



THE EMANCIPATED WOMEN IN *AGNES GREY* AND *IT HAPPENS FOR A REASON*

SANJAY DAS

Shridhar University, Rajasthan



ABSTRACT

Anne Bronte wrote in Victorian England and Preeti Shenoy, an Indian author, is writing in Present time. Both are female authors. Their contribution for women empowerment is undeniable. Anne Bronte penned two novels namely *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Preeti Shenoy has authored five novels till now, viz. *Life is What You Make It* (2011), *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *Tea for Two And Piece of Cake* (2012), *The One You Cannot Have* (2013) and *It Happens for A Reason* (2013). They both challenged the male domination through their writings and worked for gender equality. In Victorian England situation was different compare to present time in India. It was much more conservative and difficult. Women are unable to express their sexual desire and many others. But now women can. They struggled their own way and now women are struggling also to get freedom from patriarchal domination. Their issues are same but time and place is different. Agnes Grey in Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* and Vipasha in Preeti Shoney's *It Happens for A Reason* symbolize the emancipated women. The legacy for the emancipation of women from Victorian period to present time is still going on and when it will end nobody knows. This paper focuses on Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* and Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for A Reason* and their contributions to literature and empowerment of women.

Keywords: Gender equality, Feminism, Emancipation, Victorian England, Modern Time.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Emancipation of women means the emancipation of women from social injustice, which grips them since the time immemorial, financial, political, sexual, caste and creed and gender based discrimination. It also suggests that women should be allowed to choose their own life. It is not conflicts between men and women rather it is gender equality and parity replacing patriarchal domination. Struggles for gender equality were in Victorian England and now in modern India. Theory of feminism questions the biased patriarchal

domination. Anne Bronte got little attention among their sisters. Her other sisters got much recognition for their contributions to literature and rights of women for equality. But Anne Bronte's contribution for the emancipation of women cannot be denied. It is now much discussed. She emphasized on women education as in personal life as worked as a governess and her personal experience reflected on her novel *Agnes Grey* and thus her works became more real than fiction.

Preeti Shenoy, an influential Indian author, is constantly projecting the concepts of liberal and

emancipated women throughout her fictional and non-fictional works. The Forbes magazine is constantly nominating her as the 100 most celebrating Indian women since 2013. Her heroines are bold in their expression be it mental or sexual, they do not hesitate. They think them equal to their male counterpart. They are not dependant, conservative, suppressed or oppressed. They have good education and they are financially sufficient. They accept the life their own ways. Preeti Shenoy has the capacity of an excellent story teller. *Times of India* describes her works as "excellent story telling."
Agnes Grey

Agnes Grey, in Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey*, is an example of emancipated women. She got her financial freedom by choosing the profession of a governess, which was not an easy task going against the society as well family. In her own words, "my mother uttered an exclamation of a governess! Agnes Grey! What you be dreaming of? (10)". But Agnes was adamant, bold and wanted to be free from patriarchal dogma. She wanted to help her father, family and finally to get financial freedom. Her father had recently lost his wealth, so Agnes took the financial responsibility. But her family did not want that. They thought that Agnes was too little to take the burden. She got her bold personality from a genetically strong woman, her mother Mrs. Grey who married her father going against her family. Mr. Grey, Agnes Grey's father, was financially weak. But Mrs. Grey came from a wealthy family and eventually she did not get wealth from her father. This kind of incidents seems to be insignificant regarding the present time but in Victorian period it was unthinkable. It suggests the attitude of independent women who take their own decisions. Mrs. Grey took her decision as an emancipation woman, solely for her love, to satisfy her own choice and denied to take decision burdened by male dominated society. Agnes Grey an independent woman declares:

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter into a new life; to act for myself; to exercised my unused faculties; to try my unused powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something comfort and

help my mother and sister... to show papa what his little Agnes can do...(11)

She took work as a governess for the Bloomfield children. She did not get much recognition there. She got continuous criticism for not fulfilling her role as a governess. She then forced to leave that job and entered into the Murray family. Her life as a governess in the Murray family was troublesome. The Murray family ignored her beings:

...it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to thought one of them, while they talked over me or across; and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy-as if they either did not see me, or, were very desirous to make it appear so...it was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for, in truth, I consider myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them...(100)

Her journey from Bloomfield to Murray family was a journey from immaturity to maturity, from innocence to experience and which also helped to know herself and her ability as a governess. It established her unique identity, as a human being, not based on gender discrimination. At last she established her own school with her mother. Her dream came true. As James Simmons enunciates in his *Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualizing the Governess in Agnes Grey*, "it is at home where Agnes also finds once again a position of equality" (40). Her school proves herself a free woman. She then got married with Mr. Weston, not before she got financial freedom. She was now equal and exemplified woman, not a subordinate woman.

It Happens for A Reason

Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason* champions the cause of emancipated woman. Vipasha, a liberated woman, makes relationship on her own choice denying the traditional marriage institution and gives birth a baby out of their love. She was bold enough to take the courageous step which is forbidden to the male dominated orthodox society. But she does not care for that. Being a modern educated woman she consciously chooses her own future. She rises above gender

discrimination: "This my decision and I am sticking to it, no matter what" (xi). She is clear to her conscious and much more possessive about her love: I do want to share the rest of my life with someone, but only if he is the right guy. I definitely don't want a guy just for the sake of it... if decided to do so, he has to be completely worth it" (9).

She emancipates herself from all obligations both in physically and mentally. She freely discusses everything with her son: "There is nothing in the world that I don't discuss with Aryan. He chats with me freely on all subjects. Even about sex" (8). Vipasha discusses her thoughts with her friend Suchi. She emphasizes on her own decisions which she is going to continue though it seems to be unethical in the eyes of male dominated society: "I told her with firmness that was clear about what I wanted, and eyes, I knew that they might not be conventional choices... but they were important to me and I was sticking to the them (138)." Her decision seems to be unconventional and not normal. In our society normalcy is justified with male normality. Shilpa Das in her *Invisible Women: Disability, Gender, and Feminism*, discusses that: On examining the ladder of hierarchy, we find that society always equates human or general normality; the *libermench* or alpha male is the essential gender. Female normality is defined on the basis of this norm, and is thus a first level of deviance, the female being subordinate, and the 'other' to the male"(16). Thus Vipasha portrays the role of an emancipated woman. She does not want to be a subject of 'desire'. She aspires to be an independent woman financially, physically and mentally. She rises above 'gender' which is cultural construction. She proves herself through her works and becomes a human being.

Conclusion

There is a huge time gap between Victorians England and modern India. But in the narratives of both novels mirrors the transformation of women's roles and decisions that would develop in the following years. Men have to think that liberty of women is necessary to the development of society. Masculine domination of society is a corrupting influence, making boys selfish and girls

abject. John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjugation of Women* (1869) states:

"...that the principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes the legal subordination of one sex to the other- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that is ought to be replaced by a principle of equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, no disability on the other.

Both Agnes Grey and Vipasha represent the millions of women who are finally able to make their own decisions for themselves.

References

- Bronte, Anne. *Agnes Grey*. New York: Random House, 2003. Print.
- Das, Shilpa. *Invisible Women: Disability, Gender and Feminism*. *Redefining Feminism*. Eds. Ranjana and V. Bharati Harishankar. Jaipur: Rowat Publication. 2008. Print.
- http://www.goodreaders.com/authors/show/2872571.preeti_shenoy.
- Morales, Maria H. *Mill's The Subjection of Women: Critical Essay on the Classic*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. 2005. Print.
- Shenoy, Preeti. *It Happens for A Reason*. New Delhi: Westland Ltd. 2013. Print.
- Simmons, James R. JR. *Class, Matriarchy, and Power: Contextualizing the Governess in Agnes Grey*. *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Bronte*. Eds. Julie Nash and Barbara Suess. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. 25-43. Print.

A Brief Bio on corresponding Author: Sanjay Das, graduated in English from Kalyani University in 2009 and Post Graduate from Shridhar University in 2013. He is interested in Feminism, Post Colonialism and Post Modern theory. He also writes poem and short story. He has worked as an assistant professor of English at JIS College of Engineering, Kalyani and St Mary College of Engineering, Kolkata Campus.
