

IGNOMINY, INFLICTION AND INEQUALITY IN *JANE EYRE*

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Abstract:

Victorian is an era, which depicts the contemporary life in a changing society. Gender inequality triumphs all over the world, inspite of same race, colour, caste and religion. Where poltroon people try to ameliorate with the high class and the other gender. This paper deals with ignominy, gender bias and inequality. Though it brings out the symbolic and gothic elements to show the power of renaissance, it concludes with the positive attitude. Gaining identity is not mere a word of independent but recovering all the qualities of life – love, care, belongingness, equal status and education. The characters are expressed as external and inner beauty to show their difference in attitude of where people with good heart look odd in external beauty. Symbols like fire relates to characters with kind hearted and the destructive characters are linked with ice.

Keywords:

Poltroon, Ignominy, Inequality, Identity, Love, Fire, Beauty

The word 'gender' denotes that men and women are responsible for their socially constructed roles whereas the term 'gender equality' discovers the opportunity, education, rights, responsibility and needs of both men and women should be considered, favored and valued equally. Gender equality, one of the fundamental human rights is not prioritized by birth being born as male or female but by obliging to the universal truth that everyone has their own

instincts, feelings and emotions. Everyone is socially inter-connected and dependent because they share responsibility. No one is born as superior or inferior; both are same in the eyes of God. Even nature shows and teaches equality.

When compared to men, women are struggling more to attain gender equality. This is faced by women all over the world. They are treated as submissive and considered as weaker sex by their male dominants both inside and outside their home. Women must be conscious enough to differentiate their role and position at home and work place. Women deserve to be respectful and treated equally in all aspects. Gender equality starts with proper education and awareness. Women should enhance women's identity. It shouldn't be slackened down for others criticism and fabricated interpretation. Women's ability should be proven and dignified for its worth.

Many writers dealt with the issues related to gender equality by their writings. They made their readers aware of their position and their equal position in life. Gloria Steinam, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Caitlin Moran, Sheryl Sandberg, and Laura Bates have influenced their readers on gender equality in their works. They project the importance of equality among men and women and they deserve to be equal socially, culturally and economically.

Gloria Steinam, beacon of the neo-feminist movement is an American feminist, journalist and socio political activist. The feminist movement took a new dimension because of Steinam in the 1960s and 1970s. With many women leaders, she led the world towards women's liberation. She was the guiding light of the movement. In 2018, she travelled internationally as an organizer and lecturer bringing awareness about issues of equality and integrity. She inspired millions all over the world. In her book *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* which was published in 1992, She addressed women stating lack of confidence as one of the reasons for their vulnerability and their sense of losing self - worth.

"I think we each come out of the womb with some unique way of looking at the world and if we don't express it, we lose faith in ourselves,"

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a path - breaking Nigerian novelist, critically acclaimed author is a hardcore feminist. She argues in her book *We Should all be Feminists* (2012) about inclusion and awareness towards gender equality. Reading Adichie could help the people to attain gender equality. She encouraged women and men to solve the problem involving gender today.

Caitlin Moran, is an award winning British journalist, broadcaster, author, is also a member of the women's equality party. In her book, *How to be a Woman* (2011) she addressed all the issues faced by modern women and the struggle against their patriarchy.

Sheryl Sandberg is known for being the chief operating officer of Facebook. She is one of the most influential people in the world and authored a book on a cultural phenomenon. Her book, *LeanIn: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) helps to empower women and among the best selling lists across the globe. This book deals with women's emotions at the workplace from multinational companies to parliaments and the problem of sexism faced by them that made their dreams distant. She discusses issues that were impediment to achieve gender equality.

Laura Bates is an activist and British writer. In her book, *Everyday Sexism* (2014) she expresses that everyone should be treated equal, irrespective of their gender. She also explained that feminism is not about women against men, but "people against prejudice".

This paper focuses on the classical novel *Jane Eyre* which was written by the Victorian novelist, Charlotte Bronte. In this novel, Bronte has reflected upon her own experiences that she faced in her life. The environment that Bronte lived in, influenced her writings. During nineteenth century, in England, the gender role influenced people's behaviour and their strong identities. During this period women were never encouraged to write as men, and never considered as equals to men. Being a woman writer Charlotte Bronte faced many challenges in her life. She wrote under her pen name Currer Bell, because novels of women writers were considered inferior to men writings. But *Jane Eyre* achieved immediate success among readers.

Jane Eyre is partly an autobiographical novel which mirrored Charlotte Bronte's life. Bronte concerned predominantly with issues such as gender roles, equality between the sexes, education of women and problems concerning the domestic sphere. *Jane Eyre* could be focused into four distinctive parts - Jane's childhood with her aunt at Gateshead, her life as a pupil and teacher at Lowood School, her life as a governess at Thornfield Hall and finally, her reunion with Mr. Rochester.

Jane Eyre suffered terribly to become an independent woman. Though she faced many hardships she was still recognised for her personal qualities. She faced a series of inequality with men, who never respected women as their equals. They are Mr. Brocklehurst, who is supervisor

of Lowood School; Rochester, who is owner of Thornfield Hall and John Reed, Jane's cousin. All these men thought themselves as masters and they commanded over Jane Eyre which she could not tolerate or digest. She strived for equality both in her life and in her relationships.

In the beginning of the novel, protagonist Jane Eyre was introduced as an orphan living with her widowed aunt, Mrs. Reed who treated her with utmost partiality when compared with her own children - Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed. One such incident is when John Reed was in search of his mother, Mrs. Reed. As she was not there, Jane had to answer him. She answered with disinterest in order to exhibit her modesty. "What do you want? . . ., with awkward diffidence" (Bronte 9). But he was not ready to accept her answer. Instead he showed his arrogance again telling "say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?' . . ., 'I want you to come here; and seating himself in an arm-chair, he initiated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him'" (Bronte, 1999: 9-10).

Jane likes to spend her time with books. When John saw that Jane was reading book he abused her. 'You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; the entire house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows.' (Bronte, 1999: 11)

John Reed, with thick lineaments abused Jane with words manytimes and also hit her in his mother's presence. Though he did everything in her aunt's presence, his mother would remain indifferent. She always supported her son and she ill-treated Jane. He showed his antipathy towards Jane. So Jane hates them and she said boldly and directly to Mrs. Reed that she does not like her.

When the lady maid, Miss Abbot discussed about John, she made Jane to call John as a young master because he is her benefactor's son. Jane never wished to call him as her master because he was her cousin just four years older than her. Miss Eyre was not interested to obey Miss Abbot's words and Jane replied with anger "Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?" Miss Abbot argued in harsh tone and said 'No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for

your keep. There, sit down and think over your wickedness” (Bronte, 1999: 12). When everyone treated Jane rudely she started losing hope and interest towards life and she was mentally sick. It was like a deposit of dark in a turbid well.

Mr. Lloyd, the physician helped Jane to get education as she wished and her aunt allowed her to go to the school which was only for female orphans and it is known as Lowood Institution. Even there Jane was ill-treated by Mr. Brocklehurst, the supervisor of Lowood School. He insulted Jane for her past behaviour with her cousin John. The incident that was considered as true never happened at all. Jane was not the real person to be accused but it was John who abused her with words. But Mr. Brocklehurst punished her for her nature. Charlotte Bronte used Lowood School, which by name suggests ‘low’, to satirize the conditions of girls and how they were treated in charity school. Though Mr. Brocklehurst, was a wealthy person, he was not ready to provide good food and clothes to the students. Jane hated his harsh behaviour and he treated teachers with disrespect. He has instructed girl students to cut their hair for the sake of modesty.

Most of the pupil, semi starved in Lowood. Out of eighty girls, forty- five girls were ill at a time. Most of the students left the school and others died in the school itself because of disease typhus. Even, Jane’s parents died of same. They were buried quietly and quickly. Mr. Brocklehurst did not help the poor girls. He left them to starve and suffer. Jane’s friend Helen died in Jane’s arms of consumption. Jane’s favourite teacher Miss Temple who was known for her kindness left for a distant country. Jane felt completely isolated. After studying for about six years and working in the same Lowood Institution for two years, Jane felt she needed some change in her life. Through her education she gained self-confidence, admirable skills and respectable social position. She poltroon back after every discouragement with the mindset of getting her identity one day. As she wanted to experience life outside Lowood institution, she joined the post of governess, after working in the school for two years. She began to teach Adele Varens in Thornfield Hall, a young French girl, one of Rochester’s mistresses, abandoned by Celine.

Jane met the owner of the house Mr. Edward Rochester, wealthy, impetuous, and Byronic employer. He was rude in the beginning and then treated her with dominance. She had a friendly housekeeper Mrs. Alice Fairfax, who accompanied her in his house. But as days passed both were attracted to each other. But Jane controlled her emotions because she considered herself not equal to his status. She felt she is just a governess. When he treated her for granted, she was not

ready to tolerate. Although he showed feelings of love to Jane he told her that he had plans of marrying Blanche Ingram, a socially prominent woman. This disappointed Jane. He underestimated the role, capability and value of woman. There was no necessity to treat her like that as she had better knowledge than him.

Jane expressed her struggle for her gender equality. She emphasized to Mr. Rochester that, she was a free human being; she was an independent woman who can take decision on her own and expressed that she was not a bird to be trapped in a net. She wanted to show him that even though she was just a governess; she still had the right to choose her life because she was not a slave to anybody. Jane Eyre wanted to emphasize her opinion about gender equality by stating she is equal.

‘I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you.’ ...

‘And you will shall decide your destiny,’ he said: ‘I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions.’

‘You play a farce, which I merely laugh at.’ ...

‘Come to my side, Jane, and let us explain, and understand one another.’

‘I will never again come to your side: I am torn away now, and cannot return.’
(Bronte, 1999:256-257)

Jane, an orphan is a poor individual in a wealthy environment. Her refusal to marry him represents her morality of personal independence. Her poverty doesn't make her inferior but strong in character to overcome her own obstacles.

I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give.
(p.1713)

Jane Eyre faced many challenges to achieve her gender equality by her voice that women are also human being and they could feel the pain when they are hurt. Women are not machines that,

is used for work and manufacture purpose. But then, are born with feelings like love, care and kindness. She expressed her disappointment towards Mr. Rochester, when he wanted her to stay until he marries Miss. Ingram who is equal in social status and had bad temper. Jane Eyre felt it as a symbol of unhealthy relationship to love one and marry another woman. This shows his worst attitude towards women. He does not show any respect, value woman rather considered them as secondary. She could not just stay and watch him marry another woman and pay his injustice.

She struggled quite hard to defend herself as a woman and fled to Thornfield. Jane had a chance to marry St. John, a principled clergyman and one of her cousin too, who gave her job. He is been used as a motif of ice for being very cruel even though he is piousness and righteous. She should live out of her passion. Her refusal to marry him brought her back to her lover Mr. Rochester, who became widower after the death of his first wife Bertha Mason, who fired Mr. Rochester's bed curtains, Thornfield Manor and herself.

Mr. Rochester became dependent due to his blindness after the fire accident. So, Jane tried to forgive and help him. He lost his hand and eyesight trying to safeguard himself and his wife. But, his wife died by fire. Jane does not want him to treat women in general as submissive to men. Later, she struggled and made him realise that she is a human being and has all emotions as men does, striving for equality. Through her wit and intelligence she achieved what she hoped for and they led a successful and happy married life.

Rochester and Jane Eyre married and lived as equals. They both did not bother about society. They led a happy life. At this point Jane Eyre achieved her gender equality. It is high time to break the barriers and enjoy equal opportunity by both the genders. To achieve gender equality, the entire society should work for it. Charlotte Bronte used marriage to portray the power of equality between the sexes in *Jane Eyre*. Bronte used the ideas of domestic sphere through which she empowered and influenced women of her age which could be felt even today. She concerned predominantly with the problems of inequality, gender role, women education, issues concerning domestic sphere and equality between men and women. Through *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte has given the world a phenomenal concept of women empowerment, emancipation and education.

Jane is not a heroine of Victorian people, but had inner beauty of wit, self -confidence and calm morality. Charlotte Brontë's presentation of dichotomy on characters by distinguishing as the cruel or detached characters like Mrs. Reed and St. John motif as ice, while the warmer characters Jane, Miss Temple, and Mr. Rochester, are linked with fire. Inner beauty overcomes the external beauty in all sorts.

Reference

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