory statement of Candida is a command in the play Candida:

CANDIDA. Go out, dear, at once, or he’ll pay for the cab and I don’t want that.

(Shaw 16)

Morell is not the only one who is at the disposal of her command but almost all others:

CANDIDA. [Coming to rescue] Youll lose your train, papa, if you don’t go at once. Come back in the afternoon and tell Mr. Marchbanks where to find the club.

(Shaw 18)

She instructs Marchbanks:

CANDIDA. [quaintly] He cleans the boots, Eugene. You will have to clean tomorrow for saying that about him. (Shaw 36)
Her authoritative figure reveals itself fully in the third Act in the auction scene:

CANDIDA. [with emphatic warning] Take care, James. Eugene: I asked you to go. Are you going?

MORELL. [putting his foot down] He shall not go. I wish him to remain.

MARCHBANKS. I’ll go. I’ll do whatever you want. [He turns to the door].

CANDIDA. Stop! [He obeys]. Didnt you hear James say he wished you to stay? James is master here. Dont you know that?

MARCHBANKS.[flushing with a young poet’s rage against tyranny] By what right is he master?


MORELL. [taken aback] My dear: I don’t know of any right that makes me master. I assert no such right.

CANDIDA. [ with infinite reproach] You dont know! Oh, James! James! [To Eugene, musingly] I wonder do you understand, Eugene! [He shakes his head helplessly, not daring to look at her]. No: youre too young. Well, I give you leave to stay: to stay and learn. (Shaw 61)

In the above lines, it is Candida who ultimately grants Marchbanks the permission to stay thereby asserting what makes Morell the master of his house that is she, herself. At the failure of both the men to understand her sarcasm regarding Morell being the master of her household with
the capacity to wish Eugene to stay when Candida had already asked him to leave, Candida explains in clear terms that it is she who makes him the master:

CANDIDA. Ask the tradesmen who want to worry James, and spoil his beautiful sermons: who it is that puts them off. When there is money to give, he gives it; when there is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him and stand sentinel always to keep vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so. (Shaw 65)

This declaration of hers was like that of those tycoons who on being interviewed elaborate upon the creation of their empires. She is independent in the governance of her household where she is the ‘Boss’ and all others the subordinates. She makes sure everything in her household is proper and according to her will. Anything out of its place or used against its purpose is an object of her displeasure:

CANDIDA. [Turning to Morell] James; youve not been looking after the house properly.

MORELL. What have I done-or not done- my love?

CANDIDA. My own particular pet scrubbing brush has been used for blackleading. (Shaw 36)

Through Candida, Shaw succeeded in showing how each housewife is an owner of her household with everything managed by her and every household decision at her disposal. She knows the right way of having a thing done and the proper remuneration for the same. She is
well read in the economics of the times and not just a simple ignorant housemistress as she had proved in the numerous times when she refused the money “when there is money to refuse”. She showed herself in this capacity while the exposition of the play was going on:

CANDIDA. Oh James dear, he was going to give the cabman ten shillings! Ten shillings for a three minutes drive! Oh dear! (Shaw 16)

While for Morell it was an attempt at benevolence, Candida recognized Marchbanks’s ignorance with regard to monetary matters. The same reveals that the decisions regarding money are taken by her in the house which she asserts towards the end of the play. Like a thorough professional she first checks whether one is suitable for the job appointed to him or her and then decides whether to go in favour or against:

MARCHBANKS. I will stay on condition that you hand over all the rough work to me.

CANDIDA. Thats very gallant; but think I should like to see how you do it first. (Shaw 35)

And just as an ideal employer she also recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of those whom she has given charge for some work just by few observations. And the same she could predict for Eugene:

CANDIDA. Washing his hands in the scullery under the tap. He will make an excellent cook if he can only get over his dread of Maria. (Shaw 39)

Just like other ‘New Women’, Candida also is assertive in her behaviour and compels others to do things desired by her:
MARCHBANKS. [convulsively] Onions!

CANDIDA. Yes, onions. Not even Spanish ones nasty little red onions. You shall help me to slice them. Come along.

She catches him by the wrist and runs out, pulling him after her. (Shaw 37)

Again in the same Act, she makes Morell sit down and talk to her when she finds him in a detached and disturbed state:

CANDIDA. My boy is not looking well. Has he been overworking?

MORELL. Nothing more than usual.

CANDIDA. He looks very pale, and grey, and wrinkled, and old. [His melancholy deepens; and she attacks it with wilful gaiety] Here: [pulling him towards the easy chair] youve done enough writing for today. Leave Prossy to finish it. Come and talk to me.

MORELL. But-

CANDIDA. [insisting] Yes, I must be talked to. [She makes him sit down, and seats herself on the carpet beside his knee]. (Shaw 39)

Candidness of Candida is her most prominent characteristic as a ‘New Woman’. Throughout the play, she is notorious for her frank, scandalous and relentless confessions. She is well aware of the reactions to the reception of her confessions and still she stands by what she is saying regardless of others’ opinion:

BURGESS. Come: be’ave yourself, Candy. Whatll Mr. Marchbanks think of you?
CANDIDA. This comes of James teaching me to think for myself, and never to hold back out of fear of what other people may think of me. It works beautifully as long as I think the same things as he does. But now because I have just thought something different! Look at him! Just look! (Shaw 43)

It is through her revelations that audience becomes aware of Morell’s underpaying of Prossy despite his socialism:

CANDIDA. Yes, Prossy, and all the other secretaries you ever had. Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and to peel potatoes and abase herself in all manners of ways for six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? (Shaw 40)

Her frankness forces her to make scandalous confessions again and again to the horror of both Morell and Marchbanks:

CANDIDA. [with curious thoughtfulness] Yes, I feel a little jealous sometimes.

MORELL. [incredulously] Of Prossy?

CANDIDA [laughing]. No, no, no, no. Not jealous of anybody. Jealous for somebody else, who is not loved as he ought to be.

MORELL. Me?

CANDIDA. You! Why, youre spoiled with love and worship: you get far more than is good for you. No I mean Eugene.

MORELL. [startled] Eugene!
CANDIDA. It seems unfair that all the love should go to you, and none to him; although he needs it so much than you do. . . . Ah, James, how little you understand me to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity! I would give them both to poor Eugene as willingly as I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there was nothing else to restraint me. Put your trust in my love for you, James; for if that went, I should care very little for your sermons: mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day. (Shaw 40)

Her frankness initiates all the drama in the play and also culminates it. And in her, Shaw has created the most unconventional of all the unconventional new women. Candida’s unconventional new women position has been contrasted by Shaw with the typical new woman Miss Proserpine Barnett in Candida. Proserpine is an independent woman working as a typist for Morell. She is a woman crossing the threshold of marriageable age that was thirty. Her age is being given away by her face as Burgess noticed:

BURGESS. [staring disappointedly at her] Youre not the same young lady as used to typewrite for him?

PROSERPINE. No.

BURGESS. [grumbling on his way to the hearth-rug] No: she was younger.

(Shaw 9)

Though she appears to be infatuated by Morell’s Socialist preaching it seems that she is in line with the women who are soon to join the spinsterhood. The Victorian norm would not have granted such an aging woman of her class the benefit of choice with regard to a suitable partner. But even in this juncture of life she has her preferences and opinion:
PROSERPINE. [with disdain] Mr. Mill!!! A fine man to break my heart about, indeed! I’d rather have you than Mr. Mill. (Shaw 30)

She is assertive, rebellious and indomitable. She asserts her opinion about Lexy:

PROSERPINE. [putting her hair straight at a panel of mirror in the mantelpiece] Well, when you talk to me, give me your own ideas, such as they are, and not his. You never cut a poorer figure than when you are trying to imitate him. (Shaw 8)

She chides him for the opinions he hold for women:

PROSERPINE. [indignantly] I have no feeling against her. She’s very nice, very good-hearted: I’m very fond of her and can appreciate her real qualities far better than any man can. [He shakes his head sadly. She rises and comes at him with intense pepperiness]. You don’t believe me? You think I’m jealous? Oh, what knowledge of the human heart you have, Mr Lexy be so nice to be a man and have a fine penetrating intellect instead of mere emotions like us, and to know that the reason we don’t share your amorous delusions is that we’re all jealous of one another. (Shaw 8)

She doesn’t allow herself to be bullied by the father in law of her employer and gives him equally sarcastic and rude answers:

PROSERPINE. [fretfully] It’s well you and I are not ladies and gentlemen: I’d talk to you pretty straight if Mr. Marchbanks wasn’t here. [She pulls the letter out of the machine so crossly that it tears.] There! Now I’ve spoiled this letter! have to be done all over again! Oh, I cant contain myself: silly old fathead! (Shaw 32)
Just as other new women have received eye brows raised in question with regard to their adaption of masculine habits, the same is found in Proserpine when she returns after drinking champagne in dinner:

CANDIDA. [to Proserpine] You don’t mean to say youve been drinking champagne!

PROSERPINE. [stubbornly] Yes I do. I’m only a beer teetotaller, not a champagne teetotaller. I dont like beer. (Shaw58)

She displays most of the characteristics of the new women that were given high opinion by the Second Wave Feminists but still she stoops to doing dishes in the kitchen for the sake of Morell’s companionship. Due to this, her love for Morell put her under his power unlike whom Candida gave up none of her authority for love of Morell. Rather her love for him ensured her continued reign over her house. Candida managed to show how a woman can be independent of the influences, opinions and dominion within the realms of domesticity. She proves to be a matriarchal head in a patriarchal society.

Further, new women had added men’s wear to their wardrobe and popularised it as a fashion among other Victorian ladies. They created quite a sensation among their contemporaries by cutting their hair short. However, Joan took to men’s attire and bob hair as early as fourteenth century when a woman dressed in man’s clothing was frowned upon, as is evident from the reaction of the ladies when Joan entered the Royal Court of England in Act II of the play Saint Joan:
Joan, dressed as a soldier, with her hair bobbed and hanging thickly round her face, is led in by a bashful and speechless nobleman, from whom she detaches herself to stop and look around eagerly for the Dauphin.

THE DUCHESS. [to the nearest lady in waiting] My dear! Her hair.

[All the ladies explode in uncontrollable laughter.]

(Shaw 24)

Again unlike typical ‘New Woman’ figure, Joan didn’t give up the feminine attire to be observed as being equivalent to men but because of the demands of her profession and in this she proved to be an avant-garde. Even in the face of death, she gives the same reason governed by pure logic and not rebellion:

THE INQUISITOR. Now as to this matter of the man’s dress. For the last time, will you put off that impudent attire, and dress as becomes your sex?

JOAN. I will not.

D’ESTIVET. [pouncing] The sin of disobedience, my Lord.

JOAN. [distressed] But my voices tell me I must dress as a soldier.

LADVENU. Joan, Joan: does not that prove to you that the voices are the voices of evil spirits? Can you suggest to us one good reason why an angel of God should give you such shameless advice?

JOAN. Why, yes: what can be plainer commonsense? I was a soldier living among soldiers. I am a prisoner guarded by the soldiers If I were to dress as a woman they would think of me as a woman; and then what would become of me?
If I dress as a soldier they think of me as a soldier, and I can live with them as I do at home with my brothers. (Shaw 76)

Joan was not an educated girl but an illiterate as she tells when she was asked to sign the “form of recantation”. But she had the knowledge and wit that was always accompanied with sound logic. And this capability of hers made her stand in line with the ‘New Woman’. Even her rebellious thoughts had reasons sound enough to turn those who were against her, or who didn’t believe in her purpose, in her favour:

JOAN. You do not understand, squire. Our soldiers are always beaten because they are fighting only to save their skins; and the shortest way to save your skin is to run away. Our knights are thinking only of the money they will make in ransoms: it is not kill or be killed with them, but pay or be paid. I will teach them all to fight that the will of God may be done in France; and then they will drive the poor goddams before them like sheep. . . .

ROBERT. [to Poulengey] This may be all rot, Polly; but the troops might swallow it, though nothing that we can say seems able to put any fight into them. Even the Dauphin might swallow it. And if she can put fight into him, she can put it into anybody.

POULENGEY. I can see no harm in trying. Can You? And there is something about the girl- (Shaw 13)

This “something” about Joan is her confidence and quick wittedness which persuaded even the weak-hearted Dauphin and made him give the command of the army to her:
JOAN [again contemptuously]. Minding your business is like minding your own body: it’s the shortest way to make yourself sick. What is my business? Helping mother at home. What is thine? Petting lapdogs and sucking sugar sticks. I call that muck. I tell thee it is God’s business we are here to do: not our own. I have a message to thee from God; and thou must listen to it, though thy heart break with the terror of it.

CHARLES. I don’t want a message; but can you tell me as secrets? Can you do any cures? Can you turn lead into gold, or anything of that sort?

JOAN. I can turn thee into a king, in Rheims Cathedral; and that is a miracle that will take some doing, it seems. (Shaw 28)

This quick wittedness of Joan, gives proof of her intelligence that was superior to all her male contemporaries. Joan never saw her victories as some miracle but has full faith in her calibre to command:

JOAN. You never know when you are victorious: that is a worse fault. I shall have to make you carry looking-glasses in the battle to convince you that the English have not cut off all your noses. You would have been besieged in Orleans still, you and your councils of war, if I had not made you attack. You should always attack; and if you only hold on long enough the enemy will stop first. You don’t know how to begin a battle; and you don’t know how to use your cannons. And I do. . . . I tell you, Bastard, your art of war is no use, because your knights are no good for real fighting. War is only a game to them, like tennis and all their other games: they make rules as to what is fair and what is not fair, and heap
armour on themselves and on their poor horses to keep out the arrows; and when they fall they can't get up, and have to wait for their squires to come and lift them to arrange about the ransom with the man that has poked them off their horse. Cant you see that all the like of that is gone by and done with? What use is armour against gunpowder? And if it was, do you think men that are fighting for France and for God will stop to bargain about ransoms, as half your knights live by doing? No: they will fight to win; and they will give up their lives out of their own hand into hand of God when they go into battle, as I do. Common folks understand this. They cannot afford armour and cannot pay ransoms; but they followed me half-naked into the moat and up the ladder and over the wall. With them it is my life or thine, and God defend the right! You may shake your head, Jack; and Bluebeard may twirl his billygoat’s beard and cock his nose at me; but remember the day your knights and captains refused to follow me to attack the English at Orleans! You locked the gates to keep me in; and it was the townsfolk and the common people that followed me, and forced the gate, and shewed you the way to fight in earnest. (Shaw 54, 55)

Even in Charles’s dream in the Epilogue, Joan is an ardent advocate of her ways:

JOAN. And you fought them my way Jack: eh? Not the old way, chaffering for ransoms; but The Maid’s way: staking life against death, with the heart high and humble and void of malice, and nothing counting under God but France free and French. Was it my way, Jack? (Shaw 92)
Since the start of the play she stood firm on her ground firmly asserting what she wants and ultimately achieves the same whether it was the demand of a horse and armour from Captain Robert Baudricourt, raising the seize of Orleans or her trial:

LADVENUE. [pleading with her urgently] You do not know what you are saying, child. Do you want to kill yourself? Listen. Do you not believe that you are subject to the Church of God on earth?

JOAN. Yes. When have I ever denied it?

LADVENU. Good. That means, does it not, that you are subject to our Lord the Pope, to the cardinals, the archbishops, and the bishops for whom his lordship stands here today?

JOAN. God must be served first.

D'ESTIVEST. Then your voices command you not to submit yourself to the Church Militant?

JOAN. My voices do not tell me to disobey the Church; but God must be served first.

CAUCHON. And you, and not the Church, are to be the judge?

JOAN. What other judgements can I judge by but my own? (Shaw 74)

Despite her claim of hearing voices, it’s her own discretion that she trusts. She stood alone against the mighty institutions of Church, class and patriarchy for what she believed. This strong rebel in her that preferred death to imprisonment of a lifetime is what makes her unconventional.
In the Era where being able to sustain oneself was the major concern for women, Joan decides to give up an existence that would have been meaningless:

JOAN. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more? It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never ride with soldiers nor climb the hills . . . . I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpet and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; . . . . (Shaw 81)

Joan had a disposition that was skewed towards independence. Just as is mentioned in the above lines, she mentions earlier while telling how she dauntlessly disobeyed her father’s command for the sake of France’s independence:

JOAN. My father told my brothers to drown me if I would not stay to mind his Sheep while France was bleeding to death: France might perish if only our lambs were safe. I thought France would have friends at the court of the king of France; and I find only wolves fighting for pieces of her poor torn body. (Shaw 59)
Joan had the free spirit and make up of a soldier- a vocation that is mostly left untouched by the women of all times. She repeatedly refers to herself as a soldier but not a replica of men. She embraces her femininity behind her armour which occasionally comes out:

JOAN. I wish you were one of the village babies.

DUNOIS. Why?

JOAN. I could nurse you for a while.

DUNOIS. You are a bit of a woman after all.

JOAN. No: not a bit: I am a soldier and nothing else. Soldiers always nurse children when they get a chance. (Shaw 51)

Like Shaw’s other heroines, Joan also lacked some qualities expected of a typical new woman. But instead of those qualities she possessed those which make women equivalent to men in their status and not just in appearance. She managed to take the place of the commander in the army that was earlier believed to be an all-men profession. She remains firm on her opinions and successfully turned the opinion of others to coincide with her own. And all this she achieved by the sheer force of her will power. She was independent and intelligent and yet innocent and vulnerable. She was just like nature -capable of both the extremes of destruction and creation yet vulnerable enough to be left destroyed by the culture. And indeed it was Shaw’s master skill at characterisation that coloured a historical figure like Joan convincingly with contemporary ‘New Woman’ hues.

Among all the heroines of Shaw, Vivie Warren has been created in the very image of a typical ‘New woman’. She is introduced in the Act I as:
She proffers her hand and takes his with a resolute and hearty grip. She is an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly-educated young middle-class Englishwoman. Age 22. Prompt, strong, confident, self-possessed. Plain business-like dress, but not dowdy. She wears a chatelaine at her belt, with a fountain pen and a paper knife among its pendants. (Shaw 17)

In this very description, she seems to break several stereotypes - unlike a soft womanly touch she has “a resolute and hearty grip”; apart from the air of high education that seem to surround her, her appearance gives the impression of a strong and confident business-person; the chatelaine she wears around her dress doesn’t hangs domestic stuff but “a fountain pen and a paper knife”

She is casted after the first few women who graduated from the recently started Women Colleges as was evident in her high academic achievements:

PRAED. Do you know, I have been in a positive state of excitement about meeting you ever since your magnificent achievements at Cambridge: a thing unheard of in my day. It was perfectly splendid, your tying with the third wrangler. Just the right place, you know. The first wrangler is always a dreamy, morbid fellow, in whom the thing is pushed to the length of a disease. (Shaw 19)

Instead of being flattered by Praed’s praise Vivie goes on to show the practical shortcomings in the Education system. Vanity is not her cup of tea:

VIVIE. My dear Mr Praed: do you know what the mathematical tripos means? It means grind, grind, grind for six to eight hours a day at mathematics, and nothing but mathematics. I'm supposed to know something about science; but I know nothing except the mathematics it involves. I can make calculations for engineers,
electricians, insurance companies, and so on; but I know next to nothing about
engineering or electricity or insurance. I don't even know arithmetic well. Outside
mathematics, lawn-tennis, eating, sleeping, cycling, and walking, I'm a more
ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who hadn't gone in for the
tripos. (Shaw 20)

She continues to give the same unconventional impression throughout the play starting
from the very first Act in her conversation with Praed:

VIVIE. Wait a bit. That wasn't the beginning. I went up to town on an invitation
from some artistic people in Fitzjohn's Avenue: one of the girls was a Newnham
chum. They took me to the National Gallery, . . . and to a concert where the band
played all the evening: Beethoven and Wagner and so on. I wouldn't go through
that experience again for anything you could offer me. I held out for civility's sake
until the third day; and then I said, plump out, that I couldn't stand any more of it,
and went off to Chancery Lane. Now you know the sort of perfectly splendid
modern young lady I am. How do you think I shall get on with my mother? (Shaw
21)

The operas and concerts that used to be the sole delight for the Ladies until late Victorian Period,
had by then become an unbearable experience for the new women as they were well aware of the
waste of “women’s time”. More than arts and culture, the then contemporary new women
preferred:
VIVIE. Oh yes I do. I like working and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it. (Shaw 20)

Even in the sexual expression, Vivie is devoid of any sentimentality which could have been expected from her seeing the traditionally accepted view of women with regard to love affairs and their love interests. Her relationship with Frank which were the only times she displayed some affection for someone were also not characterised by an overflow of sentiments and emotions. She mercilessly dismisses Frank when she wasn’t in a mood to bear up with his frivolity:

VIVIE. Do you think your form will be any better when you're as old as Crofts, if you don't work?

FRANK. Of course I do. Ever so much better. Vivvums mustn't lecture: her little boy's incorrigible. [He attempts to take her face caressingly in his hands].

VIVIE. [striking his hands down sharply] Off with you: Vivvums is not in a humor for petting her little boy this evening. [She rises and comes forward to the other side of the room].

FRANK. [following her] How unkind!

VIVIE. [stamping at him] Be serious. I'm serious.

FRANK. Good. Let us talk learnedly, Miss Warren: do you know that all the most advanced thinkers are agreed that half the diseases of modern civilization are due to starvation of the affections of the young. Now, I—
VIVIE. [cutting him short] You are very tiresome. [She opens the inner door] Have you room for Frank there? He's complaining of starvation. (Shaw 37,38)

Even her most vulnerable moment with Frank where she was seen as totally oblivious of her ‘New Woman’ self doesn’t last for long and she recovers her composer within minutes:

FRANK. The babes in the wood: Vivie and little Frank. [He nestles against her like a weary child]. Lets go and get covered up with leaves.

VIVIE. [rhythmically, rocking him like a nurse] Fast asleep, hand in hand, under the trees.

FRANK. The wise little girl with her silly little boy.

VIVIE. The deal little boy with his dowdy little girl.

FRANK. Ever so peaceful, and relieved from the imbecility of the little boy's father and the questionableness of the little girl's—

VIVIE. [smothering the word against her breast] Sh-sh-sh-sh! little girl wants to forget all about her mother. [They are silent for some moments, rocking one another. Then Vivie wakes up with a shock, exclaiming] What a pair of fools we are! Come: sit up. Gracious! your hair. [She smooths it]. I wonder do all grown up people play in that childish way when nobody is looking. I never did it when I was a child. (Shaw 55)

She shocks the audiences most at the end of the play when she remains unaffected by Frank’s note that might had the message of breaking all associations with her:
She goes buoyantly to her place at the writing table; pushes the electric lamp out of the way; pulls over a great sheaf of papers; and is in the act of dipping her pen in the ink when she finds Frank's note. She opens it unconcernedly and reads it quickly, giving a little laugh at some quaint turn of expression in it. And goodbye, Frank. She tears the note up and tosses the pieces into the wastepaper basket without a second thought. Then she goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in its figures. (Shaw 78)

The same unsentimental attitude she displays towards her mother in cutting of all associations with her. She bluntly tells her:

VIVIE. and my way is not your way. We must part. It will not make much difference to us: instead of meeting one another for perhaps a few months in twenty years, we shall never meet: thats all.

MRS WARREN. [her voice stifled in tears] Vivie: I meant to have been more with you: I did indeed.

VIVIE. It's no use, mother: I am not to be changed by a few cheap tears and entreaties any more than you are, I daresay.

MRS WARREN. [wildly] Oh, you call a mother's tears cheap.

VIVIE. They cost you nothing; and you ask me to give you the peace and quietness of my whole life in exchange for them. (Shaw 76)
She proves to be a “New Woman” in every inch and ounce of herself. She plays instrumental role in breaking Mrs. Warren’s logical views that related marriage and prostitution as two sides of the same coin for deriving money and support from men:

MRS. WARREN. Yes; or any other point of view. What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man’s fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?—as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing! Oh, the hypocrisy of the world makes me sick! Liz and I had to work and save and calculate just like other people; elseways we should be as poor as any good-for-nothing drunken waster of a woman that thinks her luck will last for ever. [With great energy] I despise such people: they've no character; and if there's a thing I hate in a woman, it's want of character. (Shaw 47)

This highly controversial statement has ‘New Woman’ logic in it and due to this Mrs. Warren could also be considered a ‘New Woman’ who stands by her opinion, is thorough hard-heartened business woman who is well experienced and successful in her work. She is bold in regard to her expression of sexuality and in defence of her profession. The thing that drives her out of the league of new women is her conventional sentimentality. Also from a Feminist standpoint her business was condemnable and by giving upon her mother for continuing her business and all her rebellious feminist thoughts, Vivie can be seen as the first “Second Wave Feminist.”

She gives up the idea of marriage and motherhood to disown any dependency from men and patriarchal system. In this way she gives the basic code of belief of the Second Wave Feminism much before it actually started. Those who were to remain her friends would have to accept her as a human being and a woman who is incapable of sentimentality and romance:
VIVIE. If we three are to remain friends, I must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single [to Frank] and permanently unromantic [to Praed].

(Shaw 68)

Though Vivie was among Shaw’s first creations, his later heroines clearly show his departure from the typical “New woman” ideology. Shaw’s conception of ‘New Woman’ can be seen in the following words of Praed:

PRAED. Well, in making you too conventional. You know, my dear Miss Warren, I am a born anarchist. I hate authority. It spoils the relations between parent and child; even between mother and daughter. Now I was always afraid that your mother would strain her authority to make you very conventional. It's such a relief to find that she hasnt.

VIVIE. Oh! have I been behaving unconventionally?

PRAED. Oh no: oh dear no. At least, not conventionally unconventionally, you understand. . . .What a monstrous, wicked, rascally system! I knew it! I felt at once that it meant destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful! (Shaw 18)

As it can be seen from the characterisation of Eliza, Candida and Joan, Shaw indeed intended his new women to be avant-garde but without losing their identity as a woman that is without losing their femininity and without giving up the task of being a mother as the third Wave Feminists argue in their doctrine. Shaw celebrated equality of sexes and not the emancipation of one at the cost of other and also not the blending of the two to be like the class in power. His idea of “New Woman” is much like what Emma Wolf writes in The Joy of Life (1896):
I hate that phrase "New Woman." Of all the tawdry, run-to-heel phrases that strikes me the most disagreeably. When you mean, by the term, the women who believe in and ask for the right to advance in education, the arts, and professions with their fellow-men, you are speaking of a phase in civilisation which has come gradually and naturally, and is here to stay. There is nothing new or abnormal in such a woman. But when you confound her with the extremists who wantonly disown the obligations and offices with which nature has honoured them, you do the earnest, progressive women great wrong.
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