

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

**UGC Approved Journal**



**Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2018**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Tushar Singh

B.A. English (H) Vth Semester

K.R. Mangalam University,

Sohna, Gurugram, Haryana, India

Singhtushar422@gmail.com

\*\*Ms. Mouli Chowdhury

Professor/Guide, Assistant Professor,

K.R. Mangalam University,

Gurugram, Haryana, India

### Social Discrimination in the novel of Jane Eyre

#### Abstract

In 19th century England, class stratification was a predominant societal force. The novel Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte, describes the experiences of the orphan Jane as she grows from a ten-year-old girl into a young woman. As she matures Jane encounters several people who subscribe to the notion that the people who make up the lower class of society are wicked people who are deserving of their plight. However, in Jane's experience, these judgements are false. Throughout her development, Jane is forced to make her own decisions regarding caste. In the novel, the author uses Jane's interactions with other characters to expose several predispositions that were prevalent during the 19th century, and to show the difficulties that arose as a result of low social standing. This research paper intends to focus on the social discrimination portrayed in the novel Jane Eyre.

Keywords: Societal Force; Class; England

### Introduction

Charlotte Bronte was born on 21 April 1816 and died on 31 March 1855. She was an English novelist and poet, the eldest of the three Bronte sisters who survived into adulthood and whose novels became classics of English literature. Charlotte Bronte experienced the early deaths of all her siblings. She became pregnant shortly after her marriage in June 1854 but died on 31 March 1855. (bookchat)

Jane Eyre is novel by Charlotte Bronte under the pen name "Currer Bell". The novel follows the experiences of its eponymous heroine, including her growth to adulthood and her love for Mr. Rochester, the brooding master of Thornfield hall. The novel revolutionized prose fiction and focused on Jane's moral and spiritual development. Charlotte Bronte has been called the 'first historian of the private consciousness' (sparknotes) and the literary ancestor of writers like Proust and James Joyce. The book contains two elements of social criticism with strong sense of Christian morality at its core and is considered by many to be ahead of its time because of Jane's individualistic character and how the novel approaches the topics of class, sexuality, religion and feminism.

### Social Class

Charlotte Bronte flourished and received fame as a novelist in the Victorian period. In her masterpiece Jane Eyre, she proves that society is composed of classes; upper, middle, and lower class. The lower class or the poor are represented by workers portrayed Jane and Jane's friend Helen. Charlotte Bronte also confirms that class relationships have no absolute boundaries that cannot be crossed. Jane is placed in an ambiguous class position. Jane's father was a poor clergyman who married Jane's mother a middle-class woman and were situated

somewhere between two classes as a couple. When Jane was born, she also occupied this socially ambiguous position and this later becomes more critical when her parents die and leaves her as an orphan to be brought up by her wealthy aunt Reed. She lives with the Reed family but was never considered as a member of that family, she was neither a working-class servant nor a privileged Reed family child. She is in a social class between the upper and lower classes.

During Jane's childhood, there were constant reminders that she is poor, alone and even her aunt and cousins considered her inferior and not a member of the family because she will not inherit any paternal or maternal property. This is clearly portrayed in Bessie's words to Jane, "you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed". (Mrs. Nesrine)

At Lowood School, Jane meets many poor girls, they were in a difficult environment. When she left school, Jane worked as a governess at Thornfield, there she earns her money, as a governess at Thornfield, there she earns her money, and this means that she can be considered as a middle-class girl. One evening after dinner, Mr. Rochester starts discussion with Jane but sometimes he is rude and authoritative. The fact is once for all, I don't wish to treat you like an inferior. I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' differences in age and a century's advances in experience. (Put under quotation and cite if the statement is a quotation)

Mr. Rochester felt superior because of his years of experience in life. Even years of experience were a point of comparison between Jane and Mr. Rochester he felt superior because of twenty years of age and experience and age to differentiate between him and Jane even if it was not done on purpose still it is a point that Mr. Rochester feels superiority.

By the end of the novel, Jane inherits a big amount of money from her uncle and consequently she moves to the upper class. As noticed, during her life Jane experiences all

the different economic social classes, from a penniless child after the death of her parents to a governess who earns her money and finally the inheritor of wealth from her relatives.

### Different Conflicts In The Novel

#### 1. Individual V/S Society

Much of the external conflict in the novel stems from Jane having to endure societal expectations. Her conflicts toward the beginning of the novel with the Reeds and Brocklehurst exemplify this conflict. Jane's constant movements throughout the different locations of the novel represent her resistance of her roles and the expectations placed upon her. She cannot stay in one place as she begins to feel trapped. She cannot settle until she can define herself and what she wants.

#### 2. Passion V/S Restraint

The internal conflict between passion and restraint is one of the core conflicts in Jane's life. The conflict is most heavily conveyed through Jane's feelings regarding Rochester and St. John. In these romances, Jane's desires are muddled with sin and doubt about Rochester

#### 3. Love V/S Divisions

One of the external conflicts in Jane Eyre that is most prevalent is the battle between love and social class. The conflict is obviously represented by the relationship between Jane and Rochester. Rochester is of a higher class than Jane and this puts a strain on their progress as a romantic couple. Rochester's class and his efforts to keep up appearances, have corrupted him and his relationship with Jane.

#### 4. Desire V/S Morality

The internal conflict of desire vs. morality is represented through Rochester's struggle. Despite the fact that he loves Jane, he still has all of his personal demons plaguing him and affecting his every decision. Rochester's decision to marry Jane despite his situation with Bertha is the move that essentially conveys the dangers of placing one's own desires over morality or ethics as the situation quickly spirals into the ultimate negative series of results the burning of Thonfield, Rochester going blind and other situations.

#### 5. Love V/S Autonomy

Jane Eyre is very much the story of a quest to be loved. Jane searches, not just for romantic love but also for a sense of being valued of belonging. Thus Jane says to Helen Burns "to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest (JANE EYRE)

#### Religion

Throughout the novel, Jane struggles to find the right balance between moral duty and earthly pleasure between obligation to her spirit and attention to her body. She encounters three main religious figures: Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers. Each represents a model of religion that Jane ultimately rejects as she forms her own ideas about faith and principle, and their practical consequences.

#### Conclusion

Although Jane ends up rejecting all three models of religion, she does not abandon morality, spiritualism, or a belief in a Christian God. When her wedding is interrupted, she prays to God

for solace. As she wanders for the health of the poor and starving, she puts her survival in the hands of God. She strongly objects to Rochester's lustful immorality and she refuses to consider living with him while church and state still deem him married to another woman. She credits God with helping her to escape what she knows would have been an immoral life. Jane ultimately finds a comfortable middle ground; her spiritual understanding is not hateful and oppressive like Brocklehurst's. Nor does it require retreat from the everyday world. For Jane, religion helps to curb immoderate passions, and achievements. These achievements include self knowledge and complete faith in God.

Jane Eyre is critical of Victorian England of strict social hierarchy. Charlotte Bronte's exploration of the complicated social position of governesses is perhaps the novel's most important treatment of the theme of social class. Jane is a figure of ambiguous class standing and consequently a source of extreme tension for the characters around her. Jane's manners, sophistication and education are those of an aristocrat, because Victorian governesses, who tutored children in etiquette as well as academics, were expected to possess the "culture" of the aristocracy, yet they are treated more or less as servants. Throughout the novel Jane struggles to achieve equality and to overcome oppression. In addition to class hierarchy, she is a victim of patriarchal domination against those who believe women to be inferior to men. Three central males' figures threaten her desire for equality and dignity Mr. Brocklehurst, Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers belonging to the misogynistic class.

## Bibliography

"bookchat." 15 april 2009. [bookchat](#). 20 october 2018

<<http://waterstonebasbookclub.blogspot.com/2009/04/jane-eyre-by-charlotte-bronte.html>>.

"JANE EYRE." [weebly](#). 20 october 2018 <<https://janeeyrelaidbare.weebly.com/conflicts.html>>.

Mrs.Nesrine. 13 May 2017. 20 october 2018

<<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/QgrcJHsBvFDXDfddtqGdXmgKKBfDlrrsDkQ?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>>.

"sparknotes." [sparknotes](#). 20 october 2018 <<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/janeeyre/summary/>>.