



Candida: an Unconventional Woman

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ABSTRACT *Candida's is an eponymous character after whose name the play is named Candida. As her name suggests, she is very candid. She openly discusses Marchbank's love for her. Nowhere in the play, are we told that she is also in love with Marchbanks. It was one-sided infatuation of a teenager. Candida feels flattered. However, Eugene's love makes her ponder over her relationship with Morell and what is lacking in it. She does find what is lacking in it, but being a practical woman, she also finds it not a sufficient cause for leaving her Husband and her home for it. She is a practical woman who knows that one cannot live gracefully just by romanticism. She is the 'new woman' of Victorian era. Though economically she is dependent on her husband, she does not think her position in her home a bit inferior to her husband.*

Candida's is an eponymous character after whose name the play is named *Candida*. It is not a common English name. It is made from the adjective 'candid' meaning frank or truthful. Throughout the play, Candida duly shows these two qualities in her dealings with everyone around her.

Candida is a woman of 33, well built, well-nourished and had double charm of youth and motherhood. She was very good at managing people affectionately; and she does it very frankly and without the smallest scruple. She has a heart as well as mind. She is not an empty headed chic. She is well aware of her sexual attractiveness and is clever enough to make the most of it for her own selfish ends. That's why she easily makes Eugene slice onions or trim lamps for her.

Candida is an efficient housewife who looks after her home, her children and her disorderly husband very well. She has accepted the fact that having meager income they could not afford a battalion of servants. Most of the household chores are done with the help from Maria and occasionally by Proserpine.

Just like her name suggests, she is very candid. She frankly says Morell that she often feels jealous of the women who are in love with him and attend masses just to have a look at him. She is smart enough to know that all Morell's secretaries including Miss Proserpine were in love with him. Still her behaviour with Miss Garnett is normal. One more example of her frankness is that she tells Morell about Marchbanks's love for her. She discusses it openly with him. Nowhere in the play, are we told that she is also in love with Marchbanks. It was one-sided infatuation of a teenager for a beautiful and intelligent woman. Candida feels flattered. However, Eugene's love makes her ponder over her relationship with Morell and what is lacking in it. She does find what is lacking in it, but being a practical woman, she also finds it not a sufficient cause for leaving her Husband and her home for it.

Candida is the 'new woman' of Victorian era. Though economically she is dependent on her husband, she does not think her position in her home a bit inferior to her husband. When in the auction scene Morell offers her strength for her defense, she makes him realize that it is he who is

weaker and needs protection from his wife, his mother and sisters.

At the same time, Candida is not an emotional fool. She enjoys Marchbank's romanticism and finds it flattering to be loved by a man much younger than her. But she knows in her heart that one cannot live only by poetry. When Morell leaves Candida and Marchbanks alone, Marchbanks reads out his poetry to Candida. After some time, Candida says that she has limit for poetry which implies that she is a practical woman and poetry and romanticism cannot make her leave her husband or her home.

Her actions also suggest a largeness of mind and dignity of character. At the end of the play, she does not bear any grudge for her husband for putting her in an auction and making a bid for her. She accepts it as a childish act of a 'great baby'.

Candida is the central pool of wisdom in the drama. She stands for commonsense that enables one to see things as they are. Mr. Morell thinks that he is a great preacher who can draw a large crowd on every occasion. Candida makes him understand that it is not his socialism that people come to hear. They just enjoy his oratory. Candida does not spare the poet too. She helps him get rid of false notion of romanticism.

The character of Candida is very humane in the sense that like human beings, she too is a bundle of goodness and weakness. Candida can be, at times, as cruel as she could. She lets Marchbanks fall in love with her even when she knew very well that it would lead him nowhere. She even fans his feelings for her by challenging her husband's views in the presence of Marchbanks. When left all alone, she lets Eugene come near him. Not only this, she makes her husband suffer just as much as her lover suffers. She shows cruelty towards Morell by attacking his socialism and his sermons. Even Eugene finds it unbearable and urges her to stop torturing Morell.

Candida's relationship with her father also poses questions. It seems very strange that there is no sign of a human bond between Burgess and Candida. They are utterly separate, whereas in real life there would be some link

either through affection or through dislike and mutual intolerance. Family relationships may be shown through antagonism as well as through sympathy and understanding. But the relationship between Candida and Burgess is not based on love or dislike. A very formal kind of relationship they share where there is no room for love, concern or even hatred for each other.

Writing to Hunekar, Shaw identified Candida with Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Shaw wrote: *Candida is as unscrupulous as Siegfried. No law will bind her. She is faithful not for conventional reasons but for rational ones...It is just this freedom from conventional slop, this unerring wisdom on the domestic plane, that makes her so completely mistress of the situation.*

Shaw intended to show her as unscrupulous person, a wife and a mother who does not have the conventional morality which was considered the Victorian ideal of family life. The reason why she does not succumb to Marchbanks is not her fidelity: '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 restrain me.' There are allusions to Candida's sanctity, but Shaw here wanted to stress the rationality in her character. Candida feels the need to be needed and she knows that Morell needs her more than Marchbanks. It is due to her commonsense that Candida realizes Marchbanks to be of no use to her. It is Morell who can satisfy her instincts. Her choice is redundant: a respectable woman's choice.

Leon Hugo in *Bernard Shaw* questions the facts of the marriage of Candida and Morell and comes to the conclusion that it is her love for her husband that keeps her with and not her "goodness" or "purity".

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