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## Jane Eyre: Challenge and Criticism against the Conditions Surrounding Women

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to exaggerate the feminist voice of Charlotte Bronte against the Victorian male dominant society through her prominent work "Jane Eyre" as Victorian era witnessed a male independent society and female dependence, with women struggling to achieve the societal fairness. The paper will also focus on how Charlotte Bronte signified female aspiration in her novel through adoption of characters to disclose the dilemma of feminine sexuality of her period, so that the powerless women can struggle to recognise self-independence and self-esteem in the midst of male dominant society. The paper will also point out the brilliant use of characters by Charlotte Bronte to perk up and support the status of women extensively in a male dominant Victorian era. The study will explore Charlotte Bronte's aim of sorting out the issue of gender equality so that women can achieve self-respect and would never be exploited. It will also bring to light the protest by women for achieving control over their lives in the male dominant society, where women had limited rights and were treated as dolls and slaves. Also the achievement of self-esteem would be discussed, as women were not able to take a decision of their own.*

**Key words:** Victorian era, Charlotte Bronte, Feminist voice, Dominant society, Gender equality

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the History of English Literature "Feminism" stayed one of the most important concerns in many magnificent works. This concern represents feminine independence and self-esteem in the male dominant Society. One of the famous authors who have taken the leading role regarding this concern through her writings is 'Charlotte Bronte' by her famous novel "*Jane Eyre*" (1847), which is considered as a master piece of English fiction and an excellent critique work that attacks women oppression, gender and social class of the Victorian period. It was the period of sexual subjugation and witnessed the male dominant society, where females had to struggle to achieve social equality. Women were completely controlled by male dominant society and expected to proceed as a feminine ideals of that era. They were regular fatalities of societal principles. They were supposed to follow the principles set by society and as a result opportunities were limited for them and their importance in the society was shortened. They were identified physically and intellectually as the weaker gender in all ways, inferior to male authority. Thus the responsibility and reputation of women in the Victorian era is represented by Charlotte Bronte in "*Jane Eyre*" which is regarded as an impeccable feminist work and best illustration of Charlotte Bronte's effective feminism and her strong feminist disapproval on Victorian society. Charlotte Bronte's "*Jane Eyre*" offers her spirits of feminism, especially in regard of women's independence and ability to make decisions of their own in a male dominant society.

Within Charlotte Bronte's "*Jane Eyre*" Victorian Machismo is deconstructed. The novel deals with the issue; how can a woman with a need of her own setup and freedom have a

relationship with a man? An appealing anxiety is thus shaped within the men: the anxiety between the dominant Victorian masculine narrative and their own desires for their lover's agency. In this era Charlotte was concerned with women's roles and this concern reflected in her famous work "*Jane Eyre*". She took the concept of Victorian Machismo and turned it inwards, reflecting upon itself but in vastly different ways. The concept of Victorian male dominant society put woman in charge of the ethical resilience of the family but did little in regards to prepare them for dealing with the outer world. In "*Jane Eyre*" Charlotte created a case and raised her voice of female independence and highlighted her women character to be intelligent and capable rather than beautiful and shallow. Her novel gently pleads with society to redefine the ideal deeper virtue that makes female a good personality on the inside rather than just the outside. Through this sort of transformation Charlotte Bronte suggests the potential benefits for society as a whole and creates character within her novel "*Jane Eyre*" that reinforces this idea. She polished her heroine "Jane" as more attractive, confident and active woman than before, so that she can be able to struggle for her own existence and freedom against the tyranny she lived in the society. The confidence she gave her female character "Jane" is brilliantly exaggerated in the novel, through which Charlotte aimed to express the significance of woman in the male dominant society, that woman is also able to struggle to gain control over their own lives and can respect themselves;

"I care for myself; the more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself". (*Jane Eyre*).

The position and reputation of women in the Victorian era is deemed by Charlotte in "*Jane Eyre*", particularly in regard to Jane's independence and capability to make decisions of her own. To have both significant connection and specialised independence, Charlotte Bronte shaped a new man, a man who could suit the emerging Victorian woman. The man who could love the woman for her desire of self-independence and he himself would wish a woman to be liberated because in that era women were highly repressed. In this regard Charlotte attempted to shine the main characters qualities that would help the woman to progress extensively and would become self-independent. By encouraging woman to focus on the more significant feature of their identity, Bronte just expect that woman will be appreciated on the basis of their intelligence and interpretation rather than their sexual emergence or their ability to secure only their family. Charlotte introduced "Jane" as an effective and independent character who raised the voice against the Victorian machismo and affirmed her opinion about illegitimate Victorian statement during her time. Society was dominated by males, they were considered as advanced gender. However women, especially from middle class were regarded as inferior, weak and fragile gender. This offered them a restricted preference of all features of life. But Charlotte hoisted her voice and expressed her feelings on the inferior status of women in mid-nineteenth century Victorian society (England) and the need for female equality with male and should viewed as more important human beings.

Charlotte also decorated her intend of sorting out the matter of self esteem for woman, so that she would be respected not only physically but intellectually. She would never be demoralised in a male dominant society, where their status and rights are awfully deplorable. Society could offer them very few opportunities but the female character (Jane) illuminated in the novel of Charlotte Bronte's "*Jane Eyre*" demanded her position in the community, openly enforcing her rights and self esteem and as a result is recognised as a significant member in society. Charlotte often sketched the significance of gender equality. She points out it at the end

of her novel “*Jane Eyre*”, when “Mr. Rochester” became dependent because of blindness, “Jane” returned to him as an independent woman and accepted his marriage proposal only after she became financial authority, in this situation “Jane” could live with “Mr. Rochester” because of their equality. Charlotte Bronte brilliantly addressed and described their equality:

“What Jane! Are you an independent woman? A rich woman? If you won’t let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door, and you may come and sit in my parlor when you want a company of an evening. But as you are rich, Jane, you have now no doubt, friends, who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lamenter, like me? (Jane Eyre).

The above mentioned lines points out clearly the feelings of Charlotte Bronte regarding her main concern of justice and equality for women, as Jane achieved her dream and became Rochester’s equal. This is the noticeable motivation to believe that “*Jane Eyre*” is the challenge against the male dominant society of Victorian era.

## CONCLUSION

Charlotte Bronte lived and worked in a society that restricted women from childhood to be inferior to men and yet her heroine manages to challenge these socio-cultural restrictions and struggle for individual freedom and self-assertion. Charlotte does not restrict herself to just emulate the male tradition, she looks to cross way over the restrictions of the feminine phase of writing. Jane’s feminist rebelliousness against the Victorian tyrannical and patriarchal system, establishes Jane (also Bronte) as an advanced, modern thinker and woman ahead of her time. So without any hindrance we can regard Charlotte Bronte as one of the renowned writers, who through her writings challenge and criticise the Victorian male dominant society, where women were considered a fragile creature. Charlotte Bronte boldly went against the Victorian male dominant society as we found in “*Jane Eyre*”, where she freely expressed and challenged Victorian society, in favor of oppressed woman. Charlotte’s “*Jane Eyre*” sketched out her main concern, which was depiction of patriarchal society where Jane tried to maintain her own identity within male dominant society. In “*Jane Eyre*” we also find the male characters tried to keep ‘Jane’ in a dependent position, so that she cannot express her own thoughts and feelings of independence and self-esteem.

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