

**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED  
NOVELS OF BRONTE SISTERS**

**Thesis Submitted to**  
**THE KUVEMPU UNIVERSITY**  
For the award of the Degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

By

**APOORVA B RAJ** M.A., M. Phil., NET.  
Department of P.G. Studies and Research in English

The Research Guide  
**Dr RAMAPRASAD.B.V.** M.A., Ph.D.,  
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**DEPARTMENT OF POST GRADUATE STUDIES AND  
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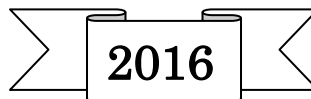
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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that **Mrs. Apoorva B Raj** has worked on the thesis entitled **Empowerment of Women in the Selected Novels of Bronte Sisters** under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis, being submitted to the faculty of Arts, Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of the work carried out by the candidate herself and has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma of this or any other University in India or abroad.

Date: 05/01/2016

Place: Shankaraghatta

  
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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Empowerment of Women in the Selected Novels of the Bronte Sisters** submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my original work and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any diploma, degree, fellowship or other similar title. This was done under the supervision and guidance of **Dr Ramaprasad B. V.**, Associate Professor, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in English, Kuvempu University, Jnana Sahyadri, Shankaraghatta- 577451. I further declare that any part of the thesis has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or diploma of similar title of any other University.

  
(Apoorva B/Raj)

Date: 05/01/2016

Place: Shankaraghatta

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**...Apoorva B Raj**

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## CHAPTER – 01

### Introduction

“Where there is power, there is resistance.”

-Michel Foucault

The question of empowering the powerless entities is not a recent phenomenon. It dates back to ancient times. Women, who were neglected and comparatively powerless, struggled hard throughout many centuries to attain the present empowered status in society. They demanded their rights and equality with men. The women took the help of pen as a mightier sword to demand their rights and to awaken the people. They sensibly started to question the whole system of patriarchy through many means – pamphlets, poetry, essays and through the most popular genre, i.e., novels during the 19th century. Their aim was to get liberated from the clutches of patriarchy and to assert their identity.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bronte sisters dealt with the issues of empowerment in their novels. This dissertation tries to examine the novels of Bronte sisters by connecting them to the debates about empowerment during 19<sup>th</sup> century. The study argues that the Bronte sisters considered proper education and equal opportunities as important in getting empowered status for women. It explores issues like how the Bronte's registered the subtle resistance of women and how they dealt with the issues of empowerment of women in their novels. It claims that the novels like- *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have redefined tradition, culture, and the role of women at home and society. The thesis argues that the

novels show the social evolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England through its transforming figure of women at individual and societal level.

These texts of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, which were composed and published in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, uphold the universal issue of women empowerment that is still an important matter of discussion. The thesis also explores the complex ways through which Brontes responded to the contemporary discourses of patriarchy.

To trace these issues it is necessary to re-read the writings of Bronte sisters who never explicitly claimed that they stood for this universal cause of women empowerment as some political and social activists did. The novels are believed to be the product of their life experience to a greater extent. This experience was the source of their novels. Thus, the thesis attempts to connect the personal struggle of Bronte's with the struggles of the female characters of their novels. In addition, the thesis examines to what extent they overruled the rules of male dominated society in the process of empowerment.

The main purpose of the thesis is to chalk out the cultural construct of women and her identity during 19<sup>th</sup>-century, which was a period of industrialisation and urbanisation. It examines the ideologies, which were used to construct gender differences and class differences. It also examines how the economic disparities between men and women in the Victorian society become an important issue in their novels. It tries to examine how Bronte sisters respond to these issues of their period.

This introductory chapter attempts to provide historical background of patriarchy, of women's movement for their rights and to the debates in social, political and religious fields including educational system. It investigates how the legal system of the Victorian period is connected with empowerment. As the focus of the study is on 'the issue of



empowerment' in the selected novels of Bronte sisters, the chapter also explores the meaning of empowerment in different perspectives. Finally, it examines the presence of the issue of empowerment of women in the Bronte's time, life and the novels.

The chapter provides the theoretical framework, which is essential for the further analysis. It gives the overview of the research work by summing up the main arguments of the following chapters.

### **Women under Patriarchy**

Patriarchy perpetuates male dominance. Victorian society was constructed under the notion of male dominance and male control. This male-centric system proved inhuman and selfish. Patriarchy is mainly based on a set of rules that assign specific roles for both men and women, which is carried from one generation to other without any hindrance. This ideological set up has unconsciously become a way of living all over the world. Especially it became more rigid in the times of industrialization of 19th century England. The transforming society filled men with a fear of losing his hold on women. So the gendered norms were implemented severely to keep a check on the growth and mobility of women from private to public sphere.

As we know, patriarchal societies always favoured men in all occupations. Johnson, a sociologist, describes patriarchy in the following manner:

A society is patriarchal to the degree that it is male-dominated, male identified, and male-centred. It also involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women. Patriarchy is male-dominated in that position of authority-political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic-are reserved for men. Heads of states, corporate CEOs and board members, religious leaders,

school principals, members of legislatures at all levels of government, senior law partners, tenured full professors, generals and admirals, and even those identified as “head of household” all tend to be male under patriarchy. (5)

Thus, gender roles are determined by men for the benefit of men. Men assert, “I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe... the rest of the world, which I define as the other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/ father, possessor of the phallus” (Jones 362). This climb to centrality has been supported by religion and philosophy. For example, “Plato and Freud define woman as irrational and invisible, as an imperfect man.” (364)

However, feminine or masculine sexuality is not an innate quality in women or men. It is socially imposed on a child through their parents under the influence of the phallogocentric world. Thus, the ideas of gender superiority and inferiority are social constructs to locate men in the centre. As Gerda Lerner, an American Historian and Professor in Women’s Studies explains, patriarchal society assumes that:

Men and women are essentially different creatures, not only in their Biological equipment, but in their needs, capacities and functions. Men and women also differ in the way they were created and in the social function assigned to them by God.

Men are “naturally” superior, stronger and more rational, therefore, designed to be dominant. From this follows that men are political citizens and responsible for and representing the polity. Women are “naturally” weaker, inferior in intellectual and rational capacities, unstable emotionally and, therefore, incapable of political participation. They stand outside of the polity.

Men, by their rational minds, explain and order the world. Women by their nurturing function sustain daily life and the continuity of the species. While both functions are essential, that of men is superior to that of women.

Another way of saying this is that men are engaged in “transcendent” activities, women-like lower class people of both sexes-are engaged in “immanent” activities.

Men have an inherent right to control the sexuality and the reproductive functions of women, while women have no such right over men.

Men mediate between humans and God. Women reach God through the mediation of men. (3-4)

In this way, patriarchy has supported men more than women. Men are valued, and women are devalued. Women are considered secondary to men and marginalized in public and private sphere simultaneously.

The above description shows women were “isolated in their own homes” (Zohrab 110). They had no identity of their own. In the 19th century England women is merely a docile puppet in the hands of the male. She was treated as the movable property between her father and husband. She was adored for her beauty rather than her brain. Her interest in learning was discouraged hugely as an unfeminine act. Under patriarchy, a woman could not be a lawyer, a doctor or a clergywoman. She was allowed only, “To read and do basic sums” (Teachman 110). Women were trained to be good wives, mothers and housekeepers. There were only two options for women- marriage or spinsterhood. Women of aristocrat family could play the piano, sing, dance, embroider, draw or paint (110). On the other hand, middle-class women were taught sewing, cooking cleaning or

purchasing food. They were prepared by the society to perform the role of a housekeeper (110). These skills could help a woman to be a charming wife for her husband, a caring mother of his child and an efficient servant doing his household works. So marriage was a restrictive bondage to woman and house, a prison. There was no space for love and courtship. If she opted for spinsterhood, then there was a very limited choice for her to lead an independent life as “a governess, a teacher in a school for children, a companion to aged and ill.” (87) So women of 19th century consciously lead their life to impress a suitor thinking that marriage is the only way to get rescued from the pool of miseries.

In this way, the patriarchal culture created an environment where men were projected as the leaders and saviours and women were forced to stay in the background. There was no economic independence for women. A married woman including her money, jewellery or clothes, and her legal entity was absorbed by her husband. Only widows if they remain without remarriage could possess and inherit property. Otherwise, her first husband’s property would come to her second husband. For this, Charlotte Bronte’s life is the best example. Soon after her marriage, the copyright of her novels, as well as everything she earned was owned by her husband. (Walters 49)

This system of patriarchy was analysed by Feminist-Marxists during 1970’s. Their examination concluded that patriarchy is another face of capitalism. They called it as “capitalist patriarchy”. Zillah Eisenstein, the socialist feminist, talked about women’s unpaid job working as a wife and mother based on her position of dependency and security on a set of social norms. Sylvia Walby has argued, “Patriarchy is as much public as it is private, and that its public form is particularly important in modern societies” (qtd.

in John 17). She generalized the theory of patriarchy as “a system of social structures whereby men are in a position to dominate, exploit and oppress women” (17).

This belief is further strengthened by language. Language is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, and speaks in the place of everything and everyone else- including women. (Jones 362) Logocentrism prevented women from self-expression. Adrienne Rich says that an “oppressor’s language” is inadequate to describe or express women’s experience. Ellen Showalter in her work *A literature of their own* illustrates the difficulty of women as a writer in three phases- feminine, feminist and female. Feminine phase, which dated from 1840-1880 denoted a stage when women writers imitated the dominant male tradition and way of writing. Many of them adopted male pseudonyms to get their works published and to escape or avoid the harsh criticism based on their status quo. Initially, Jane Austen published her first novel as written “by a Lady”, and Mary Shelly as an anonymous in 1818. Then Marian Evans adopted the name George Eliot; Bronte sisters used Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper published their poetry under the name Michael Field. Thus, using male pseudonym was necessary. (I taken up My Pen: 19<sup>th</sup> century British Women Writers) This situation made the women writers to suppress their whims and fancies while writing. It affected the narrative techniques largely under an irregular pressure. Thus, feminine phase clearly signifies “the self-awareness of the liabilities of female authorship” (Showalter 138). This can be noticed in the writings of Bronte sisters. To avoid conflict between their passionate emotions and Victorian society’s rigidity, they adopted the pseudonyms as mentioned earlier. These conscious

acts show that women of the mid-nineteenth century England were not easily allowed to take active participation in the public sphere.

### **Debates on Women Empowerment**

Empowerment “the means of moving from a position of enforced powerless to one of power” (government of India 116) is not recent phenomena. Many writers, political thinkers, and social activists have raised their voice against the injustice and inequalities for a very long period through many forms. This chapter begins by tracing the history of women’s movement. It is important to understand the historical context, within which the notion of women’s empowerment started to take place, before looking closely into the novels of Bronte sisters. It should be noted that Bronte sisters lived during a period where the issue of ‘women was debated. The chapter looks at some of the important contributors to the debates on women’s position in society, during the period in which Bronte’s lived.

The women’s movement comprises a number of social, cultural, and political movements. Voices against inequality and discrimination started to rise early in the 14th century. A new way of being and thinking was started with the movement of the Renaissance in Europe. The touch of modernity through industrialisation disturbed the whole society. It created a demarcation between public and private spheres in the second half of 17th century. As the distinction became sharper, the role of women in this new world became a matter of discussion in the society. Industrialisation created a new kind of socio-economic organization relegating women to the private sphere, which had an adverse impact on her. Thus, the question of women’s role and life started to become a matter of discussion.

Mary Astell in 18th century says:

For since GOD has given women as well as Men intelligent Souls, how should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the Faculty of Thinking, Why should we not (at least in gratitude to him) employ our Thoughts on himself their noblest Object, and not unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs? (qtd. in Walters 27)

She urged women to think for themselves and develop their own skills and intelligence in her first book *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* in 1694. She stressed on women's proper education. Walter said, "She urged women to take themselves seriously, to trust in their own judgement, to make their own choices in life by developing their talents and educating themselves" (29). Thus, she spoke for other women and supported them generously.

It was only towards the end of the 18th century other women started to speak for their rights. However, it was tough for them to live without the help of a male/ husband. Because they had internalized the concept that the only life they had was to lead life as good wives and mothers. The society in the name of culture and mannerisms insisted on womanly virtues like meekness, piety, charity, modesty and chastity all through the 18th century. However, more and more women were, being educated at least to read and write with the change of time. This created an atmosphere where women could debate the issue of empowerment.

Thus by the second half of the 18th century, Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* in 1790 along with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 argued that "women's apparent weakness were not natural, but simply

the product of mis- education”(Walter 30). “Wollstonecraft admitted that in the times in which she lived, women *were* inferior; oppressed from birth, uneducated, and insulated from the real world, most women, inevitably, grew up ignorant and lazy” (33).

“Girls *learn* how to be women when they are hardly more than babies....” (34)

For instance, *Alice in Wonderland* ironically attacks the Victorian etiquettes, which were imposed on a girl without giving consideration for her interest. Thus, innocence was mistreated and turned to neutrality in the name of religion, society, and social norms. It gradually limited their exposure to the higher thoughts and outer world. Instead of developing an individual of matured mindset, they often followed the readymade framework to be a pious woman.

Wollstonecraft remarks that any woman who tried to act like a normal human being was at the peril of being labelled “masculine”. This “unfeminine” behaviour was something that was looked down upon. (35) So girls were consciously leading their life to be a woman more than to be a human. Wollstonecraft argued that women should be educated rationally to give them the opportunity to contribute to the society. She attacks the educational philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argues that women should be educated for the pleasure of men. She proposes that all children be sent to a “Country Day School” and schooling should be co-educational, contending that men and women, whose marriages are the foundation of the society should be “educated after the same model”. Thus, Wollstonecraft strives for women’s emancipation. She strongly felt that women should be provided with the same opportunities to enhance her abilities as men were privileged. She urged women to become autonomous decision makers, but she dismissed the woman’s suffrage movement as a waste of time. (Tong 15) She wanted for



a woman “personhood”. She insisted that women should not be the “toy of man”. She should be rational and self-determinant in her life. (16)

In the 19th century, the clamour of women for equality started to spread widely. After Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, Marion Reid in 1843 gave an effective statement in her *A Plea for Women*. She insists, more forcibly that women’s “self-renunciation” in practice usually involves “a most criminal self-extinction” (qtd. in Walter 42). She claims: “any symptom of independent thought is quickly repressed... the majority of girls are subdued into mere automatons” (qtd. in Walter 42). Most girls are brought up to “a mechanical performance of duty... their own minds all the while lying barren and unfruitful”. She asks “if woman’s rights are not the same as those of man, what are they?”(qtd. in Walter 42 ). Reid’s most radical argument is that “womanliness” is quite compatible with voting. After all, woman, as much as man, is “a rational, moral and accountable creature” (qtd. in Walter 43).

In 1825, for the first time William Thompson, a man added his authoritative voice for women’s emancipation and rights in his work *Appeal of one half of the human race, women, against the pretensions of the other half, men, to restrain them in political and thence in civil and domestic slavery*. The book concentrates on the situation of the married women, who are treated as any other upper slaves. Mothers are denied of their rights over their own children and over family property. (44)

In 1869, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women*, along with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill. It is about the social and legal inequalities imposed upon women in the name of social norms by patriarchal culture. Thus, woman was subjected to the whims of her father, or her husband and she was considered physically and mentally

less able than men. At this time, Mill argued that inequality of women was a relic from the past, when might was right; but it had no place in the modern world. He said:

...[T]he Legal Subordination of one sex to another- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (Mill)

He said, “If we tried equality, we would see that there were benefits for individual women. There are benefits for society at large-doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity. The ideas and potential of half the population would be liberated, producing a great effect on human development” (Mill). He encouraged emancipation and education of women. He believed emancipated women would be better life partners able to connect on an intellectual level with their husbands, thereby improving relationships. He also argued for the need for reforms of marriage legislation whereby it is reduced to a business agreement, placing no restrictions on either party. Among these proposals is the changing of inheritance laws to allow women to keep their own property, and allowing women to work outside the home, gaining independent financial stability. Again, the issue of women’s suffrage is given importance. He supported women for her right to vote to protect their own interests. He agrees that if the chance were given, women would excel in all other arenas. (Mill)

In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention lead to “the inauguration of rebellion such as the world had never seen” (qtd. in Rossi 414). It was the first ever women’s rights convention. It brought thousands of women together to share and care each other against

the injustice of male society. It is also to be noted that the convention was held just one year before the death of Anne Bronte.

### **Women and Legal Issues of 19th Century**

The period from 1819 to 1920 is considered as the progressive era in improving the lives of Victorian women. Till then, women were deprived of all the privileges. She was mere considered as man's best friend like today's puppies.

Woman is to win every thing by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her opinions and to gratify her wishes will be the free-will offering of the heart. But this is to be all accomplished in the domestic and social circle....Then, the fathers, the husbands, and the sons will find an influence thrown around them to which they will yield not only willingly but proudly.... But the moment woman begins to feel the promptings of ambition, or the thirst for power, her aegis of defence is gone.  
(Beecher)

The situation of women in the mid of the 19th century was not comfortable. She had no choices of her own like today's women. The women from lower class could work as servants, domestic helpers, in factories, in agricultural farms or as a prostitute. But women of upper and middle-class society were not allowed to work outside the house for profit. They were encouraged to learn, but too much learning was avoided as it will make them lose their sense and because they may become mad. They did worn some skills: i.e., languages for social conversation, playing piano, dancing in the ball party, mannerisms and other feminine qualities.

Martha Bozzy and Isabella Juan *On the Role of 19th-Century Women* says:

Women in the mid 19th century had no choices. Most lived in a state little better than slavery. They had to obey men. Girls received less education than boys and obtained only low paid jobs. Women's purpose was to marry and have children. Every man had the right to force his wife into sex and childbirth. If a woman was nothing, she could do about it. Divorce was not permitted until 1891. If the woman ran away from a "living hell" marriage, the police would capture her and return her. All this was sanctioned by church, law, custom, history and approved of society in general. A woman could become independent only if she came from a super wealthy family. Prostitution was common in that time. Women were indoctrinated from birth to accept their lowly status and yet many did rebel and some analysed, criticised, and published books on women's situation. (Bozzy and Juan)

This pathetic life of Victorian women is elaborately illustrated in the case of Caroline Norton and her work *English Laws for women in the 19th-century*. She said, "It is he, who has made silence impossible. With him rests the Breaking of those seals, which keep the history of each man's home sacred from indifferent eyes. He has declared himself my deadliest foe, whose dagger has too near an aim to miss my heart ...For he would assassinate even my memory" (Norton). Further, she says that hundreds of women are suffering, whose cases are "not less hard, but more obscure" (Norton).

Therefore, she struggled hard to see reforms in the judicial system concerning married women. She desired to prove that the Law of England was partial and inactive to control any injustice that was taking place in the name of Gender. She wrote *A Letter to*

*the Queen* in 1855 describing different aspects of the Law in England for the female sovereign and the female subject. She briefly explained the laws relating to women, as taught and practised in the Inns of Court.

She said there was no legal existence for married woman in the state of England. Married woman was identified with her husband. There was no prominence for her opinion in any matter. She had to sustain all the injustice. Without legal termination by means of divorce, it was not possible for a woman to be separated from her husband. The family law of England was so rigid and it was not easy for woman to obtain divorce. Moreover, she had no rights on her property unless the separation was settled on mutual understanding or on special settlements. Norton said, "An English wife has no legal right even to her clothes or ornaments; her husband may take them and sell them if he pleases, even though they be the gifts of relatives or friends, or bought before marriage" (Norton) In this situation, she could not make any decisions on her property. The law did not permit her to make a will. Though she was living separately from her husband. Even her independent earnings including her wages or salary for working as a housemaid, teacher or factory labour did not belong to her without the consent of her husband. Then, the husband had all the authority to forcefully carry his wife with or without the help of police from any of her relative or friend's place, where she took refuge. But at any cost wife could not get divorce unless she proves his "cruelty that endangers life or limb". In any situation if she once forgiven his offences then she loses her chance of separation from the cruel clutches of the husband. In case the husband proceeds for a divorce, she was not allowed to defend herself. "She has no means of proving the falsehood of his allegations. She is not represented by attorney, nor permitted to be considered a party to

the suit between him and her supposed lover, for damages” (Norton). Then a husband could divorce a wife on the ground of her infidelity and remarry. But she could not divorce the husband, however profligate he may be. Norton said, “No law court can divorce in England. A special Act of Parliament annulling the marriage is passed for each case. The House of Lords grants this almost as a matter of course to the husband, but not to the wife. In only four instances (two of which were cases of incest), has the wife obtained a divorce to marry again” (Norton).

Further, she could not prosecute her husband for defamation. Only her husband had the rights to prosecute. In this situation, she was without a remedy in cases of enmity and separation. Then she was not permitted to sign a lease, or transact responsible business. She was not allowed to bind her husband by any agreement, except through a third party. After divorce, she was not supposed to claim support, as a matter of personal right, from her husband. The Separation from her husband by consent, or for his ill usage, does not alter their mutual relation. In all the situations, he retains the right to divorce her although he himself is unfaithful. Thus, the law was an unfair system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to suppress the woman in all situations.

Her being, on the other hand, of spotless character, and without reproach, gives her no advantage in law. She may have withdrawn from his roof knowing that he lives with "his faithful housekeeper": having suffered personal violence at his hands; having "condoned" much, and being able to prove it by unimpeachable testimony: or he may have shut the doors [Page 13] of her house against her: all this is quite immaterial: the law takes no cognisance of which is to blame. As her husband, he has a right to all that is

hers: as his wife, she has no right to anything that is his. As her husband, he may divorce her (if truth or false swearing can do it): as his wife, the utmost "divorce" she could obtain, is permission to reside alone,—married to his name. The marriage ceremony is a civil bond for him,—and an indissoluble sacrament for her; and the rights of mutual property which that ceremony is ignorantly supposed to confer, are made absolute for him, and null for her.

(Norton)

Caroline Norton also accepted that there were women, who were “bad, wanton, and irreclaimable as there were vicious, profligate, tyrannical men. But the difference is this: that to punish and restrain bad wives, there is laws, and very severe laws (to say nothing of social condemnation); while to punish or restrain bad husbands, there is, in England, no adequate law whatever.” Moreover, a woman who was divorced for her infidelity suffers less than a woman who does not. She sums up her description of injustice saying, “It is law for the rich, it is not law for the poor; and though it is the law in England, it is not the law in Scotland!”(Norton).

Thus, the condition of married women was worse and heinous under the law of England. It was said that there was no existence of married women in the law of England. She was treated as “non-person.” As cited by Norton there was two types of Divorce, i.e., the mutual separation and an entire dissolution of the bonds of matrimony. But “the expenses of only a common divorce bill are between six hundred and seven hundred pounds, which makes the possibility of release from the matrimonial bond a privilege of the rich”(Bodichon).

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon had listed the different laws concerning the property rights for a widow or a single woman in her work *Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws of England concerning Women*. The summary of her work would provide a clear picture of women's position in the world of patriarchy.

She explained that after the death of husband, the widowed woman recovers her real property, but if there be a settlement she was restricted by its provisions. She recovers her possessions if her husband had not made a will. Because the husband had, the power to deprive a wife of all right in the personality by will. Otherwise, she would get the right on the property, which she inherited at the time of her marriage. So she was liable for the debts, which she contracted before marriage, and which have been left unpaid during her marriage.

If a man dies intestate, the widow, if there are children, is entitled to one-third of the personality; if there are no children, to one-half: the other is distributed among the next of kin, among whom the widow is not counted. If there is no next of kin, the moiety goes to the crown.

A right is granted in Magna Charta to a widow to remain forty days in her husband's house after his death, provided she do not marry during that time.

A widow has a right to a third of her husband's lands and tenements for her life. Right of Dower is generally superseded by settlements giving the wife a jointure. If she accepts a jointure, she has no claim to dower. (Bodichon)

However, an unmarried woman is free from all these restrictions. She was free to act as an executer under a will, but if she marries, she could not accept an executor ship without her husband's consent. It shows marriage increase the difficulties and



complexities in the life of a woman in the Victorian society. Bodichon said that only in the case of husbands' consent a married woman could legally execute her authority as an agent for another, and as an attorney. "A single woman can act as executrix under a will, but a wife cannot. An unmarried woman is capable of holding the office of administratrix to an intestate personalty, and administration will be granted to her if she be next of kin to the intestate. But a wife cannot act without the consent of her husband" (Bodichon).

In a way, the Victorian law legally mutilated the human rights of women. Particularly the family laws of England were rigid to the part of women. In that the marriage was the significant matter, which was traditionally considered as a socio-religious concept. There was no single correct definition to define the legal concept of marriage. Queen Elizabeth I of England regarded "a common marriage vow of a wife was that she be 'bonny and buxom in bed and board'" (qtd. in Herring 5). However, ultimately, in 1875 with the support of Norton, a Divorce Reform Act was passed, but it was utilised by very limited women. Before this in 1838, she supported the passing a bill reforming an Infant's Custody Act, which gave a mother limited rights over her children until they attain the age of seven.

Then the other law of the state, which reflects the injustice, was the Contagious Diseases Act passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1864. The act was passed to prevent the venereal disease. It ordered the police to arrest prostitutes in certain ports and army town and directed the women for compulsory check-ups for venereal disease. If she is infected, then she would be confined to a locked hospital until "cured". This act exposed the double standards between men and women of Victorian society. Thus, it created a significant controversy. It was for the first time for a political issue

women organised themselves and actively campaigned for their rights. (Contagious Diseases Act)

Even prohibiting the sale of Alcohol in United Kingdom by passing Maine law in 1854 in spite of huge opposition had given a great relief for many women from “wife-beating”. In the essay *Domestic Violence in Victorian England* the following quoted statements shows the position of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century. William Montagu’s in his *Round London: Down East and Up West*, he says of women in the hospital: “sometimes as many as twelve or fourteen women may be seen seated in the receiving room, waiting for their burnished and bleeding faces and bodies to be attended to [...] in nine cases out of ten the injuries have been inflicted by brutal and perhaps drunken husbands” (Montagu). Many women felt enslaved to their husbands as Frances Power Cobbe describes in her writing *Wife-Torture in England*: “the whole relation between the sexes in the class we are considering is very little better than one of master and slave” (Hamilton 442). In the words of Michelle Nolte, “it was widely accepted around the world that “wife-beating – was included in a man’s legal right power over his wife and her property” (2). It is only in the late 19th century that women gained some rights through reformed laws, which allowed them custody and possession of their own things. (Domestic Violence in Victorian England)

Until 1870 and 1883 Married Women’s Property Act, Victorian wife had no individual rights under the law. These acts gave her the right to own property after marriage. Still the law showed superiority and favour to men over women. It is not until the 1880s that women were able to gain custody of their children and control their own properties. (Women and Divorce in Victorian Era)

Thus, “All are equal before Law” was a myth in the case of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Law, which is intended to apply equally to all persons, is often discriminating women. This is the result of the patriarchal structure, which rules the weaker section for its fancy. In this situation, expecting gender equality under the shade of Law was an idiotic thing. Later on with the effort of many reformists to ensure the gender equality, several laws were being passed and modified. We should remember that some of these reforms happened after Bronte sisters’ time. They were writing during the formative period of legal reforms.

With the following timeline of Divorce Laws, I would sum up the legal issues of the 19th century women, which outlines the women’s struggle and her condition in the Victorian England.

- 1839: Infants and Child Custody Act: women were allowed take custody of their children under the age of seven if divorced or separated. They could not take custody if they had been found to be adulterous. Before this law the father was immediately awarded custody and it did not depend on the reasons for divorce.
- 1857: Matrimonial Causes Act: allows divorce—but only in limited instances: Imposes matrimonial double standard: Permits men to divorce on grounds of adultery, but not women.
- 1857: Civil divorce was introduced in England: The process left the divorced pair either unable to remarry, or it declared their existing children as illegitimate.

- 1870: Married Women's Property Act: allowed for women to keep their earnings and even inherit personal property and money. Everything else still belonged to her husband if she had acquired it before or after marriage.
- 1882: a woman could finally keep all personal and real property that she had gotten before and during her marriage.
- 1883: Custody Acts: allowed for women to be awarded custody of children up to the age of 16. (Women and Divorce in Victorian Era)

Thus, there were many legal reforms during the Victorian period. Some of these were implemented after the lives of Bronte sisters. The laws were unjust, but the point is that this injustice was noticed by at least some people. The injustice in the legal system was brought to the public domain by some activists. Bronte sisters could be placed within this broad context where legal where legal injustice was being discussed and debated.

### **Meaning of Empowerment**

Now, it is clear that female subjugation is rooted in a set of religious and legal constraints. Society's false belief that women are by nature less intellectual and physically less capable than men keeps them away from the political, social, educational and economic spheres. Thus, social inequality is not the result of nature's decree but of society's customs and traditions. So, women must be freed from these oppressive gender roles. At the same time, she should be empowered socially, physically and psychologically by means of providing good Education and economic independence, which in turn transforms the whole social system and structure.

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. It is not easy to define the empowerment of women. Different writers have given different definitions of empowerment. According to some writers, it is the process, which leads to changes. According to *The International Encyclopaedia of Women*, the empowerment of women is cognitive, psychological, economic and political. The cognitive component according to Ms. Stormquist includes, “women’s understanding of their conditions of subordination and causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations as well as destroying old beliefs that structure powerful gender ideologies”(qtd. in Rao 6). The psychological component would include, “development of feelings that women can act upon to improve their condition. This means formation of the belief that they can succeed...” (qtd. in Rao 6). The economic component, “requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning” (qtd. in Rao 7). The political component would encompass the “ability to organize and mobilize for change. Consequently, an empowerment process must involve not only individual awareness but collective awareness and collective action. The notion of collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social transformation” (qtd. in Rao 7).

Women Empowerment is not a simple matter. The condition of women differs from culture to culture, from society to society. In the bigger sense of the word, empowerment means that women are permitted to have choices, to take part in decision-making processes, to act independently on social, political or economic levels, to participate in developmental issues and to behave as leaders. Rao cited Nelly P.

Stromquist's definition of- "Empowerment in its emancipator meaning is a serious word, one which brings up the question of personal agency rather than reliance on intermediaries, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice" (13).

The process of empowerment enables women to attain force, dominance and influence over other individuals, institutions or whole society. In the course of action, she would become prudent enough to make proper decisions and choice in her private life that influences her public life. In the words of Paz empowerment at the individual level is "the ability to direct and control one's own life" (qtd. in Rao 6).

Empowerment of women in the 19th century was a challenging step. Then every movement of women crossing the restrictive lines of society was a small stepping-stone towards their Empowerment. Their struggle to attain independence was discouraged by the Victorian society, which did not support personal growth and empowerment of women. Feminists and feminism played a vital role for the upliftment of women throughout the era. As Kaur said, "we can say feminism and empowerment of women are not isolated questions or problems. They are concerned with the transformation of the society as a whole" (8). Empowerment for women is the power of choosing the life partner and making their own future, judging the circumstances and taking decisions without the advice of anyone, questioning the societal and religious belief, acting against the conventions, thus trying hard to free from the tangles of patriarchy. These issues are of great importance in the novels of Bronte's.

### **Women Writers of the age and their concerns**

The 19th-century English literature has witnessed a significant contribution from women writers from the time of Jane Austen. Women writers had not only written the works in more number but they had filled their works with new thoughts and themes. The new trend of social analysis had started. Industrial Revolution of the time churned the socio-cultural environment of the society. The changes in the economic arena, a shift from rural to urban life in search of labour had fostered the growth of new ideologies and influences. Then the growth in the literacy level from the 18th century onwards led to the rise of a new set of readers from middle-class society. Further, the advancement in printing technology and marketing, which increased the scope for writers to earn and readers to learn, resulted in a huge number of literary outputs.

In this new time, the concerns of literary works changed from objective writings to subjective analysis. Love, marriage, and family life were carefully defined under social context. The doubts about the double standards of the society between class, gender and race, were discussed underneath the historical, sociological and cultural perspectives. But, writers of the age were not bold enough to face the traditional world directly and drastically. So, many of them filled their writings with a kind of wit and irony against the conventions; some other tried to reveal the truth under disguise, and a few enjoyed a good status by maintaining the same social ideologies in their novels.

From, the mid-nineteenth century, the literary texts started to appeal for the rational thinking and living. Women writers like Mary Shelley, Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontes, Dinah Craik, Geraldine Jewsbury, George Eliot and towards the late 19th century Margaret Oliphant, Frances Trollope, Mrs Ward filled the

literary cannon with fresh insights on feverish issues of changing society. But they also did not want to identify themselves as feminists, as society considered feminists a mad and cynic. Bronte sisters should be located as a part of such a literary scenario.

### **The Bronte Sisters and their works**

The writings of Bronte sisters dealt with the real turmoil of middle-class women. They knocked the door of women's emancipation through their female characterization. They tried to educate their peer group very sensitively regarding the urgency of women's empowerment in their works. The period of Bronte's was preceded by the domestic novels like *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* etc. where the heroine and other female characters strive to draw the attention of a suitor and get married in the end. But these three sisters break the lineage and broaden the issues of women. They filled their novels with heroic female characters, who act independently, think uniquely and live differently with their own self-identity and self-esteem.

When the novels of these proto-feminists were published under the male pseudonym, it shocked the world, and many criticised the works as a threat to the social structure of the society. The novels were condemned and received negative review. "Bells brothers' novels are disagreeable" (Allot 251). People Started to doubt about the authorship. As it was the time for male writers, Bronte Sisters used Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell as their masculine names for publication. Charlotte said " we did not like to declare ourselves women, because- without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine",- we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice..."(Gaskell 229). In the initial days of Writing Charlotte had written to poet laureate Robert Southey asking him for advice



on her work. He praised her quality of writing, but cautioned her about becoming absorbed in an imagery world:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it.... To those duties, you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. You will not seek in imagination for excitement... Write poetry for its own sake- not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity.... (Gaskell 124-125)

It contained no encouragement to aim at a career in literature. He warned her against day-dreaming. The words of Southey made her numb, and it left a wound in her mind for many years. Thus, Bronte split into two characters- Currer Bell as an author and Charlotte Bronte as a societal woman as observed by Gaskell. She struggled hard to escape from this situation.

Charlotte Bronte in her letters complained to Ellen, "I shall soon be 30- and I have done nothing yet.... I long to travel- to work to live a life of action...." (1: 385) It means she wants to lead her life according to her wish and to reveal her suppressed expression but always feared that society would not accept her passions. In the same insecure thought, she subdued her strong will and changed her mind to get married at a later stage of her life. She says, "I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a governess" (210) in her letter to Ellen on 24th January 1840. Most of her inner struggle and desires are noticeable in the personal letters written to her friend Ellen. These are the burning facts of many women's lives in those days. Bronte writes to W. S. Williams in 1849, "Families of daughters sitting waiting to be married, I have

pitied them from my heart” (C. Bronte 2: 226). She desires- “all daughters and every woman in England also had hope and motive” (227). She gave a call to the women indirectly to come out and work to create their identity. She says, “Teachers may be hard-worked, ill-paid and despised- but the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest- wrought and worst paid drudge of a school”(226).

Thus, Bronte sisters depict the characters of Jane Eyre, Lucy Snow, Agnes Grey, Helen Huntington and Shirley as independent working women, self-reliant and self-esteemed. Charlotte Bronte speaks through Jane Eyre, the fancies of women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but 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 embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them or laugh at them if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (101)

Charlotte letters and novel also reveal the life of Emily, who is “genuine and great” compared to her sisters. With a minimal education and knowledge of the outer world, she produced a fabulous work titled *Wuthering Heights*. The biographical elements reveal, Emily "is no normal being". She was much like her father, very bold and passionate. Charlotte’s Shirley is the characterisation of Emily. She would enact the role of Emily as if she would be if she was given freedom and power. (Gaskell 316-317)

Emily was kind hearted and timid, even though her *Wuthering Heights* is an adventurous and violent story of Heathcliff and Catherine. She was always homesick. For Emily journey was walking on the moors nearby her home. She once in her lifetime visited London along with Charlotte to learn French in a desire to open their school. But her homesickness haunted her badly. Prior to this, she quit her job of governess because of the same problem. She loves to be at home, cooking, cleaning and enjoying the sight of Yorkshire.

Emily strongly opposed the decision of Charlotte and Anne in the matter of revealing the true identity of sisters to the world. When the situation demanded to put an end to all gossips and explain the world who are Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, Emily objected that “not me. You go if you like, but you go with my complete disapproval” (Banks 346). Further, she warned very coldly “no doubt when you have introduced yourselves to the gentlemanly Mr. Smith, he will at once begin to lionize you. In the world you are recklessly entering, such a chance would be irresistible to him. You will be carried through the salons of Mayfair and displayed to all the gossips of London like minor foreign royalty” (346). She decided not to pen another line if her identity is revealed to anyone other than Mr. Smith and Mr. Newby (347). Gradually Emily had withdrawn herself from Charlotte and Anne after their return from London. She became silent and did not respond to any of their talks. She cried in panic “without privacy I can not write- I cannot live” (358). “...now my thoughts, my feelings, my people are scattered everywhere, exposed to thousands of eyes. They’ve damaged me- it won’t mend- there’s no escape any more.” “Leave me alone” she barked at Charlotte putting all the blame on her and kicked her foot out of Emily’s room and slammed it shut (358). From here

onwards, Emily suffered psychological depression, and then the attack of cold slowly killed her day by day. Even “the total and forced neglect” (381) of Emily filled her last days with horror as Charlotte explains to Ellen. In this way “Emily’s strange talent, which was too big to understand” (322) for Charlotte and Anne ended up too badly.

Anne, the last little sister, is very different from Emily though both of them are too close to each other. Anne is bold and determined in all her steps. She sacrificed her private life for the sake of her family working as a governess from a very young age and suffered a lot. She had a bitter experience of governessing, which she penned in her first novel *Agnes Grey*. The welcoming note of curate William Weightman on the return of Anne to her home makes it clear – “...Miss Anne, home from the Wars!”(184). Despite of the harsh experience, she made up her mind to work as governess only for the sake of money. Because on those days financial aid was a crucial, need to maintain their family. Thus, she put an advertisement of her services; “music, singing, drawing, French, Latin and Germany.” “Salary required, £50 per annum” which was an enormous sum to ask for (204) on those days. This shows her boldness and self-confidence. Again, unfortunately, she fell in the hands of Mr. Robinson, who treated their servants with rather less warmth than their dogs and horses (205) but better than the previous family of Ingham’s.

Later she returned to her home to work along with her sisters to open their school. In these days, they tried hard to publish their novels, looking at the endless delays and even the poor circulation of their book of poetry and the novel *Agnes Grey*. Anne started to write her second novel under the influence of Emily’s raw truths of *Wuthering Heights* and drunkenness of their brother Branwell. Thus, the outcome is totally opposite to her personal character. Charlotte hated her work saying- “Gentle, refined, pious little Anne-

should undertake the task of describing the downfall of a rake, sparing no detail of his dissipation and depravity, was too staggering!” (Banks 344) Even Emily was astonished at this. Charlotte felt Anne’s treatment of “Arthur Huntingdon is too frank, too painfully honest!”(345). So she suggested “some elements of human nature should and must be veiled in the retelling.” “To expose them as you have is an artistic blunder...” Anne opposed her saying “He is true”. “Who knows that better than we do? Am I to soften drunkenness and its direct effects? It would be quite wrong to do so” (345). Then she rejected Charlotte’s offer of sending her manuscript to Mr. Smith, who published Jane Eyre. She said –“we don”t want to be in your shadow, Charlotte. He is only willing because you asked him” (345). But her trust was misused by Mr Newby as Charlotte suspected. So Anne along with Charlotte wanted to clear the confusion aroused around the identity of their own regarding the authorship of novels especially of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to Smith, Elder and Co. despite Emily’s opposition.

After the death of Emily, Anne fell severely ill. However, her courage served her to bear with the pains and sufferings till her death without complaining. As her last wish, she was taken to Scarborough, where she recovered slightly and enjoyed every sight. She said to Charlotte-“I am not afraid of death. But it is terrible to leave life with so little achieved. I had a lot to do here, and almost none of its done” (393). Thus, she faced her death as a warrior. At the time of her last breath, she whispered “oh, poor Charlotte! Take courage!”(394). And she attained the saintly death.

Charlotte and her father Patrick sustained all the loss and pain of losing one after another. In 1849, Charlotte’s novel *Shirley* influenced by Emily and encouraged by Anne was published. Then *Villette* and *The Professor* were published in 1853 and 1857

respectively. Charlotte, who married in her late 30's to escape from the life of governess, died within a year of her marriage in 1855.

These three Sisters life is worth reading and re- examining because they proved “intelligence as sexy” and rejected the Victorian notion of women and beauty by capturing the attention of learned minds like Monsieur Heger, Mr. Smith, Mr. William, Thackeray and other prominent men of the 19th century, as it was against the assumption-, “a man does not fall in love with a woman’s *mind*” (275). They even had broken the patriarchal framework by proving that daughters would do better for their parental family than the son in spite of discrimination and less attention. The novels penned by them told the tale of a woman who arises from misery to mastery in *Jane Eyre*; woman as an entrepreneur in *Shirley*; and woman as an educated unmarried independent woman in *Villette*. In *Wuthering Heights*, the wild Catherine breaks and blows the entire patriarchal religious rule into the air. *Agnes Grey* is the successful struggle for survival of a poor governess and we see an empowered Helen Huntingdon at the doorstep of her (widow) remarriage in *The Tenant of Wild Fell Hall*. In this way, Bronte sisters created the female characters with real ‘femaleness’ by deconstructing the cultural concept of feminine qualities.

### **Theories and Criticism in the concerning Movements related to the Present Study**

So far, the background details of women’s position and questions in historical, sociological and cultural arena of 19th century England strengthens the dissertation with necessary details for its analysis. The present section deals with the theoretical frameworks and discourses, which enable us to understand the “identity” of women from different perspectives. Each perspective has contributed for improving the women’s

status, but each has its limitations. To substitute the limitations and to fulfil the gaps different theoretical approaches are combined to analyse the problem and its phases in this thesis. The major theoretical perspectives, which are used in this analysis, are feministic perceptions, gender studies and cultural studies. As feminist discourses are said to be “cultural politics”, culture and gender are inseparable. Thus, the recent studies turned towards the cultural aspects of the time and place to explore the real causes of the (women’s) problems and to know the alternatives they sought to overcome. Here I am going to discuss the development of feminist theories and its contribution in establishing gender equality, and gradually take up cultural studies, which helps to examine the issues concerning women and empowerment more extensively.

The question of “woman’s identity” is debated and discussed based on many grounds. Identity is ever dynamic; it is already framed, but it can be reframed or even formed in a complex process of representing the other or ourselves. The identity of a child as male or female by the biological sex organs at birth confines their roles and position in the society. Thus, the biological identity decides the cultural and social life of a person. The society has already framed a set of rules to control the lifestyle of male and female with mutual support in the system of patriarchy. Patriarchy as mentioned in the previous section is a phallogocentric system, which has framed all its ideologies to promote power relations in pyramidal structure. The enforced practice of gender norms, gender roles and responsibilities are always culture bound. The word gender, which was used first in the grammar to learn male (masculine) and female (feminine) nouns of animals in usage was later adopted to identify the nature and behaviour of man and women in relation to their sex. The practice of gendered rules has gradually taken the form of

standard conventions to measure the good nature of a woman in relation to culture and society she belongs. In the traditional setup, gender was stereotypical. Therefore, the society expects men to be men, women to be feminine. Any changes or opposition is strongly objected to and publically defamed. Patriarchy being the prominent cultural unit structured the identity of a person under the name of gender and controlled the society from its ideologies. Here the centre is conscious of its act of implementing the ideas, and the other is accepting its ideologies as natural and unavoidable to organize the society.

Literary texts of particular time and place tried to decode this system of gender. It is necessary to study the ideologies and its logical implications with the help of relevant discourses. Because “ideology is that never fully articulated system of assumptions by which a society operates, and which permeates everything it produces, including of course what is deemed to be literature”(Ruthven 31).

Women writers and women readers have always had to work “against the grain” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 203). In these pursuit feminists and the female writers treated the personal as political. Some of them even rejected the theories, which were often male dictated. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, “England has had many learned women... and yet where are the poetesses? ... I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none” (qtd. in Pykett 36 ). Like her, many women writers struggled hard to express their self through the language and style, which were logocentric/phallogocentric. The long political history of women’s movement started with the writings of Wollstonecraft, who supported the revolutionary changes in the life of women. As mentioned earlier *Vindication* illustrates the contemporary position of women in the patriarchal setup. Through the work, Wollstonecraft pleaded the male of the society for the equal education



of girls and proper sphere for women's living. She addressed women concerning their rights and education. Wollstonecraft said education is essential to the development of individual identity from the stage of ignorance and dependent position. She tried to drag the attention of the society regarding the all over development and equality rather than turning the prevailing system upside down. She added her voice to the ongoing struggle for human rights and liberation. Though she did not mention the issue of patriarchy and gender, she strongly demanded good education for women to support the welfare of the family and state.

The fruit of Wollstonecraft's efforts was enjoyed by the women of her country in the late 19th century. Throughout the nineteenth century, many struggles took place, and a number of women writers evolved and supported the cause directly or indirectly. The term feminism was heard everywhere. The feminist discourse was delivered to create awareness that feminine is a cultural concept, which is suppressing the real nature of female. Further, the term "feminism" is taken as "cultural politics" (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 204) rather than as a theory. Feminism focused its critical discourse on the construction and formation of gender and sexuality in different societies.

In the lineage of liberal feminism after Wollstonecraft, it was Harriet Taylor and John Strut Mill in *The Subjection of Women* who demanded the women's education as well as economic independence and political rights. Then by the mid- 1960's the liberal feminists formed "women's rights group" and worked for legal issues concerning women. Betty Friedan of 20th century initiated the second wave feminism with her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Friedan tried to decode the myth of tradition. She revealed the dissatisfaction of middle-class white women of America in their

heterosexual relation as they were being trapped in domestic life in the name of housewives. She urged that women should be freed from gender discrimination in the whole society. She said economic independence of women would lead to gender equality. She encouraged women to work and earn outside the home. In her second work *The Second Stage* written after twenty years, she agreed with the critics that to work outside the house and to work inside the home is difficult for a woman being wife and mother. Therefore, she felt men should support women in household work to lessen the burden of working women. In short, she advised women to become like men in her *The Feminine Mystique*, and later she urged women to be like women (not feminine) in *The Second Stage*. Friedan upholds humanism more than feminism. She described “feminist sexual politics” as the “no-win battle of women as a whole sex, oppressed victims, against men as a whole sex, the oppressors” (qtd. in Tong 33). In this way, classical liberal feminist discourse propelled women to the public sphere. They demanded the state to provide equal opportunities to men and women to determine their fate of living in the society. They inclined towards humanism. The modern liberal feminists tried to free women from oppressive gender roles. They even argued, “Men, no less than women, are also victims of de facto gender discrimination” (34).

The Marxism propagates the theory of historical materialism. They analysed inequality and injustice are rooted in the capitalistic structure. They believed socialism would establish equality in society between class and gender. Friedrich Engels undertook a systematic analysis of women’s oppression in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. He examined women’s subordination under capitalism. He differentiated women’s experience under the class system. But women, as a class

would not fight against gender inequality. Therefore, radical feminism partly denied the Marxist views on women oppression based on a mere class system. Firestone tried to substitute sex for class. However Reed's *Women: Caste, Class or Oppressed Sex?* systematically analysed the oppressive notions of class system and logically put forth that money plays a crucial role to obtain power. She thought oppression of women was not same in all class under patriarchy. On the contrary, she said bourgeoisie women were capable of oppressing both proletarian men and women. ( Tong 107) In this way, Reed argued that capitalism is the enemy of working class women more than patriarchy. Juliet Mitchell's essay, *Women: The Longest Revolution* attempted to expose how patriarchal structure exerts its control on women's reproductive function. Margaret Benston in her article *The Political Economy of Women's Liberation* explored the neglected aspect of women's domestic labour in the capitalistic patriarchal setup. She pointed out that women are the last to be hired and first to be fired. They were low-paid for their hard work. Further in Rowbotham's work *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*, women's ill-treatment under patriarchy and capitalism is recognised as double oppression at home and in working place. It is Michele Barrett, who analysed the gender representation in the materialistic world of man. In her work *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, she appraises Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* for its argument regarding the literary production of men and women that differs because of their different background. This means the ideology of gender affects the way of writing and reading of men and women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1979 wrote, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary*

*Imagination* inspired by Woolf's theory that shows how women writers reacted and resisted the pressure of patriarchy.

The issues of women, which were considered as the unconventional topic of discussion under the strict taboos slowly, gained prominence in the second half of the 20th century. The sex, gender, sexuality, reproduction and violence concerning women are being examined and eloquently debated by Radical feminists. The radicals explored the root of women's oppression. They considered the social structure of patriarchy as the cause of all discriminations. The movement started in 1960's contributed for the empowerment of women by its practice of consciousness-raising. "They insisted that men's control of both women's sexual and reproductive lives and women's self-identity, self-respect, and self-esteem is the most fundamental of all the oppressions human beings visit on each other"( Tong 49). Radical-libertarian feminists encouraged women to adopt the good traits of both masculine and feminine characteristics. They claimed women can choose their gender roles and identities, mixing and matching them at will. (50) But radical-cultural feminists stressed for "women's essential "femaleness" (50). Gayle Rubin, a radical-libertarian feminist, has said that sex and gender is a 'set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (qt in Tong 51). Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, which was published in 1979, gives the extensive view on "power-structured relationship". Millett pointed out ideological, biological, sociological aspects, which supports patriarchal system. She said that "sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role, and status" (Millett 26). She argued that the subjectivity of female is partially constructed by sociological and psychological

experiments in the power politics of the male. She acknowledged culture as ‘shaping behaviour’ (27) in determining the gender difference between biological sexes. She noted, “Expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to thwart her own or turn them inward” (31). Further, she remarked that family is the main unit of patriarchy, which serves as an agent to implement the ideology of patriarchy. Her analysis included the literary images of women in the selective writings of the 20th century male writers. She affirmed that social construction hindered the female productivity in literature and confirmed male purposiveness in addressing the readers as if they are always men to uphold patriarchy. (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 215). Thus, she explored the double standards of male dominated society in the name of sex and gender.

Likewise, Shulamith Firestone in her work *The Dialectic Sex* argues that it is the relation of reproduction, and not those of production, that form the basis of society. She thought a major biological and social revolution is needed to attain the human liberation for female. Firestone saw, “the biological division of the sexes for the purpose of procreation had created not only a false dichotomy between masculinity and femininity but also an invidious cultural split between the science and the arts”(Tong 55). These arguments of Millett and Firestone is criticised for simplifying the complex process of patriarchy and capitalism by mere figuring out male domination as the universal cause. Michele Barrett suggested that they have ignored several factors, which are related in the process of divide and rule policy of patriarchy. She mentioned how ideology is nurtured in economic organisation within home and outside in the name of the division of labour. The cultural processes used institutions like education and state to sensitize men and

women for their respective gender role and identity that create power relationship in the society.

Radical-Cultural feminists like Marilyn French believed ‘sexism is the model for all isms, including racism and classism and she sought to explain the differences between sexism’s enslaving ideology of “power-over” others and an alternative, nonsexist liberating ideology of “pleasure-with” others”(Tong 57). Mary Daly in her work *Beyond God the Father* argued that God is the paradigm for all patriarchs, and said that unless he is dethroned from both men’s and women’s consciousness, women will never be empowered as full persons. (59) Daly’s concept of androgyny is operating “through the rigid masculine and feminine gender roles, polarizing the human community into two groups” (59). She explains how men unanimously recognize and classify women as second sex, and how he becomes “an I, or a self, and each woman becomes an it, or another” (qtd. in Tong 60). By rejecting the gender roles and the cultural concept of femininity, she stressed women should be “female” and to follow “true femaleness”, which is inborn and innate. Daly transvalued the values of patriarchy; she claimed, “she whom the patriarch calls evil is, in fact, good, whereas she whom the patriarch calls good is, in fact, bad” (qtd. in Tong 63). In this way, Daly has given a call to women to strip away the false identity of femininity, which is constructed under patriarchy in the last page of *Gyn/Ecology*. She further talked about the passions of women in the last part and bifurcated it as pure passion and plastic passion. She said, “Genuine passions spur women to meaningful action, plastic passions enervate women” (65). She describes a woman having a comfortable home, a successful husband, a wonderful child, but no one is a full filled woman just as the way patriarchy likes her. But she cannot act according to

her wish and thus, never enjoy her life. (65) Thus, she advised women to nourish a genuine passion for leading a meaningful life.

Further, these feminists eloquently debated over the biological and sociological motherhood. They considered biological motherhood and the concept of mothering is another patriarchally enforced agenda to suppress women, because the responsibility of mothering is entrusted only to the biological mother. They put unreasonable demands on women's bodies and energies. (82) Radical- libertarian feminists opposed biological motherhood. Ann Oakley defined "biological motherhood is a myth" (83) and "mothers, in short, are not born; they are made". (qtd. in Tong 83) Oakley felt social mothers are just as effective as biological mothers. Further, Firestone predicted modern reproductive technology would liberate women from the burden of motherhood responsibility. However, Adrienne Rich said that no women should renounce biological motherhood. She advised them to take control of child rearing as well as childbearing and bring up children with feminist values.

In order to examine the situation of women with a different feminist perspective, socialist feminism synthesized the best insights of both Marxist and radical feminists. They believed that biology is gendered as well as sexed, means which that our bodies are subjected to social gendering process from the time of our birth. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, we are born into "gender-codified society". "Juliet Mitchell, Jane flex, Gayle Rubin, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein have all worked to examine that the masculine and feminine character types are structured and set up by specific social forms of work practices"(Papa 351). Socialist feminism adopts two kinds of approaches: dual system theory and unified system theory. Juliet Mitchell treats

patriarchy and capitalism as separate but dialectically related to each other while unified system theorists like Hartman and Rowbotham insist that patriarchy and capitalism are not separate but together from one unified concept. (351)

Socialist feminism has done the historical analysis of gender division of labour. They claimed that “human beings are constantly recreating themselves through sexual division of labour” (352). The ideological perception of women as fragile, submissive, and caring forced them to depend on men. Working women face many problems in working place. They were low paid and in addition, they suffer sexual harassment. (352) Alison Jaggar observed, “Women are viewed as sexual objects, whether or not they welcome sexual interest, and they are subject continually to sexual assaults and harassment” (108). She said a woman beautifies herself, diets and dress up to please men. Motherhood is also an alienating experience because women have no power to decide about childbearing and childrearing. In this way, finally, women are estranged from intellectual capacities. Thus, Ann Foreman declares, “femininity itself is alienation” (qtd. in Papa 353). In this situation, Mitchell advocated psychological revolution to uproot the phallic notions from the minds of men and women of society.

Juliet Mitchell, who published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974, defended Freudian and Lacan’s theories of psychoanalysis. She upheld the Freud’s discourse on “unconscious”. She says that ‘since boys and girls are born into patriarchal cultures, both of them learn to find their place in the superior or inferior positioning that patriarchy ascribes to them. This positioning becomes intimately linked to the unconscious, which cannot be separated out from external reality. Both the boy and the girl desire to be like the father because of the authority ascribed to the father by culture. They also recognize



femininity as powerlessness and, therefore, reject or accept it in different degrees (Papa 374). Thus, patriarchal culture itself created a space for a female to unconsciously deny following feminine sexuality, as it is a subordinate position. Further, Mitchell argued in favour of Freud that normalcy is acquired, relative to and a compromise with reality, which was addressed in Freud's relativity of normalcy. Mitchell also agrees with Lacan's description of sexual difference and gender hierarchy as based on the phallogocentric structure of society. Lacan's 'symbolic order' describes how a child "incorporated into symbolic order by undergoing three stages of psychosexual development" (Tong 155). Mitchell helps the reader to understand the importance of the symbolic order in psychoanalysis. (Papa 375) Then Jacqueline Rose in her work on *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* defends Lacan's theories of Language, the unconscious and the role of desire. She said that women are not inferior to men because of their different anatomy, but they are 'subjected' to inferiority. (376) Here patriarchal culture and language created the feminine emptiness rather than her body. Thus, she claims, "in Lacanian psychoanalysis; anatomy is not destiny, but it does figure as a central trope in psychoanalysis" (375).

The early feminists of the 20th century, who agreed with the points of Freud, are Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Clara Thompson. They believed gender identity, gender behavior, and sexual orientation were not the result of biological facts but the product of social values. Adler believed men and women are born in helpless conditions. Then, their respective creative selves have the power to shape the lives in any direction they want. Adler said, "neurotic" women desire to empower themselves through their thought and action, which patriarchal society treats as sickness (Tong 136). Similarly, Horney

highlights the role of environment in a person's growth as an individual. She argues that "patriarchal culture first forces women to be feminine and then tries to convince women they like being feminine" (137). Further, she explains how society confines the role of women ideologically. The society labels the women who desire to be as masculine as 'sick' or as "flying from womanhood" (137). She says society totally denies any changes in the gender role of women. She claimed a woman who tries to create an ideal self beyond the traditional femininity is psychologically strong. They know that society is the cause for their social subordination, not their biological difference. Tong said, "Along with Adler and Horney, Thompson believed women's guilt, inferiority, and self-hatred is grounded not in mere biological facts but in society's interpretation of these facts. Thus, the transformation of the legal, political, economic, and social institutions that shape society is a necessary step in the transformation of women's psychology" (137).

The follower of Lacanian theory, Lucy Irigaray aimed to liberate "feminine" philosophical thought from "masculine" philosophical thought. She claims, "Anything we know about the imaginary and women, including women's sexual desire, we know from a male point of view" (155). Thus, she felt "there is another kind of women to know, the "feminine feminine," women as women see her" (155). For this Irigaray suggested three steps for women to come out from the marginalized state. First, "women should create a female language, eschewing gender-neutral language as forcefully as they eschew male language" (156). She urged women to find the courage to speak in the active voice. She felt "trying to hide the identity of the speaker from the reader/listener is cowardly" (156). Second, she sees the necessity for women to create a female sexuality. Third, "women should mime the mimes men have imposed on women" (157). Irigaray

thought through miming; women can “undo the effects of phallogocentric discourse simply by overdoing them” (qtd. in Tong 157). But Julia Kristeva recommended that women should engage in an “impossible dialectic,” a “permanent alienation” between the semiotic (“maternal” jouissance) and the symbolic (“paternal” power or law) (qtd. in Tong 162) to avoid from becoming crazy.

In all these ways, liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical and psychoanalytic feminists theories contributed towards the reconstruction of women’s “feminine” nature against the cultural influences and supports to create a new ‘femaleness’. The different discourses and perspectives of these theories enable us to read and re-read the literary text with a looking glass to analyse the condition of women under the cultural patriarchal system. It helps to trace out how women raised from their repressed position to attain one of the power, which enable them to create or identify their individuality.

Further, as literature and gender are always intertwined, feminist theories considered texts as the tool to understand how women are presented in the patriarchal culture and society. The way we read the text, understand, and interpret with the help of concerned theories allows, us know better the gendered notions of society. But to be particular in the study of gender roles and norms of the specific time and place, the cultural study becomes an important area of focus. As cultural criticism is a field of interdisciplinary studies. It involves studying a whole way of life- “the processes that make us- as individuals, as citizens, as members of a particular class, race or gender” (Turner 2). Formally, Cultural studies began with the publication of Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*. Especially the British cultural studies is the outcome of European

Structuralists-Levi-Strauss, Saussure, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault – and European Marxists-Althusser and Gramsci. (3)

Structuralists like Saussure, with the theory of language, contributed to the theory of culture. As he says, the connection between a word and its meaning is not inherent, or natural. In the process of naming things or objects, “we apply a name to it and communicate this to others, and the word enters into usage” (10). He said that the meaning is always constructed. Saussure’s theory of language is significant in making the sense of the world we live in. He says that language is a system of relationship; when we think of the word father, we will understand the word in connection to the differences and similarities. It means that the father is not a woman, not a boy, not a mother, not an uncle and so on. Likewise, in cultural aspects the same word connotes that father is more authoritative, more responsible, more capable and protective but not emotional, not sensitive and dependent like the mother in a family. In this way, it constructs the gender role of male and female in a society. Thus, Turner says, “culture, as the site where meaning is generated and experienced, becomes a determining, productive field through which social realities are constructed, experienced and interpreted” (12). Then, the concept of signifier and the signified teach us how signs construct the meaning in our social life. The way we dress, write, speak, behave, and so on speaks about the cultural life one belongs to. For example, clothes decide one’s position and indicate their interests. So people consciously select and wear them in relation to the codes and conventions established within the culture, in order to avoid unnecessary messages or meanings it can convey, to the people who come across them. (14) This concept is widened by Ronald Barthes in his work *Myth Today*. He said social meanings attach

themselves to a sign, just as connotations attach themselves to a word. He calls these attachments as “myth”. Thus, semiotics helps to analyse the non-linguistic signs presented in the literary text in connection to the cultural aspects of the time. Therefore, Richard Johnson said that text is “no longer studied for its own sake... but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available” (35).

Moving on to British Marxist thought and ideology of 1960’s, which was influenced by European theorists like Lukacs, Benjamin, Goldmann and Sartre. One can see the changes in the traditional thoughts of Marxism that had devalued the importance of the idea of culture. “Cultural studies employed critical Marxist theory to launch attacks on the “economism” in previous explanations of how existing power relations have been instituted and legitimated” (18). Althusser said the complex unit of society is constructed with the network of different ideological apparatuses like the law, the education system, the family. These institutions are as important as the economic condition of society. In earlier times ideology was considered as a “veil over the eyes of working class” or a tool to construct the “‘false consciousness’ of the self and of one’s relation to history” (qtd. in Turner 19). But, Althusser defined ideology as a theoretical framework “ through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and “live” the material conditions in which they find themselves”(Hall 33).

Thus, language, ideology and apparatuses act together to establish and legitimate social norms. As Harland says,

The individual absorbs language before he can think for himself: indeed the absorption of language is the very condition of being able to think for himself. The individual can reject particular knowledge that society explicitly

teaches him, he can throw off particular beliefs that society forcibly imposes upon him- but he has always already accepted the words and meanings through which such knowledge and beliefs were communicated to him... They lie within him like an undigested piece of society. (12-13)

This is why feminists urged women writers to create their own language or style of writing to subvert the male dominated sexist language. And John Fiske explains how Althusser's ideological state apparatuses achieve ideological ends:

These norms are realized in the day-to-day workings of the ideological state apparatuses. Each one of these institutions is "relatively autonomous", and there are no apparent connections between it and any of the others- the legal system is not explicitly connected to the school system or to the media, for example- yet they all perform similar ideological work. They are all patriarchal, and they all assert individualism and competition between individuals. (257)

However, Althusser's concept of ideology does not confine itself merely to the study of the construction of one's culture but also helps to analyse how it structures the consciousness of a person. Thus, it includes the examination of selfhood or individualism and subjectivity. Althusser argues that ideology operates not explicitly, but implicitly; it exists in those patterns, those structures, those images we take for granted. We internalized the ideologies. Therefore, we are not easily made conscious of its presence or its effects; it is unconscious. We depend on language and ideology to be instructed about how to conceive our social identities and how to be a subject. Jacques Lacan, who is referred in the previous section for his theories of psychoanalysis, has appropriated the

Saussure's linguistics model. He argues "our unconscious is a sign system too, that functions like a language" (Turner 21). Therefore, the recent feminist theorists are using the post-Freudian notions of subjectivity to examine the social construction of the feminine and attempting to intercede in the social course. To escape from the sexual discrimination here, women can interrogate their function so that women's subordination no longer has the excuse of being "natural" is the argument.(21)

Since ideologies are implemented and observed through social machinery or institutions. A systematic study of these practices, behaviours, institutions and texts of the society is needed to examine the social and historical conditions of ideological formations. This study helps to recognize the social relations and political problems of the age. Particularly in the 19th century England, the construction of "feminine subjectivity" in the specific situation can be understood by analysing particular text, its context and discourse in relation to the contemporary ideologies. Further, as Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson have argued, that determining forces like history or ideology could be resisted and that history could be affected by radical individual effort. Then Althusser's views are supplemented by Gramsci's theories of hegemony, which acknowledge the power of individual within the cultural group/community, which could bring changes in the system. Thus, the cultural study of the present scenario is wider and more flexible. Because now "textual analysis is much more historical, more socially coded, because it now takes account not just of signs and signification, but of their combinations, in particular, culturally specific discourses" (Turner 24). In this perspective, the texts of Bronte sisters is treated as the cultural product of the age, which has the information regarding lifestyle of upper-class and middle-class women and their

position in the patriarchal setup of 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Their struggles against the cultural discourses of the time, which was not considered as an attempt to redefine the traditional role can be traced in this study.

Discourse analysis has now become a very diverse area of study. The term “discourse” refers to “socially produced groups of ideas or ways of thinking that can be tracked in individual texts or groups of texts, but that also demand to be located within wider historical and social structures or relations” (25). Foucault’s work *Discipline and Punish* examined how the discourses enable the authorities/institutions to operate the power: how institutions establish practices and routines, which disciplined behaviour, defined space and regulated the experience of time for those placed within their control. Therefore, in the cultural studies Foucault’s work has been an influential one, as cultural studies have given importance to the examination of power. In this way, discourse analysis enlarged the approaches to examine institutions (religious, educational, legal and social), the cultural significance of fashion (dress), the cultural definition and regulation of the human behaviour and so on.

Paul Willis has said, the British cultural studies is “not artifice and manners, the preserve of Sunday best, rainy afternoons and concert halls. It is the very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our most commonplace understandings” (185-186). Based on the European theoretical framework British Cultural Studies emerged to examine the working class culture and communities. Its primary interest was to study the influence of American popular culture on British everyday life, not of elite class but on middle class “bourgeois” society. Mathew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, Denys Thompson, T.S. Eliot criticised the new changes in the cultural aspects of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century



England under the influence of industrialisation and urbanisation. Later the works of Hoggart, Williams, Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies provide the necessary methodologies and objectives to start the cultural studies on a new line.

Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* widens the range of cultural studies by analysing music, newspapers, magazines and popular fictions interconnecting the life of working people. It examined the structures of an individual's everyday life- family roles, gender relations, language patterns, the community's "common sense" (39). Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* employed Leavisite close textual analysis; it included the examination of specific cultural representation in the text. It aids to explore cultural products in connection with cultural relations. According to William culture is "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual" (16). By following William's theory "culture" becomes the key concept in literary analysis and social inquiry. His book *The Long Revolution* set up a theoretical framework for the analysis of culture.

Culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture (12)

Then Williams outlined the objects of cultural analysis. It includes

...historical criticism... in which intellectual and imaginative works are analysed in relation to particular tradition and societies, but will also include analysis of elements in the way of life that to followers of other definitions

are not “culture” at all: the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate. (57)

Williams’ another work *Communication* which was published in 1962 insists that communication plays a vital role in altering the positions of people and society. It can create cultural revolutions for the human liberation. Because communication implies not only transmission but reception and response. Therefore, he said, “...men should grow in capacity and power to direct their own lives- by creating democratic institutions, by bringing new sources of energy to human work, and by extending the expression and exchange of experience on which understanding depends” (138). By saying this, he draws the attention of people towards the important role of cultural products like text, media and institutions. His thought helped for the development of a mode of textual criticism and the study of mass communication Medias that can deal with many cultural forms. His *Marxism and Literature* breaks the traditional Marxist division of base and superstructure to foreground the role of culture. He examines the processes that integrate base and superstructure and the processes through which history and culture are determined. (Turner 53) William says, “no mode of production and, therefore, no dominant social order ... ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention”(125). Thus, he insisted that there should be a political possibility in the power of the human agent to change his or her condition of existence.

In this way, until Williams and Hoggart, cultural criticism was confined to literature or history, and culture was identified with religion or accomplishment. But,

William and Hoggart tried to break the existing tradition of cultural studies. Williams tries to formulate his theory of culture through a deconstruction and reconstruction of the Arnoldian tradition of culture. To Arnold, culture is an idea of perfection, which one believes and follows unconsciously to attain.

E.P Thompson resisted Williams' definition of culture as "a whole way of life" and reframed it as a struggle between ways of life. Thomson's culture was constituted by the friction between competing interests and forces, mostly located in social class. (Turner 56) In a way, Feminist research has benefited from some applications of this subcultural approach, which helps to examine aspects of women's cultural subordination. Therefore, feministic cultural perspective will equip the further analysis of the text and context of the Bronte novels in this research.

### **Methodology and Objectives of the Study**

The present work is an effort to capture all the complex issues in historical, sociological, theological, psychological and cultural aspects that constructed the notion of gender and power relation in the Victorian society, which are present in the novels of Bronte Sisters. The focus is on the close reading of the text to decode the connotative meaning. In addition, the study of literary criticism, biographies and other related books is undertaken to understand the socio-cultural aspects of the time. In this way, the study has adopted interdisciplinary and multi- disciplinary approach as presented in the theoretical framework in the previous section. So, it is not confined to any single methodological approach.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To trace the Journey of the young girls in each of the novels who transgress the borders and boundaries of socio-cultural values and religious norms to emerge as independent spirits
- To examine how the novels redefine the moral values of the gendered system of education
- To evaluate how education is used as the key to economic independence and empowerment of women
- To study how in these novels the financial independence gradually leads to psychologically balanced mind and enable characters to make self-governing decisions on the personal level
- To look at each young girl's struggle in these novels, which leads to emancipation by attaining empowered status
- To see how the theories of feminism and cultural studies that are explained in the previous section can be used to understand the things that happen in their novels.
- To examine how even Bronte's views are socially connected

The study has considered family, marriage, education institutions, legal system, and ultimately the society, as the base of all kinds of conflict and disparities. Therefore, these cultural units are analysed to show how gender was constructed, implemented and practised among the people of Victorian era. Then, how the female characters of the Bronte novels try to deconstruct the structure of gendered society, how they attain success through individual stance and what they try to convey to the female society is examined. In the whole argument I try to show how the struggle of female protagonists

and a few female characters in the novels attain the empowerment and influences the society for a progressive change.

### **Structure of the Study**

The entire thesis has been divided into five chapters. The present chapter is an earnest attempt to provide a broad conceptual framework to carry the further argument of the study. The second chapter tries to locate the selected texts as an evolutionary tool in reforming the conventions for the equal benefit of women in the patriarchal society. In the first section, it talks about the position of women in the discourse of religion, from the ancient times to 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian society. The chapter with the help of theological discourses and traditional beliefs of the time tries to peel out the rugged conventions from the radical non-conventional notions presented by Brontes in the novels. The chapter will explore whether Bronte provide a counter discourse. It will also see whether there are strategic compromises that Brontes made.

The third chapter concentrates on the means of education, which acted as an agent in the construction of the gender-biased notions. This chapter carries the discussion of the previous chapter to a higher level of argument. It focuses on the girl's education. Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century women were educated in such a way that they should mechanically perform the duty of attending her husband's needs, rearing and caring of his children and managing his household chores. Then it tries to show how the female protagonists of the Bronte's novels utilise the same narrow educational aid to construct their identity and independent life. It also examines that economic independence is achieved through the help of education. It argues the financial stability can empower the life of each character

in the novels. It also argues that the Brontes were working within the constraints of their period when talking about empowerment.

The fourth chapter examines the institution of marriage as a part of socio-cultural unit, in which women of the 19th century were exchanged as an object. It examines woman's position in the marital market by exploring political and legal aspects of the time. Types of marriages and their validity in the society, its circumstances in the life of women are analysed to show how women in Bronte's novels execute their strong will to throw away the traditional taboos for their comfort and needs. It argues that economic independence led the Bronte women to make their own decisions concerning the important steps of their lifespan. In addition, education enabled them with psychological and moral courage.

The fifth and the final chapter intends to show how the texts of the Bronte sisters disturbed the mainstream cultural practises and tried to see the changes in the life of middle class women. Then it sums up with the argument that the Brontes' novels suggest that positive changes towards development in personal level and private sphere definitely leads to the empowerment of women who are hitherto marginalized in the male dominated world. Thus, the novels are not only trying to enlighten and empower the Victorian women, but are also imparting moral courage to every woman who is being neglected and exploited in the gendered world. This happens within the frameworks that were available to the Bronte sisters.

## CHAPTER – 02

### Culture, Religion and the Unconventional Choices

“Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the crown of thorns.”

-Charlotte Bronte in the preface to *Jane Eyre* second ed..

#### Introduction

The above statement of Charlotte Bronte defends the unconventional elements presented in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Conventionality is a set of ideas or practices adhered to by people of the society. Religion and tradition are the elements of cultural life that shape conventional things with the consent of people. This age-old practice is the core of culture. Any act of nonconformity or refusal to obey the existing principles of the society is condemned as unconventional. The 19th-century conventional society, which was in the transitional stage, faced many hindrances from the radical thinkers. They questioned the blind observations of religious and cultural norms. During this time, Bronte Sisters extensively expose the double standards of the Victorian culture in their novels. These elements are examined in the present chapter to analyze the socio-cultural and religious environment of the 19th century England. Especially women and her position in the religion, their representation in the novels are studied in the first and second section. Later I try to show how the hypocritical society framed the rules to control the intellectual and financial development of women. Then, I try to show, how the unconventional choices of Bronte sisters' female protagonists are a response to the discriminative religious and cultural practices of the period.

In this way, the present chapter argues that nonconformity of women character in the Bronte novels is a sign of resistance against the religious society and against cultural norms aimed at attaining empowerment and emancipation.

The Victorian society and religion affected the lives of Bronte's and their writings to a greater extent. Although their novels consist of a number of references to the Bible, Bronte sisters set aside the rules of patriarchal religious society. Therefore, it is important to understand the religious beliefs of Bronte sisters. Many biographers have investigated their religious belief and have given different conclusions. The study of such biographies and sociological aspects of Victorian times will help us to know the context of religious belief in the society they lived, and its impact on these sisters who created the world of novelty in the 19th-century literature and life. Grace. E. Harrison' work *The Clue of Brontes* gives information regarding Bronte's religious background and the influences of religion on their family. Lisa Wang's *The use of Theological Discourse in the Novels of the Bronte Sisters* helps to know the religious stance of Bronte sisters in their life and works.

In the present study, I argue that Bronte sisters' novels are not entirely religious discourse as Wang says in his thesis. I argue that Bronte sisters gave more importance to the human passions and emotions than the religious norms. Women in their novels express their real 'femaleness' and acts so vigorously, which was not acceptable to the Victorian conservative cultural society. Thus, the individual personality, the temperament and non-conformity of the female characters in the novels are the refusal of the conventional image of "The Angel in the House". In this way, the study concentrates on



the non-conventional notions against the religion and society, which are present in the novels. It attempts to examine how the societal norms are violated by women.

To sum up, this chapter explains and examines the religious beliefs of Christian society, the concept of womanhood and Bronte's female character in terms of their uniqueness. It shows how a woman can empower her situation and defend herself in all the conditions inspite of being questioned and threatened by male-dominated norms, values, and morals.

### **Religion and Womanhood**

The social status of men and women is vitally connected with the place which religion accords to them in its ideology, rites, and practices. Thus, the position of women in society depends upon the privileges and prohibitions imposed on her by religion. Any attempt to understand the portrayal of women and their role in the novels of Bronte sisters falls back to the biblical perspective of women. The Bible, which was written by a male, constructed the image of the woman in connection with him and his will. The Old Testaments and the New Testaments present some of the liberative as well as oppressive stories of women. The Story of Genesis says that woman was the first to fall into disobedience. A woman is born a sinner. A Woman is defined primarily in relation to her husband and her household. Women according to bible should accept her femininity, which is a cultural construct. With the purpose to attain the needs of other, God created her differently. Women should not compete with men in terms of toughness.

God wants to see a gentle and quiet spirit, one which respects God and her husband, not in a fearful dread but in a peaceful, secure rest and trust. A Godly

woman is a comfort and a companion, one whom a godly husband can trust and delight in. (Biblical Womanhood)

It stated that marriage, motherhood, and womanliness are the most important things in the life of a woman to attain salvation. Self –sacrifice is another accepted practice by women of Christianity to prove their pious nature. Any girl or woman who steps out of these conservative rules is subject to controversy and criticism. Women of the upper class and middle class had the responsibility of making home a secure heaven. The ideal woman's task is to make the home run smoothly, to obey the rules of husband, and to regulate the servants of the household. In this way, the Victorian society constructed the life of a woman under the influence of socio-religious sentiments. Thus, the notion of self-sacrifice had become a way of general happiness. It was an integral part of Victorian womanhood.

Thus, representation of women in the Victorian novels had been essentially feminine. There was no space for individuality or self- identity. Womanliness was the single criteria expected by the society despite their class or status. Therefore, women of the working class were often portrayed in poor condition to convey the message that gaining economic independence is not an easy task for a woman. In addition, even the constant effort of women to confine to the traditional set of rules based on religion and society was depicted intentionally to influence the mindset of readers to adhere to the conventions.

However, the changes in the society under industrialization disturbed the traditional life-style. Even the Evangelical Anglican beliefs raised question on many

blind practices. The new thoughts created a space for women and her existence in the domestic sphere as a moral guardian and encouraged her to involve in philanthropic works.

### **Women in Bronte's Novels**

The Brontes being the followers of Methodist principles used a different narrative to tell the story of their female protagonists breaking the stereotypical image of Victorian womanhood. Jane Austen's novels like *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* uphold only idealness or the leading male figures. Society and social problems of women are not the preoccupations of Austen. But Evangelicalism of Austen's time became a significant force to reform the Christian society. It influenced many writers to analyze the social problems of the time. Bronte sister's Evangelical Anglican background changed their thoughts and views. Their father being an Evangelical Anglican Clergyman encouraged them to pray, to read Bible and attend Church. These enforced practices seem to make them familiar with the Bible and its stories, rather than follow it without failure. As Winifred Gerin and Katherine Frank have written in the biography of Emily Bronte, she did not attend church regularly. (148 and 109,116)

Bronte sisters also felt writing might be perceived as unchaste, unladylike, and unsuitable for their social position like other 19th-century woman writers who used pseudonyms to publish the novels. However, the sisters smartly managed to dismantle this watertight compartment being within the religious framework. Their women characters provided many other possibilities to lead a life for the women of society. It

questioned the accepted beliefs and practises. As Virginia Woolf has said of women and the novel:

When a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values- to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And, for what, of course, she will be criticized; for the critic of the opposite sex will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental, because it differs from his own. (49)

Here this study tries to explain how Brontes' created the women, who resisted and challenged the conventional religious ideologies and gradually attained the status of empowered entities and then started emancipating themselves from the institution of family and society. For instance, Charlotte' *Jane Eyre* has unconventional character. Jane analysed religious beliefs under a critical perspective. Her opinion on Bible reading and Psalm, on the advices of New Testament and being true Christian are discussed in the following sections along with other female characters of the selected novels.

### **Victorian Society and Bronte's Women**

Sociology defines society as a group of people who live in a definite territory and share common rules. The basic components of a society are its culture and its social structure. Here culture is everything, which controls the lifestyle of societal people. In this sense Victorian society, which was framed on rigid norms under the rule of Queen Victoria has followed many restrictions. Social mannerisms and etiquette was most

important. “Mannerisms are nothing but the set of Christian values” (Mckellen), which a person has to follow to maintain respectability in the society. Thus, social etiquette was also connected with religion.

Bronte sisters being essentially Victorians reacted to this hypocritical Victorian society. They unknowingly initiated the changes in the life of women, when the Victorian period was slowly adopting a new set of social moralities under the influence of industrial revolution. Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte “struck a new note in English literature with the passion of their writing and stark violence of their plot” (Stevenson 104). “Their virginal heroines are neither passive nor sexually frigid, and the strength of their feelings about the men they encounter inevitably brought upon their authors accusations of ‘coarseness’” (104).

In this way, the three young unmarried sisters questioned the accepted condition of women by depicting their female protagonists outside the Victorian societal context. Because in the 19th century, the divided sphere between men and women created a huge gender disparity. The society in the name of religion, moral values, and social norms enforced feminine roles on women. The one form of sexuality that women could enjoy without restriction was the maternal status within the religiously sanctioned institution of marriage. Any other active feminine desires were objectionable. She is expected to be a passive listener, learner, and follower of men and society. In Anne Bronte’s *Agnes Grey*, Mrs. Bloomfield and her role make it clear. Mr Bloomfield’s enquiry regarding the items for dinner and his astonishment about his wife’s replay shows the assigned role of a married woman in the house:

‘Turkey and grouse’, was the concise reply.

And what besides?’

‘Fish.’

What kind of fish?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know?’ cried he, looking solemnly up from his plate and suspending his knife and fork in astonishment.

‘No, I told the cook to get some fish- I did not particularise what.’

‘Well, that beats everything! A lady professes to keep house, and doesn’t even know what fish is for dinner! Professes to order fish, and doesn’t specify what!’(A Bronte 1078-1079).

Then Mrs Bloomfield’s cold reply, “perhaps, Mr Bloomfield, you will order dinner yourself in future” (1079) is the denial of such expectation from the male that a woman will follow his orders without failure. Thus, Anne Bronte very mildly, very cleverly portrays the women’s condition under patriarchy, and she manages to be herself with a kind of resistance. Then, she conveys that these compulsions were hard to be maintained by the middle-class women. The woman’s economic contribution is also crucial to run their household. Therefore, the girls of the time were encouraged to learn domestic economy. In *Agnes Grey*, it is the necessity of money, which made the protagonist step out of the house in search of the job. She started working as a governess who was treated very badly during that time. She describes the work “A more arduous

task than anyone can imagine” (1084). However, it is the strong decision of Grey to keep up with all its miserable condition and torture “I chose to keep silence, and bear all like a self-convicted culprit” (1093). Her condition as a helpless governess shows that an ‘Angel out of the House’ in Victorian society was prone to bitter experience and challenges. On the other side the tomboyish nature of Marry Ann and “unladylike trick” (1103) of Matilda depicts how disgraceful it was to have ‘unfeminine’ behaviour. Further, Anne sensibly remarks that Matilda learned all these mannerisms from her father and maybe a bit from the coachmen (1103) to reveal the double standards of society for men and women. It questions why society or culture encourages men to adopt a set of mannerisms, which is said to be bad for women.

Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and *Shirley* put aside the conventions of society more than *Agnes Grey* did, by presenting the female restlessness throughout the novels. The novels of Charlotte Bronte were written against the advice of Robert Southey that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be” (Banks 139). Here his advice shows the conventional barriers, which separated the rights and duties of men and women. However, Brontes who disguised as Bells to publish their poems and novels proved Southey’s or societal opinion as wrong. *Jane Eyre* was praised as the most promising work. The first review in the newspaper *Atlas* was like this: “It was one of the most powerful domestic romances published for many years. It has little or nothing of the old conventional stamp upon it...” (qtd. in Lodge 6). When the mystery of the identity of the author was strongly suspected as female, the prejudiced society started to look at it negatively. Anne Mozley in *The Christian Remembrance* said “... a book more unfeminine, both in its excellences and defects, it would be hard to find in the

annals of female authorship. Throughout there is masculine power, breadth and shrewdness, combined with masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression.” (qtd. in Lodge 11) The conservative Elizabeth Rigby criticised the novel for its connection between unrestrained passion and political rebellion. Rigby criticised the novel saying, “It is true Jane does right, and exerts great moral strength, but it is the strength of a mere heathen mind that is a law unto itself. No Christian graces perceptible upon her.”(qtd. in Lodge 12) She rejected the novel as an anti-Christian composition. We can clearly see how that unconventionality is seen as anti-religious.

Thus, all the novels of the Bronte sisters are different from the sentimental dramas of the age, where women writers chose domestic fiction as their genre of writing. Domestic fiction was a work by the women, for the women and about women. The society expected them to write within a conventional framework. Any unique feminine expression was not encouraged. In this situation, Bronte sisters took a bold step and broke the traditional thoughts. They managed to pass the message to the women regarding how to empower their souls in the struggle for economic independence and self-reliance.

*Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette* filled the mind of readers with new possibilities of women’s life. It interrogated the gendered stereotypes. Jane Eyre’s character was criticised by Margaret Oliphant “Bronte Heroine dashed into our well-ordered world, broke its boundaries, and defined its principles- and the most alarming revolution of modern times has followed the invasion of Jane Eyre” (qtd. in Gill 118).

Jane Eyre’s first step of resistance against John Reed’s bullying and the punishment she received made her more aggressive. Her act of unconformity to the



womanly nature was punished by locking her in the Red Room. Before the author introduces the name of her protagonist, the reader would be aware of Jane's character as eccentric. The conversation between little Jane Eyre and Mr. Brocklehurst regarding good and evil deeds of man is an act of interrogation by a conservative Christian for the non-conservative nature of a ten-year-old girl. The conversation reveals how moral beliefs are forcefully imposed on innocents to curb their real voice of instinct. For instance, Mr. Brocklehurst threatens Jane with the story of the accidental premature "death of Martha G- a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit" (C Bronte 31). He gave the above example because he was, shocked by the unreligious attitudes of Jane and her bold opinion that "Psalms are not interesting" (29) and she did not read Bible regularly.

Mr. Brocklehurst and Mrs. Reeds intention to check the 'individuality' of Jane reflects the purpose of hypocritical religion and society in suppressing the voice, which opposes its views. This is supported by the Titus verse of Bible: "older women...are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled"(Women Teacher). In this way, womanhood was imposed on girls from their childhood. Thus, women had internalised that they were created to serve the rules of male dominated society and religion.

This unfair morals and talks of Mr. Brocklehurst made Jane restless rather than restoring her to the feminine behaviour. She waited to speak out her mind and to retaliate verbally on her enemies. Her outburst of her controlled emotions "I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say, I loved you, but I declare I do not love you..." (C Bronte 32) to Mrs.

Reeds shows that whatever they advised her to adhere in the name of religion and society is deceitful. Thus, she only values the truth, and she is not fearful to say the truth that Mrs. Reeds is hypocritical “people think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. You are deceitful!”(33). The way she talks back to Mrs. Reeds exposes that whatever is conventional is not religious. “Deceit is not my fault!” (33) makes it clear that the religion and society have disguised their selfish ends by Godly sayings. Jane Eyre’s independent spirit is confirmed by Bessies’ words “you little sharp thing! You’ve got quite a new way of talking. What makes you so venturesome and hardy” (36).

Then in Lowood School, Jane’s strange experience gives a picture of Victorian society and its demands. Helen Burns’ behaviour and her silence for all the words and punishment in the class by Miss. Scatcherd are unimaginable to Jane. Sometimes she wondered how Burns keeps her temper very calm, even in unbearable condition. Jane reveals her personality to Helen as both exchange their views-

...Helen: I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved. (54)

Helen suggested Jane to read the New Testament and observe the sayings of Christ to cultivate good conduct, as she is “a little untaught girl” (54). Here the objection of Jane to follow the words of Christ ironically indicates, in the name of god and good mannerisms people are often prevented from opposing evil forces of the society. So Jane Eyre expresses her unwillingness to adopt the mild, submissive attitude as said in New

Testament. She said that “then, I should love Mrs Reed, which I cannot do: I should bless her son John, which is impossible” (54).

Further, the story reveals how social institutions work as an agent in implementing the hegemonic rules and double standards in the society. Mr Brocklehurst says his intention of bringing up the girls of Lowood is, “...not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying” (59). He continues with the words of God to defend his decision that, “if ye suffer hunger or thirst for my sake, happy are ye. Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children’s mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal soul!”(59). It is the inhuman act of Mr. Brocklehurst in the name of God and religious discipline. Then his silly remarks about the naturally curly hair of Julia’s show his dictatorial nature.

“Miss Temple, Miss Temple, what- what is that girl with curled hair? Red hair, ma’am, curled all over?’...why, in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly-” (60). For this awful objectionable inquiry, Miss Temple answered “Julia’s hair curls naturally” (60). Mr. Brocklehurst as soon as he realised his foolish observation tried to control the situation by saying –“we are not to conform to nature. I wish these girls to be the children of grace...” (60). And he ordered, “Miss Temple that girl’s hair must be cut off entirely” (60). His directions show that womanliness is imposed forcefully on girls in an unnatural way according to the wish of man and society. The socialization of children was systematically done by parents and the institutions who are the agents of conventional society. It worked hard to control every sign of freedom so that no woman can escape from its influence. The education of the

time itself acted as a tool of social norms, values, and class system. Brontes considered that the problems of women are because of conventional society, because people like Mr. Brocklehurst do not respect the natural law of human development.

Charlotte also unmask the real face of conventions, quoting the conversation of Mr. Brocklehurst and his different attitude towards the rich, fashionable women of upper-class society in contrast with poor orphaned girls of Lowood.

I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted, of- (61).

The same person receives the visitors of upper class without any objection. They are dressed “in velvet, silk and furs” (61). They have spent hours together for their makeover. Two of the younger girls are well fashioned with “gray beaver hats, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful headdress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elder lady was enveloped in a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls” (61). But they were deferentially treated by him and others. They conducted them to the seat of honour at the top of the room. The pretension and hypocrisy of Brocklehurst is disclosed by Jane’s observation and she silently analyse the facts and false notions of society.

As Jane grows up, she steps into the world of Thornfield as a governess, and gradually gets closer to Mr. Rochester in terms of love and with the intention of marriage. When she came to know the fact that he has a wife and she is locked in the attic, she decided to leave him despite his love and rich wealth. Her denial of Rochester's proposal on the ground of his first marriage arouses a kind of passionate argument between them. In this incident Jane's assertion of her strong will and independent spirit is seen: "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even to mortal flesh: - it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet, equal- as we are!"(C. Bronte 249). This statement directly attacks the society, which has unreal notions, far from human innate feelings and thoughts. It hints that both men and women in spite of their gendered role and position are equal before God. Therefore, she wants to address the spirit- the conscience. It also shows that Bronte sisters also try to incorporate their unconventionality within a religious framework.

Then Rochester's attempt to control her individuality is the pressure of male society on a woman, which suggests that it is not easy for women to live without the shelter of a man. He says the attempt to escape to another place (Ireland) from the present situation is useless. It is just "like a wild, frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation."(249) He observes her decision is only out of her hopeless condition. Therefore, he warns her to be still and not to struggle. But Jane replied "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" (249). This is not just a reply to Rochester; it sounds as if she answered the society, which wanted to tie women's wings to the conventional norms. It is a resistance

for men's ironical advice "your will decide your destiny" (249). Because Rochester and the male society indirectly threatened that, there is no other way for Jane (a governess) to lead a comfortable and secure life than accepting the dark sides of wealthy Rochester. However, Jane Eyre's decision led her to face the most difficult days of her life. She struggled hard to get a piece of bread to fulfil her hunger. But she never thought about to change her decision. She begged for food and job. Her determination and strong will served her to attain the desired end. The shelter and work in St. John's house and village school renewed her spirit. She started to rebuild her identity under the new name "Miss Elliott". She became very independent. Her new name, new job and ultimately her own cottage satisfied her more than being "a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles- fevered with delusive bliss one hour- suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next-..."(355). She never regretted about her decision. Rather she thanked God to direct her to a correct choice. (355) She felt happy of her present condition. She said to St. John "I had nothing- I was an outcast, a beggar, a vagrant; now I have acquaintance, a home, a business. I wonder at the goodness of God, the generosity of my friends, the bounty of my lot. I do not repine" (356). Here each expression is filled with a gratitude to the almighty, though she strongly felt difficulty in following the religious ideologies, which were prevailing in the society. It indicates that Jane believes in an unseen guardian angel, but not in meaningless theological practices. Then Jane did not consider the marriage proposal of St. John as genuine. She rejected his proposal and the intention, which was purely influenced by conventional Christian society. St. John- "loves (as he can love, and that is not as you love) a beautiful young lady called Rosamond" (439). But he wanted to marry her only because he thought she should make a suitable missionary's wife, which

Miss Oliver would not have done. (439) So Jane felt her marriage with John River's would destroy her claims: "this would be unendurable" (389) as her passion would be forcefully subdued. Thus, Calder says, "Jane is under extreme pressure from St. John Rivers to become the kind of woman that society would approve, to live a life where duty is pre-eminent, [and] to submerge her own personality" (60). But Jane's decision to return to her old master Rochester and marry him, who loved her truly is a blow to the religious and social demands. The choice she made establishes egalitarian relationship of love. She as an economically independent woman made the choice to be the caretaker, life partner and more over the apple of his eye. The declaration Jane Eyre's marriage to readers as "I married him" (C. Bronte 444) regarding her marriage with crippled Rochester proves that she does not mind the conventionality or opinion of society. In the end, Jane Eyre has given the life to Rochester, but not he to her.

*Shirley* the second novel taken for analysis in this chapter is not as famous as *Jane Eyre* is. Charlotte by calling her female protagonist as Shirley added up a new name to the list of girls' nameology. Before the publication of the novel, Shirley was named for boys. But, Charlotte initiated the changes in the gendered names and she broke the stereotypical assumptions and cultural practices. Charlotte Bronte also filled the life of Shirley with all manly power and independence as the name given to her. The two female characters of the novel Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar represent the conventional and non-conventional roles. As Gaskell remarked Charlotte Bronte's life was divided into two parallel currents –her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman (237-78). Bronte being an author created a unique world for her female characters, where they have the power to prove their strength and valour equally with

men. Then as a woman, she always tried to keep her passions under control. Once she wrote to Ellen, “I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in...I don’t pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can; but they burst out sometimes, and I hate myself for days afterwards” (Barker 40). It is the conflict between the inner soul and the outer world, where the triumph is always for the strong and sturdy. In this struggle, Charlotte Bronte subdued her real voice knowing that these peculiarities are abnormal signs in the conventional society. Thus, *Shirley* is a novel about characters’ struggles to find their place in society. Even though it ends up with conventional happy marriages like other novels of the time, it depicts the position and problems of women throughout the story. It has unpleasant realities Hook says, *Shirley* clearly deviates from the “imaginative autobiography” that Jane Eyre fans expected (9). It shows how society rejects the truth for its conventions.

Shirley Keeldar derived her boldness and power of intellect by the way she is brought up and educated. That Proper education will empower women is shown here by putting Shirley with the advantage of private schooling, where she learned liberal thought and intellectual aspects. Shirley’s informal education is a boon for her growth whereas Caroline derived the minimal knowledge from formal education. As Elizabeth Gargano observes in her article on education in *Shirley*:

The parish school is a nexus of boundaries, hierarchies, and divisions, the prop of church and state. The private schoolroom, in contrast, is staged as a privileged site of intellectual and emotional exploration, a sanctuary for both



childhood's anarchic impulses and adulthood's hard-earned and private liberties of the spirit. (781)

Thus, the society in the name of tradition, custom, and religious practices implemented its norms, values, and power relations in favour of its demand. Charlotte Bronte by portraying the real condition of education and emphasising the need for its change stood against the accepted womanly values and position. Through Shirley's opinion, she shows how society moulds the unreal nature of women as real through its patriarchal ideologies:

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend... (367).

On the other side, her rational set of mind always opposed the Biblical description of Eve. Shirley felt that Eve is an innocent. Eve is deceived by male authority. She felt Milton's Eve is the product of a male interpretation. Shirley doubted the goodness of Milton. She treats him as a staunch patriarch. She says Milton failed to see the first woman. Because "...the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother; from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus-" (334). Further she said:

I say, there were giants on the earth in those days-giants that strove to scale heaven. The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded

the darling which could contend with Omnipotence, the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born. Vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations, and grand the undergenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation. (335)

These words questioned the patriarchal assumptions, which treat women as sinful and weak. It upholds the strength of women. It celebrates the divinity of Eve, who is cursed as the cause for the fall of Mankind. The opinion of Shirley criticises the narrow vision of Milton and male society. Then Shirley' disinterestedness in attaining the church ceremony and her desire to stay out enjoying the nature connotes her paganism. Her views and her decisions are against the conventional set-up. She adores Eve rather than Adam, which is like replacing the God with Goddess. Again, she feels the presence of Eve in the nature rather than in the church. It conveys she is against the idol worship that is the part of blind cultural and religious practices.

Later on, the conversation between Joe, Shirley and Caroline shows the difference of opinion between male and female. At the same time, it presents the common assumptions of society regarding the life of women. Joe the prejudiced male of the patriarchy always feels that women are inferior. He thinks business and politics are not the topics of discussion with women, who are ignorant. He advised Shirley and Caroline the moment he saw them with William outside the Church that "ye'd better go into th' house." "Because there is nought agate that fits women to be consarned in" (341). For

this, the reply of Shirley is “well, what then? Politics are our habitual study, Joe. Do you know I see a newspaper every day, and two of a Sunday? (342). However, Joe underestimated her interest and said, “I should think you’ll read the marriages, probably, miss, and the murders, and the accidents, and sich like?” (342). Shirley disillusioned his wrong assumptions. She said, “I read the leading articles, Joe, and the foreign intelligence, and I look over the market prices. In short, I read just what gentlemen read” (342). This conversation displays the expectations of male society and their stereotypical thoughts regarding a female. On the other side, the character of Shirley stands against all the conventional roles of a woman. She is an example for how good education and economic status empower a female to adopt individuality.

Caroline’s monologue regarding the condition of women awakens the reader to the marginalized life and limited opportunities, which never leads to any great changes. If society does not allow women to do what she wishes, then why does it demand her to do what it desires? This logical question triggers in the mind of woman readers and the novel serves the answer that it is the rigid gender disparity in the conventional society, which is the biggest hindrance in the path of every girl’s intellectual development. In the monologue, Bronte had given a call to the men of London and fathers of many helpless daughters to strengthen the lives of women who would be the worthiest and faithful supports in their old ages rather than their sons. She tried to open the eyes of conservative people towards the need for necessary changes in the changing time of industrialization. Caroline represents the hidden desires of thousands of middle-class and lower-class women. Bronte took the courage to call the ‘Pater’- the ‘father’ or the ‘head’ of the patriarchal families to initiate the positive changes in the age-old society. The novel also

indicates the cause for the empowered status of Shirley is her parents, who named and brought her up without implementing the gendered notions. Thus, that the responsibility for changing the system lies in parenting the children is the strong message conveyed by Charlotte through Caroline and Shirley.

*Villette*, the last novel of Charlotte Bronte published in 1853, is the story of woman's journey to find her place to live independently in the region unknown, with the people unfamiliar. Lucy Snow the timid, introvert, conservative character changes into an empowered soul at the end. Her wish to be self-reliant which was forced upon her by the circumstances makes her live an independent life. Lucy's words to Miss Ginevra—"yes, I said, I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school teacher" (C. Bronte 329) shows the growth of her character. At last she stood as an independent owner of her school being single. She liberated herself from her helpless marginalized status, as she believed:

Stone walls do not a prison make

Nor iron bars a cage,

So peril, loneliness, an uncertain future, is not oppressive evils, so long as the frame is healthy and the faculties are employed; so long, especially as Liberty lends us her wings and Hope guides us by her star. (62)

George Eliot exclaimed "Villette! Villette! It is still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre* is. There is something almost preternatural in its power" (qtd. in Huges-Hallett). The open ending leads the reader to new possibilities of woman's life. Huges-Hallett says in her article what "Virginia Woolf wrote about the Bronte 'overpowering

personality' means 'they have only to open the door to make themselves felt. There is in them some untamed ferocity perpetually at war with the accepted order of things.' The Bronte myth would have us see Charlotte and her sisters as spinsters, timidly hiding behind male pseudonyms. Anyone who has read *Villette* knows that Woolf comes much closer to the truth. It is a fierce book, and an irresistibly compelling one" (qtd. in Huges-Hallett).

In *Villette*, the theological discourse between Lucy and M. Paul reveals the rigid practices of the church and even its interference in the lives of people during the time of Brontes. Once Lucy Snow says how church makes its followers dumb and deaf to their inner voice and rules them as slaves-, "each mind was being reared in slavery; but, to prevent reflection from dwelling on this fact, every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. There, as elsewhere the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. 'Eat, drink, and live!'" (137-138).

This bold opinion on conservative Catholic Church is a setback to the staunch believers of the age. Bronte, through Lucy, attacks the blind notions. It does not mean she is against God; she believes in Bible. Lucy says, "Any solemn rite, any spectacle of sincere worship, any opening for appeal to God was as welcome to me then as bread to one in extremity of want" (173). This argument shows the belief in God builds the moral strength in a person. Lucy believed in God and destiny more than in any person and institution. She found Church and confession as the way to find her solace when she was haunted with loneliness in the vocation of school at Roe Fossette. She said to Dr. John- "I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these

in closet or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional” (198). It means she never wanted to bend to the buttery words of Catholic priests like Pere Silas; she is happy being a Protestant, where there is a space for her will and wish. Though Pere Silas says “Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold, prosaic” for Lucy. (175) This shows the complex relationship that these writers had with religion.

The concept of conversion is introduced and interrogated thoroughly in the novel *Villette*. A conversion is an act of purifying or, in other words, renouncing the fallen nature and sinful act to accept the God as saviour. However, Lucy Snow’s rejection of leaving Protestantism arouses a furious argument with M. Paul regarding Christianity, Church, and Society. Lucy claims Bible is often interpreted to the benefit of priest rather than for the glory of God “for man’s good was little done; for God’s glory less” (448). She denied the belief of charity and love in Roman Christianity. She criticised that

...poverty was fed and clothed, and sheltered, to bind it by obligation to the ‘Church’; orphanage was reared and educated that it might grow up in the fold of ‘the Church’; men were overwrought, and women most murderously sacrificed, and all laid down a world God made pleasant for his creatures’ good, and took up a cross, monstrous in its galling weight, that they might serve Rome, prove her sanctity, confirm her power, and spread the reign of her ‘Church.’ (447-448)

Thus, Charlotte Bronte unmasked the reality of religion masked in the name of God and Gospel. Then she tries to control her emotions, so Lucy asks “God be merciful to me a sinner!”(449) as she express her true views on the rigid conventionality. M. Paul

also agrees with the liberal spirit of Lucy at the end by insisting that to remain as she is – “remain a Protestant, my little English Puritan; I love Protestantism in you...” (526).

These observations in this chapter gives a strong proof that Charlotte Bronte has given a thought provoking message to the society to awaken the women from their blind subordination and murderous sacrifices.

Womanly and unwomanly traits according to the convention in the novel have been elaborately portrayed with details. Lucy narrates Paulina as a woman of society and Ginevra as her contrast. Lucy observed Miss de Bassompierre as “quiet, womanly sort” (307), by the way she answered Graham, i.e., “with intelligence, with a manner not indeed wholly disindividualised: a tone, a glance, a gesture, here and there, rather animated and quick than measured and stately... so fine and even a polish, so calm and courteous a grace...” (307). Lucy thought these feminine qualities would definitely please men like Graham. On the other hand, Graham points out “Ginevra is neither a pure angel nor a pure-minded woman” (234). This contrasting picture shows what the society expected from a woman of society. Women must be soft, calm, pious, and gentle in all her expressions and deeds. Ginevra, who is playful and careless, cannot be considered as a woman of virtue. Bronte has portrayed Ginevra as a lively character, who loves adventure and who does not care for conventions to give a clear-cut image of good and bad women of the society. However, in *Villette*, even though Ginevra’s character is unchaste and her choice is unchristian, she represents the free spirit and suppressed desires of Lucy. Lucy the self-controlled, self-disciplined protagonist who looks like pale, sober, poor woman hides all her passionate desires under cover. “Mathew Arnold called *Villette* ‘a hideous, undelightful, convulsed, constricted novel’. Convulsed and

constricted it is: convulsed by Lucy's love, first for the handsome Dr John, and later for M Paul; constricted by her desperate struggle to deny and conceal that passion" (Huges-Hallett).

Lucy talks about her confinement comparing it with the condition of the animal in cages. Her eagerness to receive the letter from the outer world of her own is like feeding her soul with the sweet feelings. "I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter"(286). It also reflects the condition of women being Angel in the House or within four walls, how much they are desperate to know the condition of the outer world and people. Then her intentional act of burying the letters written by Dr John deep into the hole of the earth in a sealed container is nothing but her forceful suppression of inner desires. However, the constant denial of M Paul's friendship is unwomanly as Paul pleads with her "be gentle, be pitying, be a woman; look at this poor face and relent" (512). Because what Lucy observes in Paulina, a woman or girl so controlled in her emotions is what we see in Lucy "I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily forgone" (309). This typical personality of women is not a part of Lucy. So "she represents a type of woman before unknown to the realms of novel-land" (McNees 3:623) as said by Susan M. Warning in 1866. G H Lewes saw the novel as "contempt of all Conventions in all things", he writes, "in style, in thought, even in the rate of story-telling, here visibly springs from the independent originality of a strong mind nurtured in solitude" (3:607). Lewes criticised the writing of Charlotte Bronte for its unconventional style and even for



immoral elements. Mathew Arnold in a letter to Mrs. Forester, writes about the author of *Villette*, Currer Bell; he answers his question “why is *Villette* disagreeable?” , “because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage, and, therefore, that is all she can, in fact, put into her book”(610). In all these ways, *Villette* provides a unique experience to readers as we cannot predict the character of Lucy and her fate till the end that is intentionally not concluded with the conventional plot of a happy marriage.

Let us now look at Emily Bronte’s classic *Wuthering Heights*, which was criticised for its uncivilized characters and their behaviour. Society thinks that freedom of individual is always obtained against conventions. In *Athenaeum*, H F Chorley reviews the novel in 1847 “In spite of much power and cleverness; in spite of its truth of life in the remote nooks and corners of England, ‘Wuthering Heights’ is a disagreeable story...” (Contemporary reviews of *Wuthering Heights*). An anonymous reviewed *Wuthering Heights* in Paterson’s magazine in 1848 thus: “we raise the perusal of *Wuthering Heights* as if we had come fresh from a pest-house. Read *Jane Eyre* is our advice but burn *Wuthering Height...*” (Contemporary reviews of *Wuthering Heights*). *Wuthering Heights* was treated as a savage love story filled with cruelty and violence. The passionate impulses are expressed without modification by the usual conventions of society. Victorian society never encouraged the individual behaviours and feelings. It always treated strong femininity as ‘abnormal’. Therefore, Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is locked in attic labelling her unbridled passions as her madness and for her non-conformity to the feminine qualities as expected by Victorian society. In *Wuthering Heights*, all the conventional moral rules have been thrown and twisted. The contradictory nature of Edger with Heathcliff creates a conflicting environment in the novel. This conflict is

between the accepted and unaccepted behaviour of the Victorian Gentleman. In the end, the passionate, eccentric character of Heathcliff and Catherine gains our sympathy rather than the gentleness of Edgar. Emily Bronte strongly defended the passionate love of Cathy and Heathcliff against moral values of the 19th century. She sarcastically remarks the artificiality and hypocrisy of the Orthodox aristocratic people. Through Catherine, she deliberately attacks the beliefs of the society. She boldly says that gentleness is not what a woman looks for in a man; a woman always expects like-minded person and equal partnership in the tie of marriage. Thus, the heart throbbing love story of Catherine and Heathcliff is an outrageous attack on societal moral values of the conventional era. Ertuğrul KOÇ says, “Emily dotes on the taboos of Victorian; she consciously lampoons in her work the ‘constructed nature of tradition’” (118). Emily manages to reveal the two faces of Victorian gentleness by placing Lockwood, a well-educated and cultured man, in his inhuman behaviour. He rubs the wrist of the little child to the broken pane until it bleeds and defends his act is saying that he did that in fear “Terror made me cruel” (E. Bronte 67). This piece of dream suggests that any man on the verge of losing his life or at any such threat will certainly become furious and animalistic. Similarly, Heathcliff becomes wild when he felt insecure about his Catherine. But this hardened reality is opposed and criticised as cruel and uncivilized behaviour by the same Victorian people like Lockwood and Edger. This hidden symbolic message can be defined by Arnold Kettle’s statement “the symbolic novel is an advance on the more fable just in the sense that a symbol can be richer- can touch on more of life- than an abstract moral concept” (201).

*Wuthering Heights* also talks about the fascination of Catharine to become the woman of neighbourhood in order to attain the social standards. Her decision to marry the perfect Victorian gentleman, i.e., Edgar Linton is the disastrous step that led to her depressed life until death. The influence of convention and the act of conformity made her senseless than sensible. She grew more passionate and rebellious, the more she tried to suppress. Thus, the innate versus institutional behaviour is depicted by Emily to show the reality over the fantasies of society. Catherine's self-assertion of sexuality to Nelly that "... I am Heathcliff!"(87) breaks the image of the virtuous Victorian woman into pieces. Being the pregnant wife of Edgar, she clings to Heathcliff sobbing that she would die if he leaves her. She says "I wish I could hold you", and continued, bitterly, till we were both dead'... I only wish us never to be parted" (195-196). This illegal affair between the wife of Edgar and husband of Isabella is strongly objectionable. Their passionate relation is noted as an uncivil behaviour, which has neither social ethics nor Christian values. In this way through the untamed natural character of Catharine Earnshaw, Emily disturbs the old values of society and its practices. The novel says that society in the name of its hierarchical relationship and general yardsticks for womanly behaviour creates a suffocating hell for the free souls, Cathy and Heathcliff.

Another equally important character who grows gradually to an empowered woman from a childish and foolish person is Isabella Linton. Nelly describes her as "A charming lady of eighteen; infantile in manners, though possessed of keen temper, too if irritated" (103-104). She eloped with Heathcliff assuming "Mr Heathcliff is not a fiend; has an honourable soul, and a true one" (106). It is the fatal mistake of Isabella being a learned Victorian aristocrat woman. But this mistaken identity of Heathcliff is the result

of calculation made out according to one of the Victorian societal formulas, which says that a well-dressed man with wealth and pampering words for a woman is always a gentleman and trustworthy. But here, the reality is, intrinsic nature cannot be changed by any circumstances, and it may be covered by sheer pretention as we see in Lockwood, Hindley, Edgar, and Isabella. Thus, Emily tried to say that Victorians are hypocrites. The goodness is not in following the conventions and religious beliefs. It is in humanity, love, and compassion for all without discriminating in the name of the class, creed, race, and gender.

Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are not as popular as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* of her sisters'. *Agnes Grey* is the autobiography of Anne as a governess; her bitter experience is expressed through the character of Agnes. This novel talks more about patriarchy and its cruel thoughts. Anne very sensitively draws the reader's attention towards the suppressed voices and sufferings of women. The ideology of Patriarchy also enforces women to adhere to the age-old practices and demands her passive subordination to the male authority of the society. Though Anne seems to be an ugly, submissive girl, her wish to earn for the family, the way she sustains the pain and ill-treatment in the house of Bloomfield, Murray being a governess, proves her strong determination for attaining the independent and decent earning out of her work without accepting defeat.

Agnes inherited her strong will and independent soul from her mother, who was a squire's daughter but married Agnes's father against the wish of her family and friends, and managed the household economy very smoothly when Richard Grey lost his money in his business venture. Her mother was an "active managing housewife, with hands and

head continually occupied with household labours and household economy” (A. Bronte 1068), who was once a splendid and highly accomplished woman. This lively nature of her mother and her decision to leave her splendid life for love is not common among the Victorian women. Money and marriage were always preferred to love and companionship in the marriage market. Marriage for women is to attain the desired higher position in the society and for men to get a beautiful woman for his service.

When Agnes realised it is hard to maintain the household expenditure by her mother alone Agnes wants to help her. However, her mother repeatedly rejects it. Instead, she tells Agnes to “go and practise music, or play with the kitten” (A. Bronte 1068). Then, her intention to become a governess is met with intense opposition: “What would you do?” asks her sister, “without me or mamma to speak and act for you ...?” “You think”, Replies Agnes, “because I always do as you bid me, I have no judgment of my own” (1070). This conversation reveals how Agnes’ ability is underestimated, and particularly how the family neglects her desire, which (family) is the base of the conventional society. It means girls were taught to live like the Angel of the House, were not expected to work like a man to lead the family. If a boy expressed his desire to work and earn in the place of Agnes, then it would be a different situation in the same patriarchal family or society.

Then Agnes’s life as a governess in the house of Bloomfield is a horrible experience. Terry Eagleton said in *Agnes Grey*, “we have ... a more direct and detailed account of the social violence to which the governess is subjected than anything we find elsewhere in the Brontes” (123). As soon she is introduced to her pupils, she observes that Tom inherits all the inhuman, brutal behaviour of the egoistic male. His sadistic

nature is seen in his torture of innocent birds. This act is even encouraged by his father and uncle without a word of objection. This callous attitude towards the helpless being indirectly shows the sadistic nature of aristocrat male society. The answer to Agnes's inquiry about why Tom catches birds is an irony on irresponsible act of parenting the child:

‘Why do you catch them?’

‘Papa says they do harm.’

‘And what do you do with them when you catch them?’

‘Different things, sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean to roast alive’(A. Bronte 1076).

Agnes's objections to his wickedness and her advice are not taken seriously by Tom: he says “papa knows how I treat them and he never blames me for it: he says it is just what he used to do when he was a boy” (1076). Even uncle Robson encourages him saying that he was “a fine boy” and his mamma “doesn't care!” so for Tom “it is not wicked” to kill innocent birds. (1076)

Anne through this incident wants to tell the society that what they call manly nature is inhuman and in the name of gendered behaviour, society is misleading the children. This kind of encouragement also harms the life of many innocent people along with birds. The socialization of boys and girls are deliberately done to maintain the line of difference and to implement the power relationship. Where man is encouraged to rule and ruin, the woman is encouraged to loose and remain passive along with other animals

of nature. This attitude is condemned further by Agnes in her discourse on society and religious duty.

Agnes and Nancy discussed God, Bible and church. In the discussion poor Nancy a cottager who loved neither God nor man hesitated by knowing the teachings in the first epistle, in which St John says, “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1116). On hearing this Nancy expresses that it is impossible to love the neighbours, who hate them and look at them as untaught, uncivilized stupid and brutish, laugh at their misery and don’t care for their miserable life. Then the advice of Mr. Hatfield to attend the Church regularly “instead of sitting poring over Bible at home” (1118) to purify their sin, makes Nancy to ask the innocent question “if I can get no good by reading my Bible and’ saying my prayers at home, what good shall I get by going to Church?”(1118). This question is for the whole conservative society and its blind belief. How can a man purify his sinful deeds merely by going to Church without mending his behaviour? How is the Church superior to the Bible? Why does God reside in Church, when he says he dwells in all creatures? It also attacks the people who are misleading the society in the name of God. It suggests that meaningless practices are insisted upon by the people of the Church to establish their control and to be the centre of power. Thus, Anne is against conventions of society that treats rich people with privileges and poor as its parasites. At the same time her observations regarding the inhumane behaviour of upper-class people with the poor cottagers is an irony on the pompous life of wealthy society.

Even Agnes finds herself dragged around by her pupils like a pony, which, she thinks, was “reversing the order of things”: “I found they had no notion of going with me;

I must go with them wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand exactly as it suited their fancy ... they seemed to prefer the dirtiest places and the most dismal occupations” (81). It shows there was no moral consideration or value for the poor governess because she is of a lower-class and she is there to serve. Anne indirectly attacks this arrogant nature of upper-class society by giving all the details of Agnes’s position in Bloomfield. She thus intended to say there are no such rules in Christianity or any religion to harm and threaten the life of innocents for selfish desires. Agnes fears “already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting: and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last, beneath the baneful influence of such a mode of life” (1123). She thought that character of Mr Weston is the promising one in the world where the human excellence was only a dream, because the society is filled with people like Bloomfield, Murray, Hatfield, Ashby and many more who are inhumane. These statements are the sarcastic remarks on the behaviour of wealthy people in the society.

In Victorian society horse riding, animal hunting, gambling are some of the traits of gentlemanliness. As this practice also shows manliness, it was encouraged by the society to its younger generation without thinking its adverse impact on children. Children learn it as a great amusement without knowing the value of other life and its pain. So Agnes’s bold step of dropping a flat stone “upon his intended victims” (1091), instantly crushing them is the only means she found out to put an end to the cruel amusement of Tom. This daring, outrageous act of Agnes’s is an answer to the rampant cynicism of Tom and his uncle. Further, she defends her act as her duty being a



governess. But Mrs. Bloomfield mocks and laughs at the way Agnes tried to confine Tom to merciful nature. She points out Agnes “killed the poor birds by wholesale in that shocking manner, and putting the dear boy to such misery for a mere whim.”(1092). This unbelievable incident is the outcome of humiliated, ill-treated, long suppressed emotions of a good human being like Agnes, which ultimately breaks out to resist the merciless world. Here she used the tit for tat policy or followed the proverb ‘thorn should be taken off by thorn.’ Totally, the experience of Agnes depicts the bare facts of society, its hypocrisy, its masked faces, practices and stereotypes.

Likewise, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which is considered as the first feminist novel of the age talks about women’s conditions and questions elaborately. The novel portrays the different stages of a woman’s life and her difficulties through the protagonist Helen as a girl, lover, wife, mother, divorcee, widow and remarried woman. Along this transformation, Helen also grows into a professional artist earning a livelihood and attaining her independent status in the middle of pitiless, gossiping, criticizing society. The strong character of Helen set an example to the Victorian women to cultivate the independent spirit and to overcome the challenges hopefully. As quoted in the article “*The Female Artist within the Framing Narrative in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*” Leaver believes that “*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, angry, restless and confrontational, functions as a centrally important document that makes a significant contribution to what is often sometimes simplistically called the Woman Question” (qtd. in Pourgiv 131). Ward states, “In its stark portrayal of a dysfunctional, abusive marriage, the *Tenant* shattered the pretences of marital harmony so beloved of many Victorians” (qtd. in Pourgiv 131). Shaw said “...Women were often regarded as lacking the mighty attribute and possessing

the evil one” (qtd. in Pourgiv 131) in the Victorian age. But Anne sketched the image of her woman artist with the positive role and masculine traits, which was against the conventional role of women and cultural aspects of the society as said by Shaw.

Anne mainly upholds the social problems and its evil effects on women through the life of Helen Huntingdon. Helen is attracted to the outer appearance of Arthur and his disguised nature. Then she got married to him hoping to reform his habit of drinking and bad manners. She was a typical woman within the Victorian framework. She decided to be a good wife. She decided that “I would ... devote my life -- and all its powers to the promotion and preservation”, “...I will save him...” (1276). Her intentions are revealed in the discussion with her aunt about marrying Huntingdon:

‘Is he a good man? ... Is he a man of *principle*?’

‘Perhaps not, exactly ... if he had someone to advise him, and Remind him of what is right-’

‘... You yourself would willingly undertake to be his teacher?.... He is, I believe, full ten years older than you - how is it that you are So beforehand in moral acquirements?’

‘ ... you have made him out to be both deficient in sense and principle, by your own confession-’

‘Then, my sense and my principle are at his service!’

‘That sounds presumptuous, Helen! Do you think you have enough for both; and do you imagine your merry, thoughtless profligate would allow himself to be guided by a young girl like you?’

‘No; I should not wish to guide him; but I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve (him) ... from destruction.

‘But still you think it may be truth?’(1276).

‘Nor do I, ... I hate the sins I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation ....’

‘... He is ... banded with a set of loose, profligate young men... whose chief delight is to wallow in vice, and vie with each other who can run fastest and farthest down the headlong road, to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.’

‘Then, I will save him from them.’

‘... you little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!’

‘... I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his. ... I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue - God grant me success!’(1276).

In this way, she was determined to strive hard to lead a role of Angel in the House, as she thinks self-sacrifice would give her satisfaction in the married life. She

wanted to be a good wife more than anything. But the unacceptable behaviour of Arthur, his friends and his illicit affair disheartened Helen's belief. She made up her mind to leave her husband for his alcoholism and take the responsibility of looking after her son. She escaped to the Wildfell Hall for the sake of her son's good future. She took her passion for painting as her serious profession to earn and live. Before this, Helen in her young age used painting as a means to attract Arthur for the courtship. Even he pays attention to Helen's art, only with the purpose of approaching her. Now the weakness of Helen vanishes with the time. She learnt the difference between romance and reality.

After leaving Arthur, Helen is introduced as an unknown woman of the province "in mourning- not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning- and she is quite young, they say- not above five or six and twenty-but so reserved!"(1190). Fergus thinks of her as "a witch" to have inhabited a place like Wildfell Hall, which is in ruins and which is far off from the people's habitation. She is no more the representation of the conventionally desirable woman: she is objectified for the gossips and scorns of society. She is treated as a fallen woman. People wrongly believed that she had an affair with Fredrick Lawrence. Her position in the society as an artist being a widow is portrayed as undesirable in the conventional society. But her diary given to Gilbert answers all the questions of the cultural society, and it clears the doubts of many by putting an end to the foul plays of jealous people of the same society.

The most reserved, self-centered, self-respected and self-reliant woman is always questioned for her 'strange lifestyle' by the mainstream social ideology. Society never wanted to see a girl or woman to live independently. This situation is clearly revealed by

Helen in the discussion of socialization of a boy like Arthur, with Mrs. Markham and her family.

Mrs. Markham remarks that Arthur's childish behaviour at the age of five and his attachment to his mother is more feminine than masculine nature. When, Arthur is about to cry at the offer of ruby nectar-the wine to drink in the house of Markham, Mrs. Markham laughs at the way he was brought up by Mrs. Graham –“the poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him, if you persist in-” (1200) and advised her to “endeavour to fortify him against temptation, not to remove it out of his way” (1201). But the anxious Helen defends her principles behind his bringing up- saying “it is all very well to talk about noble resistance, and trials of virtue; but for fifty- or five hundred men that have yielded to temptation, show me one that has had virtue to resist. And why should I take it for granted that my son will be one in a thousand?-and not rather prepare for the worst, and suppose he will be like his- like the rest of mankind, unless I take care to prevent it?”(1201). These words are about the society and individual if hundreds and thousands are there to influence our behaviour and to curb our virtues than it is a blind belief to follow what Mrs. Markham has advised. This firm belief of Helen is out of her misinterpretation of Arthur Huntingdon's character in her youthful, inexperienced days. The fear of losing his son to the bad habits of his father is seen in the expression “he will be like his-” (1201). This is also a lesson to the society and readers regarding the problems of social evils. Anne blames the fallen people of society who influence the innocents. The debate of socialization of children further reaches to a furious stage of near quarrel. The example quoted by Mr. Markham and the following question and answer of Mrs. Graham upholds the social differentiations

between nurturing a boy and a girl in the name of conventions without considering the difficulties that a girl has to face in the society.

... If you were to rear an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on the mountain-side, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest. (1202)

Accepting the idea of upbringing, a child to face the unforeseen temptations and miseries in the outer world Mrs. Graham asked, “would you use the same argument with regard to girl?”(1202) she ironically answered “certainly not” (1202). and sarcastically addresses Mr. and Mrs. Markham “No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hothouse plant-taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil...” (1202). Then with an irony in the tone she asks them very softly, “will you be so good as to inform me, why you make this distinctions? Is it you think she has no virtue?”(1202).

Her answer for her own questions is an eloquent debate over the gender-biased conventions of society. It gives all the details of how society disapproved the instinct, interest and independent life of the other sex, i.e., Women. This vast self-centered world of man and his ideologies of the hegemonic rule is criticized by Anne through Helen. The traditional way of labelling the traits of masculine and feminine nature is subverted by her principles. Indirectly she insists that if girlish behaviour does not harm anyone let it be a part of her son’s character. She said, “if I thought he would grow up to be what you

call a man of the world-one that has “seen life”, and glories in his experience, even though he should so far profit by it, as to sober down, at length, into a useful and respected member of society-I would rather that he died tomorrow!-rather a thousand times!”(1203). This hardened wish of a loving and protective mother like Helen for her ‘only treasure’, from whom she never wanted to be separated, shows that she is afraid of the cruel society, its inhuman assistance and misguiding advice.

On the other side, Mrs. Graham’s life has become the talk of the town. Her private residence, unknown past and moreover her young age and beauty are the ingredients used to cook up the stories around her. She is considered as an immodest woman of society; people tried to imagine all kinds of stories to spoil her name. This type of stories is created because she is not under the shadow of any man. Rose told her brother that the opinion of the Wilson, the Vicar and their mamma is that “if she were a proper person, she would not be living there by herself” (1241). The Victorian society expected to see a woman in the company of her father or husband or her caretaker. But Helen never considered all these as necessary to lead an independent life. Narrow-minded people like Miss. Wilson; jealous people like Eliza started to spread rumours in the society to defame Helen. They strongly opposed her presence in the social gathering. They seeded doubts in her friend circles and neighbours regarding her husband and even suspected “if she ever had any?”(1231). The gossips ultimately disturbed the relation of Mrs. Graham with Markham’s family who considered Mrs. Graham as their good friend. Gilbert is the only person who did not heed to all this nonsense and believed it was done intentionally by Miss Wilson in the party. But weak-minded people like his mother and sister got influenced by such tales. Gilbert denies the truth of these stories by making a universal

statement “the foundation is in the wickedness and falsehood of the world” (1237). As his mother said “there must be some foundation” (1237) for all these talks. His declaration shows how mercilessly people of the society tried to defame the life of a woman mere for their amusement. Then the scornful talks of Vicar and his warning to Mrs. Graham are filled with sheer mockery on the headless societal thoughts. His anguish to discipline his children by setting a bad example of Mrs. Graham’s secluded life and the stories around her shows that society never intended to know the reality. The people are not ready to see the changes in the rudiments of moral life. In the name of tradition, the society has restricted our thoughts. So people thought that the life of Mrs. Graham might be scandalous by looking at her lifestyle and comparing it with the characteristics of an ideal woman. It shows the culture as strongly cultivated a few notions in the society in the name of good and bad. Those notions ruled and ruined the life of many helpless women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. It was as if the portrayal of a female figure, as Armstrong claims, had become the center of “the struggle among competing ideologies” of the period. (5)

Thus, Jansson regards *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as one of those “rebellious texts” (32) that use images of the religious women. Anne ruled out the picture of Patmore’s ‘Angel in the House’ as impossible in the real life. Though Helen was ready to stick to the assigned role of a good wife, she was not allowed to live peacefully by her good Husband and healthy society. Anne opens the eyes of her readers to the wicked faces of society and warns them to be conscious and patient in judging the real nature of people, rather than appreciating the pretence (Arthur Huntingdon) and cursing the reality (Mrs. Graham).



## Unconventional Protagonists

Bronte sisters filled their novels with plain, obscure female protagonists, who are not attractive and angel-like figures, that the male society prefers. Jane Eyre, Lucy snow, Catharine, Agnes Grey, Shirley, Caroline and Helen Huntingdon all are active, spirited women. They represent the women of middle class and their desires. The physical appearance, family background and their interests are simple and similar. All of them dreamt of a unique status in the society, i.e., to attain empowered status, so they could lead their life according to their wish and emphasize their rights equally with their husbands. None of them wanted to be an Angel of the House: their burning desire was to be an economically independent individual. They never cared for their appearance, looks and attires. They believed in their own principles, self-confidence and hard work to attain the goal.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* refuses to adopt the conventional image of the ideal Victorian woman. When Rochester describes her as "a very angel" and as his "comforter", she protested: "I am not an Angel... and I will not be one till I die; I will be myself" (159). The refusal to confine her desire to the limited sphere of domesticity as expected by patriarchal society is explicitly stated by Jane, which was an unconventional idea during the time for women. Even the portrayal of her character and appearance is intentionally done in an unconventional way by Charlotte as she expressed her views with her sisters Emily and Anne as recollected in Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*:

I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours. (161)

When most writers considered it was not possible to make a Heroine attractive unless she is painted with beautiful features and feminine qualities, Jane Eyre initiated a new female protagonist to the world of Victorian fiction. Jane is introduced as an orphan but passionate “naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit” (31) in the house of Mrs. Reeds. Jane as a governess in Thornfield tries to beautify her looks by dressing neatly and carefully, but this wish seems to be strange to herself –“I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want to beauty would permit” (95). She regretted not being handsome and “wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; to be tall and ...” (95). to be feminine. This insecure feeling surfaced in Jane when she saw Blanche Ingram, Rochester’s love. By creating this situation, Bronte portrays the fears of middle-class ordinary women who do not have wealth and even beauty to attract a suitor for their life. She also sows a positive thought in such women of society by placing Jane as the real love of Rochester in spite of her poor background and pale beauty. Charlotte defines beauty by the intellect and active spirit of women rather than by the docile outer appearance. Jane appraises the beauty of Helen Burns as “-a beauty neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance” (51). Here it is the beauty of her intelligence and knowledge, not the physical beauty of youthful age. Jane emphasizes on the intellectual beauty of Helen, which is real and unpolished.

Charlotte continued this plain unconventional obscure characters in her other novels. *Villette* has a marginalized, ordinary, unattractive, weak woman as its central figure. Lucy Snow narrates her personality as cowardly, incapable, impractical. She describes how she “shrunk into the sloth-like a snail into its shell” (84) when she

imagined facing sixty pupils for the first time in Rue Fossette. Ms. Ginevra pointed out to her “you have no attractive accomplishments-no beauty. As to admirers, you hardly know what they are; you can’t even talk on the subject: you sit dumb when the other teachers quote their conquests” (157). Lucy by gaining the love and confidence of M Paul the most respected and knowledgeable teacher of Rue Fossette and establishing a good relationship and name with the people whom she came across, stands as a role model to Paulina and other aristocrat beautiful women of the age. Her character matters more than the initial opinions on her timid, rootless life. The simplicity of Lucy is shown in the particular choice of her clothing, dress colour and texture of the material. She is juxtaposed with Ginevra’s lavish lifestyle and colourful, stylish attires. This will be analysed in detail in the following argument. Charlotte, though she did not try to portray Lucy in good material accomplishments, equipped her with gradual growth and maturity. Thus, we have a round characterization of Lucy with all interesting developments in contrast to the flat unimproved, immovable, immature characterization of Ginevra with useless adventures and meaningless risks.

*Shirley*, the story of two main characters, also sets unconventional traits in the female characterization, although it does not have plain, pale protagonists as we see in the above novels. The two different characters represent ‘Angel in the House’ and ‘Angel out of the House’ in the Victorian society. Shirley, the tomboyish captain of the house bestowed with a male name and masculine responsibilities is described as a girl with “sprightly spirit” (193) by Mr. Helstone in contrast to Caroline, who is passive and resembles her aunt an Angel of the House. Assigning the man’s position and job to Shirley, Charlotte delivered a note to the women in a society that a woman is not mere a

woman: she is “something more” (198). This reality tries to establish the equality between men and women of society and to shatter the different spheres of society. Shirley introduces herself in an esteemed voice, “I am an esquire: Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position; it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood...” (211-212). Her property “comprising an excellent cloth-mill, dye house, warehouse, together with the messuage, gardens, and outbuildings, termed Hollow’s Cottage; but her exultation being quite undisguised was singularly inoffensive; and, for her serious thoughts, they tended elsewhere. To admire the great, reverence the good, and be joyous with the genial, was very much the bent of Shirley’s soul; she mused therefore on the means of following this bent far oftener than she pondered on her social superiority” (231). Shirley’s independent life being the person of the manor never made her feel superior or to act in an egoistic manner. Her character is opposite to the majority of aristocratic male who are least concerned of poor people as observed by Caroline.

Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress. She was agreeable to the eye. Her height and shape were not unlike Miss Helstone’s; perhaps in stature she might have the advantage by an inch or two. She was gracefully made, and her face, too, possessed a charm as well described by the word grace as any other. It was pale naturally, but intelligent, and of varied expression. She was not a blond, like Caroline. Clear and dark were the characteristics of her aspect as to colour. Her face and brow were clear, her eyes of the darkest gray (no green lights in them, - transparent, pure, neutral gray), and her hair of the darkest brown. Her features were distinguished-by which I do not mean that they were high, bony, and

Roman, being indeed rather small and slightly marked than otherwise, but only that they were, to use a few French words “fins, gracious, spirituals:”- mobile they were and speaking: but their changes were not to be understood, nor their language interpreted all at once. (209)

This physical description of Shirley shows that feminine features never hinder any women to exercise her work or to carry on the public responsibility. It tells the society; masculinity occurs with social position and power, so it is an adoptable character. But the conventional society considered that masculine nature is the inborn trait of a man. Thus, it labelled any manly behaviour is unfeminine and disgraceful for a female. However, the description of Shirley’s physical appearance and social position awakens the Victorian people from blind belief that too much learning never makes a woman look masculine. Even the active participation in the public sphere never diminishes the feminine qualities.

Thus, Helene Moglen contextualizes the nature of feminine conflicts in Shirley:

By the time Bronte sat down to write Shirley she had so matured psychologically, artistically, and intellectually that she could place the psychosexual problems that had long concerned her within a larger social context... the time had come for her to confront more directly the nature of female oppression and to consider as analytically as possible the way in which this form of oppression was related to other: to find the connections which could be drawn between women and the poor and socially dispossessed, between women and unemployed labourers, between women and children. (158)

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* gives us ferocious figures of Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Linton. Catherine Earnshaw resembles the nature of wild moor. Catherine as a child of Earnshaw was not of "cleaner manners", she 'grinned and spitted at the stupid little thing' (49) when she saw little Heathcliff for the first time in *Wuthering Heights*. She was an excellent horse rider at the age of six and "she chose to whip" (47). She was more notorious than her brother and Heathcliff. Nelly Dean explains her uncontrollable nature to Lockwood:

She had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; and she put all of us our patience fifty times and oftener In a day: from the hour she came downstairs till the hour she went to bed, we had not a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at high-water mark; her tongue always going- singing, laughing, and plaguing would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip she was-. (52)

She was commanding in her attitude as a child and hated to be scolded by any for her unfeminine behaviour. She was defying her father and family members with "bold, saucy look, and her ready words" (53). The careless attitudes were shocking to Nelly and others in the family. Her father was worried about the behaviour of motherless child; he was pleased to see her rare gentleness and strongly urged her to have the polite, calm, gentle expression of a girl-"why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?"(54).

Cathy's unpredictable behaviour, the manly demonstration in riding the horse and using the whip, negligence for any kind of elderly advice in the name of God or love, untamed tongue and unfeminine tasks done with hardened Heathcliff is enough to address

her as 'the child of storm' as the critic Lord David Cecil said. These qualities stirred the conventional image of the woman and created havoc in the society. Critics urged to burn *Wuthering Heights*, as it would mislead the younger generation of the society by its uncontrolled passionate characterization. Although Charlotte admired and defended Emily's writing, she worried about the reputation of their family as *Wuthering Heights* was strongly objected to by the readers. After reading the reviews of the novel she has written the editor's preface explaining the character of Ellis Bell and her unknown hands in creating such a powerful spirits like Catherine and Heathcliff-“Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done” (C. Bronte 7).

Emily's seclusion from the outer world made her write an “original” and “truthful” story without the influence of societal conventions. This truth was indigestible for conservative minds like Elizabeth Rigby, who rejected the novel as “an anti-Christian” composition. Charlotte's preface seems to carry an ironical note to the ideal society than an apology for what Emily has written-“Had Ellis Bell been a lady or a gentleman accustomed to what is called ‘the world,’...then doubtless it would have been wider -more comprehensive: whether it would have been more original or more truthful is not too certain”(6). Here ‘the world’ may connote world of norms, morals, values, religious beliefs and accepted rules of manmade society.

Catherine's accidental encounter with the aristocratic lifestyle of Thurstcross Grange changed her opinion and muted her natural instinct. She started to compare the lifestyles and societal standards of her with the Linton's. She returned to *Wuthering Heights* as a transformed Victorian woman. She was no more “a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze all us breathless” as Nelly observes.

Hindley exclaims in delight, “why, Cathy you are quite a beauty! I should scarcely have known you: you look like a lady now” (61). The transformation in the physical appearance was unbelievable for Heathcliff. Cathy was in more and more pressure and dilemma under the desire of attaining higher class, status, and good wealth. Catherine’s love started to swing in between Heathcliff and Linton. She grew wilder and irresistible as the day passed without Heathcliff. The arrival of Mr. Heathcliff filled her with endless joys and fierce passions. The suffering of Catherine and the revenge of Heathcliff is the result of conventional Victorian society.

Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have pious and feminine characters with the fate of attaining empowered ends though subdued to the conventional marriage and happy conclusion. Brontë’s novels indicate liberation of woman from the tangles of male authority. That the women should learn how to face the difficulties and to overcome, without losing her self-dignity is the primary concern of the novels. *Agnes Grey*, the autobiography of a governess, serves the reader with a document of woman’s struggle for livelihood. The protagonist of the novel is a typical girl of middle-class society and Methodist principles, her simplicity contrasted with the firm decision to bear the children of Bloomfield’s and Murray’s family. She self-defined her character in these lines

‘They may crush, but they shall not subdue me!’

‘Tis of thee that I think, not of them’ (1084).

The confidence of Agnes helped her to keep her patience in the extreme situation. But she lost her nature of tolerance on the day she came across the uncontrollable cruel



attitudes of Tom. So she outrageously attempted to put an end to the brutal amusements of Tom by smashing the birds to death. Later she defended her act as her duty to Mrs. Bloomfield. Thus, for the first time she rebelled against the inhuman tendency of Tom and his family. However, this rational behaviour was discouraged, and she was suspended from her job as an unfit governess.

Here Anne criticizes the parenting qualities of Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield. She rendered a valuable lesson to the reader regarding the false theories of socializing the children. The failure of parents in bringing up the good behaviour in their children is mocked by many instances in the novel. Mr. Bloomfield, who is a short-tempered never thought his attitude is influencing the character of his son Tom and his daughters. He always expected Agnes to discipline the children. On one instance, he ordered Agnes to call the children who are playing in the 'deep soft snow' in their barefoot without wearing gloves or hat or coat to avoid the severe cold. Then she requested him to call them up as "they won't listen to her." The words he roared to call them is totally crude "come in with you, you filthy brats; or I'll horsewhip you everyone!"(1085). When they turned inside at the moment they heard his voice; he told Agnes to "Do go after 'em and see them made decent, for heaven's sake!"(1086). This incident and his harsh words are filled with rudeness; he is treating the children as animals without considering what they cultivate by his personality and talks. The irony here is, he directs the governess to make them decent in their exterior looks, but he does not think he is the reason for their indecency and inhuman acts. Again, seeing his children grinding eggshells on the lovely carpet, which has gone unnoticed by Agnes, he says, "any harm! Why look there! Just look at that carpet, and see-was there ever anything like it in a Christian house before?"

No wonder your room is not fit for a pigsty-no wonder your pupils are worse than a litter of pigs!-no wonder- oh! I declare, it puts me quite past my patience!” and he departed, shutting the door after him with a bang, that “made the children laugh” (1088). The question is what are the principles of Christian house? What are its values? If grinding the eggshells and killing the birds are not harmful deeds, then what is Christianity directing the people for? Anne very cleverly unfolds the faults of patriarchy and headlong people like Mr. Bloomfield, who teach the principles of Christianity and conventions of a good House.

Thus, Agnes put forth a list of do's and don'ts of conventional and non-conventional beliefs in the novel. Though it is a story of a Governess, it has many layers of meaningful hidden sarcastic remarks on society, and it suggests the men along with women of society to mend their ways of life and to cultivate the rational set of mind. The laughter and mirth of uncle Robson on the stubborn, cruel nature of Tom is the Shameful act of the elderly person, which misleads the innocent child. He exclaimed as if Tom had achieved a noble thing in his tender age “Damme, but the lad has some spunk in him, too. Curse me, if ever I saw a nobler little scoundrel than that. He's beyond petticoat government already: by God! He defies mother, granny, governess, and all! Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Tom, I'll get you another brood tomorrow” (1091). Here, the appreciation is an example for improper socialization. If the petticoat government teaches you to be a good human being and a good Christian then what's wrong in obeying their advice? This question is indirectly asked to the conservative patriarchal society. It has given a call to the society to leave such an ardent behaviour to establish an environment where the policy of 'live and let live' flourishes.

The changes in the name of the protagonist in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* from Helen to Helen Huntingdon, Helen Graham and Helen Gilbert shows the major changes in the character, who undergoes an adventurous life after opting to marry Arthur Huntingdon in her youthful, inexperienced days. She faced domestic violence, left the husband for the sake of her son's good future, and led her life under disguise in a secluded place- Wildfell Hall as Mrs. Graham, supporting her livelihood by her artistic skill without bothering about the societal people and their piercing talks. She stood for her responsibilities in all the times as a wife, a caring mother and a good human being in spite of difficulties and challenges. Her character is a striking picture of a Hero, who faces the unexpected dangers of life with courage and faith to win over. She was hardened by the bad experiences; she used to cry for the good things and often laughed at the bad incidents.

Anne created a feminine and feminist novel for the first time in the Victorian fictional world. She touched every heart by the tale of Helen. Helen was an Angel in House; she was "tedious and dull", interested in painting and sketching but hated to be alone and to read books. She was beautiful with all delicate feminine features and fair complexion. The fate of her was dark enough to set cloud on her hopes and happiness. But she proved that a young lady of beauty and talent can challenge the unfair consequences of life. She boldly stood against the conventions of society and turned deaf to the worldly gossips on her character. By calling Gilbert unworthy to give the explanation and to reveal her real identity, she declares that "people who care for rumours are fools: they couldn't understand her story. If these people suspect her character, then she doesn't care 'Go! I won't care what you think of me!'"(1259). This

attitude is a setback to the conservative society. Thus, Mrs. Helen Graham is an exceptional woman of beauty with brain and a spirit independent of Victorian society. Her character inspires women of all age- young, married, divorced, widowed and those who decide to remarry. The novel is a blueprint of the woman's life and its different phases with a set of cautions to follow before or after making important decisions. It shows that the reality is contradictory to the imaginative beliefs of a person.

### **Unconventional Choices**

Bronte sisters flooded their novels with all new ideas and ideals. The unusual female protagonists find out equally unique personalities as their heroes of admiration. They are extremely attracted to the man, who can afford equal companionship and who can respect their individuality and integrity. Their preferences are against the conventions of Victorian manly traits. Victorian men are expected to have honesty, respectability, honour, loyalty, intelligence and moral righteousness (Hesse). Rochester, Heathcliff, and Arthur Huntingdon do not resemble the traditional Victorian Heroes. Rochester is not good looking, his age is twice the age of Jane, he has many affairs and a secret marriage, and he was a tyrant master who locked her first wife in an attic. At the end when Jane accepts to marry him he looked like 'the caged eagle, whose gold-tinged eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson' (427). Therefore the comparison of St. John Rivers with Rochester shows Jane Eyre's choice is an unconventional, unfair bargain between "a graceful Apollo" with "Grecian profile" to a "Vulcan", who is "blind and lame" (437). This bargain is not merely between two persons; it's between real and unreal personalities, conventional and non- conventional society. Charlotte by rejecting the Christian young, handsome, good-natured St. John

Rivers reversed the strong assumptions of Victorian manliness. Jane's choice can be interpreted as a man who looks at other as his equal is better than a man who demands his partner to serve his orders. This rare mindset is in Rochester as he says:

'you are human and fallible.'

'I am: so are you-what then?'

'The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the

'Divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted' (135).

But the courtship and marriage of Jane and Rochester was reviewed by an anonymous in the Spectator as "there is a low tone of behaviour (rather than of morality) in the book; and, what is worse than all, neither the hero nor the heroine attracts sympathy. The reader cannot see anything loveable in Mr. Rochester, or why he should be so deeply in love with Jane Eyre; so that we have intense emotion without cause" (qtd. in Lodge 10). As I observed Jane loved Rochester for his humane nature and true love. She never gave importance to looks and beauty. She is plain as she looks. Therefore, she found the soul mate in Rochester than in a handsome rich partner.

Emily's Heathcliff is the embodiment of monstrous behaviour. Throughout the novel, he is addressed as evil, Satan, an imp, a hellish villain, an incarnate goblin, gypsy and so on. Watson says, "Heathcliff has been considered both Protagonist and villain" (40). Catherine's love for Heathcliff is indigestible for the conservatives. Because her choice is more degrading in all terms- Heathcliff is an orphan, vagabond, classless, uncivilized, and the uncultured other of Victorian society. In the Victorian society,

gentlemanliness is measured by a man's social status and outer appearance that was totally absent in Heathcliff until he attains the desired position in the society. But the brutish masculine nature of him is more pleasing to Cathy than the mild lamb-like gentleness of Linton. She praises Heathcliff's genuine quality with Isabella "He's not a rough diamond- a pearl- containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man. I never say to him, "Let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them;"..." (105). She rejects Edgar's gentlemanliness, as she says to Nelly "I want some living creature to keep me company in my happiness! Edgar is sulky, because I'm glad of a thing that does not interest him: ..." (101). These opinions on Heathcliff even after her marriage to Edgar show that her love is eternal for Heathcliff and his for her. Still she accepted the social standards once and followed its confinements as Nance Armstrong's said in the work *Gender and the Victorian Novel*:

Marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must..., or else face the degradation of impoverishment or, worse, the need to work for a living (97).

Catherine's misfortune to marry a man whom she loved made her follow the second advice of Armstrong. But her life turned into hell. She enjoyed neither her social status nor her marital life. Catherine's sufferings started after she opted to live according to conventional society. She grew "damp and pale" (91). When Heathcliff leaves her because of her changed attitudes. Then their decision to unite in their death is a unique step they took to escape from the suffocating conventionality. Moreover, the rejection of salvation after death to attain a peaceful Heaven is an anti-Christian message in the novel. Heathcliff and Catherine made the moors as their paradise of love after their death and

some people have seen their ghosts roaming happily over the place. Thus, Emily intentionally made an unconventional choice to express her hidden feelings through the character of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Arthur Huntingdon of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a symbolic figure of social evils like alcoholism, wife beating, and illegal relations that were in a great number in those days. This handsome man with all kinds of negative traits, who wishes to enjoy the life without bothering about his manly duties as a responsible husband and father, is depicted to show the people that outer appearance misleads anyone. Helen's love for Arthur and her innocence in assuming his reformation after marriage is a lesson to the inexperienced women of society. Helen knows Huntingdon's restless behaviour and spoiled nature before marriage, but her womanly nature made her believe the tricky talks of Arthur. In the words of McMaster Huntingdon is—"An unscrupulous woman's maneuvers, a friend's broken heart, his fiancée's distress- everything moves [Huntingdon] to mindless giggles" (359). In contrast to his fallen character, Anne portrayed Gilbert Markham to show how a man of unconventional belief and human behaviour can be a perfect gentleman in the same Victorian society.

Gilbert Markham is a sensible man of good manners though he rejects society and its beliefs. Markham supports Mrs. Graham in her stance. He appreciates her artistic skill and respects her as a professional artist. He rejected the gossips of people as a real gentleman. One of the reviewers in Examiner calls Gilbert a 'Hero' in 1848. Many of the readers hesitate to accept his heroism because he stands for rational thoughts. He was behind reason than a blind follower of societal conventions. He too exhibits his uncontrolled temper in a fight with Lawrence. Along with the people of the novel, readers

too would be shocked by the brutal attack of Gilbert. Apart from this, he is a man every woman looks for as her soul mate. In this sense, Gilbert is a new Hero of unconventional thoughts with the true Christian personality in the mid of changing moralities of Victorian society. The marriage of Gilbert and Helen also breaks the traditional practice of marriage, which demands the man should be elder and wealthier than woman.

Lucy Snow's attraction towards the little M Paul who is dark, 'plain', 'pungent', and 'austere' is opposite to Helen's choice of Huntingdon. Lucy measures the personality of M Paul by his intelligence and deeds than by his outer looks. Likewise, M Paul noticed her intelligence and sensual beauty beneath her pale and quite appearance. Then the characterization of Ginevra as a most beautiful woman without brain is another contrast to Paulina. Ginevra rejects Dr. John for being "bourgeois" and calls him "slave." Her choice to marry Hamal, who belongs to higher rank, but of not good qualities, is again a contrast. Ginevra choose Hamal according to her lifestyle than the societal expectations. On the other side, aristocratic Paulina's marriage with Dr John blurs the line of the class system and ideologies of society. Anne tries to change the views of people with the changing time through this nonconventional choice. Then the unmarried single status of Lucy Snow in the end of the novel conveys women can also live independently without the support of a male.

However, Shirley and Caroline are happily married at the end of the novel. Their dilemma in the matter of marriage and the decisions of each of them before the happy conclusion shows the insecure life of women. Many incidents in the novel are unconventional. The choices of female protagonists almost throw away the norms of religion and society. Charlotte put an end to the stereotypical names of the girl child by



calling her heroine Shirley. According to the name, she stuffed the character of Shirley with manly courage and position. Shirley's every step was an encouragement to the woman of society to imagine the liberty of independent status and authoritative power. She influences Caroline, Miss Ainley and Mrs Pryor to create their identity in the society. Thus, Caroline urges others to be like Shirley in the novel. Anyhow, the story ends with marriage ties, after a serious speculation regarding the good and bad phases of marriage and nature of life partner. Shirley chose Louise Moore to marry and said Robert Moore to accept his real love for Caroline. Louis Moore was her tutor. He is not a wealthy man. But, his intelligence, kindness and sound principles made Shirley to accept him as her life partner, whom she thought would encourage her independent nature. Shirley wanted that he should guide her and be a "friend always!"(624). The story also ends up with the ironical passage of Charlotte addressing the conservative critics and readers.

The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the Quest! (677).

These last lines are a direct mockery of the conservative male society, which is eager to guide women on the lines of tradition and religious behaviour to secure their fort of Patriarchy.

*Agnes Grey* is a story largely concerned about the life of a Governess rather than courtship and marriage. But the novel starts with the unconventional marriage of Agnes' mother. Mrs Grey was a girl of aristocratic family, but she married Richard Grey, a poor parson. Agnes considered her mother and father are the best and the happiest married

couple despite of the class differences. She learnt that true love is the essence of happy marriages looking at her parents. In contrast to the unconventional marriage, the novel depicts the conventional marriage of Murray's daughter Rosalie and Ashby. Though both of them married with the consent of parents and belongs to upper-class and wealthy families, their marital life is not filled with bliss. Rosalie is misguided and misled by her parents and the society. She rejected the true love of Mr Hatfield. She said that "To think that I could be such a fool as to fall in love! It is quite beneath the dignity of a woman to do such a thing. Love! I detest the word! As applied to one to our sex, I think it a perfect insult. A preference I might acknowledge; but never for one like poor Mr Hatfield, who has not seven hundred a year to bless himself with" (1133). The opinion of Rosalie reflects the cultural boundary of women and the concept of love in the Victorian society. In the Victorian society, boys and girls were not allowed to meet privately. The upper-class girls were never left alone. Social gathering and ball party was especially organized for the young lass and lad to bring them together under the supervision of elders before marriage for their courtship and dating. Thus, matchmaking was done based on the class and rank rather than love and mutual understanding. Everybody believes "reformed rakes make the best husbands" (1134). So young girls like Rosalie blindly followed the conventions. They were taught, "he'll be all right when he's married" (1134). But this practice went in vain. Rosalie suffered a lot, which will be discussed in the fourth chapter in detail. How the marriages serves for the empowerment of women will be analysed further. However, the novel ends with the happy marriage of Agnes with Weston who loved each other and respects each other.

In addition to the unique marital choice, the choice of their dress in particular occasions also reflects the individuality of each female in the novels. Jane refused to wear jewels for her marriage. “Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange” (254). She even asked Rochester to change the subject of their talk. Further, she frankly admitted that the costly jewellery or beautiful attire would not change her position or appearance. She will be the same “plain, Quakeris governess” (255). Moreover, she looks like an ape if Rochester “will attire Jane in satin and lace, and... roses in her hair; and ... the head ... with a priceless veil” (255). This bold statement shows her straightforward nature. She never wanted to deceive the eyes of Rochester by unreal appearances. She believed in true love rather than in physical attraction. So she rejected the idea of dressing herself unrealistically. Lodge observed, “several reviewers expressed relief that Jane Eyre was not like many fashionable novels, which dwelt on the dress and manners of upper class society” (7). However he noted Elizabeth Rigby criticized, as it was the “total ignorance of the habits of society, from correct morning dress to the polite fashion in which a lady would address a host’s servant” (qtd. in Lodge 13). Then Lucy in *Villette* is very particular in her dress and appearance as mentioned earlier. She always took extra care to avoid unnecessary attention of the people towards her appearance. She usually dresses in a grey colour simple gown, which suits her position. Her dress reflected her life. She took lot of care in searching the dress material and its colour and texture when she was forced by Mrs Bretton to get ready in a new dress for the party. Her simplicity and the choice of colour and texture of the dress material are different from Ginevra’s fashion sense. Ginevra is the fashion icon in the novel. She took lots of pain in dressing herself to make a fashion statement in social gatherings. The colourful dresses and flashy accessories

show her fashion consciousness. But her crimson red attire on an occasion in Hotel Crecy reflects her unconventional choice. As red was an uncommon colour for a young woman to wear throughout the Victorian period (Nunn). Thus, she chooses to be individual. She shows her real 'femaleness'. She does not care about the opinion of the people around her. She played piano on that occasion without thinking how the conservative people measure her attitude. Her dress and her music make the strong feministic statement in the Victorian society.

Then, Shirley the upper-class young woman never worries too much about her appearance and style. She is more interested in business than in her beauty. She is not aware of contemporary fashion comparing to Caroline. Caroline is more known for her fashion sense and taste. Caroline gives suggestions for many females in the novel regarding their dress according to their age and contemporary fashion. Her knowledge reflects her interest. As she is learning dressmaking, stitching, needlework, embroidery she knows better than Shirley. In other words, here, Charlotte intentionally avoided Shirley to dress like a pretty lady to uphold her tomboyish nature. Thus, individuality of Shirley is even created by the way she is dressed in the novel.

Agnes Grey is seen in the governess attire almost all the time. It reflected her hard work and disciplined life. Rosalie gives lots of interest for her dress and appearance in the novel. She took extra care regarding her appearance for the ball party only to attract as many males as possible. It shows dress for upper-class girls is the means to show their physical beauty and financial status. Their dress reflected their interest. But Agnes believed that "It is foolish to wish for beauty. Sensible people never either desire it for themselves, or care about it in others. If the mind be but well cultivated, and the heart

well disposed, no one ever cares for the exterior” (1146). This opinion reflects the rational set of mind behind the simplicity of her dressing, which was against the cultural practice of female society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. When, Victorian women spend hours together in dressing and combing.

Then Helen disguised her entire identity in the mourning dress of a widow. Her choice created a new life and a new identity. She achieved her aim with the help of her disguised appearance. This unreligious choice despite of her husband’s presence is a bold step. However, her decision leads her to the empowered status.

To sum up, choices makes difference is analysed in all the above incidents. Here the choice of the untrodden paths led to the empowerment of women in the novels. Though the society condemned and criticised their decisions, their choice created meaningful individual identity in each of their life. Therefore, that “our power of being happy lies a good deal in ourselves....” (C. Bronte 221) as said in *Shirley* is proved here.

## **Conclusion**

Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte and Anne Bronte’s novels and the incidents in these novels are the mirrors to the social life and societal rules. They reflected the middle-class women’s questions through the non-conventional means. Their style of writing, conveying the message through the female characters and the incidents are the tools to reconstruct the mindset of rigid people. When, Victorian men and women are respected for their conventional life, Brontes have added their voice to Evangelical movement in reforming the old notions. They enriched the novels with the smallest detail of daily life, personal behaviour, dress and use of language to create awareness for

women's empowerment. Bronte sisters stood as Evangelical women of new moral values to reform the cultural ethics and mannerisms of the whole society through the touch of unconventional traits in their novel. Anne suggested through the character of Agnes Grey, "The best way to enjoy yourself is to do what is right and hate nobody. The end of religion is not to teach us how to die, but how to live; and the earlier you become wise and good, the more of happiness you secure..."(1174).

Bronte's voice for 'universalism' and 'womanism' is strongly felt in the analysis of conventional and non-conventional notions in the selected novels. Because the female characters of their novels might be replaced with the life of any middle-class woman and woman worker living under the shackles of patriarchy. Thus, the sociological, historical, theological and gender studies contextualized the novels as the echo of woman's right. Here I have tried to show how this unconventionality leads to empower women character and even encourages the readers to re-think about the prevailing role of women in their respective society.

The present chapter contributes to the argument that Brontes laid stepping-stones for the growth and development of woman's individual personality and identity within the institutions of society (marriage, family and work place). Thus, we get the new mold and model for the women's life in the conventional society.

## CHAPTER – 03

# Education and Empowerment

“We want that Education by which Character is formed, Strength of Mind is increased, the Intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on One’s Own Feet”

-Swami Vivekananda

### Introduction

The Bronte sister’s novels display a quest of women towards alternatives of social life and the attainment of an empowered status. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne being educated in the Anglican Clergy school and in Brussels learnt different languages for the sake of employment. So, in their novels, they stressed the importance of learning for women’s economic development. Among the seven novels, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily is an exception, as it talks less about the role of women’s education and employment. Whereas, the works of Charlotte and Anne elaborately elucidate the educational opportunities and circumstances of women’s earning a living. So far, many studies have covered educational issues, employment opportunities and its limitations, which are present in the novels. However, the present chapter focuses on the intellectual growth and its influence on the development of women’s individuality for pursuing their identity living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England.

This chapter carries the discussion of non-conventional and conventional notions of the previous chapter to a higher level of argument supporting the above-quoted wordings of Swami Vivekananda. The first part of this chapter examines the space for

girls and women of middle-class Victorian society in the field of education in comparison with the men of that society. The study involves the analysis of girls' educational opportunities and its aid in her moral and intellectual growth in attaining self-dependency.

The various processes of women's empowerment are traced by examining the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system, its influence on the construction of rational thinking among the women of the Bronte novels, and the emerging picture of women as an independent spirit. This section also concentrates on the gender biased notions of society to limit the social mobility of women and their struggle to discard the age-old frameworks.

The chapter concludes with the affirmation of the title, 'Education leads to Empowerment'. It confirms that positive growth gradually supports the individual life of women. It upholds the Brontes' message for reforming the conservative patriarchal society and educational system. It ends with the empowered entities of female protagonists with the establishment of their own educational institutions and achieving the desired ends of their lives. Thus, the chapter shows how Brontes' heroines are part of a response to the issues of education and empowerment during Victorian period.

### **Education and its Predicaments**

Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England was a tool of society to maintain its hierarchy and class system. Patriarchy played a vital role in educating the girls and boys.

It was believed that the purpose of educating women was to prepare them for marriage by inculcating the practical skills and moral values which would enable them to be good and dutiful wives (Laurence 165).



Educating a girl was cleverly done in the name of God, religion, tradition, and culture. Thus, until late nineteenth century, the majority of the middle-class girls were educated at home under the guidance of their parents, and sometimes by a curate, if the family was in a position to afford it. They were educated to suppress their sexuality, to control their real personality, and to curb their desires to meet the ends of their male dominated society. Thus, their education juxtaposed the statement of Margaret Mead “children must be taught how to think, not what to think”. Thus, the knowledge to do a critical analysis of what other says and to question the authority was not present in most of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century women.

As a result, education of women was a major issue in the Victorian period. It raised many questions in the radical mindset of well-educated women and many writers along with social activists fought for the right of women’s education. Like other novelists, the Brontes’ exposed the shortcomings of the girls’ educational system and mocked the prescribed role of women through the aid of this restricted learning. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte explores girls' schooling, which prepared a child to be a passive, submissive woman of society. Likewise, Caroline of the novel *Shirley* expresses her disappointment regarding the prevailing educational opportunity and monotonous learning that neither helped women to develop her intellect nor enabled her to earn a decent living. The curriculum of girls’ education was drawn basically to make her an ‘Angel in the House’.

This marginalized position of girls and women was an important issue of debate for many centuries. Many great reformers and thinkers of the respective ages objected to the distinction between the public and private sphere. The American and the French revolution in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century influenced women to question the basis of

their inequality. Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 rejected the divided sphere and insisted that women too must be in a position to choose their actions. Although, she advocated a radical restructuring of power relations within the household, she believed that the family was the proper place for forming the best citizens. So, she emphasised the significance of educating the female in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. (93-99)

Based on Mary Wollstonecraft's guidelines, the Brontes too portrayed the life of female characters in their novels. Thus, the urge for improving the condition of girls' schooling and their curricula are present in their writings. The Brontes' masculine pseudonyms helped them to express the neglected aspects of women's life and their female characterization was outspoken about the rights of women. They created awareness through their novels, which was the genre preferred by the women of the Victorian society. Caroline Helstone in *Shirley* addresses the men of London and its provinces to change their opinion on their daughters and to provide them a good space to live their life on par with their sons:

...You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seek for them an interest and an occupation, which shall raise them above the flirt, the maneuver, the mischief-making talebearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered; they will be a plague and a Care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them -give them scope and work. (409-410)

However, until the Education Act of 1870, the Victorian perception of 'Angel in the House' hindered the growth of women. Emphasis was given only for learning womanly mannerisms and behaviour as expected by society. Embroidery, drawing, singing, dancing, playing piano, and different languages to have a good social conversation in a

social gathering to attract a man was enforced for girls of upper-middle-class families, whereas, it was cooking, cleaning, sewing, and housekeeping for middle-class and lower-middle-class girls. In this way, girls were educated to attract a man of good prospects and be a good wife. As Dickens illustrates in his short story *Sentiment* that “a smattering of everything, and knowledge of nothing; instruction in French and Italian, dancing lessons twice-a-week; and other necessities of life” (Dickens) was intentionally taught by the patriarchal education system. However, the Bronte sisters were fortunate to be encouraged by their father to get educated from their childhood, But, unfortunately, the gendered notions of the time tried to influence their childhood, which they have ironically questioned in their works. One fine day, before sending the daughters to school, Patrick Bronte made his children answer his question, a playful time to analyze the maturity and knowledge of all the little Bronte siblings. The answer by Barnwell as to “What is the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of men and women?”(Banks 17) gives us the general belief of people and their narrow thoughts on a woman’s capabilities. Though he wanted to withdraw from this difficult question, he tried his minimal knowledge derived out of gendered stereotypes

‘You must look at how they are different in their bodies.’

‘What do you mean, lad?’

‘Women being softer and smaller, their minds must be so, too.’

‘The girls exchanged looks of pride. A brilliant reply! ... Patrick swelled visibly. Only Emily seemed unmoved, and remarked, ‘I am as big as you, and as strong, and I daresay my mind is equal to yours’ (18).

But Patrick agrees with the boy's answer and addresses the next question to Elizabeth: 'What is the best mode of education for a woman?' She instantly replies, 'Whatever would make her rule her house well' (18). Branwell cheekily says, 'For that you need not go away to school' (18). This conversation reveals that the Brontë's were not excluded from the prevailing disparities between men and women. However, the voice of opposition heard from little Emily resulted in a thunderbolt in the form of *Wuthering Heights*. Though it spoke less on formal education, it hinted at the societal stigmas as the real evils of man's inhumanity and differentiations.

Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* reveals poor societal demand for the educational system of girls. Mrs Murray expects Agnes to groom her daughters to be competitive enough to get a man of rank and good status as their life partners- "for the girls, she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made, without present trouble or discomfort to themselves;..." (1100). Further, Ms. Ginevra's interest in learning, as observed by Lucy, gives the curriculum of girl's studies:

...Miss Ginevra's school studies were little better than nominal; She practiced in earnest, viz., music, singing, and dancing; also embroidering the fine cambric handkerchiefs... such mere trifles as lessons in history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic, she left undone, or got others to do for her. Very much of her time was spent in visiting. (C. Brontë 94)

The irony is that "her studies were little better than nominal," which means the neglected subject of the study were prescribed for girls to learn to pass their times without

sharpening the intellect. Paulina's daylong learning task, or sewing, or drawing figures (27) or Ginevra's interest in music and dance only helped them to be successful conquerors of men's attention in society. They neither achieved anything great or different from the majority of Victorian women nor escaped from male dominance. The patriarchal society preferred girls to study subjects like history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic, which never make a person to think and explore new possibilities; it only instructs them to adopt a set of ideas to follow as universal thought. Similarly, embroidery and stitching keep women busy, without enriching their knowledge. These ideologically implemented subjects of study gradually erased the natural instinct. In this way, a girl's education system was designed to hold her attention to frivolous practices and studies right from girlhood. There were no other option

### **Gender and Culture**

Victorian England was framed on the rules of patriarchy though the land was ruled by maternal power for namesake. Queen Victoria called the women's struggle for equal rights as "mad wicked folly... on which women's poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feelings and propriety. Feminists ought to get a good whipping were women to 'unsex' themselves by claiming equality with men, they would become the most hateful, heathen and disgusting of beings and would surely perish without male protection" (Women in Valor). This illogical, harsh statement from the honourable first lady of the state, who denied supporting her own sex from the wicked rules of the male society, was an irony. Thus, women of the period were doubly oppressed and suppressed from voicing their desires.

As Solomon states, “Education for women was taught to disrupt the social balance of the time. On the contrary, the earliest push for Victorian women to become educated was because they were mothers of men and eventually teachers of men” (xviii). The only reason behind imparting the knowledge of history, arithmetic, geography, and other languages were to support the socialization of a male child to be a follower of patriarchal genealogy and a female child to be the passive listener of the other. Mrs. Murray, who expects Agnes to groom her daughters as beautiful dolls for the ball parties insisted her sons to be trained and educated to be intelligent enough to get a good placing for higher education: “With regard to the two boys... I was to get the greatest possible quantity of Latin grammar and Valpy’s Delectus into their heads, in order to fit them for school” (A. Bronte 1101). This disparity was exposed by Anne to educate the society about their mistakes. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the chapter titled ‘Controversy’ elucidates the real controversy of the time regarding the gender-biased notions in Mrs. Markham’s and Mrs. Graham’s discussion and intense argument on how societal instructions make the girls powerless and thoughtless in their life.

... you think she is essentially so vicious, or so feeble-minded that she cannot withstand temptation-and though she may be pure and innocent as long as she is kept in ignorance and restraint, yet, being destitute of real virtue, to teach her how to sin, is at once to make her a sinner, and the greater her knowledge, the wider her liberty, the deeper will be her depravity-...

..., the merest shadow of pollution will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished-... (1202).

Mrs. Graham sensibly argues with Mr. Markham, “you would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others” (1203).

She challenged the age-old practices and initiated to change the world of disparity,-

Now *I* would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good, and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant to the snares that beset her path: nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power, or the will to catch and guard herself; and as for my son-...a man of the world- one that has “seen life”,...even though he should so far profit by it, as to sober down, at length,...i would rather that he died tomorrow!- rather a thousand times!(1203)

This extensive exemplification of bringing up girls and boys in society makes the readers to rethink the proper way of instructing their children, leaving aside the gendered notions. Anne clearly rejects the societal concept of educating a child to adhere to their role of feminine and masculine behaviour based on their biological differences. She claims that if it is good to strengthen the personality of a boy to face the vices of the outer world, then why is it not good for a girl.

The novels of the Bronte sisters are filled with women, who are poor, ignorant, inexperienced, and immature, but end up as experienced grown- ups with independent will and identity. Characters like Paulina and Caroline remain in the background though

they are capable of proving their individuality like Lucy Snow and Shirley, because they had been instructed strictly on the guidelines of gender and educated to become the ideal woman. In *Villette* though Paulina “was quick in learning, apt in imitating... her pleasure was to please Graham” (C. Bronte 32). “She learned the names of all his schoolfellows in a trice... she never forgot, or confused identities: she would talk with him the whole evening about people she had never seen...” (29). It shows how a girl unknowingly practices to find her happiness in the world of a male. Even still, she is not treated with the same attention. Then the society justifies the behaviour of male and female in the name of culture. Thus, Lucy’s words reflects the gender stereotypes, i.e., John’s negligence is—“Because he is a boy and you are a girl... his nature is strong and gay, and yours is otherwise” (37), which means the male is expected to be hard and practical in the patriarchal cultural. Therefore, it is natural that he is not like Poly. Further, on one occasion when all the learned gentlemen had gathered in Hotel Crecy, the grown-up Paulina charmed them with her feminine qualities – “her beauty, the soft courtesy of her manner, her immature, but real and inbred tact”(334) pleased the thoughtful Frenchmen. They meet her, “not indeed to talk science, which would have rendered her dumb, but to touch on many subjects in letters, in the arts, in actual life,... she had both read and reflected”(334). It indicates that science was the subject for intellectuals; indeed ‘men’ held authoritative knowledge on all subjects, but poor women could not, was strongly believed. “Men have singled out women of outstanding merit and put them on a pedestal to avoid recognizing the capabilities of all women” (131), said Huda Sharawi, the writer and women writers’ organizer of Egypt, in 1924. However, history only highlights the power and glory of men, where there are no women to tell the reasons for their silence.



That a successful man in life and business should be knowledgeable and should have keen authority over the branches of science is stressed in *Shirley*. Mr. Moore to Joe Scott who knows a little of everything and has knowledge of nothing- “You’re a neglected man of science; ...you and such as you, are sometimes short of work and of bread...” (C. Bronte 59). Even in novel *The Professor*, the college curriculum of the time was noticed as useless. Mr. Crimsworth inquired of the narrator regarding his knowledge and experiences when he desired to become a tradesman, in a disgusted tone, “Do you know anything besides that useless trash of college learning- Greek, Latin, and so forth? (706) the answer was ‘I have studied mathematics’ (706). Then, Mr. Crimsworth acknowledges that he has ‘stuff’ (706); languages like French and German were considered as the language of opportunities. Nevertheless, subjects like history, geography, etc. were mentioned as the required criteria to run a business or to join a job. Whereas, Mr. Helstone wished Caroline to ‘stick to the needle, learn shirt-making and gown making and piecrust-making’ (102), and promised that she would become ‘a clever woman someday’ and continued that he was ‘busy with a pamphlet.’(102). Here, it is an irony on the societal instructions. How would domestic knowledge make a woman clever? How would sewing and stitching of clothes lead to the empowerment of women’s status? What was society instructing in disguise? The immediate answer is gender behaviour. However, sewing helps many middle-class and upper-class women to earn by working in the textile industries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It did not change the condition of women. It again pushed them to the world of ‘capitalist patriarchy’ and doubled the oppressions and discrimination. Therefore, repenting on her biological identity, Caroline carried out the monotonous work and practice as “penance for the expiration of her sins” (83). ““She

would much have liked to put them in the fire', but she knew it would have been impolitic to accede as the result would only be a fresh pair of hose, probably in a worse condition. She adhered, therefore, to the ills she knew" (83). Her position resembles the majority of the other women's and the narrator typifies the stubborn system of patriarchy, which never wants to see changes in the fear of losing its control.

Caroline expresses her disappointment about this gender-biased world in these lines:

"Look at the numerous families of the girls in this neighbourhood... The brothers of these girls are everyone in business or in the professions... their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. ... The great wish – the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they hold them very cheap (409).

These lines depict the real situation of women in rural Victorian England. Through Caroline, Charlotte voiced the urge of every girl to lead a life equal to her brothers. Even, Shirley ironically observes their situation as "ignorant as stone" (368) and questions whether "all the wisdom in the world is lodged in the male skull" (343).

Caroline's uncle takes "little trouble about her education" (77). So she had a depressing feeling that she was inferior. (77) She was interested in learning. She improved her skills and knowledge rapidly under the guidance of Hortense and even learnt arithmetic with the help of Mr. Moore. Her progress in studies made her repent her sex

and she wished “nature had made her a boy instead of a girl that she might ask Robert to let her be his clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house” (79). She discusses the insecurity of her life with Robert when he asks what she intended to do by acquiring knowledge of French, drawing, needlework, grammar, and other accomplishments. (71) She envisions a fearful future after the death of her guardian uncle and regrets not being a boy, whereby she could earn and lead life easily.

I do. I should like an occupation; and if I was a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one. I see such an easy, pleasant way of learning a business, and making my way in life. (71)

These opinions stress the limitations of female life under the discriminatory system of societal culture. The interest and the enthusiasm of a girl are neglected and underestimated by the male, merely because of her gender. Even though she is well educated and competitive to work in a position similar to any man with the same education, she is denied of the opportunities because she is a female. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane was sent to Lowood School to tame her ‘femaleness’ under the strict rules of the conservative Mr. Brocklehurst. In these ways, the illogical gender rules of the 19<sup>th</sup> century restricted many learned female aspirants from good earning and decent employment. Charlotte and her sisters filled their novels with many illustrations of gendered rules and its adverse effects on women, to make the female readers aware of their hidden potentials and forgotten dreams. Thus, the novels bring forth the neglected voices of suppressed beings. They did the job of reminding the individuality of female devoid of gender stereotypes. As Louise Otto-Peter says, “The history of all times, and of today especially,

teaches that... women will be forgotten if they forget to think about themselves” (qtd. in Engel).

Then they tried to show that male society is filled with “prejudices, it is ... most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones” (C. Bronte 336). In this way, education system as a main tool of culture regulates people’s access to knowledge. It imparts a set of cultural ideologies and affects the life of men and women. Thus, the role of gender is created based on cultural demands and its changes.

### **Social and Moral Education**

Society always checks the behaviour of man through a set of moral and social norms. It judges the virtue of a person on the actions and good deeds that he performs in the name of God. According to the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, the norm is a rule of behaviour, or a definite pattern of behaviour, which renders a person liable for some kind of censure. This ideology of society rewards the person for adherence and punishes for non-conformity. Educating people regarding the gendered identity starts from the birth of a child based on its biological sex. The norms differ from male to female, upper class to lower class, employers to the employee, and white to black. Thus, the self-centred rules of upper-class male dominated society leads women to follow their words obediently; any kind of resistance is marked as opposition to God’s will and tradition.

The Bronte sisters expressed their anger and restlessness, particularly against the social and moral norms, which governed the life of women and poor classless people. They consciously wrote their novels, which addressed the reader and explained the injustice of their time. They thought that their life experiences as reflected in the novels

might help others to escape from the tangles of absurd lifestyles. It is not the life history of the Brontes' that we read in the fictional autobiographical novels; we are exposed to women's struggle and suffering in the name of morality and social values. In addition, it opens the window to a new world of opportunities and possibilities, where women can live and construct their identity in the same society. Then it also shows that the women with a strong will and sharp intellect can successfully face the outer world.

*Jane Eyre*, a book of "dangerous and sexually arousing feminist manifesto" (xii) as described in the Penguin classics by Stevie Davies, was written in the midst of the industrial revolution. It had created the new waves in the patriarchal Victorian society. It questioned the roots of society, i.e., moral beliefs and social values by portraying the poor condition of a charity school like Lowood and sarcastically remarking on the education system and its arrogant moralistic heads like Mr. Brocklehurst and his meaningless principles. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mr. Brocklehurst in the name of religious convention and societal norms imposed self-centred rules on the innocent girls of the school. The question of morality arises when we look at the way Mrs. Reed treats poor little Jane for no fault, and instead of reprimanding her son's madness and inhuman acts, she instructs her servants to 'take Jane away to the red-room and lock her in there' (C. Bronte 7), where Mr. Reed had died nine years ago. Little Jane was exposed to cruelty at a tender age when she loses her parents and uncle. Her innocence is tattered by the arrogance of wealth and power of Mrs. Reed and her son, John. The brutal rule of the master and servant were enforced on the orphan child to show her place in the house of Reeds. Even though she was wounded by the wicked behaviour of John, she is chastised for her resistance. Miss Abbott, the lady's maid cries, "What shocking conduct, Miss

Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress's son! Your young master" (8). Jane questions the new concepts of master and servant relationship. The reply she received is a shocking insight to the immorality of elders and responsible members of the society: "No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down, and think over your wickedness" (8). These words reveal the double standard of society in the name of class and gender norms. Then, the egoistic, merciless attitude of the boy and his pranks, made Jane call him a "wicked, cruel boy and a murderer ... like a slave-driver" (7). If this small resistance is called, wicked then what can one label John's behaviour and that of the grown-up mature people like Mrs. Reed and her housekeeper's? The little parentless child begs her aunt to kill her rather than lock her in the haunted Red-room, and becomes unconscious out of fear. This heart-rending incident clearly indicates the double standards of society disguised in the name of social and moral values. Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst stand for man-eaters in the eyes of children like Jane and the others, even though they are respected for their pretentiousness in the outer world. By portraying the real phases of life, Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* questions the humanistic values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If society teaches to respect the inhumane acts of the privileged, then what are real moralistic values and what is society going to teach in the name of social norms? Jane's opposition to all such vanities of the higher class society make her take mature independent decisions of her life and help her to achieve unbelievable things through the same cursed "picture of passion"(6). Intelligence plus character is what we can see in Jane Eyre's growth with the aid of the same set of rules and curriculum.

Shirley proves the statement of Yeats, i.e., "education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". At a time when "the domestic duties which call forth the best

energies of female character” (Ellis 22), Shirley enjoyed reading and ruling, what men claimed their sphere. She was respected as captain, master and called as a tigress in the novel. The story of Shirley educates the people regarding the fake set of norms, which are manmade, and which can be reframed anytime for our fancy if we attain empowered independent status. Shirley the ‘proud’ and ‘graceful’ lady always busy in public issues and business never behaved like the typical feminine girl of the society. She never feared of ‘...the dew ...not covered her head; her curls are free- they veil her neck and caress her shoulder with their tendril rings.’(C. Bronte 242). Her personality is the good combination of masculine and feminine traits. She did not bother about the people’s opinion regarding her appearance and lifestyle. St Paul said, “It is a shame for a woman to go with her head uncovered” (89), which was mentioned in the early chapters, talking about the dress and habits of the working class women and of Caroline. However, it does not make any difference to Shirley. Whereas, Hortense exclaims on the way Caroline leaves her hair uncovered “absolutely without cap!” (89) and compares it with the low-class woman Sarah and her nonconformity. Then Robert Moore fears the working class people as being unsuitable for the societal standards and remarks that they are “completely ignorant of household work; and prêt and self-willed as Sarah was, she was, perhaps, no worse than the majority of women of her class” (88-89). This explanation indicates that Victorian society was under the threat of immoral and socially degrading mannerisms of the lower class working women. However, no one objects the upper-class Shirley, since she has power and money. Thus, the hierarchical ladder utilizes the moral and social sentiments to maintain its pyramid structure where the directions and authority flow downwards to check and curb the growth of any independent will in the lower class

people. Only sometimes as a teacher and caretaker, Mrs. Pryor has given the guidance to Shirley to watch on her words and mannerisms to avoid people's speculation on her gender. Mrs. Pryor advised, "My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed. It is a strange one. Those who do not know you, hearing you speak thus, would think you affected masculine manners" (216). Then, she even expostulated Shirley's habit of whistling. For this objection Shirley's apology that, "I forgot. I beg your pardon, ma'am" (216) shows gender or feminine qualities are practised by the conscious act of behaviour (masculine/feminine) as instructed by the society and culture.

Thus, contrasting opinions on Shirley, Caroline, and Sarah shows that the society is always trying to restrict the wayward behaviour of women by educating them according to the prevailing demands of the autocratic society. As John Keay stated, "Social ascendancy, innocently disguised as high fashion, good taste, or prestigious expenditure ...." The disguised instructions of culture and gender were imparted through the curates and governesses who almost worked as per the demands of society. Hortense consciously looks over each and every act of Caroline, when Caroline and Mr. Moore sit to read Shakespeare's 'Coriolanus'. Mademoiselle interrupts them saying, "When the gentleman of a family reads, the ladies should always sew Caroline..." (93). But Caroline refused to follow the words of Hortense. Caroline's analysis of the moral message in the drama of Shakespeare proves she knows better than Hortense and Robert. Through Caroline, Charlotte informs the reader that "the reading will give you at once how low and how high you are" (92). The message makes a reader to be more serious about the interpretation and internalization of their life with the text they read. Charlotte wants to



bring a change in the perception of women's thinking and their lives through her novels. Therefore, she mentions her desire through the above sentence. The novel stresses the right aspects of education; education should enhance the intellect of a person and guard the character from inhumane qualities. In the same way, it objects to meaningless rules, which are drawn for the benefit of society.

Lucy Snow of *Villette* narrates the lifestyle of Miss Ginevra and her fancy as a part of the false imaginative world of people, who think that attaining the standards of society, will change their position. The steps she chooses to climb the ladder of the hierarchy is always condemned by Lucy, and later by Dr. John. The reason for Ginevra's behaviour is her insecure position. Paulina represents the upper-class society; Ginevra depends on the mercy of the father of Paulina and Lucy belongs to a miserable lower-middle-class. The difference in their position is reflected in their respective conduct. Though society looks at women as a unit to perform uniform tasks, it slightly varies from class and position. Ginevra represents the 'idea of the American Dream', where upper middle-class people are urged to attain a higher status in terms of fashion and wealth. The social norms made her think that money mattered more than moral values. She felt disgusting to be the wife of a middle class working person. She mocks and rejects the sincere love of M. Isidore (Dr. John) labelling him, 'only bourgeois' (99). She never feels ashamed of her immorality in the desire of perceiving the fancies of the upper class. She shares her feelings with Lucy, 'he thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have' (99). This bold statement is the antithesis of the image of an ideal woman. She thinks that society has imposed moral values and social norms to withhold the mobility of woman. She throws away the ideal

mannerisms of a woman; she takes advantage of her feminine features and eye-catching beauty to deceive men and to fulfil her desires.

... I am the daughter of a gentleman of family, and though my father is not rich, I have expectations from an uncle. Then I am just eighteen, the finest age possible. I have had a continental education, and though I can't spell, I have abundant accomplishments. I am pretty; you can't deny that; I may have as many admirers as I choose. This very night I have been breaking the hearts of two gentlemen... there is me-happy ME; now for you, poor soul! (156-157)

Lucy compares Ginevra to the uncontrollable wind of destruction: 'Oh, she varies she shifts and changes like the wind' (162) and she wishes that 'if her beauty or brains will not serve her so far, she merits the sharp lesson of experience' (163). This opinion is of the conservative mindset. Lucy as a representative of cultured society criticised the careless attitudes of Ginevra. It shows how a girl should not be in Christianity.

On the other hand, Charlotte upholds the character of Lucy Snow in spite of her many weaknesses. Kate Millett observes that, "Lucy envies every man his occupation, John his medicine, Paul his scholarship, just as she envied them their education" (144-145). However, Lucy concealed her feelings under the strict principles of self-control, self-dependence, and self-esteem. Thus, Lucy Snow illustrates how human passions are common to all, but to keep a check on those desires is crucial to lead a meaningful life and to get appreciated. Paulina's father felt proud of Lucy's successful life journey and he wishes, "if my Polly ever came to know by experience the uncertain nature of this world's goods, I should like her to act as Lucy acts: to work for herself, that she might burden neither kith nor kin" (C Bronte 305). The novel also proves that a fair and good-looking

girl or woman is not what society respects; it expects a woman to be good in her deeds and self-dependent.

Agnes Grey mocks the way children are brought up in the upper-class society with the bizarre educational framework to maintain their status. She points towards the parents as the sole cause for sowing the gender and class-consciousness in a child from birth. People in society, are responsible for the poor and helpless condition of the women, classless people and innocent animals. As a girl, Agnes was disappointed by her parents' way of socializing her to be a timid mockingbird at home in the name of parental care and affection. Her wish to work as a governess is opposed by her mother, father, and sister because she was not accustomed to the outer world and she lacked the experience to manage her task. They thought it degrading to send a girl to earn for the family. Her mother exclaimed, "“Oh, no!’ ‘There is no necessity whatever for such a step; it is merely a whim of her own. So you must hold your tongue, you naughty girl; for, though you are so ready to leave us...’” (1070). Agnes self-confidence never led her to relinquish the scheme; she trusted her hidden potentiality “to win the confidence and affections of her pupil, to waken the contrition of the erring; how to embolden the timid, and console the afflicted; how to make virtue practicable, instruction desirable, and religion lovely and comprehensible”(1070). However, her delightful dream of becoming a governess is shattered in the manner she is treated by the family of Bloomfield and Murray. She repents her fate as governess because “either the children were so incorrigible, the parents so unreasonable, or myself so mistaken in my views, or so unable to carry them out, that my best intentions and most strenuous efforts seemed productive of no better result than sport to the children, dissatisfaction to their parents, and torment to myself”(1080). This is

the result of the upbringing of children done by upper-class families with self-centered notions. They are taught not to empathise with the emotions and sentiments of the lower class people. They derive sadistic pleasure by ill-treating the weaker sections of society. They do not consider governesses or lower class people as individuals. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tom tormenting the innocent birds is a good example of the inhumane nature of wealthy boys and men.

Anne, as a conscious writer, addresses the reader that her bad experience may be a good lesson for women, who desire to lead a decent life through hard work -

‘... my design, in writing the few last pages, was not to amuse, but to benefit those whom it might concern: he that has no interest in such matters will doubtless have skipped them over with cursory glance, and, perhaps, a malediction against the prolixity of the writer; but if a parent has there from gathered any useful hint, or an unfortunate governess received thereby the slightest benefit, I am well rewarded for my pains.’(1084)

This passage questions the religious and cultural values of the society, which supports people like Bloomfield and Murray. It totally denies the concept of poor as ignoble, illiterate and idiots, rich as noble and merciful.

Similarly, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* educates us regarding the proper path of socialising the children irrespective of gender. Providing the backdrop of Helens mistaken identity of goodness and badness of human personality, the novel rationally put forth the module for moral education and reverses the superficial social values of the age. Mrs Graham gives the new set of principles to the society for mending the faults of the traditional gendered education model. She prefers to impart equal knowledge and

guidelines to both boys and girls. She even logically argues her point to make the readers accept her words of truth. Though she seems to be strange and unconventional to Markham family and others, she had a strong reason behind her practicality. Therefore, her stance easily appeals to the reader. Helen was misguided by the society. Her moral education made her think better of a man like Arthur Huntingdon and her knowledge of social values deceived her by the bad phases of the same life. Then Charlotte and Anne invariably to some extent educate us regarding the mistakes of girls of adolescent age and awaken the reader that the insufficient educational background of a girl is the cause of these kinds of improper decision and suffering. Mr Markham analysed the strong mentality of Mrs Graham as “when a lady does consent to listen to an argument against her own opinions, she is always predetermined to withstand it- to listen only with her bodily ears, keeping the mental organs resolutely closed against the strongest reasoning”(1203). This daunting moral courage of a single woman against the immorality of the gendered rule is really a step forward in the emancipation of girls. Her predetermination and strong will have derived from her education out of life’s experience, which echoes the statement of Robert Frost “education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” Even being out of her husband’s house, she proved her pious character and maintained her angel-like image by returning to take care of her ill-mannered husband on his deathbed.

In Emily’s *Wuthering Heights*, Hindley was sent to higher studies, whereas, Catherine was scarcely and irregularly taught by a private curate in their home. Heathcliff, though adopted by Earnshaw as his son, was never encouraged to learn anything. These instances show that gender; race and class have interwoven in the patriarchal society.

People born in a good family and higher status are privileged better than one born in the lower class. Here educating and depriving from the opportunities of education was the tool of people in power to maintain their influence on the underprivileged and poor. Thus, society has 'veiled the eyes' of women, classless, powerless people to avoid the opposition and competition. These sensitive issues are present in the passionate love story of *Wuthering Heights*. We can see the unbelievable transformation and growth of Heathcliff's personality by educating himself with the etiquettes of Victorian standards and by learning the polished language and mannerisms. Even Catherine changed her mannerisms under the influence of cultured Linton Family. These incidents prove education has a great power to reform any person as Margaret Fuller said, "If you read, you will become leader".

### **Education for the Women's Employment**

Bronte's novels are populated with pupils and education institutes with the governess, curates, teachers, and professors. The sisters extensively wrote on the pros and cons of the educational system as discussed above. They even provided good models to follow for the women to strengthen their helpless situation with the aid of the same prevailing educational framework. Though they had experienced bitterness being governesses and personally felt irritated of the limited sphere of their life, they portrayed the life of governess in their novels with a twist of empowered ends. Bronte sisters struggle to publish their works is a story of women's position in the prejudiced world. Until the death of Emily and Anne, Charlotte maintained their disguised masculine identity to escape the negative criticism from the prejudiced patriarchal society. Their life is an index to the 'women questions' of the time. Bronte sisters did not receive the

encouragement as their brother Branwell received from their father. However, the sisters took the responsibility of running the family by their work of governess, which was one of the few opportunities open for middle-class girls. The sisters dreamt of opening their own school to lead a self-reliant life and to retain their self-respect by rejecting the offers of ruthless upper-class families for the work of governess. Charlotte and Emily attended classes in Brussels to learn German and French languages as a supportive qualification to begin their new venture. The strong desire to be independent made them authors of great works, but unfortunately, Emily and Anne were identified and honoured after their death only when Charlotte revealed the real names of sisters to the world. These accomplishments proved females were capable of doing the unimaginable tasks.

Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* says, “They prepared themselves to be novelists the way other women supposedly prepared themselves to be wives and mothers” (189). They chose the profession of men in the time when women were hesitating to read books, which were about female sexuality and desire. They wrote on the social problems of women, especially in the field of education and employment. Then the issues of marital market and the problems of married women, which were not discussed in depth by Jane Austen in her novels, were sensibly dealt with the works of Bronte sisters. They utilized their verbal power to exhibit the hidden desires of women. As Gaskell asserted if a woman has the ability to write, then she must “labour to do what is not impossible” (238). Charlotte and her sisters made use of the gifted knowledge to create awareness about the consequences of women’s life and possibilities of new acquisitions and position being in the same society.

Education of girls in Victorian England was intended to polish the crude nature of female sexuality to submissive artistic acts as directed by patriarchy. Attaining an education by a woman was considered as “an act of nonconformity” (Solomon xviii). The conduct books had insisted that women should learn things that help them to be good wives and caring mothers. But, Women’s urge to attain proper education had become the biggest demand. It was not to prove their intellectual power, but to earn the bread with the assistance of education. Middle-class women thought the job of governess in the private house or to teach in the schools was the only option to earn. After maidservants, farm workers and the factory Labours, the governess is the paid work available to the women of the middle class. Even though they are ill-treated, less paid and humiliated there was no other way to escape from their necessity of earning a living. Anne Bronte, though she succeeded as a good governess; expressed her strenuous bad experience in her novel *Agnes Grey* directly addressing the reader. In an article, Simmons writes, “In terms of class representations and historical accuracy, nowhere is the governess more realistically depicted than in Anne Bronte’s *Agnes Grey* (26). Lynne Reid Banks in her *Dark Quartet –the Story of The Brontes* gives the background of all the three sisters along with their brother. The units like “School”, “persecution”, “Freedom and slavery”, “Trials”... show the hard journey of sisters to get educated and to earn for their family. When Charlotte, Emily and Anne watched the suffering of their elder sisters Maria and even lost Elizabeth in the Cowan Bridge, they lost their faith. However, Patrick Bronte their father who was so enthusiastic in educating his children thought it’s “a great step and great adventure!”(Banks 16) to send his daughters to school. He had foreseen the importance of education. When, Charlotte, Emily and Anne cried and wished to leave the school “he talked to them



tenderly but firmly of their duty to become educated, of the near-impossibility of achieving this anywhere else, of the need to overcome hardships and even hatreds” (Banks 39) and they were left in the same Cowan Bridge under the personal care of Miss Evans. But, unfortunately again “Charlotte became accustomed to death” (42). Likewise, “Many pupils, weakened by insufficient, dirty food, damp buildings and wholly inadequate sanitary arrangements (one stone privy for upward of seventy people), succumbed like flies to the fever, and a number died of it, either in their homes or before they could be fetched away”(42). However, Charlotte Bronte along with her sisters Emily and Anne escaped from the jaws of illness and death. Later Charlotte Bronte wrote and published the novel *Jane Eyre* in her thirty-first year, which reflects the horrible days of their schooling in Cowan Bridge.

Thus, amid all difficulties Brontes attained their unimagined popularity and fame by hard will and obstinate nature. In *Shirley* the lines “it should be better: bitterness is strength-it is a tonic... if energy remains, it will be rather a dangerous energy-deadly when confronted with injustice”(C. Bronte 109) advocates that pain and suffering will teach a person to face the life with a practical mindset. Charlotte Bronte and her sisters never wanted to be recognized as feminist writers or supporter of the women’s movement. But, Charlotte strongly objects the criticism and reviews based on her sex or gender. She urged to be judged as an author, rather than as a woman writer. In 1849, she wrote to William Smith Williams, “to you I am neither man nor woman- I come before you as an Author only- it is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me- the sole ground on which I accept your judgement” (qtd. in Lodge 67). Again, she wrote to Lewes

complaining his prejudiced review pointing to her sex, rather than appreciating her writing skill.

The nature of the Bronte sisters and rational thinking lead to the birth of progressive female characters like Jane Eyre, Lucy Snow, Shirley, Agnes Gray and Helen. The journey of each character reaches the meaningful end according to their desire. All of them chose to be economically independent with the help of their limited education. They opted to be governesses, teachers, proprietors, artists to earn their bread, rather than desperately waiting for a perfect man to secure them from the helpless situations. The novels, though they end up with the marriage tie, uphold that 'marriage can wait, but not Education'. Therefore, all of them struggled hard to get education and employment. As discussed above the novels are the testimony of contemporary educational system and values. It talks about the need of proper education, humane value based foundation on equal lines for boys and girls and points out the loopholes of society and its blind practices.

The dream of Jane, Agnes, and Lucy to become a governess, though, seems to be the common wish of thousands of middle-class woman in the 19th century; it does not only stick on to the limited sphere of governess job. It depicts the phases of a woman's growth. Therefore, it has utilized the governess's job as a stepping-stone when there were no good opportunities for middle-class women of basic education. Jane Eyre, though she suffered in Lowood, utilized the good amount of education she derived to lead an independent life of her in the outer world. She denied the offer to work in the same institute. She waited to be free from the clutches of Lowood authority. "I desire 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... Then, I cried ‘Grant me at least a new servitude’”(C Bronte 82). This expression indicates that Jane did not want to be a part of such a Charity school, which ruins the dream of desperate little souls. She knows that it was difficult to find full liberty in the world where women had been restricted to the private sphere. Therefore, she craved for an alternative position from which she could live as she wished. She utters her anxiety to acquire “‘a new servitude!’”... though, “does not sound too sweet... not like such words as liberty, Excitement, enjoyment” she knows the futility of high expectations, so practically she alludes “servitude” (82). Her dream did not let her sleep until she got a resource to perceive it. She put an advertisement in the *Herald* regarding her qualification and ability to teach children under fourteen in a private family. It reads-“‘A young lady accustomed to tuition’, ‘she is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music’”(83). Charlotte’s added information to the reader in the bracket clearly mentions the required knowledge to get the job of governess- “(in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments would have been held tolerably comprehensive)” (83). A woman of middle-class with a desire and talent to teach can opt for the job of governess was the situation before 1840’s. However “effort in the cause of governesses is important, not only as it affects individuals at this moment engaged in the profession, but still more in its bearing upon the future of all English girls and women.”(Butler, 10) Thus, the proper academic education and certification for governess was demanded by the society. This led to the establishment of several institutions to train the governesses. In 1843, the Governesses Benevolent institution was established, Queen’s college for women started in London in 1848 followed up with

Bedford College. However, Charlotte felt these steps were “absurd and cruel” (qtd. in Shave 10) looking at the low salary and real life of governesses’ social condition.

Agnes Grey was educated and encouraged by her mother, who as a most active homemaker managed everything very economically and supported her father. Agnes’ mother by her experience felt that sewing or stitching the garments would never help her daughters emancipation and development. Therefore, she did not encourage Agnes to do household works. It also shows her motherly love for two little angels and her desire to see them in good terms, rather than allowing them to step into her shoes. However, influenced by her strong character and good will Agnes made up her mind to work as a governess to support her parents. This plan went in vain for some days with a great opposition from her father, mother, and sister. Later on, she found a job with the help of her mother’s relation with a salary of twenty-five pound. The work of the governess was not as easy as Agnes dreamt of, it turned out a hard nut to crack to the girl who thought

- Delightful task!

To teach the young idea how to shoot!

To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day! (1070)

Bloomfield’s family became a battlefield for young Agnes. She stood “like a self-convicted culprit” (1093) for no fault of her and lost the job. Nevertheless, her confidence didn’t let her down, she felt all parents and not all children were like Bloomfield’s. She regained her strength, started to look for a new job with the assistance of her mother, and ‘wrote answers to every ‘wanted a governess’ (1095) advertisement in the newspaper. As Butler shared her experience in her work *The Education and Employment of Women* –“When we see advertisements in the newspapers, offering “a

comfortable home,” with no salary, as a sufficient reward for accomplishments of the most varied character, we sometimes wonder at the audacity of employers; but when we learn that such an advertisement, offering the situation of nursery governess, unpaid, was answered by three hundred women, our surprise has in it something of despair.”(1) However, Agnes rejected these kinds of offers.

Her mother the right source of inspiration advised her to keep patience and trust her talent. She reminds Agnes knowledge is not as poor as clergyman’s daughter and insisted her to put an advertisement in the paper, stating her qualifications, “music, singing, drawing, French, Latin, and German, are no mean assemblage: many will be glad to have so much in one instructor” (1096) said her wise mother. Her encouragement keeps Agnes hope in the high spirit. Ultimately, she got a reply from Mr Murray’s residence that was richer and better mannered than Mr Bloomfield was. Agnes learnt that Mr Murray “... would treat his governess with due consideration as a respectable, well-educated lady, the instructor and guide of his children, and not a mere upper servant” (1097). Thus, Agnes education and efforts got rewarded. She demanded for the sum of fifty pounds in the time when demanding for salary was not a right of governess and many thought it’s enough to get the shelter and bread in the house of the employer for their survival. Her demand shows her self-confidence and strength.

Lucy Snow of *Villette* takes the uncertain and insecure journeys of a governess, who attains her independent status passing through the uncomfortable phases of the life. Josephine Elizabeth Grey Butler while writing about the life of a governess mentions the difficulties as follows:

‘It is difficult to imagine how the majority of governesses manage to scramble through life, when we remember that their position involves several journeys in the year, that they must sometimes provide for themselves during holiday seasons, and that they must always dress as ladies. Miserable must be their means of providing of old age or sickness, to say nothing about the claims of affection or of charity throughout life, or the means required for self-culture’ (6).

Further Butler has quoted the opinion of one of the writers who struggled hard as a governess and achieved greatly in her life. She did not reveal the writers’ identity to generalize the position of the Governess in 19<sup>th</sup> century England during 1828–1906.

Worse than the bodily privations or pains” (I quote the words of one of them) “are these aches and pangs of ignorance, this unquenched thirst for knowledge, these unassisted and disappointed efforts to obtain it, this sight of bread enough and to spare, but locked away from us, this depressing sense of a miserable waste of powers bestowed on us by God, and which we know we could have used for the lessening of evil and the increase of the happiness of our fellow-creatures. (6)

Lucy Snow’s life covers all the arenas of work and experience provided for middle-class women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She in the house of her Godmother took care of Paulina. After quitting Bretton’s family, she went back to her home. Her quest for livelihood started from there. As the narrator of her life journey, she addresses the reader regarding her position like this:

“I will permit the reader to picture me, for next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass-the steersman

stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?"(C. Bronte 40).

These lines reveal the hopeless situation of thousands of women in Victorian England. Her minimal knowledge and helpless condition pushed her to accept any task to lead her life. Therefore, she undertook the responsibility of a caretaker and a housemaid in the residence of a maiden lady, Miss Marchmont, who was a rheumatic crippled, impotent, for the past twenty years. (41) However, Lucy suspected her own strength before undertaking a tolerable job of attaining all the needs of an old crippled lady. But necessity made her to work with no other options. Gradually the monotonous task made her forget her existence and the outer world. "Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all.- I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas...-All within me became narrowed to my lot"(43). "She wanted to compromise with fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains" (43). This situation was not only of Lucy, it was for many women who were timid, coward and less equipped with educational qualification. The death of her mistress once more made Lucy look for another place. Her insecure future and desperate life taught her the lessons of courage; ultimately, she made up her mind to "leave this wilderness" (49) and move on with confidence. She took the help of her old family servant to find a new place to work. Her necessity made her to take journeys to the places that she never dreamt of in her life. Her self- realization filled her with "a strong, vague persuasion that it was better to go forward than backward..." (52). She reached London and it was "an adventure" (54) for her to walk alone in the streets of the unknown

crowded city. She encountered the unsafe cruel outer world, because of her gender. She was deceived because of her limited knowledge of economics and mathematics, “three times that afternoon she had given crowns where she should have given shillings” and she consoled herself “it is the price of experience” (56). At last, her undetermined journey ends up in Villette. There she accidentally met Madame Beck, who wanted an “English gouvernante” as said by Miss Fanshawe. Thus the fortune took Lucy to the doorsteps of the woman, whom she had never seen before. Lucy requested Madam by explaining her situation “how she was ready to turn her hand to any useful thing, provided it was not wrong or degrading; how she would be a child’s nurse, or a lady’s-maid, and would not refuse even housework adapted to her strength” (72). After hearing to Lucy’s explanations Madam gave a chance to Lucy to serve as Bonne or governess for the children of her. Madam, one of the charitable women, owner of Rue Fossette and good administrator looked after everything with the watchword of “surveillance”, “espionage” (80). She knows better how to educate girls and to control their behaviour. As Lucy observed her ‘she seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance, and under a surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women...’(80). This would be supported by Paulina father’s anxiety about his little Polly’s life in the society as she grows up “you live too retired a life; if you grow to be a woman with these shy manners, you will hardly be fitted for society” (320). Thus, the systematic set up of Rue Fossette’s curriculum and the healthy environment of the educational institute empowers the young girls to face the life carefully. The benevolent and disciplined nature of Madam was encouraging for Lucy to gain more and more knowledge and grow. Lucy remarked, “... in



short, a foreign school; of which the life, movement, and variety made it a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind”(82). In this line Charlotte, ironically criticize the poor educational system of Victorian England. On the other hand, she hints at the model for the appropriate girl’ educational system at the time the novel was written and published.

Then a girl with talent and interest could develop her knowledge and grow to the heights that one has not imagined, as we see in the life journey of Lucy. So, Miss. Ginevra with doubt exclaimed “You used to call yourself a nursery governess; when you first came here...I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a bonne – few governesses would have condescended so far- and now Madam Beck treats you with more courtesy...and that proud chit, my cousin, makes you her bosom friend!”(328). For this, Lucy answers with proud tone, “‘yes,’ ‘I am a raising character: once an old lady’s companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher’” (329). This drastic change in her life and character is the result of knowledge she gained out of her studies and experience. Thus, it proves the life experience and general assumption of Butler concerning the stagnant life of governesses is proved wrong. Lucy has seen the light of enlightenment and power, which often comes not at all in the life of a woman –“If I could only tell, as I have felt in my own life, and in the lives of other women whom I have loved, how wearily one strains the eyes for light, which often comes not at all!”(Butler 9).

Meanwhile, Anne Bronte in her *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* portrayed the growth of a painter to a professional woman artist at a time when art or painting was considered as the field of man. It was a difficult time for women of middle class England to earn a living by embracing the profession of Art. Statistically in 1851, a couple of years after the

publication of Anne's novel the "census figured out 548 women officially considered themselves as professional female artists" (qtd. in Losano 10). Anne utilized the inborn aesthetic taste and talent of woman to empower the status of her novel's heroine. In the initial stage, Helen was not serious about her artistic skill. Her talent was restricted to attract the suitable partner as society expected. As in Victorian culture, girls were educated to attain the image of an ideal woman. So even, she dreamt of becoming an Angel in the life of Arthur Huntingdon with the aid of her womanly characters like patience, tolerance, moral virtues, and guidance. However, when all her attempts to reform the devilish desires of her husband failed, she took her artistic skills seriously and improved her playtime habit of painting to earn and live independently. Thus, the same misused talent came to her rescue to build the future of her son and her identity, when she left her unfit husband to his illegal affairs and alcoholism. But the society looked at her skill and independent life as against the socio-cultural practice. Her artistic skill was considered as an unfeminine task.

... Where should I find an asylum, and how obtain subsistence for us both?

... where I would support myself and him by the labour of my hands. The palette and easel, my darling playmates once, must be my sober toil-fellows now, but was I sufficiently skilful as an artist to obtain my livelihood in a strange land, without friends without recommendation? No; I must wait a little; I must labour hard to improve my talent and to produce something worthwhile as a specimen of my powers, something to speak favourably for me, weather as an actual painter or a teacher. (1400)

These lines indicate the determination of Helen Huntingdon to improve her knowledge of painting strokes and colors to empower her helpless situation. She wanted to turn her romantic fantasy to the perfection of a masterpiece. In this way, Anne seriously took one of the talents of an ordinary woman to create a historical plot. Prior to this, the intention to earn out of good drawings was intended in the novel *Agnes Grey*, where Mary used to draw very well and even *Jane Eyre* too was interested in painting and did very well. However, these incomplete attempts and desires have been fulfilled in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Thus, the novel questions the social gendered roles and adds to the changing occupations of women of the time. It gave a new option for women to earn a new livelihood. In the research work "Painting Women: The Women Artist in Nineteenth Century American Fiction" Deborah Ellen Barker, argues that "the woman painter-as-heroine... provided women writer with an artistic alter-ego, and allowed them to explore issues of creativity and sexuality, which conflicted with the limitations of feminine decorum that readers and critics often expected of the woman writer" (qtd. in Losano, 15).

Then, Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* is an exception to all the struggles that the reader recognised in the above novels. Shirley is born with privileges; her birth determined her empowered position. The name, status, and power she inherited all reflects the manly advantages. Many of the men in Yorkshire and other places felt jealous of her fortune and capabilities. As mentioned early in this chapter woman's education that had been decided by her parents and the class she belongs to in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here Shirley has been blessed with all good opportunities. Her education plays a vital role in the construction of her character and her job. Unlike her good companions like Caroline and Mrs. Pryor's, she stands as a woman of determination and inspiration. She is always occupied with the

serious matters of business. She discusses and directs many men who work under her supervision. She has a planned venture to execute for the benefit of poor, and needy. In the project, she created new opportunities to Miss Ainley, Mrs Pryor, and Margaret Hall to work with other men of the society. This was seen as an advancement of womanly power and rule, because Miss Ainley and other two women belong to middle class marginalized position. Now the men of business are supposed to work with them. Thus, Helstone felt “female craft was at work, and that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself of too much importance”(283). When Shirley read his mind and expressed her intention to get the support of old prejudiced Helstone, he muttered, “well, you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I’ll be led for once; but mind- I know I am led. Your little female maneuvers don’t blind me.”(283) Shirley explained to him the task of those women and affirmed that she would look after everything as a responsible captain ““you must regard me as captain Keeldar today. This is quite a gentleman’s affair-yours and mine entirely, doctor’. ‘The ladies there are only to be our aides-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business.’”(283) This incident sensitively projects the unfair class and gender system. It shows how upper-class and lower-class women were treated in the society. Here the division of labour is based on the class system rather than on knowledge and intelligence. Men of the society treated women under two categories i.e., class and gender. Thus, women of lower-middle-class were doubly oppressed in the patriarchal Marxist society.

In the same novel the contrasting picture of Caroline Helstone to Shirley Keeldar, shows how the circumstances of one’s birth results in inferiority complex and insecure

future. Caroline often feels sad of her insecure and incapable condition. Once she says, “I am deficient in self-confidence and decision,”.... “I always have been deficient in those qualities....” (380) and continued that her nature would not harm anyone but herself. Though she proved her shrewdness in learning, her uncle never encouraged her to acquire the real education. The schooling was done under the traditional model of gendered ideology, which made her to opt for sewing and dressmaking rather than embracing the job of a clerk that she desired and even was qualified for. The framework of girls’ education in Victorian time had been deliberately drawn to curb the development and growth of female society. It never equipped them to choose the task, which a man claims as his right. Thus, Caroline in her soliloquy expresses her desire to enjoy independent empowered status like a man and laments the helpless condition of women in England.

... I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. Hortense would just work me and Sarah in that fashion, if she could, and neither of us would bear it. The ‘virtuous woman,’ again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; she ‘got breakfast over,’ as Mrs. Skyes says, before one o’clock a.m.; but *she* had something more to do than spin and give our portions. She was a manufacturer-she made fine linen and sold it; she was an agriculturist-she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager. She was what the matrons hereabouts call ‘a clever woman.’... I like her. ‘Strength and honour were her clothing; the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness;.... King of Israel! Your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! Do your daughters reach this royal

standard? Can they reach it? Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! Look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids- envious, bark-biting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied.... (410)

The cultural set-up of the society made Caroline to fear maidenhood. However, she did not want to lead a life in idleness depending on other. Therefore, she wished to become a governess, which was one of the few options for unmarried woman to lead a decent life. But, her desire to work as a governess seems to be a shameful thing for Shirley and the baneful task for Mrs Pryor, who served as a governess. She was not supported by anyone to step out into the outer world to encounter the harsh realities. Moreover, not even encouraged to learn more, she was advised by her uncle to adopt sewing, embroidery, and dressmaking to pass her time and to grow as a clever woman of household duties. Caroline thinks those tasks are there to chain the free thoughts and life of women. She often wanted to reject this monotonous job of stitching and weaving, but without any other way she adhered to the old unpaid employment of women. Mr Moore observed that her position is better than the lower class working people, who work in the mill and farm like Sarah and other. The poverty and the necessity made them to work throughout the day in an unfair condition for an unjust pay. They were learning to do housekeeping, cleaning, cooking, washing, and other hard task of house and farm field.

However, the industrialization and the demand for labours created a new option for them to join the factories in spite of low wages and unfair conditions.

In this way, the novels of the Bronte sisters uphold the significant role of Education in women's intellectual and financial development. They also indirectly supports the statement "marriage can wait, but Education not" because the time will not wait for anyone. Therefore, the child should be properly socialized or educated from its childhood; otherwise, they will not become independent in their life. In the responsible task of socializing Education should be applied as its significant tool to eradicate the inequality of rights and to create many opportunities for women. Bronte Sisters founded out the real cause for the sufferings of women and suggested the alternative solution for the problems, i.e., educate to improve the intelligence and independence of women.

### **Economic Growth and Self-Reliance**

Self-reliance is an appeal to the individual to obey the instinct and to challenge tradition and conventional wisdom. According to Emerson, those who are truly self-reliant, have ability to mark their place in history as great and the genuinely creative person. Likewise, the Bronte sisters and their female protagonists marked an unforgettable place in the literary cannon by their originality as "in every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts" (Emerson). Charlotte Bronte was astonished by the way Anne had written *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and she suggested to her to change the real character of Arthur Huntingdon. She insisted "some elements of human nature should and must be veiled in the retelling" (Banks 345). Because her treatment was, too frank, too painfully honest! Charlotte feared readers will not tolerate it and felt to expose them with bare facts is "an artistic blunder" (Banks 345). However, Emily "a tower of strength"

(284) as Charlotte accepted, encouraged Anne to continue with her true self. Thus, in the First edition of the novel, Anne acknowledged the success and explained her real intention behind the harsh story of Arthur Huntingdon and Helen Huntingdon. Anne in her preface writes:

I would not be understood to suppose that the proceedings of the unhappy scapegrace, with his few profligate companies I have here introduced, are a specimen of the common practices of society- the case is an extreme one, as I trusted none would fail to perceive; but I know that such characters do exist, and if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain. ... I will endeavour to do better ... I shall not limit my ambition to ... producing ‘a perfect work of art’: time and talent so spent, I should consider wasted and misapplied. ... when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I\_will\_speak it, though it be to the prejudice of my name and to the detriment of my reader’s immediate pleasure as well as my own.(3)

Her firm decision in retaining the same harsh characterization in the novel despite Charlotte’s criticism and her bold explanation shows the strong self-confidence of Anne. It shows her ethics as a responsible writer. However, she cleverly hides her identity by concluding her sentence ‘though it be to the prejudice of my name ....’ to reaffirm that the novel is written by a male named Acton Bell though it talks about women’s questions.

Thus, self-reliance of Anne made her to earn name and fame along with financial stability. But in *Shirley* money gives moral strength for the one who is good by nature.



Likewise, the other characters who strived hard to earn, gradually attain economic and moralistic growth and act according to their instinct. In other words, it is their inner perception and purpose that made them attain the self-sufficiency and self-dependency.

Economic independence and self-reliance are inseparable as shown by the female characters of the novels. The education, which helped them to earn their decent livelihood, also enabled them to take determined steps towards the personal growth according to their intuition. Jane Eyre's decision to quit the job in Lowood School despite her insecure life reflects her confidence in herself. Then, she thought 30 pounds per annum with accommodation and food in Thornfield would be enough. She "longed to go where there was life and movement" (85) rather than be stagnant in the same Lowood. Jane made up her mind to start a new life her plans could no longer be confined to her own breast; she was determined to impart them in order to achieve their success. (85) In Thornfield, she got a good place for the enrichment of her knowledge by the ample collections of books in the library of her good master Rochester. But Jane Eyre's reflection on women and life shows the reality of the private world-

Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but 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 embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (106)

The lines clearly show the position of Victorian women. She defends their silence as a means of resistance towards the male autocracy. She supports the changes towards real 'femaleness' from the feminine quality, which "the custom has pronounced necessary for their sex" as said in the monologue. Similarly, the recent work of marxists and feminists, who recognizes resistance in its more subtle forms. Charlotte Bronte had done this very sensitively by registering the subtle, overlooked and even neglected attempts of women in resisting the suppressing power. Charlotte's knowledge and intuition are expressed here through the words of Jane Eyre.

Jane Eyre never tried to imitate the image of ideal woman in her life to attract the attention of Rochester. She being herself gained, the true love of her master. She accepts that nothing can change her look to an angel like stature; it only makes her an ape- "an ape in a harlequin's jacket-a jay in borrowed plumes" (255). This statement is against the false fantasies of women's, who strive hard to beautify themselves to attract men. Jane wanted Rochester to embrace her as she is. She says, "I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly" (255). She even doubted the love of Rochester for a while. Because he seems to be more eager to see Jane in beautiful dress and precious jewellery, than in her plain looks. She felt his love may not live for long if he wishes to see an angel in her, which is far from reality.

Further, when she discovered the hidden facts of his past life and first marriage, she decided to leave the comforts and luxury, which she would afford after her marriage

to Rochester. Though, she once felt “the necessity of departure; is like looking at the necessity of death” (248), she took the firm decision to leave the secretly married Rochester. This crucial step shows that money is not important for marriage and that self-respect matter more than anything else. Jane’s strong will suggests Mr Rochester as well as the reader to follow her footsteps: “Do as I do: trust in God and yourself... we were born to strive and endure- you as well as I: do so...” (312). She continued that she cares for herself and respects herself more than anyone. “I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad- as I am now... - if at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth- so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane- quite insane” (312-313). The self-respect and self-reliance have constructed the strongest character of Jane Eyre.

When Jane is wandering homeless, she has the following conversation with a working woman she meets:

‘What was the chief trade in this place? What did most of the people do?’

‘Some were farm labourers; a good deal worked at Mr. Oliver’s needle-factory, and at the foundry.’

‘Did Mr. Oliver employ women?’

‘Nay; it was men’s work.’

‘And what do the women do?’

‘I knawn’t,’ was the answer. ‘Some does one thing, and some another.

Poor folk men get on as they can.’ (C. Bronte 322)

These uncertainties never hindered the growth of Jane or made her emotionally weak. Her unknown journey ended up in an accidental encounter with the family of a Parson. There she recovered and worked in their school. She was determined to serve as an honest schoolteacher rather than as a selfless mistress of Rochester. But St. John Rivers' proposal of marriage for missionary purpose again made her leave the place. Here, John is a handsome nobleman of Christianity in contrast to Mr Rochester, but Jane's intuition ruled over the conventions. Her expression "Alas! If I join St John, I abandon half myself...." "He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon, and that is all" (400). She was so clear in her decision and in her thought that she says, "I will give the missionary my energies- it is all he wants-but not myself: that would be only adding the husk and shell to the kernel. For them, he has no use: I retain them" (402). She scorned St John's idea of love and marriage. She tried hard to make him understand her opinion about love and marriage. At last, she left Moor House with a good sum of inherited money from her uncle. During this time, she is very clear about her destiny and very confident about her life. She is financially more stable than ever before. The economic independence aids her to empowered status. When she met Rochester in his helpless condition, she declared her independent position with a proud tone "I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress" (430). It connotes that no one holds the authority to exert power over the wish and will of Jane and she is free to determine what is good for herself. She even made a bold statement that she "doesn't care about being married" (431), when Rochester tried to make her realise that she has to marry someday, and it is not possible to be his nurse always. Then her decision to marry Rochester is a kind of triumph of her principles. After the marriage with the blind and crippled Rochester, she entrusted herself

with the responsibility of a caretaker, not treating him as her master but as her helpless dependent. She took the little Adele from her strict conservative institute of education and readmitted him to a school conducted on a more indulgent system, where Adele made a fair progress in her studies. (446)

Thus, Jane attained self-satisfaction more than marital bliss by following her intuitions. As Emerson's essay *Self-Reliance* propounds, "Nothing can bring you peace of mind but the triumph of principles." (Emerson)

Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley*, the story of a wealthy, independent, and well-educated girl with philanthropic nature and great administrative quality gives us a fully developed character of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century woman. Shirley's maturity and confidence are contrasted with Caroline's self-doubt and disparate desires. As mentioned above in the analysis, Shirley and Caroline derived their personality by their respective class and the educational background. Shirley is treated as an Angel of free spirit in the novel rather than an Angel of the house. She is the centre of power and attraction. Shirley Keeldar's enjoyment in reading "just what gentlemen read" (368) is derived partly from her knowledge that she is defying society's norms. She always freely expresses what she feels regarding religion, society, and men. She scorned the story of Adam and Eve and its blind followers. She argued with Joe Scott eloquently regarding the disguised world of humankind, where women are treated as sinners. Shirley suspects the misinterpretation of the original Greek story of Genesis by man for his benefit. Further, she questioned the society, "why can't woman exercise her thoughts and judgement as men do in reading the stories of religion?" She strongly felt "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection" (344). She remarks that men like Joe are prejudiced to accept the truth. She treated the

opinion of Joe on women very lightly by calling him “nonsense”! (345). Thus, Charlotte expressed her real views on the general aspects of man and society regarding the Bible and the Story of Adam and Eve. She even sarcastically mocked the character of Adam, the father of humankind: “more shame to Adam to sin with his eyes open!”(343). Shirley’s rationality and reasoning capacity made many to aspire to be like Shirley. Caroline always wanted to be like her, “I do like Shirley” (251). However, Caroline’s dependency and her costumed knowledge never allowed her to develop and to think freely. She hesitates a lot to express herself; she stands as a silent spectator of Shirley’s privileges and practical life. William admires the character of Shirley; he wished his “lasses to be as proud as Miss Shirley” (339).

Charlotte ironically puts forward her views regarding the pious and self-sacrificed figures of woman in the literary texts through the words of Shirley:

-Worshipping the heroine of such a poem, novel, drama-thinking it fine, divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial- false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point, if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characterise first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour. (367-368)

These words satirise the false characterization of women in the so-called great works of English Literature, and it is deliberately uttered through Shirley, who is more knowledgeable and sensible than any female characters of Charlotte Bronte’s novels. Thus, it proves that knowledge has its own weight. If Caroline had said the same than readers might have disagreed with her. This expression also reflects the personal feeling

of Bronte, as can be seen in the letter she wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey: “[B] ut I am not like you. If you knew my thoughts; the dreams that absorb me; and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up and makes me feel society as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity and I dare say despise me” (Barker 37). However, critics like Leslie Stephen say that these kinds of expressions reflect “the inherent flaw in her thinking which carried her to protest against conventionality while adhering to society’s conventions” (Allot 44).

Shirley’s manly attitudes and business tactics are the inspiring traits to the women of 19th-century society at the time of its transformation. The character of Shirley carries the propaganda of desired changes and growth of women along with men and society, which was neglected. She tried to fill women with moral courage. Her story and her acts in the novel seek to empower the marginalized women. “She scorns hypocrisy” (262) as Caroline observes. She has recognised the hidden potentialities of many women and encouraged them to exercise it properly. She acts according to her intuitions and never cared for men’s objections and power. Her generous nature shows that a woman with public responsibility and higher authority would certainly benefit the society. As Robert observes “Lack of education left anything scarcely but animal wants” (563). Women’s poor education is the cause for her submissive position, not her sex. If she were provided with genuine opportunities to gain knowledge, it would lead to overall progress as it does with Shirley. Her experience and courage made her stronger to face even the death with ease. She expresses to Mr Moore “I expect it, and have feared it. Just now I fear nothing”(531). Her knowledge of physiology is sharper than that of any man. Her anger is incomparable with a man. She is self-expressive and self –esteemed. Her rejection of

marriage proposals of Robert and other suitors shows that she values the good personality of a person more than the social status and good appearance. She proved that the opinion of the people is wrong by choosing her curate as her life partner. Before this, people as Robert thought that, “she is incapable of love-”

‘Shirley incapable of love!’

That she will never marry. I imagine her jealous of compromising her pride, of relinquishing her power, of sharing her property. (629)

Shirley in the novel of Charlotte Bronte stands for independence, individuality and integrity. Her strong character indirectly argues for the need of changes in the educational system and its framework, for the emancipation of women from age-old practices. It also encourages women to act according to their will if they consider it as useful and necessary. On the other hand, characters like Caroline, Mrs Pryor, Miss Ainley and Sahara acted as the representatives of thousands of women who wanted to see changes in the society. Their dreams and desperate situation reflects the women’s condition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Their integrity can be seen in the continued efforts to achieve self-dependency being in the rigid patriarchal set-up.

Lucy Snow of *Villette* is neither like Shirley nor like Caroline. She has grown under the shade of one or the other. She was a dependent until she made up her mind to come out of her self-doubt and hesitation. Lucy’s voyage in search of a job to a foreign country shows the insecure condition of women in England. It was not only Lucy but also hundreds of middle-class women were migrated from one place to another in search of job and livelihood in the time of industrialisation.



Lucy's interest, dedication, and hard work gradually won over the confidence of Madam Beck. Madam assigned her to engage the English class in the absence of Mr Wilson, the English Master. Lucy without any option to deny her words followed Madame with the self-assessment of her capabilities until the classroom. She took Madam Beck as her role model. Madam stood as an inspiring icon in the moment of her fear and confusion. Lucy says I might have said 'Yes', and gone back to nursery obscurity, and there, perhaps, mouldered for the rest of my life; but looking up at Madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant, she did not wear a woman's aspect but rather a man's. The Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not *my* kind of power: neither sympathy nor congeniality nor submission was the emotions it awakened. (85)

Lucy was immensely influenced by her position and independent lifestyle. Madam Beck indirectly encouraged her with many examples. Lucy too thought of her life and necessity of change and improvement; she saw "it seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence-all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire."(85). On the day, she started to work as an English teacher, Madam raised her salary (88) and her responsibilities. But she was overburdened with heavy work.

However, she kept up her patience and took the challenge with confidence. As she says "after the first few difficult lessons, given amidst peril and on the edge of a moral volcano that rumbled under her feet and sent sparks and hot fumes into her eyes, the eruptive spirit seemed to subside, as far as I was concerned"(90). She decided to improve

her knowledge and skill day and night to “get on in life” (90). She acquired fluency in the French language gradually. She did not allow Miss Ginevra and her fashionable society to influence her. She maintained her integrity in all circumstances. Lucy’s unpleasant experience made her grow stronger. Her first stage performance in the play *Vaudeville* enforced on her by M Paul in the last moment, made her bold. She with reluctance accepted the role and practiced it in the closed garret, which was believed to be haunted by the ghost of Nun. The horror filled incident made her grow fearless. She unwillingly accepted M Paul order to dress as a man for the play. Then, M Paul’s words “imagine yourself in the garret, acting to the rats” (151) filled her with confidence. Once she delivered her first speech with difficulty, she gained her voice. She felt “foreigners and strangers, the crowd were nothing to me. Nor did I think of them” (151). She proved herself and put an end to the doubts of people who were surprised and stared at her when first M Paul introduced her role in the play. These events vitally matter in her transformation from a timid introvert to a rational and expressive woman. On the same night, she resolved to sort out the misconceptions of Dr. John regarding Ginevra’s love. Her self-reflection states all the changes in her character: “for the second time that night I was going beyond myself- venturing out of what I looked on as my natural habits- speaking in an unpremeditated, impulsive strain, which startled me strangely when I halted to reflect” (164). Thus, the growth in her career erased her past traits.

Her social life gradually changed when she met Dr. John and her mother in Villette. She steadily started to visit and mingle with the people of society. She visited painting gallery and made an observation of the paintings of *Cleopatra and the Four Women* alone with Dr. John. After some days, she went to watch the play of “*a royal*

*Vashti: a queen,*” which make her realise that the bitterness of life and harsh realities change the life of innocents. She understands that the evil aroused in the character of Vashti is purely because “evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength- for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They turned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate, and murder, and madness incarnate she stood” (275). The comparison of all the historical female figures made her feel that Vashti and her portrayal is nearer to reality than Cleopatra and the Four Women.

Lucy’ maturity enabled her to reject the handsome offer of money for her work as a private governess to Miss Paulina. It shows that she never wanted to be a puppet in the hand of some great house, which takes away the peace and independence. However, she accepts that the necessity of money and shelter made her work under unfair conditions. Her principles and her dignity are seen in her words “...for the roof of shelter I am thus enabled to keep over my head; and for the comfort of mind it gives me to think that while I can work for myself, I am spared the pain of being a burden to anybody.”(305)

Then her wish to learn the subjects of maths and science was not seriously taken by M Paul. However, his behaviour never discouraged Lucy. She felt the male insecurity in departing the knowledge concerning maths and science subjects. Her “ambitious wishes were stirred by his injustice- it imparted a strong stimulus—it gave wings to aspiration” (374) rather than curbing her confidence. She rejected the help of prejudiced M Paul by saying “take away, M Paul, ‘and ‘teach me no more. I never asked to be made learned, and you compel me to feel very profoundly that learning is not happiness” (374).

This incident upheld the main agenda of male society in taxing women with the intentional burden of learning. It shows how male society made women to feel difficulties in acquiring the knowledge of maths and science. Nevertheless, M Paul's attitude ever affected the interest of Lucy in learning new things.

After these incidents, she started to introspect about herself to come over her weaknesses. Later by burning the letters of John and concealing her meaningless desires, she advances towards an independent position (383). She pondered over the step-by-step development of Madam Beck and contemplated on her growth. She derived self-motivation in her monologue-

'Courage, Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you. Venture not to complain that such an object is too selfish, too limited, and lacks interest; be content to labour for independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher.... I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded: for you the crescent-phase must suffice. Very good. I see a huge mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. I see that a great many men, and more women, hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation. I find no reason why I should be of the few favoured. I believe in some blending of hope and sunshine sweetening the worst lots. I believe that this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end. I believe while I tremble; I trust while I weep'(383-384).

Her decision empowered her soul, and she moved on persistently. The emotions and sentiments gradually faded away from her life. Her yearning for John or Paul's attention weathered away as the reality is revealed. She made up her mind to concentrate more on her career than anything. She worked hard to turn her dream into reality, i.e., to start her own little school.

At the time, M Paul asked regarding her plans. She replied 'indeed, I had not: I was doing my best to save what would enable me to put it in practice.'(514) However, at last the love and generosity of M Paul helped Lucy to see her dream come true. When Lucy asked about the source of the money, M Paul says, "plenty of money!" 'The disposal of my large teaching connection put me in possession of a handsome sum: with part of it I determined to give myself the richest treat that I have known or shall know.'" (518) He pursued her, 'you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away;..."(518) This unbelievable twist and gift to the life of Lucy Snow led her to lead an independent life as she dreamt. A man behind her empowered status also conveys that if men keep the right spirit and open mind then they can change the circumstances of unprivileged women very easily. The entire story tells us that nothing is impossible. Economic independence and self-reliance have the power to change the personality as well as the lifestyle of any who are determined to achieve a higher position.

In addition, the female characters of Anne Bronte are other examples. Agnes Grey and Helen struggled and worked to support their family, unlike Lucy. Agnes and Helen have given first priority to their family rather than to their comforts. Both decided to take the responsibility of maintaining the household expenses out of their hard work. Agnes

proved that daughters could be the caretakers and trustworthy companions of poor parents as Caroline expresses in her monologue to the man of England. Agnes always calculated the sum of money rather than the amount of pain she has to bare as a governess. She calculated that fifty pounds would be a good amount to save for the family in spite of the expected tasks she should do. She kept her self-dignity and pride aside for the sake of her parents.

... I had no claim to be regarded as a martyr to filial piety, going forth to sacrifice peace and liberty for the sole purpose of laying up stores for the comfort and support of my parents, though certainly the comfort of my father, and the future support of my mother, had a large share in my calculations; and fifty pounds appeared to me no ordinary sum...oh, I must struggle to keep this situation, whatever it might be!...(A. Bronte 1097).

Nevertheless, as she grows up and gets experienced, she wanted to be free from the job of (servitude) governess. She wanted to be an independent woman. Her father's death made her mother think of the alternative arrangements for their independent living. Agnes' mother, the strong-minded woman of good spirit, affirmed that "so long as God spared her health and strength, she would make use of them to earn her own livelihood, and be chargeable to no one;..."(1158) Then she suggested Agnes regarding the plan to start their own small school with the intention to 'gather honey for themselves'. She is glad to have educated her daughters. The idea seems good to Agnes, and she joined her mother in the new journey. They calculated their savings to get a new house in a new place to start their little school. The plan worked well. Thus, the education and money came to their rescue and her mother never repented the birth of her two daughters like

other parents. She felt proud of her daughters and thought they are the comfort of her old age. (1159) Agnes Grey with the moral support of her mother settled independently even before her marriage. This was the result of her experience and earning as a governess though it was tiresome and hard. Agnes self-decision of becoming a governess ultimately rewarded her with an identity and independent life as a founder and a schoolteacher of her own school. This significant change filled her life with confidence and bliss. On one sunny morning on the seashore, she stood with the relaxed feel and felt,

‘Refreshed, delighted, invigorated, I walked along, forgetting all my cares, feeling as if I had wings to my feet, and could go at least forty miles without fatigue, and experiencing a sense of exhilaration to which I had been an entire stranger since the days of early youth.’(1175)

This expression is purely the result of her independent status and free will, which she gained out of her genuine attempts. Thus, Agnes life seems fulfilled even before the appearance of Mr Weston, with his marriage proposal.

*The Tenant of Wildlife Hall* has a slightly different story of a family woman. Helen, who was good at painting, but not in music used her talent to draw the attention of Arthur Huntingdon. But, when his true nature is revealed, she concentrated on her skill of drawing and painting to improve and to use it for earning a decent livelihood. It was not an easy task for her to manage time and secrecy under the same roof of Huntingdon. In the 19th century, it was not an easy job for a woman to earn as a professional artist. Therefore, Helen took enough time to execute her plan carefully. She thought to seek the help of Rachel “to find out a picture dealer in some distant town; then, through her

means, she planned privately to sell the pictures she had on hand that would contrive to dispose of her jewels-..."(A. Bronte 1401). She became more serious and practical. She worked hard at her canvas from "daylight till dusk" (1401). She rejected the help of Mr Hargrave, who was interested in Helen. Mr Hargrave pleaded her to accept him saying, "he lay his powers at her feet' and 'I will be your consoler and defender!'"(1404). However, she denied his proposal by saying "'I don't like you,' even if I were divorced from my husband- or if he were dead, I would not marry you" (1404). Thus, her skill of painting and its tools saved her from male dominance. Unfortunately, the secret plans of Helen came to the knowledge of Mr Huntingdon. Then he took all the steps to watch her moves and snatched the keys of the house. He thought destroying the painting materials would end the thoughts of Helens' independence from his clutches. He put fire to "- palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish-... all consumed- the palette knives snapped in two-the oil and turpentine sent hissing and roaring up the chimney"(1409). This incident shocked Helen. She remained "speechless, tearless and almost motionless" (1409). His manly power and his authority of being her husband were exercised to the worst. He threw the keys to her and said

- 'There! You'll find nothing gone but money, and the jewels- and a few little trifles I thought it advisable to take into my own possession, lest your mercantile spirit should be tempted to turn them into gold. I've left you a few sovereigns in your purse, which I expect to last you through the month- at all events, when you purse, which I expect to last you through the month- at all events, when you want more you will be so good as to give me an account of how that's spent. I shall put you upon a small monthly allowance, in future, for your



own private expense; and you needn't trouble yourself any more about my concerns; I shall look out for a steward, my dear; I won't expose you to the temptation'(1410).

These lines clearly indicate that money is the essence of independent life. Thus, a man from patriarchal society always took extra care to maintain his authority over public life and business where there is the scope of earning, under the guise of helping and protecting the women and children from drudgery. The division between public and private life is also maintained in the 19th century to balance the power relation in the transforming society. During that time, industrialization opened new opportunities for all with the rising demand for more labours and propagated rational thinking under the influence of French and Russian revolutions. These changes led women to think gradually about their position and question the ideologies of domesticity. The slow and steady changes filled the life of women with knowledge and novelty. Thus, Helen and her quest in life represented the changing women during social transition from old blind belief to modern practical life. The novel depicts the transformational figure of 'Angel in the House' to 'Angel out of the House' as the act of rejection to the historically, theologically, and sociologically suppressed voice of women.

The apprehension of Huntingdon that money or economic support would indeed empower his wife to get rid of him is expressed, as "not in money matters, exactly, it seems, but its best to keep out of the way of temptation" (1410). He continued "you thought to disgrace me, did you, by running away and turning artist, and supporting yourself by the labour of your hands, for sooth?..."(1410). He laughed at Helen as a weak-minded woman, who could not perceive her wish as she does not hide her secrets

from other. Helen understood these words and executed her plans with the help of her servants and brother with lots of care and secrecy. So on ‘October 24th’ she was “free and safe at last!”(1423). Helen further stood on her brave decision to safeguard her son from the wickedness of the harsh world and his father. She never changed her mind for the temptation of money and other fancies. She is determined to have her son at any cost – “I am not going to sell my child for gold, though it were to save both him and me from starving: it would be better that he should die with me, than that he should live with his father” (1427). Her good intentions led her to work hard to look after her son and to repay her brother, who incurred all the expenses to furnish a new dwelling. She was glad to be in the present position-“I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy, when I know that I am paying my way honestly, and that what little I possess is legitimately all my own;...”(1426). These words reveal her self-satisfaction derived out of her earning. It denotes that a struggle for life in the forest is better than living in the golden cage as a lifeless parakeet. Helens’ life and family orientation keep her character within the framework of the ideal woman, but her restlessness and self-respect made her take extreme steps to change the predicaments of her and her son’s future. Thus, her talent and skill along with her intuitions led her to economic independence and empowered status.

Along all her decisions, her determination to be a good teacher for his son and rejection of private governess or curate to educate her son is one of the strong oppositions she made against the ideological apparatus of the capitalist patriarchal culture. This resistance is also present in *Agnes Grey* where Agnes and her sister were educated by her mother in the house. Likewise, Agnes took the responsibility of educating her children

Edward, Agnes and little Mary. She said, “They shall want no good thing that a mother’s care can give” (1181-1182). This statement upholds the position of women (mother) as a good educator than a mere housekeeper.

### **Conclusion**

The education and employment are the keys to women empowerment, which is considered as the obvious answer for the universal program of women’s development. This reality is analysed in the present chapter with the different circumstances of respective female characters of the Bronte novels. Education enhances the growth. It does not lower the standard of living, whether that of a man or a woman. The chapter attempted to examine how the people of male society deceive the female society by depriving them of knowledge systematically under the name of the religion, culture, and society. It stresses that if women are taught equally with men and encouraged in all spheres, then as Caroline thought, she might have learned arithmetic and other disciplines earlier than boys of her age.

The concept of education and employment is not the new field of study applied to the novels of the Bronte sisters. Already many writers and research students have examined and presented their views vividly. Mainly, Marianne Thormahlen has written the book titled *The Brontes, and Education* in 2011, which includes a number of chapters on the condition of the education system, its representation in the novels of Bronte Sisters and its shortcomings. Anne Elise Shave in her thesis *Education in the Novels of Anne and Charlotte Bronte* (1997) presented the different perspectives and beliefs of the two sisters on educational values. On the work of governess and her conditions so far many research

works have been done. *The independence through Education: the Governess in Jane Eyre and Agnes Grey and her Relations to Women's Identity in the Nineteenth-Century England* by Frishtick to some extent argues that the education is the means for women's development. However, this chapter in the present thesis covered all the seven novels of Bronte sisters and tried to demonstrate - how education and employment play crucial part in the maturation of female characters and how the authors of these novels attempted to awaken the people of their time regarding the negative phases of girls' education, and to what extent the novels dismantle the prejudiced male dominance. Finally, it has shown that education opened the door for employment and each character with the aid of employment attains economic independence and strongly remains self-reliant in their lives.

In the society, education and occupational choices show the individuality of a person. For this reason, the society has systematically segregated the process of socialization of boys and girls as discussed in the previous chapter. And even the social pressure was created in the name of culture and society to prevent women from taking any rational decisions or steps. Therefore, we see women were practicing and concentrating on a few subjects of life science and working in a few lower position or professions such as governess, schoolteacher, caretaker, nursing, housemaid and in other philanthropic jobs.

In this scenario, Bronte sisters through their novels have given a call for the empowerment of women with the help of education and employment. Though they never intended to be the reformers of the societal injustice, they properly redefined the scope of possibilities for girls and women in their time to attain self-dependency. Thus, I argue

that Bronte sisters female characters and plot of the novels show how a woman acquire power- to make a choice and to seek control over their and others life through the help of formal as well as informal education, which changes the perception level of a person.

## CHAPTER – 04

### **Empowerment and the Marital Market**

“There comes a time in your life when you have to choose to turn the page, write another book or simply close it.”

- Gloria Mallette

#### **Introduction**

The early 19th century was greatly influenced by the liberal feminist views of Mary Wollstonecraft. She, who stressed women’s education and employment also said “the virtue of being a good wife or mother cannot be imposed on women; it must be freely chosen by women themselves, and women should be given knowledge and education so as to make rational choices to be good wives and mothers”(Bryson, 22-23). Bronte Sisters presented ambiguity in considering marriage as the principal means of happiness in the life of women. Charlotte Bronte personally felt pity for girls and their family who were desperately waiting for the tie of marriage. She advocated that they should work for their living, she said, “teachers may be hard-worked, ill-paid and despised-but the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst paid drudge of a school” (C. Bronte 2: 226). Thus, Bronte, who had given first priority for education and employment, treated marriage as an optional subject in their life and in their fictional world. Unlike Jane Austen, Bronte placed marriage at the end of women’s journey. Although Austen felt Marriage should be out of love and affection and rejected the mercenary notions, she did not broaden her views to focus on other issues of woman’s

life. However, the Bronte Sisters enlarged the space of Victorian women by placing them as educated, economically independent and empowered. As Friedan argued, equality and human dignity are not possible for women if they are not able to earn and “only economic independence can free a woman to marry for love” (qtd. in Papa 339).

This chapter on ‘Marriage’ examines the Victorian marital market and women’s position in the male-dominated society. It tries to give the social background of the Victorian era in which women were regarded as moral guardians as well as morally weak by nature. Then, the concept of marriage for money and social status is analysed. The condition of married woman in the family, that of an unmarried single woman in patriarchal society, women’s life as a widow and the rational thought of remarriage are considerably investigated in this unit with reference to the selected Bronte texts. After this, the next section demonstrates the ‘femaleness’ of women and her self-expressions as a step towards independent life.

The institution of Victorian marriage and its disadvantages for women is analysed. The presence of social and legal issues in the novels will be looked at closely to know how Bronte sisters try to educate the readers about the legitimate power of the women in the 19th-century patriarchal society. Gradually, the chapter conveys Bronte’s message that women have to work hard to enhance their intellectual and economic power to escape from the necessity of marriage to the male only for the living. It also attempts to show that marriage on democratic lines would lead to women’s independent spirit. The marriage changes the personal and social status of the individual (man/woman). Therefore, a woman has to find a way for her comfort and growth rather than losing the identity in the marital relationship.

## Victorian Women in Marital Market

Women of 19th century England was adored as the angels of men. They were protected and placed securely from the public sphere as they were seen as feeble and fragile creatures. They were entrusted with the responsibilities of housekeeping and child rearing according to the directions of the husband. A girl of a middle-class family from her childhood learnt how to live in the house doing and enjoying the strenuous task of sewing, embroidering, stitching. They were allowed to read books or magazines to know the appropriate female characteristics. Upper-class girls cautiously tried to cultivate the social etiquettes, mannerisms and spent their time in acquiring languages required for social conversations. These practices prepared them as moral custodians to maintain the cult of domesticity.

John Gregory in a passage from *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* mocks the meaningless accomplishments of girls educating indirectly in these words:

The intention of your being taught needle-work, knitting and suchlike is not on account of the intrinsic value of all you can do with your hands, which is trifling, but... to enable you to gill up, in a tolerably agreeable way, some of the many solitary hours you must necessarily pass at home. (30)

Under these guidelines, a woman from her childhood unconsciously internalised her role as mentioned above. Nead supported this by saying "... the notion of dependency should not be seen in terms of a repressive exercise of power. The condition of dependency was believed to be a natural and gratifying component of respectable femininity" (29). But the situation of dependency is the cultural construct. The Victorian woman was a "relative



Creature” that they were “incomplete” when “independent” (Fasick 75) was an ideological plot of the society to control the growth of women. To maintain this strategy girls were brought up to regard marriage and motherhood as their chief role in life.

Thus, marriage was the yardstick to measure the success of a woman in the 19th century. Every woman whatever her class and position dreamt of a man with handsome features and good reputation. For middle-class daughters, marriage was the important step for their economic and social growth. It is a ladder to reach the higher grade in the society by marrying a man of the aristocracy. Likewise, the male of the society thought that marriage was a real business of possessing an object that serves his needs, in terms of wealth that she inherits or the physical beauty she possessed. Thus, marriage was an open market for the bargain, where love was sold for money and transformed to any who were eligible.

The female characters like Ingram, Ginevra, Catherine, Isabella, Rosalie, Matilda, and male characters like Robert Moore, Rochester, and Heathcliff in the novels of Bronte Sisters represent the mercenary marital market of Victorian society. Each of these female characters acted as the typical by-product of Victorian society except Catherine to some extent.

Here Ingram, Eliza, Ginevra, Rosalie, Matilda are teenage girls, who are brought up in the upper-class family and trained to be the followers of gender and class differences in society. All of them are educated to be ladylike figures. None of them thought about other things of life to fulfil their desires. The fashion, social gathering, and their appearance matter more than anything else. They thought of marriage as their

ultimate goal. The young girls who considered mere physical attraction and infatuation as true love had suffered for the mistake in their life. These sensitive issues are very sensibly written by Bronte sisters to awaken the people about their follies. In the same time, they mocked the idiotic behaviour of cultured society.

Blanche Ingram represents the unnatural, immature character of thousands of women of 19th century. She is a “showy”, “not genuine”, a person with “many brilliant attainments” but have a poor mind and barren heart where “nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness”(C. Bronte 181). Ingram is very artificial from all perspectives. “She used to repeat - sounding phrases from books” (181). She is the typical Victorian woman who has nothing but imitative nature, which was expected and even appreciated by the male society. Ingram’s effort to grab the attention of Mr. Rochester is unreal. She wanted to marry Rochester for his social status and political reasons. Thus, marriage stood as a political and commercial deal between the families. Looking at all these acts Jane Eyre, was disappointed with the unrealistic attitudes of the people around her. Jane expressed her surprise on this artificiality with an irony on the deceitful world of Marriage:

... It surprised me when I first discovered that such was his intention: I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife; but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles installed into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them, such as I could not fathom.

It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love; but the very obviousness of the advantages to the husband's own happiness offered by this plan convinced me that there must be arguments against its general adoption of which I was quite ignorant: otherwise I felt sure all the world would act as I wished to act. (183)

These lines show that the Victorian matrimonial alliance was taking place on the guidelines of the prevailing common practises. The practices indicate the culture of a class or community. Here Mr. Rochester and Miss Ingram are the representatives of the Victorian culture. Thus, Jane said, "they are acting in conformity to ideas and principles installed into them,... from their childhood"(183). Jane analysed their act, standing outside the cultural boundary and she even says that her opinion might be wrong on Rochester and Ingram when it comes to society and its class system. But she said if people start to think like her then 'all the world would act' as she wished. (183) Her last words are the wish of Charlotte who wanted to see the changes in the culture of Victorian society. Similarly, Miss Ginevra of *Villette* is more anxious about her marriage and suitor than anything else. She wants to attain perfection as a bride in the marital market. Therefore, she cared for her exterior looks and were interested in polishing her languages and skills to attract men of repute. She believed that her beauty and talent is there to persuade the gentlemen. In her first meeting with Lucy, Ginevra expressed her opinion about marriage. In her view, a woman has to marry a handsome man or a man with good wealth. When she came across an unmatched pair in the cargo, she felt pity for the girl. She questioned ironically "she must have been good-natured; but what had made her marry that individual, who was at least as much like an oil-barrel as a man?" (58) Her

remarks on the newly wedded couple show she is a girl who gives importance to beauty and status. Later on, she started to talk about her family, her life. In her talks, she said, for women of poor family marriage is a means to escape poverty and to obtain money.

I have five sisters and three brothers. By-and-by we are to marry-rather elderly gentlemen, I suppose with cash: papa and mamma manage that. My sister Augusta is married now to a man much older looking than papa. Augusta is very beautiful- not in my style- but dark; her husband, Mr. Davies, had the yellow fever in India, and he is still the colour of a guinea; but then he is rich, and Augusta has her carriage and establishment, and we all think she has done perfectly well. Now, this is better than “earning a living... (61).

Ginevra’s words reflect the condition of the Victorian family, in which we find number of children. The huge responsibility of parents was to find the bridegroom and to arrange the money for daughters’ marriage. Thus, many young and beautiful girls had entered into the marital alliance with an age-old man because he was a rich man. In addition, Ginevra says marriage with a rich old man was better than “earning a living” (61) in the capitalist Victorian England. This statement shows how miserable was the condition of unmarried women, who wanted to work in the time of industrialization and urbanization in England. The fear of insecure life in women, which was installed by the capitalist patriarchal culture made most of them to accept marriage as the only step to escape from the life of drudgery. Therefore, Ginevra had decided marriage was the only option to attain her desired life. But she knows her parents and their money could only lead her to marry an aged man like her sister. This apprehension made her an Angel with a treacherous mind. To some extent, she was encouraged by her father. She said- “In the

first place, I must go out. Papa himself said that he wished me to see something of the world: he particularly remarked to Mrs. Cholmondeley... I had rather a bread-and butter-eating, school-girl air; of which it was his special desire that I should get rid, by an introduction to society here, before I make my regular debut in England”(97-98). It shows how parents and family acted as an agent in influencing the acts of a person. The improper socialization and her misconception led her to a miserable life of disrespect though she married a handsome young man of good rank. “She got on – fighting the battle of life by proxy, and on the whole, suffering as little as any human being...” (508).

Likewise, Anne Bronte’s *Agnes Grey* depicts the silliness of Murray’s daughters as the result of parental care and socialization. As other girls of the society, they even considered marriage as their aim. Thus, their world was always filled with the thoughts of fashion, appearance, and parties. Their thoughts were always filled with the calculation of outer looks and ranks of men in the society. When Agnes informed Rosalie (Miss Murray) that her ‘sister is going to be married’ Miss Murray wants to know the background of her bridegroom - “to whom is she to be married?”... ‘is he rich?’... ‘is he handsome?’...young?... ‘what sort of a house is it?’ (1108). The answers were a kind of a shock to Miss Murray. She screamed at Agnes “Oh, stop! - you’ll make me sick. How can she bear it?”... - Miserable creature! How can she think of spending her life there, cooped up with that nasty old man; and no hope of change?’ ‘Mercy, how shocking! And will she wear a white apron, and make pies and puddings?’(1108). The series of question shows her narrow vision of life and her belief that only a man with all comforts, luxury and good looks will keep his wife happy. But Agnes upholds that a man of “good, wise and amiable” (1108) nature like Mr. Richardson is more worthy than a man of good

wealth. But Agnes opinion was considered as a silly remark by Miss Murray until she realised her mistake.

Then Matilda's careless talks and spirited nature is a big headache to her mother. She is always blamed for her boyish nature. Her sister Rosalie, who is more conscious of her womanly behaviour, criticised Matilda's nature-

'My dear Matilda! Nobody will ever admire you till you get rid of your rough, awkward manners'.

'oh, stuff! Harry Meltham likes such manners; and so do papa's friends.'

Well, you may captivate old men, and younger sons; but nobody else, I am sure, will ever take fancy to you.'

'I don't care: I'm not always grubbing after money, like you and mamma. If my husband is able to keep a few good horses and dogs, I shall be quite satisfied; and all the rest may go to the devil!'

'Well, if you use such shocking expressions, I'm sure no real gentleman will ever venture to come near you' (1114).

In addition, Miss Murray continued to direct Miss Grey to make Matilda learn the required mannerisms for marital bond and strictly said "you should not let her do so" (1114). In this way, Miss Murray clarifies the demands of the marital market and stresses that man of rich family and woman of divine nature along with beauty are in high demand. Thus to be the first in the race of marrying the best eligible handsome man of respective society, girls like Rosalie and Matilda should learn to hide naturally their

innate qualities and should act as if they are there to amuse the company of noblemen. By these means, they should leave an impression among the people of their class as they are apt to be chosen as good wife of great men. In the chapter titled *Ball* in *Agnes Grey* Miss Murray or Rosalie, state how much it was important to be attractive and attentive in the social gathering for a girl to conquer the hearts of as many men as possible. She explains to Agnes that getting married to a gentleman is a great venture. She thinks that character never matters in terms of money and title and that she would like to be called “Lady Ashby of Ashby Park” (1111) even though Mr Ashby might be ‘wicked’. It is because Ashby has a good repute, great wealth and ladies die to marry him. In addition, she reveals the true necessity of marriage for a girl,—“if I could be always young, I would be always single. I should like to enjoy thoroughly, and coquet with the world, till I am on the verge of being called an old maid...” (1111). These words show that the requirement of money and moral support pushes a woman to look for marriage as the single option to escape from one drudgery to another.

Catharine and Isabella, on the other hand, are treated as the best example to show how women were deceived from the societal assumptions. Emily Bronte projected how the society and its words of trickery stirred the nature of Catharine and Isabella in a different way. Catharine under the influence of false embellishments of societal status and class system forgot her real self. For the questions of Nelly, Catharine said that she loved Edgar because “he is handsome and pleasant to be with,” “he is young and cheerful” and that he loves her. More than all these she says, “He will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband”(E. Bronte 83). Nelly strongly opposes the superficial ideas of love and

marriage of Catharine; she said “worst of all” (84) on hearing her opinion that she wanted to marry Edger for his money and status. Nelly observes that Catharine is just fascinated by the richness of Mr. Edgar’s family and his youthfulness, without that she might not love him at all. As the conversation went on Catharine said she only pitied him – hate him if “he were ugly and a clown” (84) and accepted she is infatuated with the handsome, rich man of Thushcross Grange because she never had seen a man like Edgar. It connotes any other in the place of Edgar would have appealed to her if she had come across such a person earlier. She thought that physical appearance, title and rank would give her satisfaction more than love for a while, and that led her life to tragic end.

Isabella the typical aristocratic Victorian girl who learned to play music, to sing, to dance, to paint and to read failed to analyse the fallacious nature of Mr. Heathcliff. She, who looked at him as a gipsy in her initial encounters gradually, changed her mind with the change of his social status. She became a victim of his revengeful plot. He used her as a step to claim the ladder of hierarchy through marriage. She is used as a pawn in his game of revenge. Thus, the marital market often victimised girls, who were inadequately educated. The less they knew about the outer world, the more they suffered. Mrs Graham makes it clear in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that worldly temptations are same to man and woman, and it is unjust to impart unequal education and exposure based on gender. Isabella after her elopement and marriage to Heathcliff, realised her mistake. She writes to Nelly Dean asking her the answer for her questions like- “...the second question, I have great interest in; it is this- is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? ... I beseech you to explain if you can, what I have married” (135). She concludes her letter with the expression of hatred towards her husband and repents



her foolishness. Again, the abduction and forceful marriage of Cathy, the daughter of Catharine with young Linton is a cruel attempt of Heathcliff to obtain wealth and money. These meaningless bondages are the result of women's position in the Victorian society. Here young Cathy is used and abused in the marital market for money and Heathcliff's selfish motives: "A woman could easily be no more than a pawn in the hands of the economic aspiration of men" (Calder 16).

In the novel *Shirley*, Robert Moore wanted to marry Shirley to settle in his uncertain business and life. Therefore, he intentionally suppressed his love for Caroline, who is not rich like Shirley. People of Villette gossiped that necessity of money might have made Dr. John to fall in a relation with a fourteen years senior and widowed mother, i.e., Madam Beck, who is rich and well settled. People say things like "*He* perhaps was not in love; but how many people ever do love, or at least marry for love, in this world?"(110). It clearly shows that the essence of the marital market was money. Even Rochester of *Jane Eyre* married Bertha to inherit money and property rather than for real love. Calder says 'a man who married a rich woman was indeed marrying money and so the economic realities of marriage were bound to be of the greatest significance'. (16) Thus, all these plots of marriage are the result of societal beliefs and demands of the Victorian marital market. Here, the study of the Victorian culture through the Bronte novels shows that the society had misguided the men and women from their childhood. Especially the concept of marriage was introduced as the fairytale, where a girl will get a perfect hero/gentlemen and a boy will marry a beautiful angel. This story has deeply influenced the opinion of young girls and boys to a larger extent. Therefore, a general criterion was followed and expected before entering into the marital bond. However, this

ideological world is cleverly presented in the novels and to an extent the failure of all such mercenary marriage plot tries to reconstruct the notion of marriage on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.

### **Women in Married-Unmarried and Remarried status**

In such a competitive, market of marriage, the woman who married a rich man with the hope to see fulfilment in life would often feel foolish. Marriage has brought a new set of responsibilities and difficulties in the life of women. She who was under the control of her father is just exchanged to her husband's authority. Therefore, it shatters the illusionary world of women, who think they would be free and secure by accepting the institution of marriage. Calder while talking about Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* says, "Life is a marketplace. Parents sell their daughters, trade titles for riches, buy commissions in the Army or seats in parliament for their sons. A family can stand or fall by the marriages the children make" (38). In this barter system, a woman is exchanged as an object of gratitude in the wedding. As a result, she should be obedient to her master. For this reason, she was ill-educated by her parents so that she remains passive, pious and irrational in all the circumstances of her married life. Poovey's image of an ideal woman is the echo of societal expectations from a female who was on the threshold of marriage. However, it is hard to be an Angel of the house as described. This difficulty is reflected in the stories of those women who strived hard to marry the handsomest and the richest man in their life.

### Status of Married Women

Blanche Ingram is mercilessly desolated by Rochester, as he used her to make Jane jealous and test the love of her on him. When Rochester said all this to Jane for her question why did he take such pains to make her believe that he wished to marry Miss Ingram? (C. Bronte 258), Jane objected to the mean act of him with the feelings of a lady, who coined “her smiles so lavishly, flash her glances so unremittingly, manufacture airs so elaborate, graces so multitudinous” (183) on him. She said ““... now you are small-not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger. It was a burning shame and a scandalous disgrace to act in that way. Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram’s feelings, sir?””(258). But Rochester rejected her feelings as fake. Ginevra of *Villette* ended up in misery as mentioned above and in her mad pursuit of marrying a handsome wealthy young man, she lost her youth, innocence and her name among the known people of the society. Miss Murray by following her “false idea of happiness” (regarding marriage) (1173) in *Agnes Grey* learnt a valuable lesson. Her theory of marriage and love turned false after her marriage with highborn Thomas Ashby. She bears many miseries and pains silently by the bad conduct of her husband. She expressed her regret about her decision with Agnes. She explains her neglected position as a wife of Thomas in these words “*he will do as he pleases, and I must be a prisoner and a slave*” (1173). Thus, she realised after marriage the worth of real love, care and concern, which is more valuable than money.

Emily Bronte’s novel *Wuthering Heights* deals with the tragic stories of Catherine and Isabella’s marital life. They assumed that rank and status of a man is more important for marriage. Catherine married Edgar to attain social standards. Isabella married

Heathcliff again looking at his new status and outer appearance. Catherine grew mad and uncontrollable by the news of Heathcliff's marriage with Isabella. She repents her disastrous step. She threw all the societal norms aside. At last, in vain she died to get united with her lost love after death. Her marriage was filled with unhappiness, which she never expected before the marriage to Edgar despite Nelly's advice. In the other hand, Isabella is greatly deceived by the drama of love and marriage. She suffered a lot at the hands of Heathcliff.

Likewise, Rochester's life turned into hell with the madness of Bertha. Both Rochester and Bertha suffered in their own way because of their marriage. His mistake haunted him until the end of his life as in the middle he lost his love, and later he became permanently crippled. Bertha Mason also lost her serenity by marrying an unknown man of a different background.

In the novels women like Mrs. Bloomfield, Mrs. Murray, Mrs Markham and other lead their life as the silent followers of societal ideologies. They never expressed their femininity or restlessness strongly against the rules of patriarchal family setup. These women are the puppets. They tried to teach their daughters to become a replica of their personality, which the society expected. They never thought about what they were doing. Instead, they carefully maintained the role of Victorian moral guardian. Mrs Bloomfield as a wife might have obviously sensed that her husband's careless and rude nature would influence her children, and that is why they have grown uncontrollable. However, she never tries to change her husband and guide her children about what is good and what is bad. She silently supported the cruel behaviour of her loving son Tom. In the name of motherly love, she merely spoiled her son rather than mending his behaviour. Likewise,

Mrs. Murray, who knew the negative aspects of Ashby, did not warn her daughter against her or his (Ashby) bad inclinations. Miss Murray after her marriage to Ashby remarks about her mother's intentional negligence "mamma ought to have known better than either of us, and she never said anything against it..." (1173). This is a complaint about the care and concern of a mother, who failed in her duty to Agnes. The other instance is Mrs. Murray who never said a word to the wayward mannerisms of her husband who actually influenced his daughter Matilda to behave like a tomboy. In the same manner, Mrs. Ashby's Mother-in-law supports her son's bad attitudes and habits by advising her daughter-in-law to show respect regardless of any faults of his, because it is the duty of a good wife to serve her husband. These attitudes of women show how they supported the male authority without any kind of resistance. On the other hand, it demonstrates how the hegemonic rule of patriarchy has won over the mindset of innocent females who had internalised their position (subordination) as natural. But Mrs. Ashby a young married woman tries to oppose these practices when she experienced the harsh behaviour of her husband. She rejects the words of her mother-in-law saying, "She never showed such disrespect to her husband; and as for affection, wives never think of that nowadays, she supposes: but things were different in her time-..." ( 1173). It shows her resistance and rational thought.

The novel *Villette* is said to be over flooded by women characters. Along with Ginevra's unhappy married life, one can witness the struggle of women, who have lost their husband's at a young age. However, Lucy's godmother Mrs. Bretton and Madam Beck stand as inspiring models for Lucy's growth and positive changes in life.

### **Alternatives of Widowhood**

Widowhood in 19th century Victorian society was filled with perpetual mourning and difficulties. The woman who was a dependent on her husband faces series of questions regarding her insecure life, future of the children and expenses of the house. In England, the mourning of Queen Victoria set an example in the life of widows. She conveyed a message by her lifestyle that a widow should spend the rest of her life as a saint in the name of the dead husband till her death. The society treated those women (widows) with respect in the name of their lost husband. The death of the husband had given the right on his inherited property to the wife. Thus, she was suddenly burdened with the new responsibilities of the public and private sphere. Such a situation is challenging for the woman in mourning. However, many women took this responsibility for the sake of their children. The stories of those women are usually filled with worries. Nevertheless, these elements are not present in the description of women like Mrs. Bretton, Madam Beck, Mrs. Richerd and Mrs. Huntingdon. These characters emerge as successful independent women and responsible mothers in spite of losing their husband.

Lucy Snow starts her narration with the picture of her good godmother-“ Mrs Bretton, who had been left a widow, with one son,- her husband, a physician, having died while she was yet a young and handsome woman”(C. Bronte 7). Mrs Bretton was a strong woman with ‘commanding’ attitudes and ‘unsentimental’ nature. She brought up her son with great care. She never bestowed her weak and soft motherly feelings to her son. This intentional behaviour moulded the personality of her son as a humble, educated, more responsible and caring person in her old age. Lucy comments on her nature as, “Mrs. Bretton was not generally a caressing woman; even with her deeply-cherished son,

her manner was rarely sentimental, often the reverse; ...” (10). Then the huge loss of money and wealth did not break the hopes of the old woman. They moved to London, and her son was encouraged to adopt the profession of his father. Lucy narrates their sad story as “... with them all had not gone smoothly, and fortune had retrenched her once abundant gifts. But so courageous a mother, with such a champion in her son, was well fitted to fight with the world, and to prevail ultimately” (190). These lines tell the successful story of a widow, who fought with the difficulties of life and stood firmly in all situation.

On the other hand, Lucy tells the story of a widow named Madam Beck, who is the founder and creator of many persons’ bright futures. She was the owner of Roe Fossette. “Surveillance,” “espionage”- are her watchwords (80). Madam is the spring of strength and managing skills. She maintained each and everything of her machinery with her unique style. She trusted no one; her eyes are always in the keen vigilance of all the matters. She always spied her staff to keep them in check. She is very particular in the matter of work and punctuality. She is careful and is interested in everything. No one can ever fool her in any manner. She has a man’s heart, where there is no place for emotions and sentiments. Meanwhile, she is very generous in helping the poor and needy. In the words of Lucy, “no private sorrow touched her: no force or mass of suffering concentrated in one heart had power to pierce hers. Not the agony in Gethsemane, not the death on Calvary, could have wrung from her eyes one tear” (81).

Madam Beck provided a healthy environment for hundreds of girls to study under her supervision. She had a systematic schedule for teachers and students that never overburdened anyone. She maintained a healthy atmosphere in her educational institute.

Her potentiality is hugely applauded by Lucy often. Lucy admits, ‘Madame was a very great and a very capable woman’. The school offered her for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly. Nobody could have browbeaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, or over-reached her astuteness. In her own single person, she could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police. Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate-withal perfectly decorous- what more could be desired?’ (82).

These lines uphold the dynamism and brilliance of a single woman, who is the mother of her dead husband’s children. She has difficulty of rearing and caring her daughters alone, but she took the huge responsibility of running a successful educational institution for the girls of her society. Her courage and her interest are unbeatable. For instance, once, her intimacy with young and handsome physician Dr. John is mistaken to be an illicit affair. Everyone starts to suspect the frequent visits of young man to Roe Fossette: “the school gossiped, the kitchen whispered, the town caught the rumour, parents wrote letters and paid visits of remonstrance” (108). Many rival educational institutions wanted to ruin the name and fame of Madam by spreading the false tales. However, Madam “came off with flying colours” (109); her management skill, her moderate temper and her firmness led her to address the parents of the students modestly. She revealed her children’s illness and their attachment towards the doctor. She laughed at the rumours and said, “she had confidence on her” (109). She even announced that officially Dr. John would be the in charge of all girls who fell ill in her institution thereafter. Thus, her modest nature gained the trust of the anxious parents, and they



appreciated “her as a directress better than ever” (109). Like this, she slowly put an end to the gossips of her affair with Dr. John. As, Lucy closely observed Madam did not give a chance to anyone to harm her in any way. Lucy often felt proud of Madam’s proficiency. Lucy compared her to “an Apollyon of a predilection; you fought a good fight, and you overcame!” (114). In this way, a widow stood steadily as a single man army to defend and to correct the ebbs and flows of her education institute along with her life. Thus, her strong character reflects many important elements of empowered status. Firstly, her decision-making power, next her positive thinking to make changes and her ability to change other’s perceptions by democratic means shows her individual capabilities.

Compared to the vastness of Madam Beck’s life and achievement, Mrs. Grey in the novel *Agnes Grey* is a different character. She was a well-bred daughter of a squire. She married Agnes’ father for pure love against the wish of her friends and family. As a result, she lost her status and luxury after becoming a poor parson’s wife. However, her spirit never faded away. Agnes felt “a carriage and a lady’s maid were great conveniences; but thank heaven; she had feet to carry her, and hands to minister to her own necessities” (A. Bronte 1065). Agnes’ mother always cared for the happiness of her life and her love-Richard Grey. Therefore, they lived a very happy life compared to any married couple in the whole of England, as Agnes knows. (1065) Her mother brought up her sister and Agnes with a great care. Mrs. Grey employed her intelligence and learned knowledge to educate her daughters. Thus, she stood as the true pillar of the house. She was a caring mother, the loving wife and a shrewd house maker. The mutual understanding and good companionship kept them always together. Despite her husband’s huge loss in the investment and great misery, she did not repent her act of

marriage to a poor parson. Instead, she took the responsibility of looking after the economy of her house so skilfully. She always supported her husband to keep in good health and spirit despite the loss in the investments. The day she lost Richard Grey, “her spirit, though crushed, was not broken” (1158) Mrs. Grey refused the offer of her elder daughter and made up her mind to be an independent woman until she has good health and strength. She does not want to be a burden to anyone. Her old age or widowhood never breaks her hopes. She took the initiative to empower their uncertain situation by the plan of starting their own small school. She, who always supported Agnes’ decisions now, with her help constructed a meaningful life. Mrs Grey being a self-respected lady, even in her most miserable days of widowhood did not give up her ‘self’ for the need of money and moral support of her father, who offered his help for the first time after her marriage with a condition, i.e., her apology for her mistake. However, she strongly objected to the opinions of her father. She makes her father realise that his views were wrong by writing a letter that reads – she is more fortunate to marry Richard, and she is proud to have her daughters. Moreover, she never repented of her decision of marriage to a person of true love. This letter put an end to the relation with her father and the wealth, which she is supposed to inherit went to the hands of her distant cousins. Nevertheless, Mrs. Grey and her daughter never felt bad about their situation and their decision to keep up the self-esteem of their loving family.

In this way, the novels have given strong examples of the life of widow to live with hope and dream. They try to make them know a rational set of ideas, which normally they do not think in their grief of loss or mourning. Through these examples, they tried to say that widowhood is not a cumbersome condition. “Our power of being

happy lies a good deal in ourselves...” (C. Bronte 221). Dr. John’s advice to Lucy that “happiness is the cure- a cheerful mind the preventive: cultivate both” (267), though it seems a mockery to Lucy, is essential to the life of a single woman in despair. “Cultivate happiness” (267), so that worries never find room to stay. Even women of the 19th century need not follow the mourning ideal of Queen Victoria in their short, miserable life. They tried to say that middle-class women’s life is different from the life of women from aristocracy- who have plenty to spend and nothing to worry other than the loss of their husband. Here the life of each widow stands against the Victorian cultural icon (Queen Victoria) and influences thousands of women to have courage and to lead their life with a difference. These characters make us realise that death of the husband does not put an end to the life of the woman. It is the individual decisions that make a difference in the life of a person and ultimately in the society.

### **Unmarried Single Women**

Villette created the space, place and identity of Lucy Snow. She who followed her unknown destiny reached the foreign land of fresh air and opportunities. Her migration led her to build the nest for her living in a secure place. In the process of finding, the shelter and cultivating the courage and strength to build her future, she concealed her sorrows and fear; she learnt to console herself and to come over her sorrows with success.

When Charlotte wrote and published this novel, England was facing the problem of single women because of the imbalanced proportion of male and female birth ratio. Thousands of middle-class women started to live without marriage because of the high demands of the marital market. The problem of money and physical beauty left the

unfortunate girls to the fate of loneliness. Thus, the necessity of becoming independent cropped up among the women of the era more than at any time. They became governesses and teachers. Therefore, educated women of the decent middle-class family started to earn their bread for their life and to their family working under the roofs of upper-class society. Their poor condition made them forget marriage as a dream. In such a journey, Lucy Snow who became a successful English teacher and proved her vitality was always haunted with the notion of solitude. Her monologue reveals her concealed fears

... to look forward was not to hope: the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good. A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed me- a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly. Alas! When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm tree, no well in view... (C. Bronte 169).

She sadly put forth her worries to cheerful Paulina, who thinks Lucy's life is 'beautiful'. She said, "I shall share no man's or woman's life in this world, as you understand sharing. I think I have one friend of my own, but am not sure; and till I am sure I live solitary"(453). Paulina felt 'solitude is sadness'. However, Lucy's secret affection and love went in vain because of her position and looks. She had foreseen the inevitability of loneliness in the early days of her life. She thought that nobody would share his or her life with a woman of misfortune. However, the attention and care of M Paul filled her solitude with a glimpse of happiness and hope for the time being. Later the

news of his departure to far off continent pushed her to deep grief; the questions of her uncertain life mocked over her position “what should I do; oh! What should I do; when all my life’s hope was thus torn by roots out of my riven, outraged heart?”(474). Her restlessness became wild; the learnt nature of concealing her tears in difficulty led her to self-control-“Reliant on night, confiding in solitude, I kept my tears sealed, my sobs chained, no longer; they heaved my heart; they tore their way. In this house, what grief could be scared?”(476). However, the gossips spread over the Roe Fossette regarding her depression did not harm her. Everything with the disappearance of M Paul dissolved unknowingly. As the days rolled on Lucy’s mental illness cured quite well. She is restored from her bad condition. She says “when the iron had entered well my soul, I stood up, as I thought, renovated” (498). She felt love is for the one who has either money or beauty. The unexpected visit of M Paul and his unimaginable presents to Lucy made her feel that God has heard her thousands of prayers and bestowed her with mercy. She is overwhelmed by the support and love of M Paul. Nevertheless, her happiness does not end for a long period and her independent life becomes a habit. Her hard work in the school yielded success; in addition, she received hundred pounds from “Mr. Marchmont, the cousin and heir of her dear and dead mistress” (524). Miss Marchmont was a woman of fortune, but she lived her life alone in the memory of her love. She in her youth loved a nobleman named Frank and those days were her ever-cherished moments. She told her story of short-lived love and everlasting sorrow until her death to Miss Lucy when she was working as her caretaker. Frank “on the day of Christmas Eve, when Miss Marchmont was dressed and decorated herself, expecting her lover, very soon to be her husband”(45), who had promised her to visit on that night died suddenly. On that day

onwards, she lived as “a woe-struck and selfish woman” in the eyes of other people; they thought she wasted her youth and money for her selfish love. No one turned to her in her old age and helpless condition to look after her, but her economic independence led her to live thirty long years according to her wish and she died in the firm belief of reunion with her dead Frank. This story again is repeated in the life of Lucy Snow, who was waiting for M Paul for three years. And as he had promised to return in the month of November, she arranged her house, school, library and garden according to his taste (526). However, he did not return. The news of seven days of storm and dreadful tempest destroyed the hopes of thousands of people who were waiting for their relatives, friends and lovers. It filled them with unbearable sorrow. Thus, Lucy remained unmarried in the hope of receiving M Paul on the shores of agony.

The climax does not satisfy the reader’s curiosity. It just leads us to speculate the consequences. But the story of Miss Marchmont, which is placed before the beginning of Lucy’s journey. Then the examples of Mrs. Bretton and Madam Beck in the novel hints that Lucy might live like Marchmont or Madam Beck. Lucy’s bitter experiences in life have already hardened her emotions. Therefore, it was not a difficult thing for Lucy to accept the fate of spinsterhood. She might live as another model to the timid women of society.

In other words, the story reveals the personal dilemma of Charlotte Bronte in the matter of her marriage. Barker recollects Charlotte’s life and worries in his work *The Brontes: Life in Letters*. Charlotte wrote to her friend Ellen expressing her anxiety about her unmarried status in many letters; she had reconciled “I’m certainly doomed to be an old maid... never mind I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old”

(68). In another letter, she says, “I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a Governess” (72). In another incident, when Emily and Charlotte came to know that their school in Brussels was managed by a married woman, they were surprised and even felt happy to see such a ‘healthier’ environment. Emily sarcastically says, “Unmarried women grow strange. We’ll find that out for ourselves, no doubt...” (Bank 227). However, Charlotte rejected the opinion of Emily saying “I shall not ‘grow strange’, as you call it, because I’m not spending my youth sitting about longing to be married. That is what causes the strangeness- disappointed expectations. We shall fill our minds with tasks and accomplishments, and not strain after the impossible” (227). On this same principle, Charlotte portrayed the life of each protagonist of her novels like *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Lucy Snow*. And *Villette* her last novel ultimately gives a vent to the desire of being a free and an independent single woman. None of her heroines express the strange anxieties as described by Caroline (in *Shirley*) in her monologue regarding the condition of women (old-maids) in England.

In addition to *Lucy Snow*, Eliza of *Jane Eyre*, one of the daughters of Mrs. Reeds took the decision to step into spinsterhood as her sole wish. For her future, she prepared herself with self-implemented dedication and strict disciplinary rules. She was always busy in her works. She had planned to occupy each hour of every day with an allotted task. *Jane Eyre* describes her routine as “Three times a day she studied a little book, which was a common prayer book. Three hours she gave to stitching, with gold thread, the border of a square crimson cloth, which was a covering for the altar of a new church near Gateshead. Two hours for her dairy; two to working by herself in the kitchen garden; and one to the regulation of her accounts” (C. Bronte 230). Any disturbance in her

regular 'clockwork' annoyed her. She practiced these things without failure to keep her mind always busy. She even suggested the girls like Georgiana to cultivate the habit of self-dependency rather than wasting their time. She mocks their meaningless and burdensome lifestyle. However, the same Eliza appreciated the life of Jane Eyre, who is independent and a burden to no one. (237) She decided to leave Gateshead after the death of her mother and seek her life in a religious house near Lise- a nunnery, where she shall be quiet and unmolested. She decided to devote herself to the examination of the Roman Catholic dogmas and a careful study of the working of their system. (237) In this way, her resolution to be independent and single was perceived with a practical mindset. She stood stronger than Lucy snow of *Villette* and all other female characters in the novels who loved or liked a man to marry in their life. Here Eliza's decision shows her 'femaleness' and her total rejection of the institution of marriage without any bitter experience of love failure or any other thing. It demonstrates her uniqueness and strong mentality.

### **Concept of Remarriage**

The Rock Mountain review of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Nicole A Diederich compares the artistic skill and the life of Helen under the eye of legal issues of the 19th century England. He concludes that remarriage is not the end of her worries, as legal rights of the 19th century had not given a full support for the emancipation of women. In this section, the analysis of the concept of remarriage attempts to show how Anne Bronte successfully dealt with the issue of remarriage of a widow in a conservative society. Because widow remarriage was very rare in the early 19th century England, the society did not support a widow being a mother of a kid to marry again. People considered it as a



disrespectable step. The same society allowed a widowed man to remarry without any objections. However, even many women thought remarriage would again make them the subordinates of their new husband. The inherited wealth and money of the widow would become the property of her new life-partner. Therefore, the majority of widows led their life without remarriage, even though they lost their husband at a very young age. Such examples are the life of Madam Beck and Mrs Bretton as discussed above. However, the concept of remarriage in Anne's novel is not a thoughtless decision of Helen in her desperation or for the need of life's security. The young woman has experienced many cruel faces of the society in all her steps. She was not a widow just by the physical death of a loving husband. She was deceived by her husband and she was very badly ill-treated by him in front of his friends. She had the realisation that it was difficult to live in the society as a single woman. The rumours and other uneasy situations had made her strong enough to decide her life as she wished. She accepted the genuine proposal of Gilbert after testing his integrity. It means that she was not waiting for Gilbert or another man to come as a rescuer. It was Helen, who made him wait until she decided to marry him. These things show that Helen had not yielded to the words of Gilbert. She did not surrender her individuality to him. She reconstructed her life, as she desired. She never cared much for what people thought around her. She took the initiative to change her life in all the stages.

In this way, Helen stood as an empowered woman compared to Madam Beck, Miss Marchmont and Mrs. Bretton, those who lost their husbands at a very young age but never thought to live totally out of societal constraints. Their life shows the reserved nature, barren sentiments and hardened character as the result of widowhood. However,

they prove their strength by facing the outer world with Great Spirit; they dedicated their life to their children and for the benefit of the society rather than for themselves. Thus, comparing these things Anne took a step forward in the character of Helen, who lived her life as a caring wife, responsible mother, and self-centred woman. She remarried a man of her choice, rather than a man who had chosen her. She married not for necessity or security of life, but for her interest and love. As, we see Mr. Hargrave had approached her so many times the moment she decided to leave Arthur for his bad habits. But, she rejected him with rage and refused his support and sympathy though he was quite a good man compared to Arthur and his friends. On the other hand, the remarriage with Gilbert not only put a full stop to the rumours or gossips of the society, but it also empowered the status of a widowed mother to a higher level in establishing her career and personal life peacefully. Moreover, very sensibly Helen makes the choice of marrying Gilbert. Only when she noticed and experienced the happiness of her little Arthur in the company of Gilbert and her comfort in his presence, she made up her mind to remarry the man, who is a farmer. Thus, it is a marriage of her choice, and for her betterment.

### **Femaleness of Women**

The 19th-century women were adored for their feminine domestic place. Women of the society were entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining and promoting the same submissive nature as the ideal trait of a girl for the younger generation. Although, the circulation of conduct books were stopped in the late 18th century with the radical thoughts and writings of Wollstonecraft and others, the magazines and periodicals acted as the guiding agents for young girls and woman of the 19th-century society to protect the age-old culture and practices of femininity and sexuality of domestic life. Boardman

in his thesis *Representations of Femininity, Domesticity, Sexuality, Work and Independence in Mid-Victorian Women's Magazines* elaborately analysed the role of magazines in channelling the women's life to the societal expectation. He has mentioned that the popular magazines from 1845-1880 concentrated largely on the appropriate etiquettes of women. It acted as the surrogate mother of young girls in conveying the moral and social education. The popular articles and stories they covered were regarding fashion, cookery, needlework, embroidery, music and other moral issues. He observed even the titles of magazines stood for their particular reasons as in "The English Woman's Domestic Magazine"-

However, to return to the middle-class character of the magazine, the incorporation of 'woman' in the title was a constant reminder that this was a middle-class magazine which sought a readership who would identify themselves as women, the Queens of the domestic sphere, rather than as 'ladies' (Boardman 49).

The rising popularity of such magazines among the readers of the 19th-century society shows that the people still strongly believed and supported the views of conduct books in spite of radical changes of the time in the public sphere. Then, Boardman quotes the views of Lynda Nead's *Myths of Sexuality* to explain the strength of Victorian women's sacrifice.

"Power is both regulatory and productive, and so the image of the feminine ideal cannot be seen simply in terms of a range of social, legal, political and cultural practices, which restricted women and limited their pleasures; rather,

respectable femininity was also actively produced around definitions of pleasure” (qtd. in Boardman 64).

Femininity was always under repression to maintain the authoritative state of the male in the social order. The female sexuality is condemned as an act of immodesty. Thus, the ideology of femininity and domesticity was intentionally implemented as a yardstick to calculate the character of the ideal woman. These ideologies very cleverly pacified the female sexuality by making them accept without resistance about their unknown weaknesses and fears. Sexuality and sexual drives of the female were always under the severe sensor. She was only allowed to enjoy her active sexuality as a mother of her children. In this way, the cult of motherhood in the cult of domesticity was the subject of many novels and stories of 19th century England. The Woman, who follows the decency and nobility in her mannerisms and behaviour, was appreciated hugely. Any kind of feminist notions was criticised.

### **Absence of Domesticity and Motherhood**

Victorian England as defined above considered the idea of domesticity and the place of motherhood as the life of women. Novels, stories and articles, which appeared during this period, either locate a woman in the domestic sphere or glorify her motherly nature. Jane Austen and Thackeray’s novels were filled with these elements. Whereas, Bronte Sisters’ heroines are seen almost out of their house, busy in learning and rendering the duty of governess or teaching. They are not angels; they never wanted to be good wives or mothers (except Helen and Caroline). They have learnt sewing, needlework, embroidery, music, drawing and languages with an intention to earn and live, not to attract and marry. They used their strength and knowledge to construct their

life independently. Apart from Helen of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, none of them gave their first priority to marriage. Therefore, the idea of domesticity and its demands were not the essentials of their womanhood. Moreover, Jane, Shirley, Lucy Snow, Catherine, are motherless children. They lost their mother at a very young age. Charlotte and Emily might have intentionally created this background to avoid their female protagonists to adopt the soft and sensitive nature under the influence of a 'mother'. This helped the novels to have non-stereotypical characters. Jane, who rejected the idea of being Rochester's supposed 'Angel' of his married life and house, at last, stood as a guardian Angel to protect and lead him in his helpless condition. This act of Jane shows her moral strength. Then her economic independence and strong character led her to deconstruct the feminine figure of Victorian society. She proved that women were capable and practical. Shirley lived as a man in woman's cloth. She being the captain ruled many men. Her life is entirely devoid of the idea of domesticity. She was always busy in the discussion of business, politics and societal affairs. In the novel, she was seen with her pen and papers writing and calculating the plans of her projects rather than like Caroline, who sits for a long time weaving and mending. She never thought of her marriage and married life very seriously. She objected to the idea of becoming the caretaker of her husband. Instead, she wanted to have a life partner who could take care of her and who adjusted with her temper and lifestyle. Thus, her marriage with her tutor is not a step of submission to the typical life of woman's domesticity. She before marriage makes it clear to Mr. Moore what would be his part being her husband as she says "...teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property, but I ask you to share the burden and to show me how to sustain my part well"(C. Bronte 653).

This reflects that she will be the captain of the public and private sphere and he should be there for her moral support. Society assigned the task to a wife and a mother to be the moral guardians of her husband and children, but Shirley reversed the order by marrying a poor tutor, who knows nothing but teaching and guiding his pupils and other. Thus, his inexperience in the field of business is an advantage for Shirley to continue her old responsibilities without any personal competitor. The particular words said by Shirley here indicates that she never wanted to burden him with the unknown worries of business and property, in other words, she does not wish to give up her public sphere for her personal life. Then Lucy Snow of *Villette* who worked hard to raise her standards from poor condition to empowered status always thought of her solitude and in some way mentally prepared for her unpredictable life. She never thought to imitate Ginevra or Paulina to conquer the hearts of young and handsome gentlemen. She strived hard to maintain and improve her ability to attain a good position in her career so that she could gain more from her knowledge in terms of salary or earning. Her thoughts or dreams are always filled with the anxiety of an insecure future but are not about a man rescuing her. Thus, she had not given more prominence to marriage and domestic life even though she liked Dr. John and loved M Paul. Her practical sense keeps her spirit alert to the impossibilities of life, i.e., to marry a man of fine feature or good rank like Halam or Dr. John. Ultimately, the novel abruptly ends with her unheard sorrow in silence, which denotes she remains a single woman. Thus, the question of domesticity and motherhood fades away with the absence of marriage.

Catherine of *Wuthering Heights* conveys the story of immodesty and unethical behaviour of a woman, who utterly failed to follow the principles of domesticity and

unfortunately to enjoy her motherhood. Catherine's passion and love are the uncontrollable force of her life. She who grew up without the guidelines of her mother, under the influence of uncultivated Heathcliff became a wild bird. However, the fascination towards the new fashionable and neatly arranged lifestyle of aristocracy caged her unknowingly. Her whim to become the lady of the neighbourhood and to attain the standards all of a sudden influenced her character. But her opinion did not last for long. Her marriage to Edgar did not refine her real nature; she tried to mask herself. However, the return of Heathcliff fuelled her hidden passionate nature. Her sexuality is vitally expressed, and her femininity is entirely forgotten in the course of time, which will be analysed in the following section in detail. Thus, her unfortunate fate consumed her life during her daughter's birth. So, Catherine is remembered as a poor woman of unfeminine passions and improper behaviour by Nelly and others in the novel.

In this way, Bronte sisters (Charlotte and Emily) filled the female protagonists of their novels with strong femininity against the cultural feminine character of a woman. The absence of domesticity and motherhood has given more scope to show the individuality of the character. Until the end of the novels, the reader can see the growth of femaleness in the character without any distractions in the name of marriage or motherhood. The sisters by placing marriage in the concluding part have cleverly avoided the same stories of domestic life, which was very common in the writings of 19th-century women writers.

### **On Suppression and Self-expression**

The patriarchal society always wished to see the woman as a docile puppet in the hands of man. Its hegemonic rule misled the women of the 19th century by placing them

as moral guardians, the angel of man, goddess of mercy and pillar of the family. These glorified phrases were used to install the false notions, as she is more secure and respected under patriarchal set-up. Thus, the ideologically drawn identities compelled them to sustain all kinds of discrimination and exploitation passively. They feared any wayward behaviour will defame their status, so, in the fear of degradation as a witch, fiend or fallen woman, they remained submissive.

In these circumstances, talking about her sexuality was objected intensely. Anne Finger says

...Sexuality is often the source of our deepest oppression; it is often the source of our deepest pain. It is easier for us to talk about and formulate strategies for changing – discrimination in employment, education and housing- than to talk about our exclusion from sexuality and reproduction.... (Finger)

Female Protagonists of the Bronte Novels who are poor, plain, and unattractive women are considered as undesirable sexual partners or wives of good and great men of the society. Bank in her fictional biographical story of Bronte sisters has written about Madam Heger's opinion on Charlotte Bronte that she was not fair and beautiful– “how stupid she had been to imagine for a moment-! After all, a man does not fall in love with a woman's mind. And what else did this strange, stunted little English miss have to offer?”(275). This view clearly suggested that intelligence of a woman would never please a man. Thus, for Charlotte and her plain heroines that it is difficult to be loved and married with the men they desire is the general assumptions of the society. However, Charlotte proved this notion wrong in her novels. She proved ‘intelligence is sexy’ and



gave a new dimension to measure the women's potentiality. She shocked the conservative society, which treats the subject of sexuality as the matter of taboo and completely discards any kind of its expressions, especially by a woman.

The society treated the woman as a sexual object, so it is her fate to accept the desire of male society to fulfil the demands of the marital market. This concept reflects the consumer-oriented approach. Here, the subject defines the object, so the object is always a dependent. But, Bronte sisters redefined the strongly practiced and believed idea through their passionate Heroines. Jane in spite of her poor condition and unattractive looks resists the societal expectations by refusing to accept Mr. Rochester, a wealthy man of rank. She expresses her restlessness regarding Rochester's behaviour towards her sex (gender).

'Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?- 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! And 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. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: - it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are! (249)

This furious and outrageous self-expression is a fight back to the patriarchal expectations from a poor and plain woman. She condemns the classifications of women in terms of their sensual beauty and economic status. She emphasised the truth that men and women are equal before God. Despite the biological differences between men and women or financial status of poor and rich, they both have same soul and heart. In this way, she rejects the 'custom' and 'conventionality' of the hypocritical society. For Jane physical, social and economic conditions never made her feel low. Her sexual self-esteem keeps her spirit always high during all the circumstances. Even when she knows the fact that Rochester's mad wife is prisoner in the attic of the same mansion, she did not lose her sense. She analytically thought that her future in Thornfield with the husband of a mad woman (Rochester) would be more miserable. Therefore, she decides to leave him with introspection, i.e., "I care for myself." She knows that no one, there in the world to care for her and no one is there to cry for her (312). She asserts, "I will respect myself" (312). Jane was a practical woman. She had decided to leave Rochester before this when she heard that Rochester would marry "the beautiful Miss Ingram" (196). Her self-examination shows her determination and self-respect –"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" (197). In addition, her declaration to be herself till her death rejects Rochester's wish to see her as an Angel. Her assertion "I had rather be a *thing* than an Angel" (258), connotes that the life of an Angel is more artificial. She notices that love out of sexual appeal never lives for long. Thus, she boldly expressed her views "I suppose your love will effervesce in six months or less.

I have observed in books written by men” (256). Jane ironically questioned the interest of Rochester by saying somewhere she had read the book written by ‘men’ that the husband’s love only lives for first six months of marriage. Her particularity in the authorship of the book stressed that it was not the views of any women but it was said by the men, so it might be true is what she argued.

In the words of Gilbert and Guber, “what horrified the Victorians was Jane's anger... For while the mythologizing of repressed rage may parallel the mythologizing of repressed sexuality, it is far more dangerous to the order of society” (338). They also say, “Richard Chase somewhat grudgingly admitted in 1948 that the novel's power arose from its mythologizing of Jane's confrontation with masculine sexuality” (338). On an evening when Rochester sang a song for Jane, he concluded the song with the lines:

My love has sworn, with sealing kiss,

With me to live- to die;

I have at last my nameless bliss:

As I love- loved am I! (268)

His song left Jane disappointed at the last lines. She became furious rather than pleased with the sweet voice and phrases sung by Rochester. It shows she is not like other women who “...would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise” (269). She asked him “whom he was going to marry now?” (268) that sounds as a strange question to the readers as well as Rochester. But she felt it was necessary to ask and correct the opinions of Rochester. She expressed her objection on the idea of “dying

with him” (269) she considered it as a “pagan idea”. She said, ““I had no intention of dying with him- he might depend on that”” (269). She continued that ““indeed it was: I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee”” (269). Her objection and anger show her strong femininity. She is not like common women to accept all the wishes of her would be husband. She has her own life. She wanted to lead her life as she wished. So she wanted to make him realise her individual character, which is “hard- very flinty” (269) She just tried to show him her “rugged” nature before the marriage and make him “...know fully what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it”(269). These attempts show Jane has given the option to Rochester to accept or deny the marriage with a hardened woman (Jane) before he comes to a firm decision.

Then, Bertha Mason’s madness and her attempt to kill Rochester by putting fire twice suggests that her suppressed sexuality made her take revenge against the male dominated world. Her laughter and her rage show her rebellious nature. She was locked up in the attic as a mentally retarded person. Thus, in the novel, it is Rochester and Richard Mason, who are targeted by Bertha. It shows her disappointments are with the husband and her brother who represent male sexuality. Mason describes her terrible acts ““she worried me like a tigress’... ‘Oh, it was frightful!’... ‘I did not expect it: she looked so quiet at first”” (208). And he continued ““she sucked the blood, she said she’d drain my heart,” (208). This incident illustrates the madness of Bertha on one side and on the other it shows her uncontrollable fury against the male authority. Here her brother, who has come for the first time to see her in the Thornfield, seems to be already aware of her condition. He represents the neglected attitude of parents and the family of a girl. In the

society, the parents of a girl normally take lots of care until the marriage of the daughter. After that, they think it is her fate to adjust with the husband and his family. This is followed in the name of culture and tradition in the patriarchal society. In this situation, Bertha's behaviour towards her brother shows the outrageous attitude of a girl (being a sister or a daughter) against patriarchal family, which neglected the life of a woman right from childhood.

Rochester explained about Bertha's madness as inborn or inherited from her mother to Jane. He mentioned that she tormented him with her 'tone of demon-hate' and cried with "fouler vocabulary" (305). Especially her fury on the "wedding apparel" of Jane and her eventual attempt to attack Jane indicate that she is quite sensible enough to read Rochester's plan of second marriage or if it "perhaps brought back vague reminiscence of her own bridal days"(305) as Rochester said, it conveys she might be severely disturbed by her marriage or heterosexual relationship with Rochester. The heterosexual relationship is part of the patriarchy. Therefore, it is hard to think about the presence of equality between men and women. The violence against women in the heterosexual relationship is found in all society. Thus, Bertha's madness, her improper behaviour and revengeful attitude as described by Rochester is from the male perspective. Throughout the novel, we never hear Bertha's words apart from her meaningless screams and laughter as an abnormal woman. This aspect creates a suspicious environment in Thornfield Hall. It hints at the presence of domestic violence. The marriage of Rochester was kept in secret. Bertha is always locked in the covert chamber under the strict vigilance of trusted servant Grace Poole and Dr Carter. When the secret was disclosed, Jane observes Rochester's restless anger "you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady:

you speak of her with hate- with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel- she cannot help being mad” (296). The changes in his behaviour suggest that he is insecure of his position. His marriage with Bertha for money and prosperity on the advice of his father and brother was rejected by Rochester the moment he obtained the wealth in the form of a wife. Until that time, he had no complaints about Bertha’s behaviour or his fathers’ advice. It shows Rochester was not innocent in the plot of their marriage.

Then at last, on one night Bertha set fire to Thornfield. In her act she was so particular as “ she set fire first to the hangings of the room next to her own, and then she got down to a lower story, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess’s .. and she kindled the bed there; but there was nobody sleeping in it, fortunately”(423). Then she climbed to the roof, “she was standing, waving her arms above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off...” (424). When Rochester approached her “she yelled and gave a spring, and next minute she lay smashed on the pavement” (424). This incident is the triumph of Bertha’s attempts to destroy the patriarchal set up of Thornfield Hall, first she tried to burn Rochester in his bed and for the second time, she paid her ghastly visit to Jane. (305) Her excitement and hellish pleasure in destroying the prison house (Thornfield) of her life shows her unsaid sufferings. Her rejection of Rochester’s help and her death expresses her incomparable vigorous femininity. Along with her death, she took back all her wealth for which Rochester married her, and she took off his physical strength, by which he suppressed and locked her in the hell (attic).

In *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Guber treated Bertha as the dark double of Jane. Jane, who was the ‘passionate picture’ in her childhood, was forcefully

trained to subdue her ardent fury in Lowood. Thus, Bertha in Thornfield did what Jane supposed to do is the argument of Gilbert and Guber. They analysed-

Jane's unexpressed resentment at Rochester's manipulative gypsy-masquerade found expression in Bertha's terrible shriek and her even more terrible attack on Richard Mason. Jane's anxieties about her marriage, and, in particular, her fears of her own alien "robed and veiled" bridal image, were objectified by the image of Bertha in a "white and straight" dress, "whether gown, sheet, or shroud I cannot tell." Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha, who burns down the house and destroys herself in the process as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own. (360)

Further they quote Richard Chase who says, "May, not Bertha, Jane seems to ask herself, be a living example of what happens to the woman who [tries] to be the fleshly vessel of the [masculine] elan?" "Just as [Jane's] instinct for self-preservation saves her from earlier temptations..." (361). However, the analysis here focuses on how the female freely expressed her repressed voice against the suppressions they found in the form of heterosexual marriage.

Charlotte's Shirley, which presented the masculine traits in a female personality, altered the cultural and social assumptions of the sex of a woman. The class, status, and power enhanced the sexual appeal of Shirley on par with the gentlemen of the upper-class society. She is treated as the leader, captain and role model to the male and female of her country. Her empowered position allowed her to express the views on worldly issues like

religion, politics and socio-economic crisis with the men of the patriarchal society. Her words and advice are accepted with due respect rather than neglected as the talks of a common woman. Thus, gender is not constant; it changes with the change of social circumstances, cultural behaviour and context. The man who inherits the weak mind and sensitive nature is said to be feminine. Likewise, a woman with the manly behaviour is called as masculine. In this way, the gendered behaviour is non-biological. The gendered behaviour creates the personality of a person, and it gradually influences his/her sexuality.

As Michel Foucault has shown, sexuality is a historical construct and is a product of negotiation and struggle; therefore the underlying economic conditions of these negotiations and struggles cannot be ignored. The social meanings that are given to biological difference are more important than the actual difference itself, but what is particularly dynamic about definitions of sexuality is that they are not fixed, but are often in contradiction. (qtd. in Boardman 144)

Kay Boardman considered “sexual innocence was closely associated with political ignorance and in this sense the notion of woman as other became a powerful tool in the hegemonic discourse of separate spheres” (143-144). In *Shirley*, Charlotte tried to evade the dividing line between private and public sphere by portraying the character of Shirley as intelligent and strong. Shirley sits and talks about business with men for long hours in spite of being a woman. She argues with Joe Scott about Milton’s *Paradise lost* and *the story of Genesis* with contempt. She questioned the gendered notion with irony “Joe, do you seriously think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?”(343) Moreover, her argument goes on to defend Eve and her unfortunate fate. She says: “to



confess the honest truth, Joe, I never was easy in my mind concerning that chapter (St. Paul's first Epistle to Timothy). It puzzles me" (343). Both Shirley and Caroline mocked the narrow-minded opinions of Joe when he said "Nay. Women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion. It's wholesomest for them" (344). Shirley vehemently opposed his words saying, "Consider yourself groaned down and cried sham over, for such a stupid observation," "you might as well say men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Of what value would a religion so adopted be? It would be mere blind, besotted superstition" (344). Further, she strongly opposed the credibility of St. Paul's Story of Adam and Eve in English. Thus, she says, "'Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection.' 'it is permitted to woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace;' and so on'" (344). Joe's sarcastic reply "that willn't wash, miss" is vigorously rejected by Shirley in these words "I dare say it will. My notions are dyed in faster colours than yours, Joe. Mr. Scott, you are a thoroughly dogmatical person, and always were" (344). Also she remarked that it would be better if he is in his own house than to talk about all this sensible issues of intelligence.

Similarly, she taught a good lesson to Robert Moore, who proposed to Shirley only with the intention of inheriting her vast wealth and good status through marriage. Shirley was aware of his hidden agenda and his true love towards Caroline. She rejected his proposal saying, "you have made a strange proposal- strange from you; and if you knew how strangely you worded it and looked it, you would be startled at yourself. You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart" (555). Later, she wept passionately with the mixed feeling of sorrow and anger and

thundered, “You have pained me; you have outraged me; you have deceived me” (556). She added, “‘I did respect- I did admire – I did like you,’ ‘yes, as much as if you were my brother; and you- you want to make a speculation of me. You would immolate me to that mill, your Moloch!’”(556). She muttered “is Robert a man or something lower?” Then she cleared his misunderstanding that she never or ever loved him, she said-

‘you conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman’s feelings,’ ‘you have announced it is a fashion revolting to a woman’s soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manoeuvre to ensnare a husband. You imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand because I have courted you. Let me say this: your sight is jaundiced; you have seen wrong. Your mind is warped; you have judged wrong. Your tongue betrays you; you now speak wrong. I never loved you. Be at rest there. My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me’ (556).

It sounds like a statement made by Charlotte through Shirley regarding the stereotypical beliefs of male regarding the woman’s feelings. She proved man as wrong in all his perceptions regarding the vivacity of a woman. Shirley’s fury flowed in her words “loved you!’ ‘why, I have been as frank with you as a sister- never shunned you, never feared you. You cannot’. She affirmed triumphantly- ‘you cannot make me tremble with your coming, nor accelerate my pulse by your influence’” (556-557). She felt ashamed of his feelings towards her social and friendly talks. As, she got to know his narrow mindset “she rose, she grew tall, she expanded and refined almost to flame. There was a trembling all through her, as in live coal when its vivid vermilion is hottest” (557). Her figure

resembles the incarnation of burning flame and rage that destroys the patriarchal framework, which treated woman as a sexual object. She with great disgust told Robert “that is to say that you have the worst opinion of me; that you deny me the possession of all I value most. That is to say, that I am a traitor to all my sisters; that I have acted as no woman can act without degrading herself and her sex; that I have sought where the incorrupt of my kind naturally scorn and abhor to seek”(557). She continued with contempt, “thou art fallen! You, once high in my esteem, are hurled down; you, once intimate in my friendship, are cast out. Go!”(557). She called him ‘Et Tu, Brute!’(558) In this way, the thunder and raining filled with fiery lightning revealed a woman’s inner self to a man of treachery. This kind of behaviour is not supposed to be seen in the normal life of Victorian women, who were trained to be polite and passive all through their life. Shirley stood as a modern woman, she expressed her feelings without the fear of societal norms. She criticised the good and bad of the society very strongly. She declared that women’s sexuality is not sober. This incident teaches an unforgettable lesson to a man like Robert in general. As Robert accepts his shameful deed and cunningness by saying, “never more will I mention marriage to a woman unless I feel love” (558). Robert even acknowledged that Shirley’s education made her different and unapproachable by any clever tricks and falsity of any man. They discussed Mary Cave who was unintelligent in her decision. Then Robert noted that education makes all the difference: [if], “she had been educated (no women were educated in those days); supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips,...”(561). Therefore, as discussed in the

previous chapter appropriate education empowers the woman to express her thoughts freely and firmly.

Lucy Snow of *Villette* is the snail suddenly caught under the sunny summer from her secluded habitual life. Readers are wonderstruck by the way Lucy grows from her repressive self to expressive stance. She was filled with self-doubt and sorrow regarding her future. The life pushed her to an adventurous journey. Thus, she who was caged in her fear and timid nature came out with excellence. The experience of life hardened her heart and sharpened her mind with good and great lessons. Christianity in the 19th century England was trying to convert as many people as possible to Catholic cult. They used all kinds of temptations to attract the poor people to submit their will to the Catholic Missionary. They used many agents to influence the life of weak, mild and disabled to embrace its principles as the boon of their survival. In this situation, Lucy, who was a homeless, friendless unfortunate woman in despair was forced by M Paul and Pere Silas for many a times to accept the theological bent of Roman Catholicism. But, Lucy expresses her distrust and truthful bitter opinion on dogmatic nature of Church and Christianity of Rome as mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis. The pamphlet written by Pere Silas to pursue Lucy for conversion looks like the promising note of heavenly bliss for the poor and needy souls. However, that did not stir the decision of Lucy; instead she smiled at its deceiving words and laughed at the initials written on the cover ““from P.C.D.E to L---Y”” (441).

More than words Lucy's gesture expressed her sarcasm, rage and rebellious nature. As Mathew Arnold said Charlotte's mind was filled with hunger, rebellion and rage. (Leavis 180) Her work *Villette* reflects nothing but absurd feelings of a woman.

Lucy's silence and intentional negligence in many incidents show her resistance to the pitfall of patriarchal society. When M Paul wanted to hear the response of Lucy regarding the pamphlet she had read, she repressed her emotions purposefully. She thought that to react or to reply to his demands "was the affair of the very docile pupil of Pere Silas, not mine" (443). As an act of disrespect, she "took some quill pens from her desk and began soberly to mend them" (444) knowing that it would irritate M Paul. "On this occasion I cut my own finger—half on purpose. I wanted to restore him to his nature state, to set him at his ease, to get him to chide" (444). This strange behaviour of Lucy shows her hidden emotions. Her boiling temper led her to cut off her finger until it bled and diverted Paul's attention. Thus, he, at last, cried "Maladroit! 'She will make mincemeat of her hands'" (444).

She concealed her anger, as she knew there is no use in expressing her feelings through words. After two days of "unnatural silence," Paul approached her with "the bundle of new-cut quills" (444) and said it is her Protestantism that filled her with such a strange rebellious nature. He felt doubtful of Lucy's teaching of Lucifer's tract to pupils of the school being an ardent follower of Protestantism. Lucy accepts her disrespect to such a tract, which teaches "the pure essence of faith, love, charity!" (445). She explained the reason behind her opinion very clearly and confidently to Monsieur (M Paul). She said:

'Monsieur, I don't scorn it—at least, not as your gift. Monsieur, sit down; listen to me. I am not a heathen, I am not hard-hearted, I am not unchristian, I am not dangerous, as they tell you; I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I.' (445)

She eloquently argued with him regarding the pointlessness of Romanism and its selfish motives of helping the poor. She said, “Rome, prove her sanctity, confirm her power, and spread the reign of her tyrant ‘Church’” (448). She stood unmoved by “the Churches on Solemn occasions- days of fete and state” (448). She felt, “many people—men and women – no doubt far her superiors in a thousand ways, have felt this display impressive, have declared that though their Reason protested, their imagination was subjugated... what she saw struck her as tawdry, not grand; as grossly material, not poetically spiritual” (448). After her observations, she declared to M Paul that “I did not like it, ‘I did not respect such ceremonies; I wished to see no more’” (449). In this way, once she gained her courage to express her dislike she went on clearly and said powerfully that “she had a mind to keep to her reformed creed; the more she saw of Popery, the closer she clung to Protestantism; doubtless there were errors in every Church...” (449).

Prior to this M Paul’s irritating talks on women filled Lucy with bitter feelings. The intentional sarcastic remarks and behaviour of Paul towards Lucy’s attempts to learn science initially disappointed her. Later on, she says, “but by and by it only warmed the blood in her veins, and sent added action to her pulses...” (374). It shows the growth of challenging nature in Lucy. She started to receive the insults as the lessons of the life. She worked hard to overcome the past bad experiences in her life. This positive attitude becomes the strong base for the attainment of empowered status. Thus, the mental strength (determination) of Lucy helped her to successfully build her femininity or individuality.

Madam Beck's strange behaviour and the unexpected departure of M Paul disappointed Lucy. So on one night when madam tried to speak to her in a very mellow voice, showing her care and concern, Lucy burst like a volcano with sparks of flame; she refused Madam's consoling words and said:

‘Madam,’ ‘you are a sensualist. Under all your serenity, your peace, and your decorum, you are an undenied sensualist....she in a mocking tone continued...if you have any sorrow or disappointment—and, perhaps, you have—nay, I know you have—seek your own palliatives, in your own chosen resources. Leave me, however, leave me, I say!’(476-477).

Lucy scorned Madam's pretensions and demanded that she leave her alone. She expressed her fury in an unimaginable way; she said, “keep your hand off me and my life, and my troubles. Oh, Madame! In your hand, there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyse” (477). Lucy called Madam as ““Dog in the Manger!””(477) for her selfish motives in spite of her help and encouragement. Lucy is perceived as a refugee in Villette on the days of her struggles. Along with Lucy, Miss Ginevra and Madam Beck too expressed their self without fear of society in some of the incidents. Ginevra never felt ashamed of her nature; she boldly accepts it with Lucy. Although, her expressions look odd and immature, the way she expresses it, is a rejection of the image of the ideal Victorian woman. Then Madam Beck who handles the teachers and students along with the societal friends and foes of her educational institute always keeps a check on her behaviour. She took all the merits and demerits of her institution and life with ease. Her words, mannerisms and principles always guarded her against suppressing notions of society. The way she managed to clear the doubts of students, parents and rival

institutions regarding the frequent visits of handsome young doctor to her house, shows her maturity. With a laugh and lighthearted talks, she put a full stop to the headless gossips of the society. She said, “She had confidence on her own” (109). This statement connotes many ironical meanings. It tries to point out that any kind of false talks would not harm a person who believes in his/her self.

Finally, Lucy Snow emerged as a saint amid worldly temptations. Her silence is the strongest resistance against the difficulties and different attitudes of people in the patriarchal world. Ginevra, a close companion of Lucy, observes, “you seem to me insensible both to pain and fear and grief. You are a real old Diogenes” (505). She noticed Lucy’s brave nature and wondered how she maintains her emotions with a balanced mind. She with an admiring and astonishing tone questioned her in the letter “how could she endure the visitations of that long spectre, time after time, without crying out, telling everybody, and rousing the whole house and neighbourhood?” (505). This is about the appearance of Nun the ghost, which normally fills the mind of a woman with horror and fear, but Lucy is exceptional even in this circumstance. Thus, Lucy is composed of balanced emotions and strong mind.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily uses a tale of love and passion with a Gothic touch that would catch the reader in the world of revenge and blood. Lockwood, a person of outer world in the novel, is the reflection of readers’ entry into the world of the unimaginable tempest. While the sisters were discussing their novels, Emily said, “she [Emily] was basing it on a story she had heard at Law Hill, about a local man who had adopted an orphan and raised him, like a cuckoo, among his children. The boy had made himself hated by supplanting the man’s real sons, and had brought disgrace and ruin upon



the family” (Banks 322). Charlotte and Anne were stunned by hearing the details and a passage of the story. Gilbert and Guber called *Wuthering Heights* as “Bible of the Hell”.

Catherine is the centre of all the disastrous events that affects the life of every man in the novel. In her childhood, she was the cause of her father’s worries and disappointment. Cathy’s wayward behaviour enraged her father, he scolded her saying “I cannot love thee; thou’rt worse than thy brother. Go say thy prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!”(E. Bronte 53). Her rare silence on her sickness pleased Mr Earnshaw. He wishes her daughter will “always be a good lass”. Unfortunately, that was the last wish and words of her father. After the death of Mr Earnshaw, his son Hindley took over the control of *Wuthering Heights*. Hindley’ inhuman treatment of Heathcliff and his attempts to separate Catherine from Heathcliff made them more hardened. However, the accidental encounter with the people of *Thurshcross Grange* transfigured the wild, untamed girl to a Victorian lady. This superficial state of mind psychologically disturbed the opinions of Cathy about Heathcliff and Edgar. Her wrong assumptions made her take strange decisions in the matter of her marriage. The changes in Cathy were recognised by everyone in *Wuthering Heights*, Hindley and her wife felt happy and tried to maintain her reformed attitudes. On the other hand, Heathcliff was wonder struck and disappointed, but Nelly suspected her and questioned her. By knowing the selfish reasons, Nelly felt ashamed of Cathy. Cathy failed to conceal her passion. Even little Hareton noticed her disguised nature and called her “wicked aunt Cathy” (78). The truth pricked her conscience; she “drew fury” and “seized his shoulders, and shook him till the poor child waxed livid” (78). Her impulsive behaviour shocked Edgar. He started to move from there. But, Cathy the furious girl of

Moors demanded that he stay back. She said, "I won't be miserable for you!" and continued to defend her act "I did nothing deliberately. Well, go, if you please- get away!"(78). She in a couple of days realised her mistakes, but it is too late to hold back Heathcliff who has already left her. In her depression and dilemma, Cathy expressed her genuine feelings to Nelly; she declares that her love for Heathcliff is not by any kind of attractions "but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a Moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire" (86). This comparison reveals her true self. Further, she revealed her intention behind her marriage to Edgar. She said that "...if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power" (87). Although, her true motives look "worst" to the eyes of Nelly, it is one of the tactics used to blur the class difference and enmity between Hindley and Heathcliff. This decision was taken to root out the unfair system of the society by following the same societal rules of marriage. Here, Cathy shows her strong resistance by pretending to be one of the societal ladies.

She without the fear of anything expressed herself very symbolically to Nelly:

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, ... my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always,

always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable; and –... (87-88).

This self-revelation of Cathy was against the patriarchal society and its gendered rules. Cathy being a wild, untamed tigress roared against all who came in her way and pounced on them to threaten them for their life. She is not a Victorian woman of good qualities. Her too much passionate love affected the lives of all characters in the novel.

The return of Heathcliff activated Cathy's hidden blaze. As Nelly observes, "the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand, because no fire came near to explode it" (96). The calm married life of Edgar and Catherine started to feel the sand storm. The frequent visits of Mr Heathcliff disturbed the minds of Cathy and Isabella. He injected a kind of love and hatred in Thushcross Grange. The triangular love story played havoc with the decent living of Edgar. Day-by-day Cathy grew stronger and uncontrollable; her interest in Heathcliff is shown in all her acts. The helpless Edgar was haunted by the indecent behaviour of his wife and her lover. His resistance was insulted by Cathy without considering him as her married husband. Even his anger against Heathcliff was dismissed "if you have not courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten. It will correct you of feigning more valour than you possess...." (116). She said, "I wish Heathcliff may flog you sick, for daring to think an evil thought of me!" (117). She compared her husband to a mouse and called, "cheer up! You shan't be hurt! Your type is not a lamb, its a sucking leveret" (117). The clash between Edgar and Heathcliff brought out Cathy's dual nature. She said, "I'm nearly distracted," "a thousand smith's hammers

are beating in my head! Tell Isabella to shun me; ...should she or anyone else aggravates my anger at present, I shall get wild” (118).

The uncontrollable heated incidents changed the life of Catherine, Edgar, Isabella, Heathcliff and even Nelly into a great misery. When, Edgar asked Cathy to choose between her husband and her old lover to put an end to this revengeful play she exclaimed furiously “I require to be let alone!” and “I demand it!”(119) giving the reason for her illness. The cause of her mental illness and physical deterioration is her duality, her wild passion and her selfishness. She wanted Edger as her legal husband and Heathcliff as her friend, which is not possible. Here, Emily hints that a woman like Catherine suffered from the marital laws that hindered her from taking a clear decision. The rule of conventional society destroyed the peace of her mind. As she felt more restrictions, she grew wilder in her approach. Her every expression is filled with intense passion. She is incarnated as a monster – “she rang the bell till it broke with a twang; ...it was enough to try the temper of a saint, such senseless, wicked rages! There she lay dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth, .... she would crash them to splinters!”(119). Her harsh behaviour made gentle Edgar to fear of her madness or death by further opposition to her unwomanly nature. Thus, Edgar failed as a husband to keep a check on the wayward behaviour of his wife and unknowingly he lost his control on his sister Isabella, who eloped with Heathcliff in her foolishness.

This way, neither Cathy nor Isabella subdued their personality for the conventional rules of the society. Both the women struggled for the life they wished to lead. But unfortunately, they both meet a tragic end. Catherine without the fear of society or husband uttered each word, which rejects the marital confinements and womanly

trademarks. Edger' soft and polite nature has become the weakness of him. He was placed as a close spectator of his own life without control. The following passage clearly shows Cathy's real nature-

‘Hush!’. ‘hush, this moment!’ You mention that name and I end the matter instantly, by a spring from the window! What you touch at present you may have; but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar: I'm past wanting you. Return to your books. I'm glad you possess a consolation, for all you had in me is gone. (128)

These words express her real femininity and sexuality, which the Victorian society tabooed strictly in the 19th century when Emily had written this gothic romance. Emily ironically criticises the societal principles by the sarcastic remarks of Heathcliff about Edger- “that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*! From *pity* and *charity*! He might as well plant an oke in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares!” (149).

The last few hours of Cathy' life is filled with unacceptable female expressions to the eyes of conventional society. Emily simultaneously raises pity and disgust for the character of Cathy. Cathy, who is a pregnant woman carrying the child of Edgar, never thought of her unborn child and her future as its mother. She only thought about Heathcliff and his marriage to Isabella. Her self-inflicted injuries and illnesses are the strong opposition to the male domination. Then the entry of Heathcliff made her lose her sanity. She expressed her passionate love to him in front of Nelly. Nelly stood helpless to avoid the unfair and illegal relationship between the pregnant wife of Edgar and the

husband of Isabella. Cathy desired to hold Heathcliff until their death. She once again affirmed to Nelly “he’s in her soul”. When Heathcliff got ready to leave her room, she strongly objected to Heathcliff “holding him as firmly as her strength allowed.” And ordered, “you shall not, I tell you.”(156). Nelly’ warning regarding the entry of Mr. Edgar to Thurstcross along with his servants did not make any difference to Cathy compared to Heathcliff. Heathcliff tried to leave; he attempted to free his hand from the clasp of Cathy, but “- she clung fast, gasping: ... no!” (157). She stood without any worries. She only feared losing Heathcliff. Her femininity is a huge blow to the capitalist patriarchal culture, which has made the class and gender stratification without considering the feelings of ‘other’ (lower-class people and women).

Her death knocked down the life of Heathcliff and Edgar. But, she who tormented all from her childhood to death, “closed her lids wearing the expression of a smile” (158). Thus, Cathy attained her liberty from her prison through her death and the smile on her dead face mocks the patriarchal society. Isabella and little Catherine’ life fulfil the strong desires of dead Cathy. Isabella left Heathcliff along with her child to far off London. Cathy married Hareton for true love, which led to the happy union of true minds despite all differences.

Moving on to Anne’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, the female protagonists are comparatively moderate in their expressive nature. They stood for good reasons and struggled for the welfare of all. Helen was an Angel from all aspects. She tried hard to maintain her role as a true Angel of a fallen man. But, unfortunately, her innocence was used as a weakness to deceive her in all the steps by Arthur Huntingdon. Arthur noticed the strong femininity in Helen before their marriage. On the day when he

came across her painting and appreciated her skill, he took the portfolio without her permission, which had the sketches made by Helen. This act filled Helen with fury; she insisted that he return her sketch. She cried with impatience that “I never let anyone see them”. She said, “I hate them to be seen,” “I can’t let you have it, indeed!”(1282). In spite of her objections, he annoyed her by taking “a complete miniature portrait that she had sketched with such tolerable success” (1282). His pranks turned Helen rebellious. She cried again with a demanding voice “Mr. Huntingdon, I insist upon having that back! It is mine, and you have no right to take it. Give it me, directly- I’ll never forgive you, if you don’t!”(1282). But Arthur derived a kind of pleasure in chiding her for a long time and, at last, returned it. The moment she received it, she wants to show him how much she valued her principles. “She tore it in two, and threw it into the fire” (1282) without considering it is the portrait of the same Arthur Huntingdon, whom she likes secretly. She does not care for his feelings in that incident. Arthur stood dumb; he never expected such a reaction from Angel like Helen. “His merriment suddenly ceasing, he stared in mute amazement at the consuming treasure” (1282). This is what we see even in the marital life of Helen and Arthur Huntingdon. Helen was mild as Angel until she found out the treachery of Arthur. After she realised the fallen state of him, she stood for her principles. As she answered early to the query of Arthur regarding her act of burning his picture ““because, I wished to destroy it’, with an asperity it is useless now to lament” (1283). Likewise, she made up her mind to teach him a good lesson in the life. She quarrelled with him for his wrong deeds, questioned him and guided him as a moral guardian. But his unchanged nature enabled her to leave him.

After marriage, she understood the sadistic nature of Arthur. He used to derive lots of pleasure in Helen's "anger" and "agitation". He is a double-faced scoundrel who often irritated Helen with his former "amours" stories. (1310-1311) In the first quarrel Helen was deeply hurt by her husband's immoral opinions, so she locked herself in her room without allowing Arthur to enter. Further, she said "... I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning" (1312). Consequently, the differences between them increased day by day. Her act of shutting the door against him represents the resistance she showed against his manoeuvring nature. Her answer "she would love you with all her heart, if you deserved it" (1315) is not only the self-expressive words of Helen, but it is also the answer of thousands of women who are blamed as unsuccessful wives. In the words of Calder, "Domestic contentment is a woman's responsibility, and any disruption of it necessarily her fault. If she cannot keep her husband at home, she has failed" (22). She indirectly warned Arthur that she is not so weak to silently endure all his cruel attitudes by saying "if she gives you her heart, you must take it thankfully, and use it well, and not pull it in pieces, and laugh in her face, because she cannot snatch it away"(1315). Helen persistently has objected to his bad manners. She expressed her hatredness towards his alcoholism and his unnecessary closeness with Lady Lowborough. She argued logically to make him realise his worst part and questioned him rigorously about a husband' duty.

... an offence for which you would think yourself justified in blowing another man's brains out? Is it nothing to trifle with your friend's feelings and mine- to endeavour to steal a woman's affections from her husband- what he values more than his gold, and therefore what it is more dishonest to take?



Are the marriage vows a jest; and is it nothing to make it your sport to break them, and to tempt another to do the same? Can I love a man that does such things, and coolly maintains it is nothing? (1328).

This advice made him feel insecure, and he tried to remind her of her duties as a wife. He rejected her suggestions saying he was not ready to be “dictated by a woman, though she be his wife”(1328). But the unexpected reply of Helen again made him silent. She questioned the cruel potentiality of Arthur “what will you do then? Will you go on till I hate you; and then accuse me of breaking my vows?”(1328). She was always quite clear in her mind and words, which foresaid she is courageous enough to take any hard decision when the necessary.

She is a woman of principles as said earlier. She diplomatically rejected the friendship of Mr. Hargrave, when he tried to take advantage of her husband’s absence. She said firmly “if you knew more of me, you would not think it- or if you did, you would not say it, and expect me to be flattered by the compliment” (1337). Helen tolerated the irresponsibility of Arthur as a husband and as a father of her child for a long time. She felt it was no use quarrelling for the same issues. “She was tired out with his injustice, his selfishness and hopeless depravity” (1348). She saw him as a man filled with lust and selfish motives. He never cared for the feelings of the other. He was an inhuman master to his servants and pet animals; he was a careless husband, a bad father and an unfaithful friend to all. Her disappointments were considered by Hargrave as the right situation to please her and to gain her love and confidence. However, Helen never thought of such mean acts, she resisted him and ultimately threatened him by “holding palette-knife against him”. At that moment she was burning with anger, she cried

furiously "... Listen to me- I don't like you,'... 'If I were divorced from my husband- or if he were dead, I would not marry you. There now! I hope you're satisfied" (1404). Her expression and behaviour made Hargrave think "that she is the most cold-hearted, unnatural, ungrateful woman he ever yet beheld!"(1404). Thus, Helen represents the image of a new woman, who with courage and intelligence reconstructs her life with her own effort. Her rejection of Huntingdon, Hargrave and even for sometimes Gilbert is the denial of disguised male dominance in the name of protection. She refused the hegemonic rule of any men on her life thereafter. She bared all the pain and faced the worst circumstances with patience. Her patience is the greatest strength in the way of her empowerment and emancipation.

The argument with Mr. and Mrs. Markham put forth her broad and matured knowledge. Her logical reasoning and strong determination make her the representative of a new set of rational thoughts. Mr. Gilbert observed her character as "she is always predetermined to withstand it- to listen only with her bodily ears, keeping the mental organs resolutely closed against the strongest reasoning"(1203). Helen never felt it was necessary to answer the people to clear their doubts. She is not much worried about the gossips of the town regarding her life. She is a strong-minded lady, who knows that the trivial talks cannot harm her personality and her life. In one of the incidents, she says, "- Go! I won't care what you think of me!"(1259) to Gilbert, without thinking about consequences.

In this way, she seriously cultivated to follow the previously advised words of her aunt regarding life and marriage, i.e., "principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth"(1264). Thus, Helen's strange

journey filled with all bad situations a woman would face by the injustice of man, ultimately gave rise to feminist views in the life of a female who once possessed only feminine qualities. Helen's voice filled the society with unheard voices of many women of the age. Her bold decisions like to live, as a "widow" despite the husband living, is the bold step against the patriarchal setup. It indicates that to live as a widow is more peaceful and secure than to live as a wife of such a wretched person.

Agnes Grey is a girl of colourful dreams. Her wish to step out of the house for the job and to earn was against femininity of a woman in the 19th century. She is a perfect woman as she grew up, apart from her desire to be economically independent. She subdued her real self forcefully under the cover of "unshaken firmness, devoted diligence, unwearied perseverance, unceasing care" (1093), but, unfortunately, her tolerance is tested severely by Bloomfield family as analysed in the previous chapter. She felt death would be more peaceful to those birds than bearing cold-blooded torments in the hands of inhumane Tom and his family. Then, she defended her act as her duty being a real governess to his mother. Her true self cost her to lose her bread, but she had not lost the confidence.

In the house of Murray, she is treated better than in Bloomfield. Agnes pupils are of adolescent age. They have already cultivated their own way of thinking. Agnes work is just to assist them in learning when they wish to learn. She is merely a puppet, a silent spectator and a listener of the nonsense talks of Rosalie and Matilda. Agnes' silence and smile helped to control her emotions. Many a times she feels irritated by the company of these young ladies (Rosalie and Matilda) who "...chiefly owing to their defective education, comported themselves towards their inferiors in a manner that was highly

disagreeable...” (1115). Thus Agnes tried to change their attitudes through her teaching but there was no use. She says, “I made many and various attempts to deliver my pupils from these delusive notions without alarming their pride- which was easily offended, and not soon appeased- but with little apparent results; ...” (1115). Then Agnes started to build her comfortable zone outside the Murray’s family, i.e., with poor cottagers. She likes to talk and spend more hours with Nancy. She knows Rosalie and Matilda never loved them. She even became a good friend of Mr Weston. Agnes is a mature lady. She knows her limitations and societal obligations. In the mid of high-class society, she wanted to maintain her own space. She felt “it was disagreeable, too, to walk behind and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for, in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic...” (1127). Then her liking for the “wild flowers” (1128) shows her love towards nature and symbolizes her character, which is unique and rare as the wildflowers.

As Tillie Olsen said in the work *Silences*, Agnes Grey’s silence and inner talks (dialogues) can be considered as a kind of resistance to ‘the dominant discourse’. She who is a lower-class working woman is doubly oppressed here in the name of class and sex. So her deliberate silence and limited conversations with the upper-class people shows her resistance. She says that she often acts “as if I were wholly absorbed in my own reflections or the contemplation of surrounding objects; or, if I lingered behind, it was some bird and insect, some tree or flower, ... I would pursue my walk alone, at a leisurely pace, until my pupils had bidden adieu to their companions, ...”(A. Bronte 1127).

In another incident Agnes advice to unhappy Rosalie after marrying Mr. Ashby shows she has a belief in 'sisterhood' as radical feminists believed. She said to Mrs. Ashby not to "make an enemy of her mother-in-law.' ... though cold and haughty in her general demeanour...she (generally women) has strong affections for those who can reach them; and, though so blindly attached to her son, she is not without good principles, or incapable of hearing reason." "She would, in time, become your faithful friend, and a comfort and support to you..." (1174). This advice indicates that a woman if believes other woman and treats them as sisters, then women can face this gender discrimination and other problems of their sex effectively.

Then Agnes' mother, the pillar of their family and courage of Agnes and Mary, is equally important. Mrs. Grey is more independent and intelligent in handling the life of her own than Agnes. It seems that Agnes is the shadow of her mother to a certain degree. She never repented her decisions. She very enthusiastically managed all the difficulties as discussed in the previous chapters. When she heard the marriage proposal of Mr Weston to marry Agnes, she was very happy. She did not think about her lonely life after the marriage of her daughter. She even rejected the idea of Weston who was ready to come and live with them after marrying Agnes as a support to old widow mother. Her decision shows her dignity and determination to live without the help of even daughters once given in marriage as it was against the Victorian respectability. In this way, both the mother and daughter have shown their femaleness in all their choice and deeds.

To conclude, this section tried to cover each incident of all the six novels of Bronte Sisters. It exposes the real feelings of women, which is devoid of typical feminine characteristics. Thus, the self-expressions of every female character opposes the

suppressive nature of the patriarchal system. It strongly objects the notions of patriarchal ideologies. Bronte Sisters elaborately covered the different phases of women's life and struggle and have given a sensible message, i.e., 'feminine' is an ideological concept of culture. So 'femaleness' of women is essential to live successfully in the world of the male.

### **Social and Legal Issues Concerning Women in Marriage and Family**

The family is the basic unit of every society. Marriage is the most important institution, which creates a healthy environment for family and supports societal welfare. In the divided sphere of the 19th century, men saw home as a place of refreshment, relaxation and recreation. They thought that women were blessed with plenty of leisure hours and stress less life. The society treated home as the safest place for women who are weak and mild. But, unfortunately, the same place was a ground of disadvantages for women's growth and development. Instead of protecting and promoting the rights of women, it has systematically created an illusionary world of gender. The parents thought of the female child as a burden and that it was their responsibility to groom her feminine qualities according to a set of rules and guard her against the worldly temptations until she is married to a suitable man. After that, it is her fate, which might be good or bad, she should try her best to adjust to the demands of her husband. The people of the 19th century, who were more concerned about respectability, considered marriages of their children measure the prestige. But they were not too much worried about the marital lives. This can be seen in the marriage of Rochester of *Jane Eyre* and Miss Murray of *Agnes Grey*. It shows that young men and women were misled by the guiding parents, who believed that money could change anything.

Marriage has been taking place for various reasons social, political, economic, emotional and religious. It includes various forms arranged, love, arranged cum love, forceful marriages, legally objectionable marriages and marriages against family obligations. Even many relationships out of marital tie have existed during all the times. In this, the traditional heterosexual marriages are rooted in the patriarchal ideology of power relation, where man is superior, and woman is his subordinate. Thus, the reinforcement of gender roles strongly existed in this practice. Normally, heterosexual marriages will not take place on the egalitarian notions. Women are segregated to private life, as the caretaker of husband and his children. She is doubly exploited by societal conventions and control of her husband. The theorists and critics observed that the industrialization, especially in the 19th century, changed the scenario of the family life. Men started to spend most of their time out of the house in their work and business, and women remained inside the house as the guardian of family ethics and morals. Though the changing society provided new opportunities for the women of middle-class and lower-class, they were paid very less. Thus, women were totally neglected and insulted until the late 19th century.

As mentioned in the first chapter women were the neglected subjects in the legal system of England. Especially married women were not mentioned as an individual anywhere in the law of the land. They were identified in relation to their husband. She was not free to act or decide as she wished. She did not have authority over her sexuality or reproduction of children. She was deprived of every human right. Thus, marrying a man of higher rank was not the end of her difficulty; it was the beginning of unseen miseries.

Marriage (heterosexual marriage) is a traditional institute rooted in patriarchy. Therefore, it promotes male superiority and female subordination. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century by marrying, a woman used to lose her right on property, whether it was inherited or earned independently. On the other hand, unmarried women lived under the authority of father until he died and later her responsibility would be given to her brother or uncle. If she was the only daughter, the right of property would be enjoyed as law permits. But the life of spinsterhood was more miserable than the married life. This condition made women accept marriage as the means to escape from the life of loneliness.

In the Victorian England, mercantile marriages were hugely preferred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than the marriage for true love. People tried hard to get into a relation that enhanced their economic status. Rochester was advised by his father and supported by his brother to marry Bertha, who was of unsound mind, just for money. Rochester with grief said to Jane “my father and my brother Rowland knew all this; but they thought only of the thirty thousand pounds, and joined in the plot against me” (C. Bronte 301). More than the selfish motives of common people, it is the law of the land that filled them with inhumanity. The right to property for a woman in all the patriarchal society is denied, and the practice of Dowry system is encouraged during all the times. Thus, people think marriage is a tool to obtain the good fortune in terms of getting moveable and immovable properties of great value. Therefore, a woman is treated as a token of exchange in this transaction.

Bronte Sisters knowingly or unknowingly knocked the door of the judicial system to provide justice for women of the era. Apart from the general social problems



like gender, class and race disparities, Bronte novels particularly covered the most sensitive issues concerning women and her questions.

Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* represents the condition of marginalized women of the other race in the land of white people as Jean Rhys depicts in her sequel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Jean Rhys criticised the patriarchal system that made the life of many innocent girls miserable. The character of Bertha shows how the active female sexuality was treated in the Victorian society. The people considered that this kind of women were a curse to the family and the society. So they were locked in secret attics. The insanity of women in the 19th century is constituted by the feminist behaviour and free sexual assertions against the norms of the time. (Mathur 17-18) Adam Philips, the psychotherapist and writer, says in an interview to BBC “Attics are where wives who cannot be contained, who are over-sexualised and unruly are stored away” (qtd. in Mathur 18). In addition to this, Charlotte indirectly implies that it is the right of property that pushed Rochester as well as Bertha into the tie of marriage, which resulted in an unhappy married life, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Similarly, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* encashed the loopholes of the legal system to take revenge against Edgar Linton of Thushcross Grange. The enmity between the two males led to the sufferings of two innocent females- Isabella and young Cathy. The illogical law had given strength to the evil powers of the man to destroy the helpless women. Heathcliff deceived Isabella with the act of love and married her for her property, and he plotted the marriage of young Cathy with his son Linton, a diseased person as Cathy is the single successor to Edgar's whole property. Because according to law “what was her personal property before marriage, such as money in hand, money at the bank, jewels, household

good, clothes, etc., becomes absolutely her husband's, and he may assign or dispose of them at his pleasure whether he and his wife live together or not."(Bodichon)

It was again the same husband's right to the property of his wife that made Robert Moore approach Shirley with the proposal of marriage. He accepts his mistake with Caroline he says, "I wanted to marry her for the sake of her money, and that she refused me indignantly and scornfully" (C. Bronte 627). In the conversation between Caroline and Robert, they talked about the whims of many men who want to marry Shirley only because she is rich. Robert ironically remarks that Shirley is an eccentric, who is incapable of love. He says, "She is peculiar, and more dangerous to take as a wife-rashly" (628). He further added, in his disappointment that "she will never marry. I imagine her jealous of compromising her pride, of relinquishing her power, of sharing her property" (629). He continued by accepting his wickedness with Caroline behind the marriage proposal to Shirley and revealed "he never wanted to kiss Miss Keeldar in his life, though she has fine lips, scarlet and round as cherries: or, if I did wish it, it was the mere desire of the eye" (629-630).

These observations clearly point out that man of the society though they are considered as gentlemen often wanted to marry a woman for her wealth or in some cases for her submissive feminine character, but not for her real independent femininity and her sexuality. Thus, a woman with good wealth or woman with ideal nature is more vulnerable to the dangers of treachery, domestic violence and male domination.

During Brontes' time, marriage was a social and legal contract. The church, the clergy and the relatives were the witnesses. The formal marriage ceremony ends with the

signature of the names of newly wedded couple in the registry of the church. The bride would sign her maiden name for one last time. From there onwards, her name, her wish and her life merges with her husband. To get separated from this bond was hard to women under the same law. The patriarchal setup had finely woven a cobweb to control the mobility of women. She, who has lost her separate existence in terms of law after marriage, is not allowed to get divorced very easily. The time and money which she has to incur led to the silent death of numerous poor women in 19th century England. “The expenses of only a common divorce bill are between six hundred and seven hundred pounds, which makes the possibility of release from the matrimonial bond a privilege of the rich”(qtd. in Norton). The wife cannot be the witness or defendant. “The law cannot dissolve a lawful marriage; it is only the legislature that this power is vested” (qtd. in Norton). In these circumstances, it was unimaginable for a dependent poor woman to get justice.

Isabella, who fell in hell by marrying Heathcliff, revealed her pain and horror filled married life to Nelly Dean. She said that Heathcliff married her “on purpose to obtain power over her brother” (148). She pleaded Nelly not to “mention a syllable of Heathcliff” infamous conversation to her brother or Catherine” (148). She wanted to see his failure in all his cruel attempts (ruining the peace and happiness of Edgar). She wished to die early or to see him dead! (148). Her effort to escape from Heathcliff failed but, all of a sudden Heathcliff told Nelly that he agreed for Isabella’s separation “if she desired” and Nelly too said “Isabella will doubtlessly avail herself of the permission”(147). Then the ironical words of Heathcliff show the condition of helpless women under the inhumane husbands in Victorian Law –

‘If you are called upon in a Court of Law, you’ll remember her language, Nelly!’ And take a good look at that countenance: she’s near the point which would suit me. No; you’re not fit to be your own guardian, Isabella, now; and I, being your legal protector, must detain you in my custody, however distasteful the obligation may be...(148).

In the subsequent days, his brutal nature exhausted Isabella’s patience. But, the death of Catherine made him sad distracted him. So she felt “he would not chase her over England” if she escapes from his wretched hearth. She called him “monster!” Whereas, Nelly’s reply for her is shocking, despite all his rude behaviour, Nelly called him as a human being and even better than many men of the time. She said to Isabella “be more charitable: there are worse men than he is yet!” (165). It connotes women of the 19th century were harassed so cruelly, and the lack of legal protection led them to sustain all the violence silently.

Caroline Norton writes in the *Letter to Queen* regarding the condition of English women of her times, “she cannot prosecute for a libel. Her husband must prosecute; and in cases of enmity and separation, of course she is without a remedy”. Then, “separation from her husband by consent, or for his ill usage, does not alter their mutual relation. He retains the right to divorce her after separation,—as before,—though he himself is unfaithful” (Norton). It was in 1875 with the support of Norton that a Divorce Reform Act was passed. Prior to this in 1838, with her great support, a bill reforming an Infant’s Custody Act was passed, which gave a mother limited rights over her children until the child attained the age of seven years. Later it was raised to sixteen years in 1873. Then,

the act of 1886 reframed the determining factors to decide the custody of children for their welfare. However, the husband retained the lifetime legal guardianship of the child.

Therefore, Isabella escaped to Thurstcross Grange and with the help of her brother, she left for London. There she gave birth to her Son Linton. In secrecy and disguise, she nurtured her “peevisish” child until her death. During this juncture, Heathcliff’s word to Nelly reveals his rights over the separated wife and her child. He says although Isabella and her son did not want to hear about Heathcliff, he can recall them when he wishes- ““But I’ll have it,’ ‘when I want it. They may reckon on that!”” (174). Similarly, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen, escapes from her husband with the help of the trusted servants and her brother Lawrence. Helen knew her powerless condition in the matter of possessing her son and her property. Therefore, she schemed to abscond without the knowledge of Huntingdon. She prepared herself mentally and financially to face the outer world before her escape. The law of the land did not allow a woman to have the rights over her child, her inherited wealth or independently earned money until the death of her husband. Thus, Helen disguised herself as a widow and lived under the name of Mrs. Graham. Helen’s decision to live a life of widowhood despite her husband’s presence is a strong step to deceive the legal system, which unfairly deceived women with many injustices. Her position led her to act cleverly. Her experience made her think that widowhood is better than the pathetic wifely status. Her bold decision empowered her economic position. She started to earn and possess the right over her money and property. It is an ironical attack on the biased nature of judiciary, which made women fear of their insecure position.

If an English, wife is guilty of infidelity, her husband can divorce her to marry again; but she cannot divorce the husband a vinculum, however profligate he may be. No law court can divorce in England. (Norton)

Helen represents the condition of such women, who were not supposed to be freed at any cost from the vulgarity of their husbands'. Arthur Huntingdon is a man addicted to alcoholism, illicit affairs, and is a true psychopath. However, Helen is not empowered with legal rights to prosecute against his unfaithful nature and inhumane behaviour. It was not the problem of Helen alone; it was the issue of thousands of women in England. Alcohol was a great public issue until the Maine Law was passed in 1854. Wife-beating, domestic violence, sexual harassment were common. Men considered physical abuse of their wives as their personal right. The police of the state supported the brutal acts of husbands by helping them to trace the escaped wives and fetch them back to the custody of the same cruel person. No law of England protected middle-class women from the difficulties. Unhappy marriages turned as the curse of their whole life. Nothing could change the situation other than death. Rochester explained his inability to take Divorce from his mad wife. This situation made him hide all the truth from Jane and others. He said, "I could not rid myself of it by any legal proceedings: for the doctors now discovered that my wife was mad- her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (C. Bronte 302). Otherwise, there were provisions for a wealthy man to prove his wife's adultery and get the divorce easily. But, to prove the false fidelity of Bertha, who was medically proved as insane was not permitted. So, she inhabited as a grim shadow of Rochester. The law of England did not permit remarriage except in case either of the husband or wife's death. In addition, it was not easy to obtain the permission in the

court. It was considered as a special case and through a private parliamentary act, the law permitted for remarriages. This procedure continued until 1857. Otherwise, until 1923, the law for divorce remained the same. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 allowed for a less costly judicial separation but without the right to remarriage (Women and the Law in Victorian England). For this reason both in *Jane Eyre* and in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the heroines get married to their suitors after the death of a respective legal partner, i.e., Bertha, the wife of Rochester and Arthur Huntingdon, the husband of Helen.

Apart from these judicial procedures, the divorce or separation through mutual consent was in practise. If a man of respectable position or sensitive nature or any background gave his consent for separation, then women need not suffer under the hard proceedings of the judiciary. Here, again, the will of man is significant; it was on his whim or mercy that the wife could get liberty. In the case of Heathcliff and Isabella, it was discussed but not executed. In *Villette*, Paulina's father was separated from his wife by mutual consent, who was an unchaste and careless woman. Similarly, Lord Lowborough's divorce in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was done on mutual consent, which gave him the full authority over his children and even his wife if he wished in the near future.

Bronte Sisters exposed the cruel faces of men as well as careless nature of women in contrast to the pitiful pious females. Women, who are unchaste and who run behind money, physical attractions and status are treated as a threat to the houses of a happy family. Heathcliff and Catherine Edgar's relationship, Arthur Huntingdon and Lady Lowborough's affair, Arthur Huntingdon and the new governess Miss Myers' illicit relationship are examples, which resulted in the marital disputes between wife and

husband, who loved and respected each other. In the case of Catherine, it was because of her passionate love the relation with Heathcliff lasted even after their respective marriages. However, their behaviour was liable to condemn. As a reader, we feel pity for Edgar in all his attempts to put together his scattered relationship. Likewise, we feel bad about the foolishness of Isabella and sympathy on her situation as the unfortunate wife of rude Heathcliff. But, the lustful nature of Arthur is unpardonable compared to Catherine and Heathcliff. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Arthur as well as Annabella know each other and love each other even before their respective marriage, but both of them are opportunists, and they want to settle with wealthy and good-looking life partners. Therefore, they married for the social comfort and maintained the affair secretly. Lady Lowborough (Annabella Wilmot) married the close friend of Arthur and Arthur married beautiful Helen, who knows Annabella. The unreliable nature of both of them deceived innocent Helen and Lord Lowborough. Nevertheless, when the truth is revealed, it crushed the hopes of Helen and Lowborough. It resulted in the divorce of Annabella and Lord Lowborough and the elopement of Helen. The shameless attitude of Arthur and Annabella was shocking to the conservative readers. In addition, Anne Bronte had shown there were a few governesses like Miss Myers. Miss Myers intention behind her work is to grab the money of a wealthy man, without any consideration towards the marital status or the presence of his wife or his son. Anne by portraying the real natures of many people, tried to create awareness in the society. She also mocked the legal system, which did not treat the wife as a witness to the crimes of her husband and did not easily accept her words about his adultery. It shows that there was no hope in the justice, where



prostitution was legalised, without thinking about the common people's life and family setup.

In connection with property act Shirley represents the most empowered woman. She being the sole owner of her vast inheritance has full authority to utilize her property for her benefit or she could distribute it according to her will. The intelligent and shrewd Shirley made the will of her property suspecting her near death because of illness. She explained her intention to Harry, her solicitor:

... if I made no will, and died before you, Harry, all my property would go to you; and I do not intend that it should be so, thought your father would like it. But you, 'will have his whole estate, which is large- larger than Fieldhead. Your sisters will have nothing; so I have left them some money... then she told she had left Caroline Helstone some money too; that this manor house, with its furniture and books, she had bequeathed to me, as she did not choose to ask the old family place from her blood; and that all the rest of her property, amounting to about twelve thousand pounds, exclusive of the legacies to my sisters and Miss Helstone, she had willed, not to me, seeing I was already rich, but to a good man....(519-520)

This decision of Shirley is an act of helping a genuine person to empower their status with the aid of required economic assistance. Her will is really an appreciable step. As per the rules of law, the daughter inherits the wealth of her father if she is the only child. Thus, she has the power to use it as she wishes, if she is unmarried. Shirley the mature, sound-minded woman took the right decision at the right time. Her choice made her

exercise her interest and power without anyone's objection. Charlotte cleverly concluded the questions on Shirley's property even before her marriage to Mr. Moore. As mentioned in the will Mr. Moore is the good man, who has right on twelve thousand pounds of Shirley's money that he inherits on the mercy of Shirley. Therefore, the consequent marriage of Shirley and Mr. Moore did not raise the question of the property rights as it is decided by indirect consent of Moore. As Norton says-

An English wife cannot make a will. She may have children or kindred whom she may earnestly desire to benefit;—she may be separated from her husband, who may be living with a mistress; no matter: the law gives what she has to him, and no will she could make would be valid. (Norton)

However, an unmarried woman at the age of twenty-one has the same rights to property as a man. So she is free to take any decisions if she is the only child who is entitled to all the intestate real and personal property. Then it also said “when a woman has consented to a proposal of marriage, she cannot dispose or give away her property without the knowledge of her betrothed; if she makes any such disposition without his knowledge, even if he be ignorant of the existence of her property, the disposition will not be legal”(Bodichon).

More than the benefits, there were disadvantages for women in the property rights of the 19th century. The father or the husband, by will, can deprive the woman of all right on the property. For instance, Mrs. Grey lost all her father's property to her cousins by the will of her father against her as a punishment for her disobedience. Then in some other incidents, it is clear that a widow is merely the guardian of her husband' property

until her children attain majority. Thus, Mrs Bretton looked after her husband' property after his death and handed it over to her son Dr. John. In this way, the law dictates "if a man die intestate, the widow, if there are children, is entitled to one-third of the personalty; if there are no children, to one-half: the other is distributed among the next of kin, among whom the mother is not counted. If there is no next of kin the moiety goes to the crown" (Bodichon).

Then, Charlotte in *Villette* talks about the failure of legal authority to check the marriage of minorities, which led many of the young girls of adolescent age to fall in the trap of cruel men. Ginevra mentions that her marriage is not legal as his uncle says because she is not mature in legal terms. But there is no seriousness in the complaint or in its impact. Therefore, we can see the utter failure of her fanciful marriage to Alfred M. le Comte de Hamal. This incident indirectly points out the failure of the legal system and its laws, which are nominal and powerless to protect the life of uneducated and immature girls of the 19th century.

Until 1880's women were deprived of, full Property Rights and Infant Custody Rights. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 granted the right of her earnings after separation. The married woman's property act of 1870 allowed women to retain her earnings in the form of money or property, which she earned after her marriage. It was in 1882 women were allowed the right to own their property what they possessed at the time of their marriage. (Women and the Law in Victorian England)

In addition to these issues, the death of the mother at the time of delivery was common during Victorian era. This serious problem is mentioned in the novel *Wuthering*

*Heights*. The death of Mrs Hindley at the time of delivery, death of Isabella and again the death of Catherine on the birth of her daughter shows that women were prone to many physical problems after marriage. They were ignored in all conditions; their existence was to accomplish the desires of their husbands, which mainly included his sexual urge and to bear his children at the cost value of their life. The deaths of women at the time of childbirth are due to medical problems and inadequate measures in the state towards the health and safety of the new mother and infant. In *Agnes Grey*, first three children of Mrs. Grey died in as infants. Thus, Agnes and Mary are the children who were reared and nurtured very carefully. Even Charlotte Bronte, who lived and succeeded in her life as a great writer by creating the empowered entities in her novels, married at her thirty-eight year and died on her first delivery. These incidents from their novels and real life indicate there was need for improving the medical facilities and health condition of women in 19th century.

Then the problems of girls in the unhygienic educational institutions and series of deaths created an insecure and horror filled environment in most of the charitable schools of the era. The careless management and improper rules were the main cause of this situation. Charlotte Bronte depicts the stark facts in her autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre* and in her *Villette* gives the guidelines for English institutions to run the girls educational institutions along the model of Roe Fossette a Labassecouriennes school for girls.

The last observation, but not the least, on the problems in the labour system concerning women and children are mentioned in *Shirley*. The lower class women, who found works in factory and textiles during the time of 19th-century industrialization, had to face many difficulties. Women were paid less and were compelled to work for long

hours under insecure and unhealthy conditions. They were doubly oppressed in the system of patriarchy in the home and in the outer world. The most heinous was child labour practice, where innocent and incapable children were exploited inhumanly in the factories. They were paid only 10-20% of an adult male's wage in spite of long hours at a job. (Child Labour) Along with them, pet animals were treated very badly as mentioned in Anne Bronte's novels. People of Bloomfield and Murray family did not have any soft concern for the dumb creatures. They used and abused the animals for their fancy. Even Arthur Huntingdon's inhuman attitude about the mild dog, his careless words about his horse, and his passion for hunting birds and other innocent creatures shows the inhumane traits of human beings belonging to high-class society. It was until 1970's that no one questioned the brutality of man on helpless creatures. Thus, the novels pictured the upper-class society, which looked at all of the three - lower class women, poor child worker and helpless animals as their puppets that can be used to derive the sadistic pleasures without any mercy or humanitarian concern as cruel. These attitudes were against the human and animal rights, which were not considered as serious issues in 19th century England. It was almost in the 20th century the changes took place in the social setup.

In this way, Charlotte, Emily and Anne worked as the most responsible writers of the age. They deliberately depicted all the questions of women along with children and animal to create awareness of the reality and to encourage radical thoughts for the changes in the society. Anne writes in her preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that-

Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim; and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense. (3)

She further defends her stance in writing the realistic story by questioning the readers about their opinion on writers' ethics as follows: "to represent a bad thing in its least offensive light is, doubtless, the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue; but is it the most honest, or the safest?"(3), "When there is no peace" in the society and the inexperienced young generation is stepping into the "snares and pitfalls of life" as "thoughtless travellers" (4). Then she strongly urged, "All novels should be written for both men and women to read" (3).

### **Marriage of Likeminded**

Anne Bronte has portrayed the marital relationship of Helen with Arthur Huntingdon in her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as the mismatch of Angel with a demon. At the same time, she creates an ideal character for Helen's re-marriage. Gilbert Markham is a man of virtue. He has understood Helen's life and difficulties. He supported her decisions from the day he knew her. Helen chooses to marry Gilbert for his nature of understanding and his patience. The man who appreciated the lifestyle of a widow who is a professional artist and respected her as the mother of a child, rather than lending his ears to gossips of the town is the best suitor for a woman like Helen. Thus, the re-marriage is not another pitfall in the life of Helen.

Likewise, Jane Eyre married Rochester, who loved her truly in spite of her poor status, unattractive beauty and bad temper. Her decision had given a new life to the physically disabled person. Jane became the protector of blind Rochester. Her desire and dreams are perceived by following her intuitions than the social obligations of the society. Armstrong explains it is Jane's sexual empowerment that "allows emotion to overpower convention and become a value in its own right. Blotting out all features of political person, place, and event" (197).

Then the marriages of Shirley and Caroline Helstone took place on the basis of egalitarian notion and love respectively. Shirley, who rejected more than five suitors of good repute, was suspected as "incapable of love". Shirley always believed and argued, that women is equal to men. She never wanted to compete for "empire with men". She felt it was a selfish act to quarrel for one over other in the marital life. She questions, "Shall my left hand dispute for precedence with my right? Shall my heart quarrel with my pulse? Shall my veins be jealous of the blood which fills them?"(C. Bronte 226). She was determined to marry a man superior to her in knowledge and manners. However, her choice to marry the poor tutor Mr. Moore of good nature breaks the stereotypical practice of marriages. Her decision made a difference in the life of a tutor. Then her piercing words redirected Robert Moore to his real love, i.e., Caroline. The love also played its cupid role in bringing Agnes Grey and Weston together at the end, which reflects the love between Agnes' mother and father. However, the marriage of Mrs. Grey and Richard Grey was a rational step in those days. Agnes' mother left her status and class to the love of Richard, a lower class parson. Again, the marriage of Paulina and Dr. John is 'the marriage of true minds' that respect and adore each other. This marriage is also against

the traditional conditions of marriage. Paulina of upper-class family, almost the heiress stepped down to marry “a bourgeois,” i.e., a middle-class doctor Mr. John Bretton. Likewise, Cathy and Hareton’ marriage blurred the line of difference between the class systems. Their marriage uprooted the revenge of two families and struggles of many lives in *Wuthering Heights* and *Thurshcross Grange*.

Thus, the happy marriages of Bronte Novels are the marriages for true love and respect rather than for money and false prestige. They indirectly rejected the practices of the Victorian marital market and show that the mercantile marriages would not fill the life of women with respect and happiness. The best examples in the novels are marriages of Ginevra and Alfred, Bertha and Rochester, Catherine and Edgar, Heathcliff and Isabella, Rosalie and Ashby, Annabella and Lord Lowborough, Helen and Huntingdon, Helstone and Mary Cave.... These marriages were for money and physical attraction, which perished within a short span of time. In addition, mercantile marriages are filled with women’s exploitation, as we noticed in the early sections. Thus, girls should be conscious as Helen’s aunt advises in the novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Charlotte Bronte wrote to Ellen regarding marriage and love in her letters as “do not ever be over-persuaded to marry a man you can never respect- I do not say love...and as to intense passion, I am convinced that that is no desirable feeling” (Barker 75). Anne Bronte in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* through the aunt of Helen guides the inexperienced young girls about marriage and love, who have attained the age of marriage. She advises Helen-



Don't boast, but watch. Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse- these are nothing – and worse than nothing – snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you, if after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool'(1264).

She stressed the importance of her words by reminding, "*Matrimony is a serious thing*" (1264). But, unfortunately, Helen became the victim of the same deceitful world, even she was guided and guarded in all her steps. Eventually, Helen with her experience explained what is important in a marriage to Mrs. Hargrave's daughter Esther, who is about to marry. Helen thinks that to marry a man without love is equal to "sell[ing] yourself to slavery". She feels marriage is the lifetime event that bound a woman to her husband until death. Therefore, a girl or a woman should decide who is good for her life. Helen advised Esther- "... when I tell you not to marry without love, I do not advise you to marry for love alone – there are many, many other things to be considered. Keep both heart and hand in your own possession, till you see good reason to part with them; ...

though in single life your joys may not be very many, your sorrows, at least, will not be more than you can bear. Marriage may change your circumstances for the better, but in my private opinion, it is far more likely to produce a contrary result” (1415).

On similar grounds, the conversation between Caroline and Mrs. Pryor reveals the reality of marital life. Mrs. Pryor out of her bitter experience is denied the joy of marital bliss. She said that society gives a false picture of marriage. “They are not like reality. They show you the green, tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath.” (396) For this Caroline objects and claims, “there are happy marriages. Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage must be happy.” (396) But, experienced old married or single women like Mrs. Pryor, Mrs. Yorke and even Miss Mann vastly felt that marriage is a pitfall. Mrs. Pryor practically put forth her argument that “Two people can never literally be as one”. She advises Caroline to “be satisfied” and wished “Let all the single be satisfied with their freedom.” (396) She further stressed that single life is better than married life by her warning to Caroline that “the single should not be too anxious to change their state, as they may change for the worse.”(398)

In the final novel *Villette* by Charlotte Bronte, we understand that the anxiousness regarding the spirit of individual women is made clear by creating an empowered personality, i.e., Lucy Snow. Lucy Snow, who often thought of her insecure future without money, shelter and protector, at last, stood as an independent woman capable to lead her life alone. Even though Charlotte left the climax of Lucy’s life to the wild imagination of readers, the way Charlotte brings up the character of Lucy suggests that Lucy remains single and strong. The disappearance (death) of M Paul only puts an end to

the dream of her marriage, but not to her life. Thus, she lingers in our memory as an empowered woman of prudent nature, rather than a woman in great despair. The abrupt and unexpected conclusion of the novel does not make readers think about what's next in the life of Lucy.

*Villette* has shown how a woman with education and financial power can successfully lead the life being individual in the patriarchal society. After analyzing the character of Lucy, I thought Jane, Shirley, Caroline and Helen would have lived their life successfully being independent if they had not found the person whom they decided or loved to marry. Because marriage is not the ultimate goal for them, all the heroines of Bronte novels are financially independent and psychologically strong. They are not eager to marry to build their fortune on stable grounds under the shade of a man. These protagonists are exceptional according to Calder, who said, "... Most of the girls passed straight from childhood to the responsibilities of matronhood without any chance of testing their strength as young women, except in the marriage market" (20). All of them were well educated, experienced, mature, and able enough to lead their life with a decent alternative other than marriage.

## **Conclusion**

Apart from Charlotte Bronte, Emily and Anne lived in seclusion and died silently without the marrying, but all of them have created the characters near to the reality. Their novels reveal the most private affairs of marital and out of the marital relationships publicly without veiling the cruel phases of life. They questioned the society regarding the ethics and practices. Through these novels Bronte sister, unknowingly created a wave, which gradually took serious forms in feminist movements. Their personal anxiety and

difficulty in the matter of marriage are what we see in the novels. Calder writes, “The Bronte sisters had direct and personal experience of having to make their own way without the aid of either inherited wealth or husbands, and the first reflections of this appeared with the publication of *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre* in 1847”(58). The Victorian marital market was for beautiful and rich women, which Bronte and their heroines were not inherit. Victorian society treated women without marriage “as a class of unfortunates” (58) but Brontes’ propagated that unmarried women are more fortunate than the married ones.

Brontes tried to create awareness about the unfair legal system by upholding the existing social issues and evil practices. In the novels, they have suggested the alternatives for women to live. They persistently insisted that women should get ‘proper’ education. Education helps a woman to build her future. It empowers them to raise objection to the false notions and unjust conditions. It also prepares women to decide and judge the pros and cons of any situations and persons without depending on the opinion of other. Thus, women will grow in all aspects. Their intellectual, psychological, financial and social growth will lead her to marry for respect and practical cause rather than for show.

In these ways, the novels tried to teach women to alter their condition in the Victorian times, when patriarchy had reached a crescendo. In 1845, R. A. Slaney, an M.P., reported on the condition of the ordinary women (Birmingham housewives):

... the woman is obliged to remain constantly in the close court or neglected narrow alley where she lives, surrounded by all the evils adverted

to; dirty children, domestic brawls, and drunken disputes meet her on every side and every hour. Under such circumstances, the appropriate employments of a tidy housewife in brushing, or washing, or cleaning, seem vain and useless efforts... (qtd. in Simons 153)

These lines clearly show the condition of women in England. In this situation, Brontes' novel struck a new note by giving a call for change. Each female protagonist resisted the system of patriarchy and redefined the cultural practices or beliefs of the era. They directly or indirectly tried to awaken the women from their forgotten state. Thus, the study of the institution of marriage here tries to show how a woman could change her situation or position by making the decision of her life. It argues potentiality is not something impossible to acquire. It is present in all of us. Only thing we have to do is to raise our consciousness to use it properly. Then empowerment would be achieved without any doubt: this is what we saw in the life of Jane Eyre, Lucy Snow, Helen Lawrence (maiden name) and Agnes Grey in the study.

## CHAPTER – 05

### Conclusion

Through the analysis of the selected novels of the Bronte sisters, particularly the female characters, this thesis has sought to address the issues of women empowerment and the ways in which women have attained individuality in the novel. The concepts of 'gender' and the 'separate sphere' has been analysed as the cultural construct of the 19th century England. The study has treated religion, education and marriage as the cultural institutions or agents to impart the patriarchal ideologies of the society. In the thesis, I have argued that the Bronte sisters had redefined the role of women at private and public sphere by resisting the socio-cultural ideologies of the time through the female characters.

Based on the historical background and theoretical framework of the first chapter the inferences are drawn in this thesis. The work of decoding the encoded meanings of particular incidents, events, dialogues, gestures and signs has been done to show how women are represented in the novels in contrast with the 19th-century Victorian cultural society. As the Bronte texts are believed to be more autobiographical, the study considered that the texts has undoubtedly contained evidence of the cultural construct of feminine and masculine concepts of the society. Thus, the study has concentrated upon the ideological representations of gender role and its implications. It has tried to show how the text presents particular beliefs and how these beliefs were mediated through the conventions.

As all the three authors are sisters and obviously from the same background (middle-class society), it helped to look into the life of middle-class women and their struggles more closely. In the study, a set of female characters that are not confined exclusively to conventional beliefs and gender ideologies were taken up to show how they behaved, how they thought and then how they attained empowerment being under the cultural pressure of patriarchy. As Mary Poovey in her study *The ideological work of Gender* said that “The middle-class ideologies we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations” (3)

The first chapter examined the condition of women in the patriarchal cultural setup of 19<sup>th</sup> century England to understand the gender system and women’s questions of the time. The study has shown gender inequality as multifaceted, multidimensional and all pervasive phenomena affecting all aspects of women’s life. This (gender) concept “is embedded in many different, mutually reinforcing levels- individual consciousness, the home, the workplace, legislation, state structures and ... economic and political system” (Srivastava 140). Then the study focused on the theories and criticism connected the cultural concept of feminine and masculine traits under different perspectives. The theoretical framework was drawn from a broad spectrum of feminist point of views, gender studies and cultural studies. These perspectives or discourses have helped to analyse the texts in an effective way to trace the thread of the issue of women’s empowerment in the selected novels of Bronte sisters. As mentioned in the chapter the study has not adopted any particular methodology to provide an extensive analysis.

The study has shown women's subordination was heavily emphasised in the patriarchal nature of the Victorian religious society. Thus, in the second chapter, these religious constraints and position of women have been analysed to show how the society used women's sentiments to control their socio-economic development. However, the female characters in the Bronte novels understand the hegemonic function of patriarchal religious authority and reject the conventional beliefs that construct the gender ideologies. The study has concentrated on how they act, speak and dress against the cultural mannerisms of the society to show their resistance.

The third chapter examined the educational and employment opportunities for the girls and women of the 19th century England. The study concentrated on the gender-based education system and its disparities. It has tried to discover how far this biased education enabled them to progress, whether there were proper employment opportunities for them to use that education, and how those jobs enabled them to attain social mobility and empowerment. I have argued in this chapter that education allows women to acquire moral courage and mental stability. It strengthens the belief that they can succeed in their life. Thus, Bronte sisters' female protagonists show the role of education and economic independence in the psychological empowerment of women. It shows women's financial stability allows them to obtain autonomy on the decisions they make and the life they want to lead.

Then the institution of marriage was discussed in the fourth chapter to analyse the cultural construct of the Victorian marital market, its ideals and demands. The study has shown woman's freedom is negated in the name of religion, social respectability and family welfare. It has attempted to examine the status of women in married, unmarried,



widowed and remarried conditions. The study has revealed the gender relationship between male and female at two different levels. First level is the hostile superior and subordinate relation and the second level is the successful companionship and cooperative relation. It argues that the superior and subordinate relation of husband and wife is a notion implemented by the patriarchal ideologies in the name of culture. Then it has tried to prove that culture had cultivated differences rather than unity in the family system. It has looked into how Bronte novels treated the institution of marriage, how the central characters considered it and to what extent they (Bronte and female protagonists) disapprove of marriage as the only goal of women. It has taken the concept of femininity or femaleness to show feminine as a cultural construct and femaleness as the individuality of a woman. The chapter has analysed how patriarchy excluded women from having a full legal authority or identity. It has tried to show the concern of Bronte novels regarding the political empowerment of women, which was hitherto not seriously discussed in the novels of other contemporary writers. Finally, I have concluded the chapter with the argument that marriage held outside traditional, religious and societal notions, have led to the well-being of women, because such marriages give importance to mutual respect, love and understanding between the couple that would create a healthy relationship in married life.

Here the study upholds that the cognitive, economic and psychological empowerment of woman would certainly empower women to establish a political identity in the society with their own individuality along with that of the husbands. It has attempted to show Brontes' simple heroines and their independent stance filled the novels with a set of moral message to the female readers of all ages. The novels sensitize both

men and women for the change of their role in the family and society to bring gender equality. Their writing has proven to the world that the persuasiveness of the water is incomparable with the flame of the woods. Similarly, a woman who swallows her tears in silence and suppresses her desires does not lack the power or intensity; they simply need the moral courage to flood over the burning fire to cool off its dancing flames. This task of encouraging the conscience is done in the novels of Bronte Sisters.

The thesis has made an effort to explain that nobody can stop a woman if she decides to change her condition. The society, culture, religion, and the entire system is an ideological construct. This patriarchal structure has made women as weaker and milder beings. Therefore, it is inevitable for women to defy the role of feminine to prove her individuality. Julia Kristeva has said,

If women have a role to play in this on-going process of power and denial~, If women have a role to play it is only in assuming a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning... in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary moments. (166)

The analysis has traced such 'revolutionary moments', which are present in the Bronte novels from a subtle to a substantial level. We can look at Jane Eyre's nonconformity to religious norms when she was a ten-year-old girl and her refusal to wear jewellery and to appear like an angel in her wedding dress, and her strong objection to marrying already wedded Rochester merely to attain social standards and secure future. Her undying will power and hope during difficult times and sufferings shows that

she had made up her mind to build her future. Thus, she attained her dream in the end. Similarly, the analysis has tried to trace all the steps of female protagonists of Bronte novels to register their positive moves, which were considered as the negative attitudes from the cultural point of view. How they put aside the rigid cultural norms and stood for their individuality and empowerment is shown.

In this way, the study has illustrated the presence of the issue of women's growth and development towards empowerment in these novels. The theme of women's selfhood is extensively examined in the thesis based on the feminist, gender and cultural theories. The conclusions are drawn based on these theoretical frameworks. The speculations are done under the limelight of relevant perspectives. It has done some degree of guesswork to support the hypothesis of the thesis. But it is just a viewpoint of the reader to show the femaleness of women hidden in the character and their actions in the novels. It has attempted to show that gender inequality arises not because of the physical weakness of women or patriarchal ideologies but rather from the lack of awareness about one's own power. Because women are denied the opportunity to know themselves and the world around them, they believed they are inferior and so become the victims of gender system. But women have to know they are also the perpetrators of the gender ideology. For instance, mother-in-law of Mrs Ashby advises her to adjust with the improper behaviour of alcoholic husband and the people of society including her mother believe that it was the responsibility of a wife to reform her husband and to keep him always happy. In this situation, only education would help women to understand their position and bring changes in the whole system. Education helps women to improve the quality of life not only in physical aspects (visible changes as in the character of Cathy) but also in mental

and intellectual aspects. The proper education affects the thinking process and the mentality of an individual. Therefore, it is considered as the key point to the empowerment of a person. Thus, the girls' education is stressed more in the Bronte novels than the popular concept of the time, i.e., domesticity.

The present research work is confined to the analysis of Bronte sisters' novels- *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as working against the Victorian capitalist patriarchal cultural society. The study has limited its analysis to the condition of women in the Victorian culture and her resistance against the conventions to attain empowerment. Thus, the hypothesis of the thesis has proven effectively in the study as I mentioned in the introduction chapter.

This thesis has attempted to show that the issue of women empowerment is not a recent phenomena. The texts of Charlotte, Emily and Anne who were considered as proto feminists composed and published their novels in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, also uphold the universal issue of women empowerment that is still an important matter of discussion. It shows that more has to be done for the development of middle-class female society. And it stresses that unless women decide to come over from their subordinate position no one can bring about a large difference in their lives. Many writers, reformers and thinkers have come and gone but still the debate continues.

Then the further research based on this work can be done by comparing the cultural construct and practises of gender roles in Indian context with the texts of Bronte sisters and Victorian society or particularly the institution of marriage can be examined in

a comparative study between two cultures to draw the similarities of marital market and the position of women dating back to 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED  
NOVELS OF BRONTE SISTERS**

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## CHAPTER – 05

### Conclusion

Through the analysis of the selected novels of the Bronte sisters, particularly the female characters, this thesis has sought to address the issues of women empowerment and the ways in which women have attained individuality in the novel. The concepts of 'gender' and the 'separate sphere' has been analysed as the cultural construct of the 19th century England. The study has treated religion, education and marriage as the cultural institutions or agents to impart the patriarchal ideologies of the society. In the thesis, I have argued that the Bronte sisters had redefined the role of women at private and public sphere by resisting the socio-cultural ideologies of the time through the female characters.

Based on the historical background and theoretical framework of the first chapter the inferences are drawn in this thesis. The work of decoding the encoded meanings of particular incidents, events, dialogues, gestures and signs has been done to show how women are represented in the novels in contrast with the 19th-century Victorian cultural society. As the Bronte texts are believed to be more autobiographical, the study considered that the texts has undoubtedly contained evidence of the cultural construct of feminine and masculine concepts of the society. Thus, the study has concentrated upon the ideological representations of gender role and its implications. It has tried to show how the text presents particular beliefs and how these beliefs were mediated through the conventions.

As all the three authors are sisters and obviously from the same background (middle-class society), it helped to look into the life of middle-class women and their struggles more closely. In the study, a set of female characters that are not confined exclusively to conventional beliefs and gender ideologies were taken up to show how they behaved, how they thought and then how they attained empowerment being under the cultural pressure of patriarchy. As Mary Poovey in her study *The ideological work of Gender* said that “The middle-class ideologies we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations” (3)

The first chapter examined the condition of women in the patriarchal cultural setup of 19<sup>th</sup> century England to understand the gender system and women’s questions of the time. The study has shown gender inequality as multifaceted, multidimensional and all pervasive phenomena affecting all aspects of women’s life. This (gender) concept “is embedded in many different, mutually reinforcing levels- individual consciousness, the home, the workplace, legislation, state structures and ... economic and political system” (Srivastava 140). Then the study focused on the theories and criticism connected the cultural concept of feminine and masculine traits under different perspectives. The theoretical framework was drawn from a broad spectrum of feminist point of views, gender studies and cultural studies. These perspectives or discourses have helped to analyse the texts in an effective way to trace the thread of the issue of women’s empowerment in the selected novels of Bronte sisters. As mentioned in the chapter the study has not adopted any particular methodology to provide an extensive analysis.

The study has shown women's subordination was heavily emphasised in the patriarchal nature of the Victorian religious society. Thus, in the second chapter, these religious constraints and position of women have been analysed to show how the society used women's sentiments to control their socio-economic development. However, the female characters in the Bronte novels understand the hegemonic function of patriarchal religious authority and reject the conventional beliefs that construct the gender ideologies. The study has concentrated on how they act, speak and dress against the cultural mannerisms of the society to show their resistance.

The third chapter examined the educational and employment opportunities for the girls and women of the 19th century England. The study concentrated on the gender-based education system and its disparities. It has tried to discover how far this biased education enabled them to progress, whether there were proper employment opportunities for them to use that education, and how those jobs enabled them to attain social mobility and empowerment. I have argued in this chapter that education allows women to acquire moral courage and mental stability. It strengthens the belief that they can succeed in their life. Thus, Bronte sisters' female protagonists show the role of education and economic independence in the psychological empowerment of women. It shows women's financial stability allows them to obtain autonomy on the decisions they make and the life they want to lead.

Then the institution of marriage was discussed in the fourth chapter to analyse the cultural construct of the Victorian marital market, its ideals and demands. The study has shown woman's freedom is negated in the name of religion, social respectability and family welfare. It has attempted to examine the status of women in married, unmarried,



widowed and remarried conditions. The study has revealed the gender relationship between male and female at two different levels. First level is the hostile superior and subordinate relation and the second level is the successful companionship and co-operative relation. It argues that the superior and subordinate relation of husband and wife is a notion implemented by the patriarchal ideologies in the name of culture. Then it has tried to prove that culture had cultivated differences rather than unity in the family system. It has looked into how Bronte novels treated the institution of marriage, how the central characters considered it and to what extent they (Bronte and female protagonists) disapprove of marriage as the only goal of women. It has taken the concept of femininity or femaleness to show feminine as a cultural construct and femaleness as the individuality of a woman. The chapter has analysed how patriarchy excluded women from having a full legal authority or identity. It has tried to show the concern of Bronte novels regarding the political empowerment of women, which was hitherto not seriously discussed in the novels of other contemporary writers. Finally, I have concluded the chapter with the argument that marriage held outside traditional, religious and societal notions, have led to the well-being of women, because such marriages give importance to mutual respect, love and understanding between the couple that would create a healthy relationship in married life.

Here the study upholds that the cognitive, economic and psychological empowerment of woman would certainly empower women to establish a political identity in the society with their own individuality along with that of the husbands. It has attempted to show Brontes' simple heroines and their independent stance filled the novels with a set of moral message to the female readers of all ages. The novels sensitize both

men and women for the change of their role in the family and society to bring gender equality. Their writing has proven to the world that the persuasiveness of the water is incomparable with the flame of the woods. Similarly, a woman who swallows her tears in silence and suppresses her desires does not lack the power or intensity; they simply need the moral courage to flood over the burning fire to cool off its dancing flames. This task of encouraging the conscience is done in the novels of Bronte Sisters.

The thesis has made an effort to explain that nobody can stop a woman if she decides to change her condition. The society, culture, religion, and the entire system is an ideological construct. This patriarchal structure has made women as weaker and milder beings. Therefore, it is inevitable for women to defy the role of feminine to prove her individuality. Julia Kristeva has said,

If women have a role to play in this on-going process of power and denial~, If women have a role to play it is only in assuming a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning... in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary moments. (166)

The analysis has traced such 'revolutionary moments', which are present in the Bronte novels from a subtle to a substantial level. We can look at Jane Eyre's nonconformity to religious norms when she was a ten-year-old girl and her refusal to wear jewellery and to appear like an angel in her wedding dress, and her strong objection to marrying already wedded Rochester merely to attain social standards and secure future. Her undying will power and hope during difficult times and sufferings shows that

she had made up her mind to build her future. Thus, she attained her dream in the end. Similarly, the analysis has tried to trace all the steps of female protagonists of Bronte novels to register their positive moves, which were considered as the negative attitudes from the cultural point of view. How they put aside the rigid cultural norms and stood for their individuality and empowerment is shown.

In this way, the study has illustrated the presence of the issue of women's growth and development towards empowerment in these novels. The theme of women's selfhood is extensively examined in the thesis based on the feminist, gender and cultural theories. The conclusions are drawn based on these theoretical frameworks. The speculations are done under the limelight of relevant perspectives. It has done some degree of guesswork to support the hypothesis of the thesis. But it is just a viewpoint of the reader to show the femaleness of women hidden in the character and their actions in the novels. It has attempted to show that gender inequality arises not because of the physical weakness of women or patriarchal ideologies but rather from the lack of awareness about one's own power. Because women are denied the opportunity to know themselves and the world around them, they believed they are inferior and so become the victims of gender system. But women have to know they are also the perpetrators of the gender ideology. For instance, mother-in-law of Mrs Ashby advises her to adjust with the improper behaviour of alcoholic husband and the people of society including her mother believe that it was the responsibility of a wife to reform her husband and to keep him always happy. In this situation, only education would help women to understand their position and bring changes in the whole system. Education helps women to improve the quality of life not only in physical aspects (visible changes as in the character of Cathy) but also in mental

and intellectual aspects. The proper education affects the thinking process and the mentality of an individual. Therefore, it is considered as the key point to the empowerment of a person. Thus, the girls' education is stressed more in the Bronte novels than the popular concept of the time, i.e., domesticity.

The present research work is confined to the analysis of Bronte sisters' novels- *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as working against the Victorian capitalist patriarchal cultural society. The study has limited its analysis to the condition of women in the Victorian culture and her resistance against the conventions to attain empowerment. Thus, the hypothesis of the thesis has proven effectively in the study as I mentioned in the introduction chapter.

This thesis has attempted to show that the issue of women empowerment is not a recent phenomena. The texts of Charlotte, Emily and Anne who were considered as proto feminists composed and published their novels in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, also uphold the universal issue of women empowerment that is still an important matter of discussion. It shows that more has to be done for the development of middle-class female society. And it stresses that unless women decide to come over from their subordinate position no one can bring about a large difference in their lives. Many writers, reformers and thinkers have come and gone but still the debate continues.

Then the further research based on this work can be done by comparing the cultural construct and practises of gender roles in Indian context with the texts of Bronte sisters and Victorian society or particularly the institution of marriage can be examined in

a comparative study between two cultures to draw the similarities of marital market and the position of women dating back to 19<sup>th</sup> century.