

The Quest for Identity of Victorian Women in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Mahbuba Sultana*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Manarat International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Citation: Sultana, M. (2022). The Quest for Identity of Victorian Women in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. *Journal of Sustainable Learning and Development*, 2(2), 28-33.

*Corresponding Email: mahbuba@manarat.ac.bd

Abstract: This study analyzes how Jane and Nora's individuality grows throughout the novels, where Jane quests for identity and examines factors, and Nora's identity is disfigured by financial dependency like a doll. Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* permits a glimpse into life from a woman's unique perspective: independence from an early age and engaging in the challenge of living alone. Jane did not reach the point of submitting to a repressive society. With her gender, her personality is more inspirational to be a model for women of all ages since she radically alters the concept. *A Doll's House* is not only one of Henrik Ibsen's well-known plays yet additionally a remarkable commitment to women's activist writing, although the characters don't appear to be highly outstanding from the get-go. In this novel, Ibsen focuses on the hero, Nora, who is pretty much the exemplification of a cutting-edge lady regarding decision and conduct toward the third and last venture's end. This study analyses the notion of "the quest for identity" in *Jane Eyre* and *A Doll's House*, considering the protagonist of these two novels, Jane Eyre and Nora Helmer.

Keywords: Victorian women, identity quest, *Jane Eyre*, *A Doll's House*

INTRODUCTION

"Our identity is fictional, written by parents, relatives, education, and society" (Genesis P Orridge). The quest for identity is the foundation of the human world. The quest for identity can make anyone unique and successful. Identity crisis has intensified, and the search for self-identity involving self-definition and self-development has been a central theme of many novels and dramas. Literature consists of this process- the crisis of self, the quest for identity, and succeeding discoveries. The novel by Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* is the tale of a young orphan girl Jane who grows up and comes of age in Victorian England. Brontë portrays Jane's battle to make her voice heard and communicate her insight's reality. Jane starts her journey as an abused and unreliable ten-year-old young lady and, during the novel, forms into a self-assured and self-conscious lady in her mid-twenties. The social psychological effect is available and entwined in Jane's life, development, and personality arrangement.

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen handles women's rights and privileges as an issue of significance. All through this period, it was ignored. Ibsen recognizes that in nineteenth-century life, the role of women in society was to stay at home, take care the kids and care for their better half. Nora Helmer is the person in *A Doll's House* who shows the nineteenth woman and is depicted as a casualty of an identity crisis. She sacrifices her entire life for her family. When she was young, she always listened to her father, and after her marriage, she had to follow her husband. The personality of Nora Helmer, which throughout a significant portion of the show is mistreated, portrays an unauthentic personality to the viewers. Throughout the entire play, she tries to establish her genuine identity. This research shows that both

Jane and Nora are suffering from identity crises where Jane, as a youngster, battles to look through a character, and Nora, who has family and is married, likewise feels the identity crisis.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are:

- a) To explore how Jane's personality changes during her search for identity and examine the elements that shape Jane's identity and its development
- b) To show how Nora's identity is strictly mutilated by her economic dependency on her husband and analyze the reasons that reveal Nora is blessed with a doll-like existence in her husband's home

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jane Eyre

Many researchers focus on *Jane Eyre*, albeit with differences and issues. In a 2005 study, Suyadi examines the influences of the surrounding on the main character, Jane Eyre. In the survey, the researcher mentioned, "Firstly, there is a close relationship between literary works and psychological phenomenon. Secondly, the psychological analysis, specific behaviorism falls into a general curriculum that human behavior is influenced by the personality and environment where they live. The dominant influence builds Jane Eyre's personality and the characteristic of the environment where she stays".

Yustina (2010) concentrated on the way *Jane Eyre* is based on the individual psychology of each person. She examines the connection between the basic principles of individual psychology and the nature that Jane is. These strategies are employed to find the most appropriate analysis and solution to the issue. The researcher discovers that love for anyone is always a sacrifice.

George Lewes extensively supports the Victorian belief that a woman is an angel within the home (Abaker, 2019). So, he is planning to suggest to these lovely ladies (ladies) ought to be kissed instead of being tattooed. Victorian society was hostile to women in all areas of existence. They were dominated by males and even the academic critiques, who were patriarchal with their actions. The patriarchy factor was prominent in the family both in the literary and social. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and many other female writers fought against the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. They were the founders to the movement for women that flourished in this period of the twentieth century.

However, other male writers and critics from the world of fiction, such as William Thackeray and Elizabeth Gaskell have influenced Charlotte Bronte's writing positively. She also admired the two and admired them through her novel. Smith (1995) states that Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* to enjoy Thackeray by stating:

"There is a man in our days whose words are not famed to tickle ears; who, to my thinking, come before the great ones of society. She adds - I feel honored in being approved by Mr. Thackeray because I approve Mr. Thackeray. One good word from such a man is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges" (Smith, 1995).

A Doll's House

Ibsen's portrayal of the feeble and mild lady infers the eighteenth-century progressive author Mary Wollstonecraft who contends in her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that "Women are taught since their infancy to have the softness of temper, outward obedience, and scrupulous attention." (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Once joined by the endowment of magnificence, these traits will guarantee the protection of man. That is repeated uproariously in a way that would sound natural to Torvald's words, "Poor little frightened songbird... Rest assured, my wings are broad enough to shelter you. How lovely and secure our home, Nora, a sanctuary for you. I'll keep you here like a hunted dove I've rescued unharmed from the hawk's talons...." (Ibsen, 2005, ACT-III, p.111). For an individual there's something

incredibly comforting and satisfying about knowing that he's forgiven his wife and has apologized for her of his whole existence. It could be that she proves to be one way or the other twice his property as if the man has allowed her to reincarnate to the point that, in a way, she's the two of them, his wife or his kid. Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft centres on the idea that man tries to gain the ideal role model of a woman, by the reduction of her to an honest state and youthfulness.

"It can be debated that the male-female relationship in *A Doll's House* is based on a Master-Slave ideology," (Hegel, 2010) Friedrich Hegel, the great Enlightenment theorist, stated.

Hegel believes that the recognition of one's self cannot be achieved by a struggle with another. Nora and her soul mate Torvald recognized their dependence on one another and self-consciousness ultimately led to Nora's growth. In the same way, herself was constructed by the unique interrelation among her best half on one hand and with her patriarchal community on the other.

Hegel says, "the self through supersession, receives back its self, because, by superseding its otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but secondly, it equally gives the other self-consciousness back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but superseded this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free" (Hegel, 2010). Then, Nora recognizes Torvald as her lord and is obediently expecting her position as a slave to her master. After the battle, Nora understands the expert's trust in her, and she is compelled to defeat him and be free from him.

METHODOLOGY

This study takes the technique of "close text-based analyses", one of the central strategies of modern criticism. "Close text-based analyses" is a careful and sustained going-over of a text. This process includes using short passages and excerpts, concentrating on the text itself, reviewing deliberately, noticing complex things and responding to text-dependent questions

ANALYSIS

The Quest for Identity in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte has made the courageous woman Jane Eyre disprove the customary Victorian acquired perspectives on ladies and endeavours to pass on her views about women and their freedoms. In her novel *Jane Eyre*, Bronte imparts her viewpoint on Victorian ladies and sees the characters on focusing on their real issues using first-person narrative technique.

Bronte offers her audiences a champion, Jane, who's solid, energetic, and fit for expressing her viewpoints and battling for her rights and freedom. Her qualities are not quite the same as those of genuine Victorian ladies, who men persecuted. The customary thought shows ladies as dependent, reliant, feeble, and dour; Jane is something contrary to those qualities and pictures. She is a strong and passionate woman. At the story's start, she has a battle with her cousin. Readers can learn and perceive how solid, clear, and energetic Jane is. Through Jane, Bronte challenges inequality in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Jane's first meeting with Rochester is essential in the connection between Rochester as an image of a Victorian male person and Jane as another defiant female person who searched for her identity throughout her life. Within *Jane Eyre's* quest for self-acknowledgment as a women's activist and a feminist, looking and requesting for equality, uniformity, and equity is another important topic.

Jane Eyre needs to change the customary jobs given to ladies. Women are just like men; in any case they have to make use of their resources. Charlotte Bronte challenges her general public and demonstrates her female character. Based on such uniformity, Jane needs to have a sweetheart. She will not wed Rochester as an inconsistent like a fancy woman and a mistress. She proclaims to Rochester that: "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!" (Bronte, 2000, p. 216). Charlotte Bronte depicts

the connection between her love and M. Heger like Jane Eyre's love relationship with Rochester. Charlotte Bronte needs balance and equity-based love.

In any case, she couldn't track down genuine romance in a male-dominated society. Finally, Jane Eyre is becoming vital. The way she interacts with people has modified according to the new identity she has gained, especially after achieving financial freedom. She has overcome every difficulty in her life. She reacts to Rochester's heavenly cries to return. She knew the story of Rochester in which he is blind with handicapped hands. The final chapter starts with "Reader, I married him", (Bronte, 2000, p.382). That demonstrates that Jane Eyre turns out to be completely mature. Instead of stating "Reader, we got married," which would provide the reason for their equilibrium in the squabble between genders, Bronte declares "Reader, I got married to him (Bronte, 2000, p.382)". Charlotte Bronte urges her heroine to wed in Rochester following a shift in gender roles, in which Jane is socially and economically progressed. Charlotte Bronte develops another variant of manliness where there is no depreciation of women's identity.

Besides, in *Jane Eyre*, Bronte wiped out the idea of the woman's homegrown circle. *Jane Eyre* isn't important for the homegrown domain. Genuine affection is likewise the primary topic in this text. The quest for love that is true is the most fundamental aspect of her pursuit of self-realization through all of Jane Eyre's experiences. Jane Eyre is looking for more than just a pure, inconsolable love following the trauma of a traumatic childhood and adolescents.

The Quest for Identity in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

The play *A Doll's House* was written in the nineteenth century when women were engaging for financial and social freedoms, honors, rights and privileges identical to men in the public eye. Indeed, the play was composed when ladies were subjugated in their orientation jobs and where certain limitations were implemented on them by the prevailing male society. It was an arrangement of man-centric society, wherein each lady was raised accepting that they had neither poise nor self-government and should respect the control of prevailing male sexual orientation. In the words of Marianne Sturman, "In *A Doll's House*, he especially probed the problems of the social passivity assigned to women in a male-oriented society (Ibsen, 2005, p. 51)".

Ibsen's backing for women's freedoms deceits in his promotion of equal management in the public eye. He accentuates more the balance between men and women's battle for identity. Nora endeavours to show the excursion of such a lady as she, step by step, concludes that her life and identity are false, and her genuine requirements and desires go past the limits of her marriage. Helmer utters animal terms to allude to Nora, his wife, for example, 'skylark', 'squirrel' and 'singing bird', which recommends that Helmer doesn't love Nora as an equivalent and deals with her like a pet. He calls her a 'possession' like she was a thing, not an individual with a different identity. His use of derogatory terms focuses on society's standard of regarding women as inferior.

Also, Helmer is depicted as the one who influences their relationship because he controls all the money and gives it to Nora as gifts. From a feminist standpoint, the society of that time gave both genders stereotyped social roles to play. This does not provide them with the liberty to discover their identities and the things they'd like to be. Nora and Helmer are loyally adjusting to their social roles. She doesn't work and stays at home and cares the kids. Nora is a good example who fulfills the role of an obedient wife and mother. The role of spouse and mother doesn't draw out the entirety of her latent capacity. One more part of the play, according to the feminist viewpoint, is the monetary dependence on ladies. The woman was not permitted to work regardless of whether or not she expected to depend on her better half, father, or child for money. The obligation of bringing in cash was allocated to man, and he used to do likewise, not on the grounds that he cherished his family, yet to feel happy for being the expert and protector of his loved ones. He calls Nora a "spendthrift" (Ibsen, 2005, p. 5) to represent her shortcoming as opposed to his solidarity.

Up to the furthest limit of the play, she looks for Torvald's oversight to do little positions like dance practice or selection of her ball dress. Kristine likewise has confronted hardships in her day-to-day existence, and she knows about the "hard world" (Ibsen, 2005, p. 14). She breaks the conventional mould that society had moulded for women that will be mild and docile objects of male consideration. To finish up, the author has shown gender-specific roles as Nora-Torvald and Kristine-Krogstad's connections and squeezed them for his potential benefit to outline the contrast between restrictive and outright love. The play manages with the difficulty of keeping a distinct character – the female character – inside the restrictions of a generalized social job. In this way, the play could be referred to as a women's activist one as it expresses the female voice in the play and focuses on a lady's battle for statement and identity.

FINDINGS

The findings of this research are:

- a) Jane Eyre is the novel of a search for love and to feel appreciated. Jane searches for heartfelt affection and a feeling of being esteemed, of having a place.
- b) Ladies were remembered to have wasted advanced education since they were viewed as substandard compared to males, and effort was recognized to mark them debilitated. Women's learning contained sorting out some way of singing, playing piano, painting, dancing, reading, and so on.
- c) In this research work, it is tried to find the amount Charlotte Bronte prevailed to make female characters in *Jane Eyre* stay in contradiction of traditional Victorian society and to determine how fruitful she was in sensationalizing the events of her life, occasions, issue, and portraying them in the texts, and utilizing creative mind also.
- d) The play by Henrik Ibsen *A Doll's House* will uncover that Nora is blessed with an appearance of a doll in her home with her spouse, where she is not able to establish an identity of her own. She has forfeited her identity to adjust to the expectations of Torvald. In any case, she continuously perceives this lack of an individual self and the need for identity.
- e) Torvald's selfishness disillusioned her. Hence, she decides to look for identity by figuring out how to lead her life alone. Her financial dependency completely ruins her identity on her husband.
- f) In the last part of the play *A Doll's House*, Nora decides to accomplish self-dependency by leading her life according to her own will.
- g) Nora's identity is built on their roles as spouses and moms, which can be inadequate in shaping a self. She instructs herself with the goal that she can remain on her own, thereby enabling herself to establish her identity and foster a sense of an individual.
- h) She is developing a character and evolves into a rebellious individual towards the end of the play. It is by and large what she should be as an individual and states her identity.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian novel typically entails a protagonist who is in search of self-identity. The texts portray the conflict between the social environment and personal aspirations. Hence, these are the most appropriate structure to represent women's battle for identity. Jane as a young girl, struggles with searching for identity, and on the other hand, Nora, who has family and is married, also feels an identity crisis. The ideal Victorian woman's lifestyle revolved around the domestic sphere of her family and her home during the Victorian period. Middle-class women are raised to be clean and innocent, soft and physically undemanding, and submissive and docile. Women were not given their rights and privileges and were expected to marry and be a domestic servant of their husbands. It is possible to

conclude that Charlotte Bronte has succeeded in creating a confident, passionate as well as confident character in the novel *Jane Eyre*, who battles to be free and challenges the conventional model of Victorian life, where men rule over women. In fact, girls were taught to accept their appearance as accessories. Women were not allowed to voice their opinions outside the very narrow scope of topics, and certainly not to seek their own identity. For sure, Nora is a developing character. In *A Doll's House*, Nora Helmer wins all barriers and perceives responsibility towards herself which had consistently been disregarded.

REFERENCES

- Abaker, G. H. B. (2019). The Image of Victorian Women as Depicted in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*. 7(6), 49-58.
- Bronte, C. (2000). *Jane Eyre*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suyadi, E. (2005). The Influence of Environment on *Jane Eyre's* Behavior in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*: A Behaviorist Perspective. surakarta: Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (2010). *Phenomenology of the Spirit. The Master-Slave Dialectic*. Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Ibsen, H. (2005). *A Doll's House*. Gloucester: Dodo Press.
- Smith, M. (1995). *The Letters of Charlotte Bronte 1829-1847*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral subjects*. Printed at Boston, by Peter Edes for Thomas and Andrews, Faust's statue, No. 45, Newbury Street, Mdcxcii.
- Yustina, T. (2010). *Jane's sacrifice for love reflected in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte: An Individual Psychological Approach*. Skripsi thesis, Bachelor of Education program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, <http://eprints.ums.ac.id/8250/>