

**Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a Protest Novel:
Jane Eyre's Self-Realization Through the Path of Varied Injustices
Prevailing in Nineteenth-Century England**

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Abstract

Jane Eyre, written by Charlotte Brontë, is a novel that vividly depicts various social injustices prevalent in 19th-century England, particularly concerning class, gender, and morality. At the heart of the novel lies Jane's struggle against the rigid class system. As an orphaned girl without wealth or social standing, Jane is treated as inferior by those around her. She faces discrimination and condescension from characters like Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, who represent the privileged upper class. Jane's lack of wealth and connections limit her opportunities, highlighting the harsh realities faced by those outside the aristocracy. Gender inequality is another prominent theme in *Jane Eyre*. Women in the novel are often relegated to subservient roles, expected to be obedient and passive. Characters like Bertha Mason and Adele Varens are marginalized and silenced, their voices ignored or dismissed. Even Jane, despite her intelligence and strength of character, faces limitations due to her gender, particularly in her quest for independence and self-determination. Furthermore, *Jane Eyre* critiques the hypocrisy of Victorian morality. Characters like Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers manipulate and exploit others under the guise of righteousness, highlighting the corruption and double standards inherent in society's moral code. Mr. Rochester's treatment of Bertha Mason and his attempt to enter into a bigamous marriage with Jane exposes the hypocrisy and immorality that often lurk beneath the surface of respectable society. Overall, "Jane Eyre" serves as a powerful critique of the social injustices present in 19th-century England. Also reflects themes such as colonialism and feminism. Hence my research paper, through Jane's journey, tries to bring forth the inequalities perpetuated by class, gender, and morality and also would delineate Jane's search for self-realization through the course of the novel.

Keywords: Social Injustice, morality, society, gender, class

Literature has witnessed the roles of women evolving through the ages. Most of the published writers were men and the portrayal of women in literature was without doubt biased. According to author Anita Nair, literature has always been ambivalent in its representation of women. Good women are the one who accepts social norms and she is rewarded. From the Elizabethan age, the theme of misogamy and the superiority of man was predominant. Women were not looked at as a person but were considered a mere necessity for the pro-creation process.

During the Victorian era, there was an unending debate over the roles of women. Women were treated in the literature as angelic figures, innocent, physically weaker, and nothing less than household commodities. Alfred Lord Tennyson in his poem 'The Princess' states:

“Man for the field and women for the heart
Man for the sword and the needle she
Man with the head and women with heart
Man to command and women to obey”

So it is evident that women during the Victorian age were in a subjugated role. The Portrayal of Jane in Jane Eyre's Metamorphosis is the concept of the heroine. Jane appears as a rebellious, self-respected, spirited, courageous, unconventional, outspoken girl and later on self-dependent woman in the journey of her life from Gateshead Hall to Moor House. Her unconventional traits of personality are exhibited by Charlotte in her dealing with Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Ms. Scatchered, Mr. Rochester, and Mr. Rivers.

The research paper tries to show the journey of Jane from a docile girl to a mature self-respected lady of Mr. Rochester. Charlotte shows the metamorphosis of Jane from enslavement to empowerment and thereby changes the concept of the heroine.

In a world where women are judged primarily by physical appearance, clothing, and social standing, being docile, Charlotte Bronte changed the whole concept of the heroine in her novels especially in Jane Eyre as she presented poor, plain, outspoken young women with nothing but her native intelligence. When Charlotte Bronte decided to write the novel Jane Eyre, she was determined to create a main character who challenged the notion of the ideal Victorian woman.

At Gateshead Hall: From the beginning, Charlotte exhibits Jane's spirit to protest. As a small girl, she exhibits the spirit of the revolt and self-esteem girl. She was living with her aunt as an orphan and according to Victorian norms of a girl she should be grateful to her maternal aunt for providing her shelter doubt she bore all the injustice and rudeness of her maternal cousins. She suffers alienation but when she is mercilessly bitten up by her maternal cousin

John as she is reading his book. He scolds her and throws her down and she is hurt and her rage comes out and she calls John 'a wicked and cruel boy.' She said, "You are like a murderer; you are like a slave driver." For the first time, she realized that she should not be passive but should fight her fate and express her feelings. Her maternal aunt Mrs. Reed became angry and locked up her in a red room.

Mrs. Reed to get rid of little Jane enrolled her in the orphanage school. When the manager of the Lowood Institute Mr. Brocklehurst visited her at home, Mrs. Reed introduced her as a "liar girl". This was a cruel blow for Jane and she was filled with anger. She becomes bold and she says to Mrs. Reed that she is a liar she says, "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 grownup 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 miserable cruelty." So in her anger and passion Jane is far removed from the conventional model of the Victorian child who should be "seen and not heard." Instead, she is part of a new emerging more sympathetic attitude to childhood which shows that adults should pay attention to the suffering and emotional and psychological needs of children.

Jane as a Student at Lowood Institute, her revolt and bold spirit to speak the truth is also presented as Lowood –the Orphanage school which is a benevolent institution in name but a hell. Jane is not as oppressed at Lowood as at Gateshead but she still is not allowed to do as she pleases. Brocklehurst makes Jane stand on a stool in front of the class and orders her classmates to shun her because she is a liar. The main idea behind this harsh treatment was that if the body was punished, the soul could be shaved but through Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte challenges these notions and offers a sympathetic description of the rebellious child which helps to transform Victorian attitude. Jane develops a friendship with Helen Burns who tries to convince her to be submissive but for Jane it is difficult. She doesn't like Miss Scatchered who abuses Helen for dirty nails and ill manners. Jane criticizes the hypocrisy of Mr. Brocklehurst who advises Christian philosophy regarding "original sin" which was satirized by Bronte by Jane's critical views. Little Jane is against all the operations. When her favourite teacher leaves Lowood after marriage Jane feels restless and does not wish to submit to the world of Lowood. She rebels by advertising on her own for the position of governess and leaving the school to work at Thornfield.

Jane as a governess at Thornfield Hall

At Thornfield Jane doesn't face any serious operation but mature young girl Jane is not ready to reveal her innermost feelings to her master Mr. Rochester. Jane falls in love with her

master Mr. Rochester and decides to get married to him but it is due to love she is marrying him and not for money. When Mr. Rochester bestows riches and jewelry she puts her foot down and says, “O sir! Never mind the jewels!” and rejects to accept them. After the mystery of Bertha Mason, the wife of Rochester, Jane is emotionally shattered but very soon she regains her composure. When Mr. Rochester asks her to stay with him as his mistress in another part of the world she rejects it and decides to leave Mr. Rochester. She says, “I am no bird, and no net ensnares me, I am a free human being with an independent will.” This statement resembles Karl Marx’s revolutionary manifesto. Jane upholds her principles, her morals, and her independence. If she had accepted Mr. Rochester’s proposal she would not be a self-esteeming girl.

After leaving Thornfield, Jane looks for work but finds nothing within a matter of hours she is reduced to begging for food. Her innate pride and delicacy are severely tested. After three days of destitute life, she reaches the Moor House in a nervous collapse. She is tenderly nursed by Diana & Mary Rivers. She gradually regains strength. She hides the story of her previous life and her name. She assumes the name Jane Eliot. She continues to delight in the company of Diana & Mary and St. John Rivers. Jane asks him for employment. Jane finds him fiercely religious. His church sermons distress her because they are so fervent. He tells her that he needs someone to set up a small school for girls in the nearby village. Jane accepts the job of teacher. She settles into her new life well. She finds satisfaction with the new life but is still tormented regularly by the dreams of Rochester. Amazingly, Jane receives a fortune of 20,000 from her uncle. She also finds out St. John, Diana & Mary as her family- first cousins and she splits her fortune in four ways. She says, “It could never be mine in justice, though it might be in law.”

St. John Rivers asks her to come with him as a missionary in India. He also wants to marry her. But again Charlotte shows Jane a bold woman who rejects St. John as she still loves Rochester. She says, “I scorn your idea of love.” I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer, St. John and I scorn you when you offer it.” St. John Rivers tries to control her. She is very passive with him and submits to his wish. But she does not yield to his proposal of marriage. She rebels against it, though it is difficult for her.

Jane is Rochester’s wife at Ferndean Manor, after the Rivers incident, Jane becomes an independent woman as she inherits her uncle’s inheritance. She is charged with emotions, she hears Rochester’s voids calling her desperately. She prepares to return to Thornfield. She goes

back to Thornfield and is shocked and dismayed to find it a “blackened ruin.” She learns about the fire and Bertha’s death. Jane’s first sight of Rochester evokes pain and pity as he is a changed man scarred both physically and emotionally. He cannot believe that she is back, so many times he has dreamt of her return that he feels that it is a dream. He repeats his proposal to her. She accepts to reunite with him without hesitation. This time this is lawful and pleasing to Jane. Here Jane exercises no rebel nor submission to Rochester as now she has her independence and is in control of herself.

So, the journey of Jane shows the journey of a modern woman, when Rochester calls her an angel, she responds with, “I am not an angel, I asserted and I will not be one till I die, I will be myself, Mr. Rochester. You must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me...” By accepting the idea of being an angel she would be sacrificing her identity to cater to Rochester’s desire. Jane refuses to become Rochester’s mistress because becoming his mistress would not allow her to be his equal and would make her a lesser person than who she was destined to be. St. John’s offer of marriage would bring her financial security yet domesticity. St. John tries to alter her identity to “an ape in a harlequin’s jacket” Feminism ideals are shown when she chooses to value her identity and independence over materialism. So her rejection of St. John and acceptance of Mr. Rochester convey a strong message of female independence. The prominent message is that women should value their independence thinking and equality rather than subjecting them to male control. To Jane marriage is a trap that would make her lose her independence. She refuses to be the ideal domesticated wife of St. John. He became angry and announced Victorian thinking, “If you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. Through my means He opens to you a noble career as my wife only can you enter upon it. Refuse to be my wife, you limit forever to a track of selfish ease...”

So the way Jane Eyre puts her values of freedom and self-fulfillment before these options shows feminist ideas of female empowerment. She says, “I am no bird and no net ensnares me, I am a free human being with an independent will.”

So, Jane Eyre places her values of freedom and self-fulfillment before conformity. The novel was written in 1800, it conveys messages of individual empowerment and equality that apply to modern society. Jane begins as an undeveloped orphan, a neglected plain, small despised girl. She becomes a school-mistress almost a missionary but finally, she is a beloved wife and mother. So Charlotte Bronte’s story of a plain orphan girl whose superior qualities are finally acknowledged and she gets the rewards of love and becomes the modern version of Cinderella

tale. Jane not only wins her Prince charming but does so by asserting her independence and her values.

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