

**Bertha Has Been Chained Years:  
A Deconstructive Reading of Jane Eyre Novel**

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**Abstract:-** *Jane Eyre (1847) is a multidimensional novel in which many different interpretations are blended together. The present study would explore the novel from a deconstructive point of view in order to find the indeterminate meanings present in the novel which are always in conflict with the determinate meaning, or the preferred one. They study would revisit the novel's unvisited elements, better to say less visited or ignored elements. Although, the novel has been studied and interpreted through feminist and post colonialist point of view. I would base my study on the language and discourses used in the novel, character of Rochester, and Jane's narrative in the novel. With deconstructive principles in hand, I would prove through this paper that there are other possible meanings of the novel which are in conflict, in opposition with the preferred, framed and constructed meaning. I would also expose the binary oppositions created in the text and would also expose how this hierarchy of binaries is violent and oppressive. I would begin my study by introducing the concept "Deconstruction".*

**Keywords:-** Deconstruction, Trace, Discourse, Differance, Jane Eyre, Ambiguity, Charlotte Bronte, Determinate, Indeterminate.

The term Deconstruction, the moment it has entered philosophy, has created space to new thoughts and ideas which have revolutionized our culture, our worldview, our literature, our life and other perspectives. Margaret Drabble, a renowned English Novelist in her book "The Oxford Companion to English Literature" defines deconstruction as "an approach to the reading of literary and philosophical texts that casts doubt upon the

possibility of finding in them a definitive meaning, and that traces instead the multiplication (or dissemination) of possible meaning.

Deconstruction is not a theory, as Derrida – the founding father of Deconstruction, calls it out rather it is a way, a method, an approach of reading any text (whether a novel, poem, drama, story, discourse, building etc.) against the grain i.e., against the constructed or framed assumptions and values. It explores and exposes the instability of language and meaning which the text otherwise tries to cover up. It works by exposing binary oppositions created during reading and interpreting a text, and then shows by removing the centre (which masters these textual assumptions and values, and then creates a violent hierarchy) how a text speaks up and reflects rest meanings, which always are there in the text and keep haunting the framed or preferred meaning.

Deconstruction lends ear to the meaning which runs counter to the preferred one; thus deconstruction is interested with the marginal ones which are otherwise ignored by other interpretations and philosophies. The purpose of deconstruction is to expose the text as object of language, always unstable, irreducibly complex and undecidable. That is to say, it denotes the pursuing of meaning of a text, exposing the supposed contradictions & internal oppositions upon which a text is founded, and showing those foundations are unstable and irreducibly complex.

It is a process, a phenomenon, an act, a method actually similar, in some ways, to the formalism (New criticism) i.e., in both cases the reader engages in a close readings. A very close reading of a text indeed; noting the presence and operation of all its elements. However, the ends are radically quite different.

New criticism (Formalism) seeks to demonstrate that a work (a text) has essential unity despite the paradoxes and irony creating its inner tension expressing a single, stable and realizable truth; where as deconstruction seeks to show that a text has no organic unity rather has disunity because of contradictions, in it.

For Derrida, Saussure's 'Sign'- a combination of a signifier (sound/image) and a signified (mental/concept) is not stable, unchanging entity in deconstruction. According to Derrida, any given signifier does not lead to a single signified rather to several signifiers. For example, a statement as uncomplicated as "The Tree is Big", says more than four words. The word 'Tree' would evoke a lost of associations like, "other plants,

leaves, trunk, growth, soil, fertile land, etc. In the same way, the word 'Big' would also evoke many other associations. Each of these signifiers (other plants, trunks, leaves, soil etc) in turn becomes a signifier because it leads to other associations i.e., to other signifiers. Thus, any signifier does not lead us to a single signified - a transcendental signified as the Structuralists assumed but rather leads to a chain of other signifiers.

When a reader discovers contradictory, indeterminate, incompatible meanings in a text, deconstruction is in play. The moment it is recognized that a text has multiple meanings and interpretations, the reader expects to interpret it over and over again. Thus interpretation becomes a creative act as important as the text undergoing interpretation.

A traditional critical reading of a text tries to give a meaning to it, while as a deconstructive reading involves critiquing and questioning about the hypocrisies of text showing that what it (Text) claims to be saying and what it is really saying are quite different.

A deconstructionist is a reader, a decipherer, an examiner & a critic. As a reader, he/she sees in text certain relationship in the sequence a language that the author has utilized without having unequivocally aware of it. As a decipherer or interpreter, the reader is to deconstruct, and to recreate, rebuild and reconstruct the content of the text. As an examiner, the reader re-reads the content to examine every entry seriously and keenly and completes a regulated examination to recognize the inside inconsistency, discontinuities and irregularities. And as a critic, the reader re-reads the text against itself to draw out the unconscious of the text.

Deconstruction often involves a method, an act of reading that concerns itself in decentering i.e., unmasking the problematic nature of all centres. It is a kind of textual practice which aims to demonstrate the inherent instability of both meaning and language.

It almost rejects the word analysis or interpretation as well as it rejects any assumption or value upon which a hierarchy (violent) meaning, or interpretation is constructed in a text.

## Jane Eyre Novel and Deconstruction

Jane Eyre novel penned by Charlotte Bronte was published in 1847. The novel met huge acclaim and criticism as well. The novel has been, since then, interpreted mostly through feminist and postcolonial perspectives. But I would base my study of the novel through deconstructive point of view. The approach I am practicing is focused on language (close analysis of language), on Rochester's character (exposing his hypocrisies, and then reversing his position), and on Jane's narrative (exposing bias and partiality in her discourse).

### **Language is not stable: Deconstructing language in Jane Eyre.**

The language of Jane Eyre novel seems quite unstable, irreducibly complex, and internally conflicted right from the very beginning. Rochester's discourse about his father seems ambiguous, internally conflicted, far away from a single stable and transcendental meaning. Rochester says Jane that his father was an avaricious and greedy person, fond of property. He loved his estate, his property and did not want to divide that. So, he gave all his property to his elder son – Rowland; as we get is in the text:

“Well, Jane, being so, it was his resolution to keep the property together; he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother, Rowland.

(Jane Eyre, P-581-82)

But if we look closely at the words (language) of the above discourse spoken by Edward Rochester to Jane; it seems very complex irreducibly, and unstable in interpretation.

There are many ways the above words can be deconstructed in order to find unconscious of the novel. Few Possible unconscious or indeterminate interpretations are as:

Firstly, the preferred determinate meaning of these words is that it was Rochester's father's strong will to keep his property undivided so he resolved to give all

his property to his elder son - Rowland. We also get that Rochester was deprived from inheriting a fair portion of his property.

But the moment we decolonize our minds from ideological constructed meanings and look keenly at the discourse; we are confronted by many other meanings out of this which go unnoticed or are unconscious. The ideologically preferred meaning is always haunted by absent meaning which is always present as a 'Trace', and which is ignored otherwise and sacrificed for the sake of dominant one.

For instance, what if we listen to Rochester's father's absent narrative, in which he blames Rochester for being impudent, careless and disobedient to him. That is way he disinherits Rochester. It is also possible that Rochester proves licentious and flirter of women as we see he flirts many women spending money extravagant after women, and may be wants to sell his portion of property and estate, which his father could not bear, and he resolved to give all his estate (property) to his elder son, Rowland. Why his father did not give anything to Rochester? Why did Rochester's father gave all to his elder son? Why did not Rochester's father want to divide his estate? May be Rochester's brother was more loyal and obedient to his father. May be Rochester was disobedient to his father.

It is clear from the language also, the word 'resolution' used here means strong will i.e., it was not a mere statement rather a strong will to keep his property together. If we observe the word 'dividing' which means to separate into parts or portions, may be Rochester wanted his portion to be sold out for he needed money for flirting women or he was under heavy debts. That is why his father could not bear idea of dividing his property. It is also possible that Rochester's father had proved Rochester impudent, disobedient and disloyal and thus he did not want to give him any share.

Thus, it is crystal clear that the language used in the narrative is highly unstable and ambiguous. Furthermore, the novel makes us clear about its ambiguous language in the following words spoken by Rochester:

“ I had some trouble in finding an attendant for her, as it was necessary to select one on whose fidelity dependence could be placed.”

(Jane Eyre, P-590)

The traditional meaning made out of these words is that Rochester faced some difficulty in finding a caretaker for Bertha Mason – his wife, and it was necessary that the caretaker should be faithful, one who could be trusted upon.

But when we look keenly at the words, we get many other meanings which are contradictory, and are either scapegoated for the sake of dominant one or are ignored. Because these words could also mean that it was difficult for Rochester to find a corrupt attendant for his wife – Bertha, who could be paid to get involved in Rochester's nefarious plan of locking Bertha in the attic room by proving her mad and violent and thus justifying her confinement. Rochester found Grace Poole fit for this task as all she wanted was money. So, Grace Poole joined Rochester in his wicked plans of proving Bertha Mason as violent and mad, and justified her confinement in the attic. We get Grace Poole's character from Rochester's narrative.

“ I'll give Mrs. Poole two hundred a year to live here with My WIFE, as you term that fearful hag: Grace will do much for money.”

(Jane Eyre, P-574)

This clearly indicates that Grace Poole was a corrupt attendant who was probably paid by Rochester for proving Bertha violent and thus mad. It seems that Grace Poole was very much involved in Rochester's plans. She was a hired servant who could do anything for money.

Thus, it is clear from the above explanations and justifications that language (words) of a narrative is always unstable, and irreducibly complex; having not a meaning but meanings.

**Deconstructions Rochester's Character:**

From Jane's narrative, we get that Edward Rochester is the master of Thornfield and is Jane's employer; to whom she marries at the end. We also learn that he is a wealthy, passionate but unconventional, rash, impetuous who spends much of his adult life roaming Europe in an attempt to avoid the consequences of his youthful indiscretions. He is married to Bertha Mason – a Creole Jamaican woman who proves to be insane, so his life gets ruined. He is a sympathetic figure mostly for Jane but suffers long because of his marriage to Bertha Mason.

He has a foster daughter – Adele, who was claimed to be his real daughter, mothered by his French mistress – Celine Varens. He was involved in many affairs with many women like Celine Varens – a French, Giacinta – an Italian, Clara – a German. And according to Rochester, Celine was greedy and was having many affairs: Giacinta was unprincipled and violent and Clara was mindless, heavy and unimpressible. No one suited Rochester's taste.

We also get that Rochester was disinherited by his father from his estate. According to Rochester, his father wanted to keep his property together, and he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate; and he resolved to give his entire property to his elder son – Rowland.

But when look closely, Rochester narrative seems ambiguous and complex i.e having many interpretations. When analyzed very closely i.e., upon finding and solving ambiguities; Rochester proves to be a villain but not hero, an oppressor but not an oppressed, a flirter and teaser of women, an avaricious person, a cruel husband, a beguiler and untrustworthy boyfriend, a framer of lies, a constructor of stories, a pretender, and nothing else.

Let's begin from Rochester's father who disinherited him from his property. The narrative Rochester uses creates a sense of sympathy in us (readers) for Rochester and a sense of hatred towards his father. But why did not Rochester's father gave all his property to Rochester instead of his elder son, Rowland? Why did Rochester suffered why not his brother? May be Rochester was involved in some wrong doing; May be Rochester proved disobedient to his father, which made him angry and thus disinherited him from his estate.

Thus, there are many versions of interpretation of this narrative which are scapegoated and ignored for the sake of dominant one. The way Rochester presents his discourse about his father's disapproval to divide his property and his negation to give any portion to Rochester, seems a kind of euphemism Rochester uses here for his father's disinheritance to Rochester.

Rochester's discourse about his mistresses – Celine, Giacinta, and Clara too seems a frame story of lies and nothing. Celine Varens – a French opera dancer, with whom Rochester fathered a daughter, proved unfaithful and greedy. She loved his money and had many affairs. Giacinta – Rochester's Italian mistress proved unprincipled and violent. Clara – Rochester's German mistress was mindless, heavy, and unimpressible. So in one way or the way Rochester's mistresses could not satisfy his tastes. But, what? When we lend our ear to Celine Varens' discourse which runs counter to Rochester's discourse, although Celine's discourse is absent but is always present in Rochester's discourse (Derrida's Trace). From Celine's absent discourse, we make – out that Rochester had sex with Celine many times and after getting fed up with her, he left her blaming her to be unfaithful and greedy. In the same way, Giacinta's and Clara's absent discourse running counter to Rochester's discourse, prove Rochester a flirter, teaser, and oppressor of women; who once fed up abandoned them.

Finally, poor Bertha Manson one who was once a beauty of Spanish Town Jamaica, is now mad, violent and beast – like and has been locked for many years. Bertha is denigrated and stereotyped as maniac, crazy, violent and animal – like both in the discourse of Rochester and Jane as well.

Rochester not only proves Bertha as insane but rather unfaithful as well, we get this Rochester's words to Jane;

“She had tried me indeed: Her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices grew sprang up fast and rank; they were so strong, only cruelty could check them, and I would not use cruelty”.

( Jane Eyre P-585)

Bertha Antoinette Mason, as we get from Rochester's discourse, was to own thirty thousand pounds from her father. Since Rochester – a pauper now (as he was disinherited from property) thought it a way to live up.

He planned marrying Bertha in order to own her property and after marrying her brought her England became owner of 'Thirty Thousand Pounds' of Bertha; and then stereotyped her as insane and violent in order to get rid of her. He then hired a corrupt attendant for her in the form of Grace Poole who (for the sake of money) assisted Rochester in proving Bertha mad. Thus, he justified her confinement in the attic room. After years of confinement and loneliness, Bertha became mentally disturbed as there was none in Thorn field Hall whom she could speak to or who could listen to her.

Jean Rhys gives an ear to Bertha's discourse in her novel – *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) which is a prequel to Jane Eyre novel. And from Bertha's point of view, the tale is very different and contradictory to the existing interpretation.

### **Deconstructing Jane's Narrative:**

As we know that Jane is the narrator and assumed heroine of the novel. She narrates all these events after ten years of her union with Rochester. So, she is a wife first and then a narrator. We listen everything and to everybody through Jane's discourse. It is Jane who calls and stereotypes Bertha as beast. Jane's narrative looks a racist, oppressive and biased one in which she favors and supports her husband despite being wrong; while as she stereotypes and denigrates poor Bertha, Jane also doubts and denigrates other people who had dealt with Rochester in one way or the other. Despite Rochester's flaws and faults, she believes him and also marries him. Jane is more a wife than a narrator. As she says;

“ I have now been married ten years I know what it is to live entirely for and what I love best on earth – I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman

was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh”.

(Jane Eyre P -864)

It is clear from the above discourse (words) that Jane is a wife – narrator but not a completely unbiased, impartial narrator. There is a curtain of love and affection over her eyes for her husband which probably stops her going to the unconscious of the text speaking against her husband. She ignores everybody - Bertha, Celine, Giacinta, Clara, Rochester’s father, Rowland, etc., lending her ear only to Rochester. Jane ignores the absent discourse of Rochester’s father disinheriting Rochester from his estate. Jane ignores absent discourse of Celine, Giacinta and Clara not lending her ear to anybody. Bertha Mason, who is very much alive and present to Jane; Jane fails to approach and listen to her. She believes Rochester blindly without confirming anything about him. She is a one sided narrator, a biased one, a partial commentator, a wife narrator.

This is clearly reflected in Jane’s discourse about Rochester. The moment she learns that Rochester lied her about his marriage and hid the matter from her; Jane still forgives him in a very short time. It is very clear in these word;

“Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eyes, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner and besides there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien - I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly, only at my heart’s core.”

(Jane Eyre P569-70)

The above words crystal clearly depict that Jane is not an unbiased or impartial narrator but rather a corrupt, a sentimental commentator, a carried away narrator who is herself blindfolded, unable to see clearly the dark side of Rochester’s discourse.

**Conclusion:**

Jane Eyre (1847) is a discourse, a narrative which stereotypes and humiliates Bertha Mason and many other minor characters and puts them on the margin, while as prefers Rochester and Jane at the centre and dominant figures. It scapegoats the rest characters, which are very part, infact important part novel, for the sake of Rochester and Jane.

The discourse puts Bertha at the background, while as Rochester at the foreground. But upon pulling the carpet under the feet of dominant figures like Rochester and Jane i.e., by exposing the unconscious of the novel like flaws and faults of Rochester, his oppression of Bertha, his teasing of women, and rest; we make it out that Rochester is actually a devil in the man's face, not only Rochester, but also Jane's narrative upon deconstructive principles, is proved as biased and partial.

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