

**WOMEN'S DESIRE FOR FREEDOM BEYOND SOCIAL  
EXPECTATIONS: A STUDY OF KATE CHOPIN'S *THE  
AWAKENING* AND ANNE BRONTE'S *THE TENANT OF  
WILDFELL HALL***

*Dissertation*

*Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for*

*The award of Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature*

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled **WOMEN'S DESIRE FOR FREEDOM BEYOND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS: A STUDY OF KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND ANNE BRONTE'S *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*** is a bonafide record of research done by **ANUPAMA K B** (Register Number AIAVMEG003), has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other similar title.

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Place: P.Vemballur

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# Chapter-1

## Introduction

Women's desire for freedom beyond social expectations was a significant theme of 19<sup>th</sup> century women oriented works, as they wanted to escape the trap of Victorian double standards. This theme has been widely explored by numerous woman writers including Kate Chopin and Anne Bronte. Their novels dealt with the struggles faced by women trying to break the cover of social expectations imposed upon them.

Kate Chopin was born on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1850, in St. Louis Missouri as the second child of Thomas O' Flaherty and Eliza Faris. She was bilingual, speaking both French and English, and bicultural as the reflection of French influence in her thinking is visible in her fiction. Being mentored by various women including her mother, grandmother and great grandmother, she formed deep bonds with her family and also wrote about the nurturing love she received from them. Being recognized as one of America's significant 19<sup>th</sup> century authors, Kate Chopin's fiction is widely taught in universities, explored in scholarly books, and has been made into plays, films and Opera, and has been translated into more than twenty languages. Her fiction is set mostly in Louisiana and her major works focused on the lives of intelligent yet sensitive women.

“After playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were not my own” (Wilde Oscar, Intentions, 1891). She was brave enough to deal with the themes of abusive relationships and adultery, and also to criticise some cultural orthodoxies and social conventions of that period. She also believed that her characters hold the responsibility for their decisions even if they fail. They were accountable for required realisations, negotiations in their lives too.

Chopin could express herself through her works showing the impatience towards customs that affected her intellectual development and material freedom. If we go deep into the twenty-first century, her works still stay relevant giving touching moments of self-awareness and intuitive observations about human nature. Chopin didn't have a trouble-free life as a novelist as she faced several rejections in publishing her works due to the sensitive themes she put forward. She, in her works, spoke to men and women similar, as individuals, breaking the virtual barriers made by the Victorian society against freedom.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* was published in 1899 exploring the desire of women to find her true self and live it fully. The story takes place in Louisiana in 1890s within the upper class creole community. Through the life of the protagonist Edna Pontellier, Chopin criticises the patriarchal society which suppresses the freedom of a woman to think, feel and act like she wants. There is a clear depiction of how women are taught from their childhood itself to betray their own instincts and live according to society's desire.

When Kate Chopin lived and wrote, the state of women was extremely miserable. They were considered as the legal property of their husband and divorce was seen completely illegal. They were supposed to fit in the Victorian ideals of motherhood and femininity. Victorian concept of womanhood was a delicate, passive and saintly figure, meant to fulfill the needs of her family and to find satisfaction in raising children and doing household chores. Through *The Awakening*, Chopin questions the foundation of this social order.

The book shows the gradual growth of Edna Pontellier as an autonomous person with desires of her own and the challenges she faces while trying to achieve those in a society where they aren't valued. The restrictions imposed on a woman by marriage and

motherhood is destroyed by her to reach the world of individual freedom. From a traditional societal role, she awakes to her full potential through experimenting and exploring. Chopin could strongly deal this difficult theme with a cunning craft which affirms its 'crowning glory'.

English novelist, poet and the youngest member of Bronte literary family, Anne Bronte was born on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1820 in Thornton, United Kingdom, as the daughter of Maria and Patrick Bronte. She could publish her first novel 'Agnes Grey' in 1846, in reference to her experiences as a governess. After this well-received novel, she followed it up with her next novel 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' in 1848, which unfortunately came to be her last, as her life was tragically short due to tuberculosis. Anne used the pseudonym 'Acton Bell' along with Charlotte Bronte as Currer Bell and Emily Bronte as Ellis Bell to create a book of collective poetry. Her writing often overshadowed by her sisters Charlotte and Emily, but later she could grab her significance as a talented writer.

Anne was courageous, determined, keenly observant and pragmatic. She had strong faith in Christianity and good talent in music. Being a serious novelist and poet, Anne was examined by female authors like Elizabeth Langland as a major literary figure whose aesthetics can be seen in the realm of realism. Unlike the romanticism in her sisters' works, she wrote in a sharp and iconic style, with a realistic voice. Her books had overtones of despair, showing her realistic and determined view of the world. They were occasionally satirical, rarely humorous and had a melancholic view of the profoundly imperfect world she closely observed. "If Anne Bronte had lived ten years longer, she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen, perhaps even a higher place" (Moore George, Conversations in Ebury Street, 1924).

Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* explores the themes of gender discrimination and the suppression of women in Victorian society. It can be considered as one of the first modernist novels telling the story of a young wife who runs away from her drunken, abusive and adulterous husband, something virtually unheard at that period. The novel claims the need for women living in the mainstream with equal rights as men and having the opportunity for free expression without being judged by societal norms. Helen Graham, the protagonist of the novel exemplifies the womanist ideals by challenging the traditional role of women in society. She rejects to be a passive victim of her conditions around and instead takes control of her life by daring to leave her abusive husband and start a new life seeking independence. She also breaks the virtual rules made by society for women by pursuing her career as an artist even though it was considered as an inappropriate thing for women at that period.

Through the experiences of Helen, Anne could expose the double standards and hypocrisy of Victorian society, where men were free to lead an immoral life and women were expected to be virtuous submissive. The novel also shows how the sexuality of women was repressed and controlled by men through the attempts of Helen's husband, Arthur Huntington to subjugate her. In 2000s, this novel gained interest in readers due to its insight into the historical roles of both men and women, as among many changes occurred, domestic abuse stays the same.

The novel can be seen partially autobiographical as the character Arthur Huntington seems to be similar to Anne's brother, suffered from alcoholism and opiate addiction. She concentrated more on realistic notions than romantic ones to show the brutal and unromantic life led by women in Victorian society. Helen trying to stay dedicated to her husband even after much brutality shows how women were trained to stay obedient to men and remain chained keeping the wounds unhealed.

“Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (Walker Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, xi-xii). Through this Walker implies that feminism is a part under the much bigger ideological umbrella of womanism. Alice Walker coined this term in her short story ‘Coming Apart’ in 1979 and later in 1982 publication ‘*In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*’. This theory mainly holds an anti-racist feminism as its core. It claims that mainstream feminism is actually a movement by white women and the needs of black women stays untouched. Womanism doesn’t oppose feminism or decline its value but rather believes that feminism is only a part under this much broader concept.

This project intends to analyse women’s desire for freedom beyond social expectations in *The Awakening* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by dividing the paper into Introduction as chapter 1, discussing the authors, novels and the theory in brief, ‘Womanism’ as chapter 2, about the theory in detail, ‘Womanism in *The Awakening*’ as chapter 3, examining the womanist elements in the novel, ‘Womanist perspectives in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’ as chapter 4, analysing the novel from a womanist point of view, ‘Discovery of womanity in both Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Anne Bronte’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*’ as chapter 5, looking over the roots of womanism in both books against the suppression of women and Conclusion as chapter 5, explaining the reflection of womanism from Victorian age itself in the light of these two works.

## **Chapter-2**

### **Womanism**

Womanism, a theory coined and defined by the African-American writer Alice Walker, refer to feminists of colour, specifically Black feminists centering their experiences, efforts and contributions for a better world, not only for themselves but for all of humanity. This word came from the expression of black mothers to their female children 'you act womanish' pointing out their grown-up behavior. It shows their courageous and willful behavior unlike the immature notions which is beyond the confinement of societal norms.

Women from all sections of the society has gone and still go through various kinds of physical and mental abuse under the power of patriarchy. From early days itself, they have tried to raise voice against such oppressions but the patriarchal claws were so sharp which made them weak. The first and second waves of feminism tried to bring a visible change for women, but their voice mainly focused on the problems and struggles faced by white upper-class and middle-class women. Even though they wanted to bring a global change, the sections of women struggling not only by gender inequality but also by race, caste etc. stayed away from their concerns. Such problems mainly affected the black women of west and lower caste women from other parts of the world. They were poor, excluded from the mainstreams of the society and weren't identified as a proper individual.

Intersectional feminism could recognize this and took the other plights faced by women along with gender issues like race and class into account. Womanism can be seen as a wider ideology including all such issues with equal importance. Alice Walker defines a womanist in two ways, being 'womanish' by taking the responsibilities and charge of one's own life and a woman loving other women sexually or non-sexually

appreciating their culture, emotional flexibility and strength. They love individual men at times, sexually or non-sexually, as this theory view people as individuals neglecting the barriers of gender.

Womanism becomes relevant in all periods as it considers the liberation of all sections of women, irrespective of their class and colour. A black woman can only be truly free if comes out the chains of both gender and her skin. It takes much effort and time to break both of these rooted mindsets, and such concerns are prioritized here. In feminist theory such concerns were seen outside the boundary of female issues which made black women isolated. This perspective makes the theory applicable in all kind of struggles faced by women all over the world.

This can be seen as a postmodern theory as it denies the concept of centrality taking a deviation from the modern nature of feminism. Instead of holding an enclosed view, Womanism tends to keep things open and flexible. Even though this theory wasn't there before 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is applicable for many works before this period. The women characters who felt trapped not only by gender but also other societal stereotypes and the woman writers who tried to expose such lives to the world risking their societal roles were actual womanists. But in many situations they were completely isolated while raising their voice for many.

Like women stayed inferior to the patriarchal forces of men, black women and other minority groups from Third World countries stayed inferior to both men and white women, being forced to remain in the lowest strata of the society. Nobody seriously thought about such a hierarchy until Walker defined it, on the basis of her own experience. This condition is clearly visible in literature too as such women took a lot of time to enter the literary world comparing to the white women writers. As women used

literature as the major medium to expose the struggles of life, these women from lower strata and their problems stayed silent.

The theory of Womanism finds beauty in everything around, as loving music, dance, moon, spirit, food, folk and even struggles are the characteristics of a womanist. Walker uses rich definitions with historical allusions to the history of Black women and their commitment to freedom. Her theory often starts with her exploration of some movements and key figures in the experience of Black women. An allusion to Harriet Tubman is found in the second part of Alice Walker's definition who led slaves above three hundred out of slavery on "The Underground Road". White people questioned the humanity of Black people when Tubman was a model of wisdom, religious faith, kindness and commitment to freedom. Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Julia Foote, Amanda Berry Smith etc. of late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are other guides for womanist theology. Resource for womanist theory is also found in many clubs of Black women formed in the 1800s.

Novels and short stories could also serve as resources for this theory. From Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola LeRoy* (1892) to modern novelists like Toni Morrison (*Beloved* and *Paradise*), Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*), Tina McElroy Ansa (*Baby of the Family*), Gloria Naylor (*Mama Day*) and Edwidge Danticat (*Krack? Krack!*), the everyday lives of Blacks have been written by Black women novelists. They tried to bring equal importance to the themes of slavery, sexism, colorism and racism by blending literature with cultural insights.

"Womanist" is a confessional phrase which indicates that it must be claimed rather than imposed, offering an organic endeavor of constant self-reflection. Additionally, a womanist who does not consider themselves to be a womanist isn't allowed to label others as such. For instance, calling Black women from the nineteenth



century “womanists” isn’t right as writers like Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Anna Julia Cooper didn’t claim this label for themselves. But at their best, they represent a developing womanism that gives other womanists of this era a rich framework to build upon.

The overarching paradigm for womanist liberation is established by Cannon’s “Black Womanist Ethics” published in 1988. In order to make her case, she refers to the writings of anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston. The best literary source for comprehending Black women’s social and religious experiences is women’s literary heritage. Cannon conducts a thorough investigation of class, race and sex using an interdisciplinary method that integrates ethics, history, literary studies and political economy. Her goal is to demonstrate how the triple oppressions of class, racism and sex result in Black women’s autonomy differing from the dominant ethics held by white men. The right to choose is taken for granted by mainstream ethics. The right to choose is taken for granted by mainstream ethics. According to Cannon, it is impossible to make this presumption about those who are subject to oppression as it is a dynamic and pervasive phenomenon. Cannon makes a strong distinction between womanist ethics and hegemonic ethics.

Lesbian feminist Barbara Smith in her famous anthology “Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, 1998 presents selected writings by lesbian activists and Black women writers on a variety of provocative and significant topics. At present, her works remains an irreplaceable text based on the lives of Black women among Whites. She was much concerned about the lives of women in Third world countries and the suppression they went through. Famous scholar and Black American activist Angela Y. Davis in her book “Blue Legacies and Black Feminism”, 1998 analyses the lyrics of prominent Black women blues singers like Gertrude ‘Ma Rainey, Billie Holiday ad

Bessie Smith from the womanist point of view. She consider them as fierce examples of the experience of Blacks in the mainstream American culture.

Bell Hooks in her book “Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism”, 1981 examines feminist movements from suffrage to 1970s. According to her, Black women suffered the lowest social standing of any group in American culture as a result of merging racism and sexism during the time of enslavement. This work is still taught today in courses on philosophy, Black culture and gender. She believes that even though racism separates Black men from White men, the force of sexism unites them. This shows how Black women were marginalized by the power of both Whites and Black men.

The majority of Black women believe that feminism hasn’t adequately and comprehensively described them to the world in which they live. They believe that in order to seize this fresh momentum, something must emerge that is unattached to a preset master. Alice Walker can entirely and without hesitation connect with womanism; it comes naturally to her unlike feminism. It’s crucial to keep in mind that many women find womanism easier to relate while defining both feminism and womanism. A womanist discourse also emphasizes the need of spirituality and ethics in eradicating the intertwined oppressions of race, gender and class that put barriers to the lives of African-American women.

For Alice Walker, all womanists are Universalists. Her analogy of a garden where all the flowers bloom equally invokes this notion further. A womanist believes that both men and women must survive, and she wants to live in a society where they can coexist while being culturally distinct. By the inclusion of men, Black women can confront gender inequality without directly attacking men.

## Chapter-3

### Womanism In The Awakening

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is generally labeled as an early feminist novel, analysing the strong woman character Edna Pontellier, who dared to break the social constraints created by the society. But the novel has much deeper relevance when it is viewed from a broader perspective of womanism. Even though the work has a huge time gap with the formation of womanist theory, it is visible how much it needed the approach of this theory. The novel focuses on the expression of inner-self regardless of gender.

*The Awakening* can be viewed as a case study of the condition of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century and how they wanted to escape from constraints and boundaries made by the patriarchal society. Chopin portrays the protagonist of the novel Edna Pontellier, who represents the urge of women to come out of the limitations imposed upon their identity by the chains of marriage and motherhood. The conventional social roles assigned for them made them feel entrapped within the harsh boundaries of male-defined institution of womanhood. Even though they wanted more than being mere wives and mothers, their desires were completely controlled by men. The realistic notion of this novel shows how women who made a bold attempt at that period against such restrictions ended up facing severe outcomes.

The primary role of a woman is interpreted as 'being a good wife and a good mother'. Women who fail to possess such stereotypical traits aren't considered as one of "true womanhood". Edna is being rudely accused by her husband for her lack of care towards children and for not being a "mother woman". Chopin has used another character namely Adele Ratignolle to compare the socially accepted women with Edna. She represents the women who worshipped their husbands and idolized their children

finding it as their duty. The novelist bring the idea that the definition given by society for womanhood denies their opportunities and freedom to find their true self and identity.

From early days of their life itself, women are trained to live according to the desires of the male-dominated society without questioning. This automatically make them confused about their own identity and true individuality. They unknowingly fit into the societal roles assigned to them. The true feminine personality and female identity gets buried under the suppression since ages. Women who knew this trap wanted to get out such norms but many of them weren't dare enough to break it. Through Edna, Chopin could show her inner struggle as a victim of 19<sup>th</sup> century rigid double standards and also her curiosity about the consequences of such revolutionary reactions.

The puritan society made certain codes to justify the objectification of female sex. The narrator shows this tendency through various situations where Mr. Pontellier, Edna's husband treats her as a mere object. "You are burnt beyond recognition" (The Awakening 02) marks his attitude towards Edna as some piece of personal property. Later her womanist consciousness make her feel the need to be free and liberated and understand her worth. "I'm no longer Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not" (The Awakening 106) shows Edna's hidden rage kept under suppression. The real struggle here is to free herself from being a possession or object owned by others.

Most of the times women are defined not in the terms of their individuality but associated with various men, as someone's wife, daughter, mother and even a nun is defined as the Bride of Christ. Chopin calls Edna Mrs. Pontellier as every other woman. The novel doesn't show an instant growth and self realisation of the protagonist but a gradual one showing that such a change by tearing apart the stereotypical roots

implanted inside takes a lot of time. She gradually reconstructs her sense of individuality by taking charge of her decisions irrespective of the so called rules existed. Towards the end of the novel, Chopin address her by Edna, showing her growth as an individual, strong enough to take her life decisions.

The novel represents a miserable marriage that destroys the individual selfhood of the female sex. It is clear how Edna feels completely dissatisfied and uncomfortable in her marriage with Mr. Pontellier. Worst is the way he treats his wife just like a commodity and expected to satisfy his needs and take care of their children. All such conditions make her feel suffocated and holding this burden for a long time eventually takes away her precious elements in life. Once she dared to break the cage, she couldn't even think of going back to it. Her inner rage kept inside for a long time outburst when she threw her wedding ring on the carpet striving to crush it.

A marriage infected by fury and desperation is what it is. When Edna's sister Janet comes to invite her to her wedding, Edna refuses saying, "Wedding is one of the most lamenting spectacles on earth" (*The Awakening* 65). Marriage, which is supposed to bind two souls together for a happy life thereafter, becomes the worst nightmare for the protagonist. People like Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier, whose souls are yoked by violence together by society's desire erases the beautiful expectations about marriage. Such relationships ultimately steals away the selfhood of women and makes it difficult for them to define themselves.

Womanism is highly connected with the mother-daughter relationship and how it leads to the growth of a woman. The presence of the mother creates a sense of protection which is absent here in Edna's life. Her mother's death drastically wounded her inner self, which constantly longs for the mother's presence. Having no mother figure to seek help against the pressures of male standards of womanhood make her

confront the dilemma 'redefine her or submit to the male definition'. Even though she urges to establish herself as an individual, lack of power and strength from the roots makes it difficult for her to decide.

"In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realise her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognise her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight-perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman" (The Awakening 12). Even though most of the women had a passive opinion about their subordinate role in the society, Edna interrogates it without an external support. She was courageous enough to pursue her personal liberation, emancipation and ultimately for her independence and individuality, she was even willing to pay by her life.

Chopin shows the development of the protagonist mainly in three stages; Sleeping phase, dreaming phase and the awakening phase. The phase of sleeping is relatively a short one without much importance. But it matters as there won't be dreaming and an awakening without sleeping. Her dreaming phase make her feel that freedom can be achieved through swimming and also uses that metaphor to describe her childhood. Edna's complete awakening goes together with her suicide, but her gradual awakening is shown to the end of the novel. The novel arises the pain of women by showing her death that even though she has awakened through her efforts, she could only end up realising that she won't be completely free from the societal stereotypical expectations ever.

At the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, southern society stuck on strict gender norms, and the theme of individuality woven throughout the novel keeps itself contrast to such conventions. Different from other characters like Leonce an Adele, Edna has a totally

different perspective upon individuality which encourage her to be autonomous and independent. When Edna wanted genuine love out of marriage, Leonce viewed it just as a business transaction. To uphold his social value, he wants his wife to act in specific ways, according to the wishes and expectations of the society they live. When Edna decided to stay away from her husband buying a new house, the only thing that kept him worried was his social reputation.

Edna's rediscovery of feelings suppressed within for a long time direct to the search for freedom, self-expression and love. Both her physical and spiritual awakenings signal her search for self. She comes to understand that she was slowly discovering the woman she wanted to be always, free from the boundaries of the society. In that attempt to discover herself, she tries out the assertive self initially by refusing sexual relationship with her husband. She then focus on her creative self, recovering her interest in painting. She tries to determine her relative self by examining her feelings about motherhood and relationship with other people. At last she get insight to her sensory self by giving herself freedom to act according to her desires. Edna finally come to succeed in defining who she is, but understands that establishing her own identity in the society she lives is more than she can ever afford which leads her to taking the decision of ending her life , leaving all the drama around as such.

Womanhood has been revealed as a manifesting and expressive attempt in the novel to transcend the barriers drawn by the male ideology. Women who really urge to make a difference by being rebel to the societal view of womanhood are seen suffering from the consequences thereafter. The protagonist who chose to refuse the role of traditional women instead of acting passive feminine goes through many such challenges and she still wanted to distinguish life from self. Once she realises that her efforts and dreams become insignificant as the society won't allow her to subvert the

usual roles of female identity and gender constructed by them, she is shown “swimming” gradually into death than choosing to stay submissive in the cage. Chopin treats Edna as a gender anomaly by differentiating her undiscovered individuality with female stereotypes. Because of the naturalistic structure of the novel, it gives a universal view on the freedom of people irrespective of gender.

Kate Chopin could use powerful symbolisms and imageries in the novel to show the urge of women for their personal emancipation and the development of Edna Pontellier. Her sleeping phase was completely passive and she could only start dreaming when she understood the extent of her passion and the limitations which blocked her from achieving those. Chopin has used symbols like art, music and houses to convey Edna’s journey towards self-discovery and the search for her freedom and desires against the expectations of Victorian society in those caged domestic roles of wife and mother. Such images are not only used to show the life and thoughts of Edna but also other women of the Victorian era.

The symbols of art and music is used in the novel become the major elements of the novel as Edna starts recognising the difference in the use of each character and understanding music. Through different music performances of two women, Chopin could use music as a major symbol to contrast the stereotypical expectations of women with the unconventional. Certain women characters of the story are also illustrated as symbols to identify different kinds of women existed in Victorian society, from those who were labelled “outcast” to ideal “mother-woman”. This style explores the interdependence of gender roles and female sexuality, challenging the cultural assumptions of women existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Birds and water also appear as major symbols to represent the character development of Edna. The symbol of birds are used as major symbolic images



throughout the novel to give the idea of spreading the wings to fly. They are also used to convey the situations and emotions undergone by the protagonist and the choices and failures made by Edna towards her journey to freedom and self-discovery. She is initially portrayed as a beautiful but caged parrot and this image eventually changes to a disabled but free bird. This shows how a woman is supposed to be strong even with the scars than being weak and beautiful.

The novel starts with the scene of Madame Lebrun's caged and wrathful parrot, which shrieks at Leonce, Edna's annoying husband and a mocking bird. Chopin has used this caged bird to represent Edna Pontellier and the entrapped life of Victorian women in common who longs for their freedom, and their loud but neglected inner voices. The mocking bird on the other side represents Mademoiselle Reisz, having completely different perspectives. Women of Victorian age were considered just like this caged parrot, as they were valued only for their beauty. Instead of the bars of a bird cage, they were imprisoned by societal roles and expectations, limited to wife and mother. The last scene of awakening in the novel is the one which involves the bird imagery where "A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water"(The Awakening 112). Here death is shown as the only way to freedom for her, as like a free bird she escaped the cage but wasn't strong enough to survive because of the depth of the wounds made by the chains around, for a long time.

Chopin writes "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamouring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (The Awakening 12) by representing ocean as a symbol of freedom and escape. She uses a similar statement again towards the end of the novel as Edna spent her final moments in the ocean, to reinforce the

significance. It is shown as her final escape from a society where she can no longer survive, bounded by the ropes of Victorian conventions.

The usage of imagery and symbolisms by Chopin has only made the womanist themes more powerful by exploring the discovery of sensuality beyond gender constructs. Such imageries reinforces the connection by suggesting an inner-reflection of individualism. Understanding Edna as a person rather than simply a woman shows how the novel can be interpreted much effectively through womanist perspective than feminist one. Chopin strongly claims the need of freedom and independence for every human being without gender barriers. The investigation into Edna's life journey through this novel reveals its emphasis on analysing one's individuality than mere feminine liberation.

## Chapter-2

### Womanist Perspectives in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deals with the themes of love, reclamation and the struggle for the freedom of women. The novel explores the life journey of Helen, a strong and independent woman who is committed to create her own path in life against the boundaries of societal expectations and traditional gender roles. Love is portrayed here in a complex manner, by Helen's relationship with her husband Arthur, Gilbert Markham and her son in completely different ways. Helen's marital relationship with Arthur is significant yet complex in the novel, as it defines the power dynamics of a male centered society. Arthur, who seemed to be a pleasing and well-mannered gentleman gradually turns out to be completely abusive and alcoholic husband. Despite the ill treatment she receives, Helen stays dedicated to the marriage vows she agreed and try to reform Arthur, believing redemption as a way to save his soul. Anyways, her attempts becomes ultimately unsuccessful, and forces her to leave her husband and strive for her independence elsewhere.

The relationship of Helen with Gilbert, alternatively, is identified by mutual respect and compassion, which shows that love can breathe between two equals. Even though they come from entirely different backgrounds, they are enchanted by each other and ultimately fall in love. Gilbert loves Helen without being selfish, and supports her in her longing for independence. Their relationship, might feel unconventional for the time, but it shows of how love is possible to empower and strengthen both partners.

Helen's battle for freedom and the strong decision to leave her abusive husband and be independent by becoming a tenant at Wildfell Hall reveals her bold instinct inside. Throughout the novel, we can see her asserting her agency in different ways, by painting and writing diary. Such self-expressive ways liberates her from the restraints of

gender. Her need of independence challenges the traditional roles of gender existing in the society she lives and encourages young women to assert their agency and discover their potential and individuality. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is a powerful one, who is completely different from the typical women of 19<sup>th</sup> century. She defends women for equality with men and denies to live the life shaped by men.

Victorian women were defined as angelic creatures, intellectually inferior to men. So they suppressed the talents of women and silenced their voices. Here, Helen used to paint a lot before her marriage but the life thereafter forced her to stay away from the world of art. Art as a way of expression of emotions and feelings were completely chained down to maintain the male superiority. Marriage was a huge trap for this in most of the situations and majority of the women weren't dare enough to come out of such black boundaries. Helen, even though was confused about her future, she took the courage to step out of the toxic marital relationship and save her growing son along with her. When she slammed the door against him, it was a slap on the face of society and all the male oriented moralities and conventions.

Even though she wanted a complete detachment from her husband, she was too kind to look after him when he was sick. She understand the problems and pains around, along with hers, which makes the novel close to womanist perspectives. She was bothered about her growing son and kind towards every human being around, depicting the strong but tender nature of women. She was confident enough to live independently and raise her son without his father in a period when women were considered completely dependent upon men.

The novel criticises the imposition of power upon women by the patriarchal society of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the justification of practices establishing the superiority of men over women. Helen by taking a reverse action in her life journey by leaving her

cruel and abusive husband makes an opposition of the patriarchal order existed in that period. She is portrayed as a rational, determined and creative woman different from the Victorian concepts which claims her potential to live in society's mainstream and to be treated equal to men in social life and law. The secret eyes and rumours laid upon a woman living alone without her husband are overcome by the protagonist.

Anne Bronte has maintained a realistic approach throughout the novel which reflects the society she lived in. The creative sides of women oppressed by such a male oriented society and their empowerment by coming out of such restrictions is depicted in the novel with much clarity. Women who lived neglecting the Victorian double standards and live according to their decisions were considered completely illegal then. They weren't allowed to be prominent in their talents or choose life decisions beyond the desires of men to make women feel inferior to them. Even providing education was rare due to this reason. The intellectual development of women through education is shown deliberately by the author using Helen's character, to promote the strength and confidence earned by only education.

In the novel, Arthur Huntingdon is depicted as a womanizer with many other bad habits. But all these flaws are safe under the superior coat given to men at that period. The Victorian double standards were only meant for women and a slight diversion from those conventions made them outcast. Even though Arthur was Helen's husband, she wasn't allowed to raise voice against the immoral things he commits. This continuous suppression of women made them react with much force which resulted in the strong writings against Victorian conventions. These expressions for freedom through various arts like novels and paintings started shaking the double standards of the period.

Arthur is portrayed as a guy having no guilt about the cruelty he does. He clearly represents the common nature of Victorian men to oppress and rule the lives of women.

They also develop a tendency to pass that superior ego to the young boys to make similar men. This prevents the society from stopping this continuous style of oppression faced by women. Helen, knowing the upcoming troubles, tries to save her son from such bad influences. Arthur wanted to teach his son to drink wine at a very small age just like him and forced to find pleasure in killing innocent birds and animals. Helen wanted a son to respect and value women without seeing them as inferior. She wanted her son to be a person free from the male egos of the age and be kind towards both human beings and animals irrespective of the gender.

Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham are shown as complete contrasts to make it clear how a Victorian man actually is and how a real man should be. Gilbert isn't depicted as a perfect man but a person with good soul and pure intentions. He has flaws but never egoistic or act superior to women. He consider women equal to him and respect their decisions without judging. Anne tries to let her readers know that a man can be like this, but they are taught differently from an early age itself. And the proper way to teach a boy from his childhood is shown through Helen, by giving sensible knowledge to be kind towards everyone and everything. The author shows the solution along with the problem faced by Victorian women.

Helen using her passion of painting as an escape from the dark realities of her life and Arthur trying to deny those desires shows how women were disallowed to express themselves in any ways. She used pencil sketches on the back of the canvas to express her frustrations, secret desires and suppressed likings, and her husband's face was one of them. Art was used by her not only to express but also to disguise her emotions and thoughts. Their true identity and individuality were hidden in the pages and canvases where they bleed words and pictures. So, most of the novels got published in that period were autobiographical in nature, under pseudonyms.

The novel concentrates on female excellence, exposing the white-washed masks of Victorian period. The protagonist who goes through different kinds of dilemmas, miseries and depressions is portrayed as an idealistic woman who unfortunately got married to a man without character. Her reaction against his alcoholism and adultery, and the struggle to free herself from those, were criticized by many as they were considered highly unsuitable for women. Even though she decides to leave him, her morals make her nurse him when he gets sick. Her motives of freedom weren't of revenge but liberation, which supports the perspective of womanist theory of being kind towards everything along with being strong.

The Wildfell hall where Helen starts a new life is portrayed as a mansion of Elizabethan era, constructed of dark grey stones, which looks cold and gloomy. The dilemma she deals with, on taking proper care of her child, and the mental pressure to start a new life in a new place without anyone's help matches the state and atmosphere of that mansion. She starts earning through selling the pictures she paints and gradually gets a hold on her life. She was afraid to be with another man after her experience with Arthur and rejected all kinds of such approaches. But being ready to welcome Gilbert into her life towards the end of the novel shows her growth as a complete independent woman, bold enough to fulfill her desires and take charge of her life decisions.

A transition from an innocent, passionate girl to a matured grownup woman is beautifully portrayed by Bronte. This character development includes her self-discovery and establishment of freedom. The trauma she deals because of her marital relationship with Arthur makes her think more than twice about everything, especially a new romantic relationship. Her observations on the actions of Gilbert and the way he treats Helen and her son makes it visible. Her urge to be with Gilbert and resist him at the same time shows her lack of trust towards Victorian men. To the end when she accepts

Gilbert, we don't see the same innocent girl who fell in love with Arthur, but a much sensible woman who is ready to take control of her life and stay strong in both ups and downs of life. The theory of womanism doesn't promote to stay away from all men but to welcome them without depending on them or stay inferior, and the same message is given by the author here.

Anne has used a lot of symbols and imageries throughout the novel to give an intense impact, including trees, flowers, painting and the weather. Throughout the novel, Bronte has used the images of trees and flowers to show how men used to underestimate women in Victorian period. They were often compared to fragile and delicate flowers with beauty but no power and strength. Flowers are often considered as good for blooming and making people happy. They are plucked and destroyed for just the sake of people, which is similar to the way men used to treat women then. In the beginning, Arthur compares Helen to a dewy rose, which is the modest and often mysterious. Not only Helen, but also others female characters are also compared to various flowers. The novel is a determined voice of such women against patriarchal men that they aren't fragile but strong enough to change the entire course of their life and start new, through the protagonist who was strong enough to save herself from abuses, be confident in her talents and bringing up her son.

Painting is portrayed as a major symbol to show both the figurative and literal escape of Helen. In the beginning, she used to paint in order to escape from Arthur and his drunken friends. But later she could use it for a living along with the expression of her inner self. Her development in personal and emotional journey is visible through her art. Her transition from portraits to landscapes shows the change of mindset from a dependent eighteen year old to an independent lady, as her focus on what other people want, changed to what she actually wants. Most of her paintings depicted her inner-self



and emotional state. One of her paintings admired by Gilbert, which shows a scene of bare trees, is a clear representation of her loneliness and suffering. She could make her paintings alive by putting her soul and pain in it.

Anne has used weather in the most creative way in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by connecting them to the moods of the characters. Gilbert as a farmer and Helen as a painter are deeply associated with nature and its changing weathers. Bronte has done a completely liberal use of weathers to depict their moods, especially Helen. During their visit to the seaside, the weather is exhibited with much glory and happiness, like a blessing on their love. But in contrast, the weather is portrayed completely dark, gloomy and wet when Gilbert finds Helen with Frederick, mistaking their attachment in a romantic way. In this situation, author could easily convey the stormy and disturbed state of mind of Gilbert. Sometimes the mental situation of the character completely contrasts the weather, which is sarcastically used by Anne to mock at its lack of importance. A really beautiful atmosphere of spring in her new home is shown while Helen desperately thinking about her husband, as an utter mockery of that thought and sadness. Anne has indirectly illustrated the peace and happiness came into Helen's life, even though she feels desperate about it at times.

The first part of the novel is composed by Gilbert Markham's letters to Jack Halford, his brother-in-law, explaining his daily events of country life and the second part consists Helen's diary. Thus the novel doesn't talk from the perspective of a woman only. The problems raised in each situation are concerned about the basic rights a human deserve, showing that this isn't just a feminist novel. The role of society and the conventional double standards passed from generation to generation on the basic rights of women from their early days itself is a humanistic issue. Such a system teaches women that they are inferior to anything outside in their initial days, and asks them to

rely upon men not only for the basic necessities but also for their happiness and romantic fulfillment. Keeping men as masters and women as their property was nearly legal in that period.

Anne Bronte indirectly convey the message that such men are created out of the society they born. They are mentally and physically trained from their early days to act superior to women and made to think it's completely fine to abuse them. The mental conflict they possibly go through in their younger age is clearly shown through the character of young Arthur, Helen's son. Arthur tries to make him find happiness in killing the innocent, hurting the kind and disrespecting women. Helen takes a big visible effort to take her son away from such cruelties. So apart from the struggles of being a woman in the Victorian society, they have to take extra efforts to make changes in there. The novel conveys not only the need of freedom for women, but also the significance of kindness and respect towards each other, through the bold and matured lady character of Helen.

## **Chapter-5**

### **Discovery of Womanhood in Both Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Anne Bronte's *The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall***

Both Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* discovers the theme of strong womanhood and struggles faced by women in the societies they live but never belongs. Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of *The Awakening* and Helen Graham, of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has challenged the conventional roles assigned for women, unlike other passive women around them. They had to make a long journey in order to break the barriers and discover themselves. The historical backgrounds of the authors and the time period of publishing of both novels are connected in many ways. Both the authors were in search of personal fulfillment in a period and society of suppression, which resulted in these novels with two bold woman characters.

Even if Alice Walker coined the term womanism in 1970s, the themes and elements of both novels can be seen through the lens of this theory. Chopin mainly focuses on the self-discovery and liberation of Edna in *The Awakening*, describing her as a woman living in New Orleans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her awakening was the result of her feminist exploration for personal autonomy, sexual liberation and emotional fulfillment. She challenges the conventional gender roles and makes an effort to escape the constraints of marriage and parenthood. Kate Chopin criticises the few options accessible for women in the society and pulls attention to the limitations placed on their ability to express themselves and be unique through the experiences of the protagonist.

In other ways, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Bronte introduces the issues of gender inequality, abuses faced by women along with the limitations placed upon

them in the Victorian era. As a strong protagonist from 19<sup>th</sup> century, Helen demonstrates strength and determination to protect herself from the confines of the patriarchal society. She is shown as a woman who looks for personal growth and fulfillment outside the responsibilities as a wife and mother. Exploring herself as an artist, she chooses it as her career which was traditionally held by men at that period. The patriarchal idea that women should limit themselves to domestic chores and stifle their own aspirations, is challenged by her determination to pursue her artistic interest. A form of womanist opposition to patriarchal norms can be found in Helen's rejection of social expectations and a refusal to fit in the figure of a meek and obedient wife. Bronte criticises the social injustice that continue to oppress and mistreat women through the lens of this bold character.

From a womanist perspective, both Edna and Helen exhibit similarities by addressing the wider issues faced by women. These women have shared characteristics as both shed light upon the miseries universally affects women and their struggle for identity and individuality. By challenging the traditional roles, confronting social expectations and seeking liberation, each of them could create a space for themselves in womanist literature. Rebellion against social expectations imposed on can be seen similar in both Edna and Helen, by rejecting the narrow role assigned for them to live according to the wishes and desires of society. Edna stands against the need of being an idealized "mother-woman" image and seeks freedom, independence and self-discovery. Like that, Helen denies the stereotypical social rules and norms by leaving Arthur, her abusive husband and starting a life by herself as a single mother, questioning the Victorian approach of marriage and domesticity.

Both characters seek personal fulfillment beyond the barriers of traditional marriage and motherhood. They desire to explore their personal identities and follow

their passions which make them question the system where women are supposed to serve people as their sole purpose. They find ways and struggle to seek self-expression and individual growth. The chains offered by the institution of marriage in Victorian society is forcefully broken by Edna and Helen as they understand it is completely on the basis of patriarchal roots. They criticise this patriarchal structure and interrogate the power dynamics of marriage in an unequal manner. The concept of treating women as a property or staying subservient to their husbands is challenged by them. They stand strong against the social pressure to adjust with the oppressive marriages and thrive for a relationship with equality and mutual respect.

Both protagonists experience emotional and sexual awakenings which challenge the suppressive attitude of society towards female sexuality. In *The Awakening*, Edna chooses a passionate relationship and explores her deep and hidden desires, which automatically led to the greater sense of liberation and self-awareness. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* also, Helen seeks for a deep and strong emotional connection and rejects being an object for satisfying someone's desire. By dominating their sexuality, they could challenge the patriarchal control over the bodies of women, according to their desires.

When they decided to set out for their liberation, they had to face isolation and many sacrifices. They had to put a lot of efforts to confront this loneliness, judgment of the society and their rejection for acting against the established stereotypical norms and rules. But despite all such difficulties, they were ready to make sacrifices for being free and authentic, showing the impact and strength of womanist ideals. Both of their decision to prioritize their own needs over societal rules challenges their financial security and social status. But they neglect the rumours and gossips about their past to move ahead with determination.

In both Edna Pontellier and Helen Graham, their artistic tendency intersect with their ways of discovering womanhood. Art provides a form of self-expression and discovery, from the social oppressions upon them. They find it as their only way to express their thoughts, voices and emotions which usually gets ignored. By embracing those artistic capacities, they powerfully assert their identity and react against the limited roles assigned for them. They could also use it for running away from the so called expectations laid upon women. By deviating from the traditional roles imposed upon them, they could show their refusal to prescribed gender roles and cross the boundaries to confirm their right to be acknowledged as individuals.

Art helped both of them to dive into the depth of their inner feelings and uncover the suppressed ones. Those artistic passions acted as catalysts in their individual growth and helped to discover their authentic selves as women. Through their expression of art, they could confront the male dominated society and expose their defects and unequal attitude. Challenges against the powerful patriarchal structures that tries to suppress the voices and experiences of women were resisted by them through art for gaining women's agency and showing their real potential. Art supports both Edna and Helen giving them sense of agency on their life experiences. Through their pursuit of art, they could reclaim their control over life, by narrating their story themselves and shaping their destinies. In both works, art acts as a major tool to assert the autonomy of the protagonists and make their own paths as empowered women challenging the societal norms.

“She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before” (The Awakening 27). Such strong statements by Chopin shows Edna's realisation of the world and her hidden potential. After her artistic and sexual awakening, she rises to the final awakening of womanhood,

where she understands her significance more than anything around in her life. Towards the end, Edna chooses death over life after Robert leaves her. That doesn't mean she got defeated by him or failed in her way to empowerment but her determination towards her choices she had all along. Her death wasn't a thoughtless one but rather preplanned, in the sense of 'coming home' as her wish, to the sea. She decides to embrace the ocean naked, to blend with the natural source that helped in her awakening.

Similarly, Helen isn't portrayed as a typical woman belonging to the 19<sup>th</sup> century chains. She could create a powerful space by herself, being independent physically, emotionally and financially, without living a life shaped by men. "When I tell you not to marry without love, I do not advise you to marry for love alone: there are many, many other things to be considered" (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 269). This very statement shows marriage isn't completely dependent upon love, but mutual respect and equality. Men made them feel trapped for a lifetime, which made them strong enough to break those traps. Helen never even dreamt of a worse married life with Arthur, which eventually made her bold enough to repel his actions. She became courageous enough to embrace her womanhood and have a separate identity.

Both novels could take a revolutionary move towards the establishment of womanhood in a society which taught women to be passive. Chopin as well as Bronte could draw attention to the protagonists only by the portrayal of other women who never got a chance to come out of such restricting bars made by men. Women weren't given proper opportunities to explore their inner talents and passions, instead suppressed to make them feel inferior to men. This eventually passes from generation to generation which prevented them from exploring their womanhood and individuality. Basic human rights were often denied for them which was shown normal among people. Women who took an actual effort to deviate from such slow poisonous conventions were totally

discouraged and suppressed, as such determined rises from the part of oppressed women questioned the superiority of men.

Helen becomes more of a womanist as she wanted to make a change in the coming generation, different from the men she saw. Anne took off the romantic image of self-destructive people and brought them to the light of reality. She could portray this through Arthur and use the character of Helen to show the reversal of those actions from childhood itself through young Arthur. Actually Helen is Anne herself, reacting to the established Victorian norms, which made her suffocate from her early days itself. Men enjoyed their freedom along with the right to restrict women's freedom. This point of view refused to see women as human beings just like men, and people who got deviated from this view were out casted. Women who reacted through art like Anne struggled a lot to stand along with the main stream. The power and rage of the author towards the judgmental society she survived is clear through the protagonist she introduced and her surroundings.

Chopin was also rejected from the mainstream for reacting so openly in a realistic way. Her works were neglected from getting published and *The Awakening* was banned due to the way she exposed the sexuality of women. Victorian society wasn't ready for such an exposed way of writing from women authors, as women were still publishing their works in the pseudonyms of men. Such a sudden and strong opposition made the waves of changes in women and made them rethink of their life meant for nothing but the sake of men. When Edna shut the door on her husband's face and left the house, Chopin could hit the entire patriarchal society which taught women to be meek and silent towards all the injustices and atrocities. Instead of being mere toys to men, Edna taught her readers to take that one decision, to set themselves free.



Both Edna and Helen come from toxic environments which forced them to live according to the prescribed rules placed upon them. The Victorian double standards and social expectation trained them to live like an insect in a jar. They weren't given the respect they deserved or valued as a proper individual with an identity. They were supposed to act within the asserted roles of wife and mother, denying all the rights as a human being. They weren't allowed to explore their womanhood, sexuality or not even their feelings. Such an unchanging pattern was hard to break or even move a little. Majority of the women stayed passive to this system without knowing they are being the victims of the age. Some women knew this reality but weren't able to come out of it due to the fear about their existence and social image. A very few women dared to come out of those chains, breaking the so called core values and institutions like marriage prevailed then. They explored their womanhood completely, bravely questioned the conventions and struggled for entire women of their age. They could pass inspiration and courage to their future generation by starting the revolution. Writers contributed strong woman characters to the women under chains to set fire in their hearts to seek their individuality. Edna and Helen could make women realise that a change is inevitable and possible by them. They could rewrite the "women" written by men and create a revolutionary impact in that age.

## Chapter-6

### Conclusion

Both Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are novels ahead of their time. They both give profound recognition into women's desire for freedom and independency beyond the social expectations at their respective periods. The portrayal of female protagonists in these novels, who dared to challenge the conventional norms and expectations laid upon them in search of individual autonomy and fulfillment shows the major need of the period. In *The Awakening* Chopin highlights the meaningless life led by women as machines in the Victorian era and how they get suppressed by the society if they tried to run away from those prescribed duties. Similarly, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne shows the struggles faced by women for choosing themselves and neglecting to live according to the traditional roles.

Edna and Helen were no ordinary women of their time, and the period was in need for such strong women among the majority who accepted all the injustices they had to face. Even though both the novels focus on the case study of 19<sup>th</sup> century, their perspective is completely post-modern, which makes them womanist works ahead of time. It wasn't easy for women to act against the social cultures they grew up in or break the cages built for them for a life time. They were totally objectified as men's property, being forced to betray their own identity and individuality. As they were treated like that from their early days itself, it was difficult for them to recognise the maltreatment did by the society. They were suppressed not only physically but also mentally and emotionally, which made them dumb against the conventions which eventually destroyed them.

In such a scenario, a very few women had the thought of changing this stereotypical life and challenge the power which controlled them from childhood. They

wanted to experience the world outside their cages, taste freedom and above all, they wanted to explore their own inner self. Even though the theory of womanism took time to evolve, these two protagonists and the authors who created them can be seen as early womanists of the century. They could pave the way for womanists and make an influence on womanist literature come thereafter. They were revolutionary, not through violence but art. They had to create a second thought in women about their present lives and a fear in the patriarchal powers on the reaction of women against their system. For such a movement, they had to risk their social status, individuality and their life itself.

Edna is a perfect example for women who rebelled with much courage and made a mark on the societal expectations of womanhood and still decided to end the journey of life due to the ugly face of the society. She hasn't failed but actually won by taking charge of her decisions on life. Moving towards the deep ocean to end her life, she remembers the night she swam far and scared of being unable to reach the shore. But in her last moments she wasn't scared and didn't look back, which shows her determination and courage to take control of her decisions. "How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious" (The Awakening 112), shows the sense of freedom she gains in the end. She feels reborn, opening eyes to an entirely new and unknown world. She finally feels free from the chains she had for her entire life and decides to go far away from the possessions upon her. She could create a way and courage for the women from coming generations, to break anything which tries to restrict her freedom or suppress her individuality.

Escaping from her abusive husband and living a life completely by her own shows the strong determination of Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Unlike other women, she was bold enough to save not only herself but her son too. The patriarchal nature of Victorian society was developed mainly by the way men were taught and

trained from their early days itself. Helen took a brave decision to initiate the destruction of such poisonous and contagious roots of this system. When she decided to leave Arthur, she was taking a huge responsibility of a boy who wasn't supposed to be like his father or other stereotypical men of Victorian period. Along with her need of freedom and independency, she wanted to make a change in the behavior and attitude of future men towards women, and develop a sense of kindness and humanity towards everything around. Even though she goes through a lot of judgments and slut shaming, she stays strong believing in her. She was a complete womanist who wanted to bring a change not only in herself but also the society around her.

When Edna wanted to focus on her empowerment and explore her individuality, Helen decided to change the roots of patriarchy for future women too. Both concerns were relevant to the times they lived as well as today. Edna followed the womanist approach of standing against the wrong traditional conventions in order to find herself. She was a typical womanist who loved nature, art and music to achieve serenity. Edna was different from other women around her as she was able to change her mindset and come outside the cubicle of restrictions to attain liberation. The family she grew up and the society she lived in never favored her desires or passions. So her struggle was not only with the society but also her trained mindset to obey the patriarchal rules. Life of women at that period were similar to the insects in a jar, not being able to come out of it even if the lid is open, due to the way they lived their entire life. Edna was asleep like every other women until she understood it is similar to being blind, and an awakening is necessary.

Helen, like Edna, loved the world outside her, till the moment she understood it was stagnant and contagious by patriarchy and injustice. She was innocent and delicate, just as the way men wanted women to be. When she was eventually introduced to the

terrifying face of patriarchy, a revolutionary instinct which was hidden for her entire life awakens. She was openly judged and disrespected for choosing herself, as society was afraid of women who discovered their manipulative and misleading nature. A massive character development can be seen in Helen, from a flower to fire, ready to face any kind of challenges came in front of her. She was kind and calm unlike the patriarchal powers around, which shows her strong determination towards the decisions she took. She was not only an empowered woman but also an empowered parent, who wasn't ready to create another slave of patriarchy.

Even though the theory of womanism is mainly based on the struggles of black women and the need of their empowerment, it is highly relatable to each and every woman irrespective of their class and race. Womanism stands for the rights of people without the barriers of gender. Both Edna and Helen reacted against the violation of equality for women, as the society failed to see them as basic human beings with same emotions and desires. Both of them loved art and used it to express themselves as a catharsis among the narrow minds of Victorian society. Beyond their class, race and colour of skin, they were caged souls longed for happiness and liberation. Womanism urged for the independence of women, not only from the physical barriers of societal norms but also the emotional constraints made by them over years. Edna and Helen could come out of that shell risking everything they had, which makes them the initial womanists in history.

“You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me. I won't be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife” (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 171). These words from Arthur gives much clarity to the way men are taught from their early age itself. They were trained to establish superiority and dominance over their wife or any other woman, rather than treating them as equals. They learnt it as the

truth of life and felt inferior by considering the needs, desires and opinions of women. Arthur trying to teach his son to be unkind and rough like a “man” makes them think that men are supposed to be rude and dominant while women, kind and passive. Helen foresaw the dangers of such a teaching and reversed the paths of learning by introducing her son to the beauty of nature, power of kindness and the importance of respecting all humans alike. Thus Anne Bronte could give the picture of a perfect womanist, who walked ahead of times, with a strong will.

“Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of fate” (The Awakening 17). Apart from restricting women to explore their passions and desires, they were forcefully pushed into the institution of marriage, to adjust and cope up with the needs and choices of another person. Running away from those obstructions and prescribed way of living made them social outcasts by degrading their identity. Edna was ready to lose everything she had when she understood that she owns nothing but her. She wasn’t ready to lose herself for a society which never actually valued her but used for advantage. By sticking on to her identity and individuality, over the conventions and norms make Edna a strong womanist.

Kate Chopin and Anne Bronte were two strong women who were brave enough to portray revolutionary women protagonists in an age of taboos and constraints. They used art as a medium to express the harsh realities of the period instead of romanticizing them. Even though the novels aren’t autobiographical, the protagonists Edna Pontellier and Helen Graham speak in the voices of Chopin and Bronte. They were revolutionary yet calm, with strong determination and souls on fire; being true womanists!

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