

PORTRAYAL OF FEMININE EMOTIONS IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S JANE EYRE.

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ABSTRACT: *Charlotte Brontë holds a unique place in presenting heroines who are assertive. As the author of vivid, intensely written novels, Charlotte Brontë broke the traditional nineteenth-century fictional stereotype of a woman as beautiful, submissive, dependent, and ignorant and delineated the portrait of a 'new woman' who is independent and who does not simply submit herself to the norms of the patriarchal setup. Charlotte Brontë's first novel, Jane Eyre (1847) was immediately recognized for its originality and power. Since then, Brontë has been considered by critics as one of the foremost authors of the nineteenth century, an important precursor to feminist novelists, and the creator of intelligent, independent heroines who asserted their rights as women long before those rights were recognized by society. Through Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë aims to project the need to fight against the oppression in the patriarchy. Penniless, lonely and starving, Jane Eyre does not remain a victim of social injustice but emerges as a brave warrior to stand against the male domination and is determined to assert her individuality without submitting to the accepted traditional norms. Both Mr. Rochester and St. John want to master Jane and in both the cases, she insists on her independent will. She wants power and the freedom to be active as she wishes to experience the world in a positive and constructive fashion. She does marry Mr. Rochester, but on her own terms and not at the cost of her independence.*

KEYWORDS: Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte, Feminine, Patriarchy, Oppression

INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Brontë holds a unique place in presenting heroines who are assertive. As the author of vivid, intensely written novels, Charlotte Brontë broke the traditional nineteenth-century fictional stereotype of a woman as beautiful, submissive, dependent, and ignorant and delineated the portrait of a 'new woman' who is independent and who does not simply submit herself to the norms of the patriarchal setup.

Charlotte Brontë's first novel, Jane Eyre (1847), was immediately recognized for its originality and power, though it was some time before its author was universally accepted to be a woman, rather than Currer Bell, the masculine pseudonym she consistently employed. Since then, Brontë has been considered by critics as one of the foremost authors of the nineteenth century, an important precursor to feminist novelists, and the creator of intelligent, independent heroines who asserted their rights as women long before those rights were recognized by society.

Brontë, like Austen, confined herself to her limited range and constructed the plots of her novels on the basis of her limited experiences. Her novels contain transcripts of actual scenes and people, mostly recreated from experience rather than being wholly imaginary. Regarding the originality in Brontë's fiction, it is worth to observe the comments of G.H.Lewes on Jane Eyre, "Reality-deep, significant reality- is the great characteristic of the book." In her letters, Brontë repeatedly stresses the handicap she suffered as a novelist from the limitations of her life. In a letter to Mr. Williams dated Oct. 4, 1847, just before the publication of Jane Eyre, Brontë wrote:

I am, myself, sensible both of deficiencies of capacity and disadvantages of circumstance which will, I fear, render it somewhat difficult for me to attain popularity as an author. The eminent writers you mention- Mr. Thackeray, Mr. Dickens, Mrs. Marsh etc., doubtless enjoyed facilities for observation such as I have not; certainly they possess a knowledge of the world, whether intuitive or acquired, such as I can lay no claim to- and this gives their writings an importance and a variety greatly beyond what I can offer the public.

Charlotte Brontë not only had a strong imagination and need to create, but also a sense of duty and recognition of the need to earn a living. She had direct and personal experience of having to make her own living without the aid of either inherited wealth or husband's money. Throughout her life, she remained self-dependent woman and this fact we find in her fiction also. In all her novels, Brontë lays stress upon the importance of women's economic independence as she advised her friend, Ellen Nussey in the letter dated Aug. 9, 1846, not to become a dependent wife, "I do not wish for you a very rich husband, I should not like you to be regarded by any man ever as 'a sweet object of charity.'"

The theme of independence is tied up with the need to love and to be loved passionately in her novel, Jane Eyre in which Brontë presents the inner life of a woman with the burning intensity of a passionate heart, vividly and realistically. In Jane Eyre, Brontë presented a new concept of a heroine-one who is vigorous, active, energetic and full of zest for life. With reference to this, Brontë had once told her sisters that they were "morally wrong in adopting the conventional heroine and I will show you a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours." Brontë created the heroine, Jane Eyre, in fulfillment of this resolve. The novel, Jane Eyre is a narrative of a passionate, headstrong young woman confronting the world with obstinate integrity and it treats of marginality and loneliness, of the desire for adventure, intimacy and independence. Its heroine confronts myriad dangers and oppressions but survives to tell a tale of triumph. Jane Eyre is a simple, plain looking penniless orphan. Both her parents died within a year of her birth, leaving her to the care of a maternal aunt, Mrs. Reed of Gateshead, who is a widow. Jane Eyre is ten years old, withdrawn and unloved, but high-spirited and with a strong sense of justice.

Jane Eyre does not have any sense of belonging in Gateshead as she is badly treated and she feels lonely, though she lives with her aunt and cousins. Commenting on this, she expresses:
I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one

amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacities, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure, a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment.

Jane is often locked in a red-room where Mr. Reed “breathed his last.” When she is in that room, she is very much horrified in such an atmosphere. She expresses her fear thus:

... I had to cross before the looking glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp.

Jane undergoes such insane treatment yet she survives, resolves to face the problems in life and is courageous enough to speak against injustice. Reacting to the ill-treatment and humiliation meted out to her, she says to her aunt, “I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with a miserable cruelty.” Jane is a very bold and straight forward girl as when her aunt calls her a liar she rebels saying, “I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I love you, but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world.”

Jane’s resentment of the harsh treatment meted out by her aunt and cousins manifests itself in severe temper outbursts, which shocks and offends Mrs. Reed so much that she arranges for Jane to be sent away to a charity boarding school. Her aunt’s decision to send her to the boarding school is welcomed by Jane because she is very much aware what would be her condition if she had to stay there any longer. Dependent and penniless, Jane guesses rightly that “had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child-... Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scape-goat of the nursery.”

Thus, Jane’s open act of rebellion initiates the move into the second stage of her life as she leaves Gateshead for Lowood. Lowood Institution is based on Brontë’s own experiences at the Clergy Daughters’ School, Cowan Bridge, which she attended with her sisters. At Lowood, the living conditions are terrible and as a result many children die from a severe bout of typhus fever. As a result of the ill-treatment by the dominating warden, Mr. Brocklehurst in the Lowood School, Jane erupts as a child all in ‘fire and violence,’ Helen Burns, the best friend of Jane, turns that violence of response inward against herself. Helen Burns dies not from the disfiguring disease of typhus, with all its negative associations of corrupting flesh, but rather from the self-consuming fires of consumption which ‘purify’ her out of existence.

Jane spends eight years at Lowood and Miss Temple’s sound teaching guides her into the role of a useful and productive pupil. With the marriage of Miss Temple, Jane ceases to be a disciplined and subdued character. Here, it is important to note that Miss Temple leaves the job in order to

become a wife-the only honourable destiny that tradition designed for women. Left in her 'natural element' Jane Eyre begins to feel 'the stirring of old emotions.' She is once more the rebellious child and wants to escape the routine of eight years of Lowood and Jane Eyre's desperate cry is an insurrectionary cry for liberty and freedom, "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it, and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into a vague space; 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'Grant me at least a new servitude!'"

At the age of eighteen, she seeks independence in the form of a position of a governess in a private household; a search which brings her to Thornfield, the home of Mr. Rochester and his ward. When Jane first meets Mr. Rochester, she does not know that he is the owner of Thornfield Hall but she helps him to ride on his horse as he has fallen from the horse. When Jane returns home, she finds Mr. Rochester there, but she does not show any interest in him. Jane, throughout her relationship with Mr. Rochester, a relationship between an employee and an employer, insists on her freedom. When Mr. Rochester announces himself to be her master and that he has the right to command her, she instantly refutes, "I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience...I am sure sir, I should never mistake informality for insolence; one I rather like the other nothing free born would submit to, even for a salary."

Later, Mr. Rochester finds Jane very charming and is fascinated by her education, efficiency, high moral sense and strong character. But the realization that he is in love with her comes only when she saves his life by extinguishing the fire in his bed. He feels grateful to her and wants to shake hands with her and while shaking her hand, he has a strange energy in his voice, a strange fire in his look and his lips are trembling. He says:

'I knew, you would do me good in some way, at some time: I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you: their expression and smile did not' (again he stopped)- 'did not' (he proceeded hastily) 'strike delight to my very inmost heart so far nothing... You have saved my life: I have a pleasure in owing you so immense a debt. I cannot say more. Nothing else that as being would have been tolerable to me in the character of creditor for such an obligation: but you: it is different, I feel your benefit no burden, Jane!'

Jane is no day-dreamer, no romantic in the conventional sense of the term, blind to Mr. Rochester's faults and defects. Not only does she know that Mr. Rochester is aristocratic, proud, changeable and irritable but also that he has had many mistresses in the past. So, she does not respond positively to his advances in the initial stage. Though before meeting Jane, Mr. Rochester has had many mistresses, his love for Jane is true. He confesses before Jane that he is entirely under her influence and says:

'I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me- you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger,

it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced- conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has witchery beyond any triumph I can win.’

When Jane passes sleepless nights thinking of Mr. Rochester and wanting to see him and to hear his voice again, she realizes that she is also in love with him. Mr. Rochester wants to intensify Jane’s love for him, so he shows that he is soon going to marry the rich and attractive, Miss Ingram and gives her a feeling that she may have to leave Thornfield Hall. Jane is shocked and surprised to think that she may have to leave Thornfield Hall because she loves this place so much as it ensures freedom and she grieves saying, “I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield: I love it because I have lived in it a full and delighted life...I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified.”

Jane’s love for Mr. Rochester deepens constantly, as does her horror at the dawning realization that Blanche Ingram, in spite of being beautiful, accomplished and ladylike, is harsh and cold. When she realizes that Mr. Rochester himself knows this and does not love Miss Ingram, she is devastated. She could have accepted the situation if there was genuine love between them, but is tormented at the idea that he will marry for ‘family, perhaps political reasons; because her rank and connexions suited him.’ Jane imagining that Mr. Rochester is about to marry Blanche Ingram, says to Mr Rochester that “If God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you.”

Jane does not fail to note the ribaldry and flirtatious tone adopted in the conversation between Mr Rochester and Miss Ingram. Although entertaining and articulate, there is lack of depth and sincerity visible in their discourse with each other. The next day, Jane is sent for by her aunt Mrs. Reed, who is on death bed. In Gateshead, Mrs. Reed, as cold and austere towards Jane as ever, tells her that she received a request some years before from Jane’s uncle that she be sent to join him in Madeira. Mrs Reed hated Jane so much that she told this man that the child was dead. Although she still hates Jane, some pricking of the conscience has forced her to clear her mind of its action before she can die.

Jane returns to Thornfield, preoccupied with a feeling of anticipation and fear for the future. She is too intent upon preparing herself for the pain she will feel, when Mr. Rochester marries. As there is no sign of any wedding preparation, she begins to hope that the marriage is not going to take place. To her surprise, Mr Rochester welcomes her cordially and his delight at her arrival is easily reflected through his actions.

Mr. Rochester has been watching her when Jane proceeds for her usual solitary walk. He apparently follows her, and persuades her to walk with him in the orchard. It is in this idyllic setting that the final truth of his feelings becomes clear; he denies the existence of any engagement to Miss Ingram and pleads instead for Jane’s hand in marriage. At first aghast, she is transported into pure joy when she realizes that he is being sincere and genuinely loves her. He calls her his ‘bride’ and declares that he will soon marry her. Throughout Mr. Rochester’s courtship of her, Jane retains her integrity and is not ready to please him if what he wants her to do offends her dignity as a woman and goes against ‘the dictates of conscience.’ The marriage between Jane and Mr.

Rochester is at hand, but before the marriage, Jane sees strange dreams which imply that the fruition of their love is impossible:

‘On sleeping, I continued in dreams the idea of a dark and gurdy night. I continued also the wish to be with you, and experienced a strange, regretful consciousness of some barrier dividing us... I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop- but my movements were fettered, and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdraw farther and farther every moment.’

The marital union of Jane and Mr. Rochester is abruptly halted by an announcement that Mr. Rochester has a wife, Bertha Mason alive and mad. When Mr Rochester’s marriage with Jane is interrupted, his heart is broken and he goes to Thornfield Hall with the priest and the lawyer to show them his lunatic wife. Everybody is stunned to see Bertha Mason as she violently grapples his throat and bites his cheek. He sadly tells them, “That is my wife, such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know- such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours!” He tells Jane that, “after a youth and manhood passed half in unutterable misery and half in dreary solitude, I have for the first time found what I can truly love” and requests her not to leave him.

Mr. Rochester is a spouse shackled to a failed marriage and burdened by an inadequate and a degrading partner. He specifically addresses the question of legal proceedings, when he eventually tells Jane the story of his marriage to Bertha:

My brother in the interval was dead; and at the end of the four years my father died too. I was rich enough now- yet poor to hideous indigence: a nature that most gross, impure, depraved, I ever saw, was associated with mine, and called by the law and by society a part of me. And I could not rid myself of it by legal proceedings; for the doctors now discovered that my wife was mad...her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity.

Mr. Rochester is guilty of error, dissipation and bigamy, but at the same time, he is also redeemable and forgivable, especially since he attempts to rescue and protect Bertha. Mr. Rochester’s capacity for redemption is intimated in a letter that Brontë wrote to W. S. Williams on August 14, 1848: Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, mis-guided, errs, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live- but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it. He is taught the severe lessons of experience and has sense to learn from them- years improve him; the effervescence of youth foamed away, what is really good in him still remains.

In pleading with Jane to stay with him at Thornfield, he acknowledges his past, saying, “you must regard me as a plotting profligate- a base and low rake who has been stimulating disinterested love in order to draw you into a snare...” He admits to having tried ‘dissipation’ but ‘never debauchery’ and pleads with her to be his ‘comforter and rescuer.’

This discovery of mad woman in the attic nearly destroys Jane along with her hopes of happiness. Despite Mr. Rochester's pleas and protestations and her devoted love for him, she cannot accept the situation and decides to flee from Thornfield rather than consent to be his mistress. Commenting on the situation, A.C. Rickett opines "She [Jane] revolted against the accepted convention of woman's place in the routine of life; she revolted against the formalism and hypocrisy, the harshness and cruelty that she saw around her." She boldly refuses to become his mistress, saying:

'I tell you I must go! Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automation? - a machine without feelings! And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!- I have as much soul as you- and full as much heart!

Jane favours independence and dislikes 'lamb like submission' to anyone, even to Mr. Rochester. Jane asserts her independence of the prevailing idea that it is duty of a woman to sacrifice her in improving or protecting a sinning man. With the knowledge of the history of Mr. Rochester's past mistresses, Jane refuses to stay with him after his attempt at a bigamous marriage, though she wrestles with 'Feeling,' which begs her 'think of his misery; think of his danger- look at his state when left alone...soothe him, save him; love him...' In spite of her refusal to marry him, she is unable to forget him, and has deep love and sympathy for him even after having left Thornfield. Penniless and almost starving, Jane roams in the countryside in search of work and sustenance and stumbles upon a house one night, when the last of her strength is about to forsake her. St. John, Diana and Mary Rivers restore her to health and fitness and they become her family. It turns out that they are in fact cousins and when an unexpected inheritance falls to Jane she insists on sharing it equally with them, allowing her to repay their kindness and enabling all four to become financially independent at last. This reveals Jane's sense of gratitude and the importance of an individual's economic independence.

While Jane's relationship with St. John is developing, his hold over her becomes more and more pronounced, and she feels a claustrophobic need to please him at all times. The overpowering, formidable personality of St. John Rivers creates such tremendous impact on her that she obeys him, but she can never submit herself to him as she says:

As for me I daily wish more to please him but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach: it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted.

Later, Jane is under pressure from St. John to become the kind of woman that society would approve of and to live life where duty is pre-eminent and submerge her own personality. She feels embarrassed and reflects, "I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master: he expected me to do a great deal; and when I fulfilled his expectations he, in his own way, fully

testified his approbation. By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference...”

St. John Rivers offers Jane a proposal of marriage and an invitation to travel with him to India to be a missionary. He is a peculiar character and Emile Montegut’s comment upon Rivers is worth quoting:

...without tenderness, without love for creatures of flesh and blood. His are purely spiritual passions. It brings tears to the eyes to see the sad, dry look resting on the beautiful young girl whose love he disdains. A calm heart and an unquiet spirit, he dreams only of martyrdom, of the pursuit of the ideal goal and the conquest of eternal salvation. He is ambitious for moral truth as a conquerer is ambitious for kingdoms and empires.

St. John Rivers makes it very clear to Jane that he does not have any love for her but only wants her to accompany him to India as a wife for the missionary purpose. Her passionate side which values the beauty of true love is clearly displayed in her rejection of his offer. She rejects the idea of being ‘forced to keep the fire of my nature so low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital(organ)’ - and this reflects the horror she feels at living in a loveless marriage.

Jane, unwilling to compromise her independence at any cost, refuses St Rivers’ proposal but makes it very clear that she is rejecting the idea of her becoming a missionary’s wife and not the missionary, as she says, “Keep to common sense, St. John, you are verging a non-sense. You pretend to be shocked by what I have said, you are not really shocked: for, with your superior mind, you cannot be either so dull or so conceited as to misunderstand my meaning. I say again, I will be your curate, if you like, but never your wife.” Jane decides not to accompany St. John in order to please him at the cost of her personal integrity, which is revealed in the following lines: In leaving England, I should leave a loved but empty land- Mr. Rochester is not there: and if he were, what is, what can that ever be to me? My business is to live without him now...if I were waiting some impossible change in circumstances, which might reunite me to him...Alas! If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death. And how will the interval between leaving England for India, and India for the grave, be filled?

When Jane Eyre feels that Mr. Rochester is desperate and is in need of her, she decides to go back to Thornfield Hall to ascertain once and for all what has happened to Mr. Rochester. Reaching Thornfield, she finds it burned down by his mad wife who set fire to it and killed herself in the process and in trying to save her, Mr. Rochester is badly injured- he is blind and a cripple. When she finds that Mr. Rochester is completely helpless- a blind and a cripple, she wants to serve him as her love for him is true and pure and so she promises, “I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your house-keeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion- to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hand to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be desolate, so long as I live.”

Though, circumstances deny for some time their marital union, both Jane and Mr. Rochester do not forget each other. Jane says:

‘Perhaps you think I had forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader, amid these changes of place and fortune. Not for a moment. His idea was still with me, because it was not a vapour sunshine could disperse, nor a sand-traced effigy storms could wash away; it was a name graven on a tablet, fated to last as long as the marble it inscribed. The craving to know what had become of him followed me everywhere.

When Jane returns to Mr. Rochester, he cannot believe it and thinks her to be a vision, a spirit. As he cannot see her, he touches her to confirm her existence there. He is overjoyed at her return and expresses his powerful feelings in this way:

‘Oh, you are indeed there, my skylark! come to me. You are not gone, not vanished? I heard one of your kind an hour ago, singing high over the wood: but its song had no music for me, and any more than the rising sun had rays. All the melody on earth is concentrated in my Jane’s tongue to my ear(I am glad it is not naturally a silent one); all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence. No-no-Jane; you must not go. No- I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence- the sweetness of your consolation: I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself- I must have you...my very soul demands you; it will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.’

Their love is so true that it does not change with the change of fortune and place. Though Jane does not marry him when he is healthy and handsome, she marries him when he is blind and cripple. It is the power of true love that they are extremely happy after many years of their marriage:

‘I have now married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest- blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am! evermore absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh...All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character- perfect concord is the result.’
Commenting on Charlotte Brontë’s handling of love-theme, Q. D. Leavis comments, “Charlotte Brontë’s handling of this love-theme demonstrates that the relation between lovers should be one of mutual need, in which the woman is not idealized but is recognized as an active contributor, fearless, unashamed, of passionate feeling and while needing to serve, still determined to have her sights acknowledged.”

Charlotte Brontë presents the feminine world in its myriad hues by portraying different women characters reflecting the various shades of the feminine experience. Mrs. Reed is a study in female subjection to the authority of the patriarchal setup. Helen Burns is an example of submission to the authority whose reward is moral advantage and posthumous compensation. Miss Temple, though financially independent, decides to compromise on her independence in order to become a wife. The insane Bertha Mason is the representative of the helpless Victorian women who were expected to follow the conventional social norms which treated them as ‘the other’ and is often said to be the suffering emblem of the result of the Victorian patriarchy. Blanche Ingram is the representative of the manipulative women who use their feminine charms to achieve their vulgar

desires. Prancing and flouncing like a living doll, she is a woman who has willingly offered herself as a sexual trophy in the marriage market. Hence, she decides to sell herself to the highest bidder, Mr Rochester. To Jane, who vehemently declares that “I am a free human being with an independent will,” all these modes of sexual slavery represent a degradation far more radical than the self-abnegation.

Brontë’s depiction of Jane Eyre draws us into a consideration of the problems of human life as a young woman in the early nineteenth century may have found them. Her experiences of the marginal options available to a woman, who is without class or wealth produces a novel that is historically specific about human problems, even as it focuses on one individual’s experience and this gives expression to the feelings which women even in the twenty-first-century India experience. So, in her oft-quoted outcry against stultification, her desire for travel and scope, Jane Eyre articulates a universal problem and not merely a personal problem:

Women feel just as men feel: they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidery bags.

Blanche Ingram is the manipulative beauty operating the sexual markets. She wants to marry Mr. Rochester for his wealth and connections. She is attractive and has many brilliant attainments yet she is not genuine and original as Jane rightly comments:

She [Blanche Ingram] was showy, but she was not genuine; she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books; she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity: tenderness and truth were not in her.

All the above mentioned qualities of Blanche Ingram remind us of Mary Crawford in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* who stands in contrast to the morally upright and responsible, Fanny Price. Though Edmund is fascinated by the beauty and accomplishments of Mary Crawford for some time, he realizes that Fanny Price is superior to Mary Crawford, when he comes to know about Mary Crawford’s morally shallow nature. In the same way, Jane presents a contrast to Miss Ingram especially in the way she loves and attracts Mr. Rochester. Jane’s love is true and Mr. Rochester loves her for her truthfulness.

Through *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë aims to project the need to fight against the oppression in the patriarchy. Penniless, lonely and starving, Jane Eyre does not remain a victim of social injustice but emerges as a brave warrior to stand against the male domination and is determined to assert her individuality without submitting to the accepted traditional norms. Both Mr. Rochester and St. John want to master Jane and in both the cases, she insists on her independent will. She wants

power and the freedom to be active as she wishes to experience the world in a positive and constructive fashion. She does marry Mr. Rochester, but on her own terms and not at the cost of her independence.

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