

Surreptitious, Suppression in Secluded Life

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Abstract

Is a girl child's character sketched in the family or in the society? This question gives scope for multiple answers and controversies. As we know life is full of mystery- if one is courageous enough to solve the riddles then history is created. To face the challenges in life there is an urge to possess foresight, fearlessness, firmness and fortitude. So, the inert qualities should be developed to face the external environment. A girl child is urged to face the challenges in life physically and mentally, if she is successful she is praised lest penalised with stringent rules. Hence she has to mould her skills making herself compassionate to understand the society. There is a need to make proper analysis in order to trace out the factors that play a pivotal role in building up the character of a girl child from birth to profession. I have taken for analysis Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* to find out the true factors that influence the mindset of a girl child during her life time.

Keywords: Suppression, Identity Crisis, Class-Consciousness

Introduction

In England during the early 19th century, both men and women were allowed to get education and work in factories but were denied equality. Men were given supremacy than women; this led to the difference in rights. A woman's private space is house where she is allowed to exercise her power in domestic matters. Apart from upper class and lower class, there arose a new class division where women were put in the second class or subordinate class. They ought to be a subservient woman who is good at cooking, stitching, housekeeping, supplying the domestic needs of the family and abiding the code of behaviour in the society. In the upper class, women do not work, but they are expected to stay at home and take lessons vis-à-vis on becoming a good wife before they get married. Their children are been taken care by the nurses, servants to help and the governess to teach them. Women are exhibited as an object of opulence,chutzpah and buoyancy.

A girl from the middle class is allowed to work as a governess for the rich ladies. They lag between the status of a family member or a servant. An educated woman is not allowed to compete with men in any field in the society. She is denied the rights to raise her voice, fight for her rights. It is the unwritten truth universally accepted during that period. The society in which a girl child is brought up decides what she has to do, and how to do it within the dimensions of religious and ethical norms. There were few opportunities available for middle class women and are forced to work for meagre salary. They are being pictured as completely vulnerable, ineffective, impotent creatures. Hence, women were generally expected to marry and perform household and motherly duties rather than seek formal education. Even women who were not successful in finding suitable husbands were generally expected to remain untutored, and take a position as childminder.

Anne Brontë, the youngest of the three Brontë sisters born in Yorkshire village to a poor clergyman on 19th Jan 1820. The financial condition of the family made her to choose the position of a governess in April 1839 with the Ingham family of Blake Hall, Mirfield, in Yorkshire. Being humiliated at service, Anne was forced to leave and join Robinson family of Thorp Green in May 1840. *Agnes Grey* the debut novel of Anne Brontë portrays the status of a woman during the Victorian period. Her keen observation, experience, annoyance, emotional starvation of governess life is apparently explored without taking sides. The author reveals the grievance, savagery, suppression and repression of a middle class woman in the 19th century.

In the novel *Agnes Grey*, the protagonist Agnes Grey was born as the youngest daughter of a poor country clergy man. Her mother is from a well versed family and on marriage with a poor parson she was denied the right to claim the family inheritance. Mary and Agnes were brought up in strict seclusion by their mother who educated her daughters. Financial loss in business hit the family like a thunderbolt. The family suffered consequently without proper food, clothes and so on. Mother a hard working lady rolled her shoulders to meet the family needs. Though Mary and Agnes were ready to assist her, she never allowed them to work. “ I was still a child in theirs; and my mother, like most active managing women, was not gifted with very active daughters: for this reason- that being so clever and diligent herself, she was never tempted to trust her affairs to a deputy, but on the contrary was willing to act and think for others as well as for number one; and whatever was the business in hand, she was apt to think that no one could do it so well as herself; so that whenever I offered to assist her, I received such an answer as – ‘ No, love, you cannot indeed- there’s nothing here you can do.’” (7) Being the youngest daughter, she was always treated as inefficient, incompetent to take any task and not allowing to use the faculties to exhibit the talents, powers in the family environment. So, the young Agnes without contrition always tried hard to win their confidence and affection. Finally she decided to unfold her wings, expressed her idea of becoming a governess to her family members. During that period a lady of middle class family had the only choice of becoming a governess to support the family. Agnes’s parents accepted her proposal with reluctance. “- Delightful task! To teach the young idea how to shoot! To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day!” (10)

Clustered Wings:

Agnes though born in a middle class family has attributed good culture and education from her mother that induced her to face the challenges of the hidden society. Agnes became a governess, teaching children in a private family at Wellwood House, some twenty miles away from her home. Mr.Boomfield’s family lived in a mansion of Wellwood. Her pupil were Master Tom Bloomfield, a well grown boy of seven, Mary Ann a tall girl around six years old and Fanny a very pretty little girl of four years old. Tom Bloomfield used his rocking-horse, dragged it creating a loud noise to draw the attention of Agnes and made her to watch how he would use his whip and spurs. Mary showed her doll and talked about her fine clothes. “Tom lifted his fist with a menacing gesture; she uttered a loud shrill scream, ran to the other side of me, and made a face at him.” (16) When Agnes tried to control his rude behaviour, Tom just exclaims that he is obliged to do so in order to keep her in order. While walking in the garden Agnes observed some bird traps, when she questioned Tom about its need, he just says “Different things. Sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean roast alive.” (17) Tom is being encouraged by his father to torture the innocent birds and sometimes silently he also enjoys watching his son pulling off the legs, wings and heads of sparrows. Uncle Robson praises Tom for his

action too. Mother says “its pity to kill the pretty singing birds, but the naughty sparrows, and mice and rats; I may do what I like with. So now, Miss Grey, you see it is not wicked.”(18).

Suppression:

On observing the actions of Tom, Agnes decided to enforce her right to teach him what is good and bad, but all her attempts and action were futile. Mrs.Bloomfield cautioned Agnes not to tell the defects of her children to anyone except her and what they had to learn and how they are to be managed. Agnes was totally denied to exercise her rights on her pupil. Mrs.Bloomfield’s company was always irksome to Agnes. Agnes was further instructed to nurse MaryAnn and sometimes contrived on her service, ordered when to walk, run or stand. The children weren’t afraid of their actions, neither the punishment of father nor the anger of mother hence parents bid them with the hope of reward. But poor Agnes couldn’t guide them by fear of anger, desire of approbation but is expected to keep them in order. Agnes applied her tactics to teach the children the moral values to make them good pupil but was imputed for their mischievous actions. Agnes was harassed, disappointed and finally dismissed with indignation. Her conscious alerted her that any change must be for the better, tutored by experience, longed to redeem her honour in the wide world.

On the 31st January Agnes was appointed as a governess in Horton Lodge to teach two young ladies and two young gentlemen. Rosalie was sixteen years old, a pretty, tall and slender, fair lovely girl. Right from the young age, the children had not been cared well by the nurses or taught by the governess. Because of constant remorse, scornfulness, often testy and capricious nature of governess made them to loss their temper. Miss Matilda Murry was a veritable hoyden, with dark complexion always tried hard to drive the governess off with her abusive words and actions. Miss Murray warned Agnes to keep her temper, to be mild and patient with the children, especially with the little Charles. She was instructed either to persuade or to make gentle remonstrance but not to hurt them on any occasion. “And make them as happy as you can, Miss Grey, and I dare say you will do very well.” (50) We can feel the mother’s concern for her children, the upper class attitude towards the other section of group i.e. commanding them to follow the rules laid especially for the governess but not for them. “...though they were at home surrounded by friends, and I am alien among strangers; and I did not yet know enough of the world, not to be considerably surprised at this anomaly.” (50)

Identity Crisis:

John, alias Master Murray was eleven years old, fine, stout, healthy boy, frank and good-natured, educated but now he was very rough, boisterous, unruly, unprincipled, untaught, unteachable for a governess under his mother’s eye. Master Charles was 10 years old small, pale, inactive and robust, pettish, coward, capricious, selfish, mischievous, malicious, the stubborn one who need to be handled with care but at times it was difficult to teach him without punishing, it was a high task for Agnes. Agnes smothered her pride and suppressed her indignation and decided to accept the things in submission until he is shifted to school. The children were all brought up in a comfort zone that made them to enjoy their life at the risk of others. They even never regret for what they have done to the others. Agnes’s was always crushed in the corner of the carriage that always makes her sick by the time they reach the church. They never maintain punctuality but order the others to maintain it. “...sometimes they would have tea at four; frequently, they would storm at the servants because it was not in precisely at five; when these orders were obeyed, by way of encouragement to punctuality, they would keep it on the table till seven or eight. ... I was told to be

ready precisely at six, and, having dressed in a hurry, came down to an empty room, and after waiting a long time in suspense, discovered that they had changed their minds, and were still in bed;” (55) All the efforts of Agnes to regulate their behaviour was neglected and despised her request. As a governess she felt degraded by the life, ashamed of submitting to so many indignations.

Class Consciousness:

During those days the upper class people often call for a ball and enjoy themselves in dancing, drinking- a platform to show off their prosperity either to choose a bride or bridegroom. Rosalie being smart, beautiful wishes to conquer the hearts of ten thousand, and break them all by selecting one who is high-born, rich indulgent husband whom around fifty ladies were dying to have. Rosalie made an errant flirtation with Mr.Hatfield, Mr.Weston and just crushed them on the earth when they made a proposal to marry her. “ And the novelty and harshness of the lesson you have taught me today, and the bitterness of being disappointed in the only quarter any appearance of asperity”(95) Mr.Hatfield received a severe blow, but his pride impelled him to conceal secrecy. Rosalie targeted Mr.Weston to be the next victim in the ball to induce through her beauty. “I don’t suppose he will ask me to marry him- not should I desire it: that would be rather too much presumption! But I intend him to feel my power.” (106)

A woman who is fair and amiable is praised by everyone, especially for her beauty by the bulk of mankind, on the other hand if she has a disagreeable personality she is inveighed as greatest crime; on the other hand if a woman is plain and good with retired manners and secluded life none of them knows her except her immediate connections. But they try to dispose unfavourable opinions of her mind because of their instinctive dislike nature and vice versa. Rosalie who is beautiful and attractive tried to seduce the young men, later deceive and hurt the men too were falling for her beauty. Excessive vanity, drunkenness, enslaves the faculties and perverts the feelings of others. Agnes the woman in solitude has a liking for Mr.Weston, but always tried to hide her feelings from him. Rosalie marries a rich man Sir Thomas Ashby, but life turns to be a distress for her when she couldn’t seek pleasure in richness.

Conclusion:

Life of a person takes different dimensions; sometimes happiness filled with ecstasy, misery with hatred or a bed of roses. It depends upon the perspectives, culture and education that inbuilt the character. Parents play a crucial role in designing a part of the child’s life with proper guidance, support, and motivation like a caterpillar in the cocoon. With the knowledge and wisdom they try to explore the world like a butterfly with colourful wings. Agnes was taken care well by her parents, guided, supported, educated with moral principles whereas Rosalie, Matilda they weren’t been monitored properly by their parents rather left adrift in the world with the label of richness. They always used to take the advantage of their freedom and deceit others. Master Tom Bloomfield and his sisters were taught how to exhibit their supremacy in hurting others especially the lower creatures by their parents. The children were taught to suppress the powerless and weak creatures. Through these characters analysis one can find out that the real growth and development of a child either boy or a girl starts from home and society is the place that accepts or welcomes the chance.

Reference:

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