

## Dissecting Benevolent Sexism in the Victorian Novel *Jane Eyre*: A Study of Gender and Power through the Lens of Ambivalent Sexism



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**ABSTRACT:** This research aims to find out how benevolent sexist attitude is depicted in the Victorian novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. The research incorporates the Ambivalent Sexism Theory that provides a theoretical framework for finding out the benevolent sexist attitude by exploring the narratives, the characters, the relationships and interactions between the characters throughout the novels. The study employs a Qualitative Research Methodology to conduct the research. The necessary data are collected from textbooks, journals, articles, dissertations etc. The study develops a code scheming that focuses on the narratives and interactions between the characters that reveals the benevolent sexist notions. The study will analyse the power dynamics, gender roles, romantic relationships and marriages, social constraints and double standards present in the novel. The result of the study will help to understand the complex nature of power dynamics between men and women in the society. It will also reveal how men and women practice this subtle kind of sexist notions that limits the agency of women within the social construct. It will inspire the future researchers to work on this subtle form of sexism to understand its very nature and the consequences it has on the wider social landscape.

**KEYWORDS:** Ambivalent Sexism Theory, Benevolent Sexist Attitude, Representation of Women, Victorian Era, Gender Roles.

### INTRODUCTION

Victorian Literature has represented a huge number of female characters within the social context of that time. This study will focus on Charlotte Bronte's depiction of the female characters, their positions in the society, their relationships and interactions with other characters to understand the benevolent sexist attitudes in *Jane Eyre*. The Ambivalent Sexism Theory is the crucial theme in understanding the benevolent sexist nature that might be seen as positive and beneficial attitude towards women but ultimately confines women within the social expectations and their traditional gender roles. The paper will explore the concept of romantic relationship and marriage illustrated in the novel to show how men and women choose their partners in marriage and how their idea of marriage reinforces benevolent sexist attitude towards women. The research will also explore the benevolent sexist attitude of men and women, separately, where men with their expectations from women and women adhering to the traditional norms practice this subtle form of sexism consciously or unconsciously. The paper will also find out such female characters who defy the traditional roles and stand against the sexist attitude and how they deal with such sexist notions imposed upon them. While exploring the texts, the study will focus on the power dynamics portrayed by the author to understand their view of the Victorian society and her navigation of the benevolent sexist attitude of that time. The study will explore the narratives, keeping the cultural and historical context of the Victorian era in mind, to understand how the social construct systematically exploits women's freedom of choice and dignity in a patriarchal world. It is beyond saying that the complex nature of benevolent sexism will provide a rich understanding of women's position in the world. Victorian Novels provide a rich illustration of the social conditions of that era. The Victorian society witnessed a radical transformation in the lifestyle and beliefs of people. The female novelists like Charlotte Bronte tried to show the experiences of women in this social transformation through their portrayal of female characters. Though industrial revolution was at its peak and women were still expected of their traditional roles. Very few job opportunities were available to the women. Most of the times they are expected to achieve their domestic role and, in some cases, they were assigned with the role of a governess. Moreover, the social prejudices about inter-class marriage, men and women's contribution in marriage, certain standards and decorum related to women's suitability in marriage and society were prevalent in the Victorian society.

This research aims to explore and point out the benevolent sexist attitude prevalent in the Victorian Society. While it will explore such subtle sort of sexism it will simultaneously touch on the historical and cultural context of the Victorian society. This research

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will be able to address the social prejudices imposed upon women and how women accepted or rejected those prejudices. The research will also be able to understand the respected novelist's stand regarding such sexist notions.

Victorian era has marked a significant change in the evolution of the female characters with its diverse narratives and varied representation of women in a fast-growing culture. While the research will sort out the benevolent sexist attitude of that particular era to examine its consequences, it will also provide a lens through which the analysis of the presence and nature of the benevolent sexism in our contemporary time will be possible.

Victorian Literature is believed to be rich with its social depiction of that era. The research will explore the female characters and their position in the society with the theoretical lens of "Ambivalent Sexism" by Glick and Fiske(1998). The research will analyze the subtle nature of benevolent sexism which confines women within their traditional role imposed by the society. The Victorian female characters are provided with limited agency and freedom of choice through a systematic exploitation which hides behind the patronizing or paternalist attitude, complementary remarks on their traditional roles, and reliance on heterosexual intimacy maintained by the patriarchal society. The research will be able to explain why and how such notions prevail in the society despite the women's realization and constant demand of their equal rights. While the study will engage with the novel *Jane Eyre*, its outcome will enhance readers' knowledge about the social prejudices that exist till now.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Edwin Whipple, in *The North American Review*, critiqued *Jane Eyre* for its focus on "female peculiarities". He also includes detailed descriptions of dresses and "superficial refinements of feeling" (95). The critiques reflect 19th-century skepticism toward women writers and their ability to address profound themes. Scholars such as Wang Guofu highlight *Jane Eyre* as a transformative work which presents a "new conception of women as heroines of vital strength and passionate feelings" (225). Similarly, Zheng Kelu argues that Jane embodies "ahead-of-age female consciousness," directly challenging the patriarchal authority of Victorian society (167).

Charlotte Brontë's depiction of male characters highlights the benevolent sexism pervasive in Victorian gender norms. For instance, Mr. Rochester's characterization of Jane as "my sympathy—my better self—my good angel" reflects an ostensibly positive but reductive view of women as moral guides (Brontë 480). His affection for Jane is entangled with a need to dominate and control her, as seen in his attempts to deceive her about Bertha Mason and his insistence on disguising Jane's plainness with fine clothing. Similarly, St. John Rivers's marriage proposal is another instance of benevolent sexism. His declaration, "I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service," positions Jane not as a partner but as a tool for his religious ambitions (613). These attitudes reinforce societal expectations that confine women to subordinate roles under the guise of admiration or duty. Ambivalent Sexism Theory, as described by Ruth Gaunt, offers a framework for analyzing gender dynamics in literature. The theory distinguishes between hostile sexism, which includes overtly negative attitudes toward women, and benevolent sexism, which idealizes women as nurturing but dependent beings (30–31). Wei Chen emphasizes that benevolent sexism preserves inequality by cloaking restrictive gender roles in seemingly positive attitudes, such as admiration and protective paternalism (2).

In *Jane Eyre*, benevolent sexism manifests in the way male characters, particularly Rochester and St. John, view Jane. Rochester's treatment of Jane fluctuates between affection and condescension, as he often positions himself as her protector and guide. His insistence on controlling Jane's circumstances, including his attempt to manipulate her emotions during his proposal, reflects an underlying belief in her dependence on his authority. St. John's proposal, while framed as a partnership in service to God, denies Jane's autonomy and seeks to subsume her identity into his own goals. These examples illustrate how benevolent sexism operates as a subtle but pervasive force, limiting female agency while maintaining the appearance of respect or admiration.

### **Research Questions**

- How do the female novelist Charlotte Brontë illustrate the idea of marriage and romantic relationship in the context of Victorian era that reinforce the notions of benevolent sexist attitude?
- How do the male and female characters reveal their benevolent sexist attitude that limits the agency and freedom of choice of women in the novels?

### **Research Objectives**

- To explore Brontë's illustration of the idea of marriage and romantic relationship in the context of Victorian era that reinforces the notions of benevolent sexist attitude.
- To analyze how the male and female characters reveal their benevolent sexist attitude that limits the agency and freedom of choice of women in the novels.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research adopts the Ambivalent Sexism Theory as the theoretical framework which will be essential to address the benevolent sexism represented in the Victorian novel *Jane Eyre*.

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Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske's "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism" (1996) provides an insight into the subtle forms of benevolent sexism namely, the patronizing and protective paternalist attitude towards women by men, the reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles by complementary remarks and the heterosexual intimacy between men and women that indicates men and women are incomplete without each other. The idea that men must play a protective role towards women and provide for them reinforces the traditional power dynamics. Similarly, encouraging women to follow their traditional role to get recognized and accepted by the society limits women's freedom of choice. The belief in heterosexual intimacy suggests that women are incomplete without their male partners and must maintain a traditional relationship for their own happiness. The study with the help of this theoretical framework will be able to identify the elements of benevolent sexism throughout the novel. While exploring the elements of benevolent sexism present in the texts the study will focus on the marital and romantic relations of the female characters. It will also focus on the benevolent sexist attitude present in both male and female characters of the novels.

The study also includes the concept of feminism. The concept of feminism has developed through four stages. The first wave lasts from 1830-1920, with two certain indicative movements – the suffragette (women's desire for getting voting rights) and another one is civil rights movement. After four decades with the initiative of second movement it indicates connection of group of women, deeper relationship with political debates. Approximately inaugurated in 1992 third world feminism emphasizes on individuality, identity of women and combined rebellion. And the fourth world feminism indicates the existing in all the three movements' concepts, inquiries into freedom, equality and empowerment. Moreover, Feminism itself being a political stance imposes on gender as a subject of analysis with a greater reflection on cultural practices and as a platform alongside demands equality, rights and justice. It idealizes that the roles of gender are predefined and women are expected to fit into these roles for instance keeping contributions as 'mother' or 'daughter' which are not usual but social have to be trained so well with a view to thinking, talking and acting in particular ways (Ghoulali and Abdeldjoud 15). Feminism tries best to identify the dimensions of culture of the women's material life. The major theoretical and political concern of it is: the disparities exist between a man and a woman, a social creation, created by men, to retain power visible in religion, the family, the knowledge system are all cultural 'structures' enable the unending reinforcement of inequality. To establish the effective ways of masculine power they do not seem oppressive. Ideologically cultural structures provide or set a system of beliefs that tries to make women's luck destined to be subjugated (Nayar 83-84). The feminist concept will help to understand women's role and limitation in the novels while marking their struggle against the patriarchal society. It will also help to analyze how women of the novels try to assert their agency. Methodology

The study has adopted a Qualitative Research Method to conduct the research in a systematic and effective way. The primary data are collected from the main texts by a thorough reading focusing on the identification of benevolent sexist elements. The secondary data are collected from existing journals, articles, books, dissertations available online. The data analysis methods include textual analysis and content analysis. The data has been analyzed through a logical interpretation with attempt to see the "what" and "how" of women's position in both the novels. The research is explorative in nature. Exploratory research is an approach to gain new insights by exploring a new area that has not been explored before. The study is also aware of the ethical considerations which have allowed the researchers to collect the data from primary sources. The benevolent sexist undercurrents in the theme of marriage. Victorian era's gender roles are depicted in the expectations of the characters. This also influences the portrayal of relationship in *Jane Eyre*. The novel engages with the benevolent sexism theory through the presentation of power imbalances, expectations and the complexities inherent in marital relationships.

### **The Theme of Marriage in Locating Benevolent Sexism:**

Marriage in *Jane Eyre* is the depiction of the prevailing societal norms of Victorian era. Marriage, in the novel, is a reflecting element of benevolent sexism. The marital expectations are presented in the novel portrays a complex interplay of gender roles, power dynamics and societal expectations. It makes the theme of marriage a rich ground for exploring benevolent sexism theory. The idea of marriage is introduced in chapters 27 and 28 through Mr. Rochester's courting of Jane. Mr. Rochester's benevolent sexist attitude is prevalent when he says to Jane, "I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thorn field orchard." (678) Here, Rochester presents himself as broken with a hope that marriage to Jane will bring him emotional recovery. In chapter 29, Jane encounters St. John Rivers. Rivers' proposal adds another layer to the theme. His marriage proposal is rooted in benevolent sexism. He views Jane primarily as a suitable companion for his missionary endeavors, rather than an individual. He says, "I claim you- not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service". (613). In Chapter 30, Jane expresses her feelings for Rochester. Here, the theme of marriage becomes a battleground between love and societal expectations. Rochester's request, "Jane be still; don't struggle so like a wild, frantic bird," symbolizes the benevolent sexist attitude of his towards Jane. In this extract, his desire for Jane conforms to his vision of a domestic and subservient wife.

In chapters 31 and 32, The revelation of Rochester and Bartha's marriage creates more complexity in the theme of marriage. Rochester's desperation for Jane, despite his compromised state, is marked with benevolent sexist attitude. He says to Jane, "You are my sympathy- my better self- my good angel." (480) In this statement he shows Jane as a moral guide rather than an equal partner. Jane's encounter with St. John's sisters in chapters 33 and 34. This accentuates the societal expectations implanted with

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marriage. Diana and Mary Rivers are supportive but deep down they embody benevolent sexism by adhering to traditional gender roles. Mary states, “We lifted our heads and hearts from the dust.” It signifies the societal expectation that women should endure torture for the greater moral good within marriage. In chapters 35 and 36, the theme of marriage takes a new turn. Jane returns to physically impaired Rochester. Here, in this incident benevolent sexism is evident in Rochester’s acceptance of his dependence on Jane. He states, “I cannot get at you, nor even so much as put out my hand towards you.” Jane’s role of caretaker mirrors societal expectations imposed on women. Their role is to provide emotional and physical support in marriage.

In chapters 37 and 38, the theme of marriage reaches to its climax with the union of Jane and Rochester. Rochester declares, “I am a free human being with an independent will.” (386) This statement challenges traditional gender roles but the underlying benevolent sexist attitude remains as he relies on Jane for emotional support. Victorian era’s gender roles are depicted in the expectations of the characters. This also influences the portrayal of relationship in *Jane Eyre*. The novel engages with the benevolent sexism theory through the presentation of power imbalances, expectations and the complexities inherent in marital relationships.

### Male characters’ benevolent sexist attitudes

In the novel *Jane Eyre*, benevolent sexism is evident in the attitude of Mr. Rochester towards Jane. In spite of the caring manner, Rochester’s actions and selection of words reflect the societal practices of the time. His actions define the society’s treatment of women. Men are often in paternalistic role over women in the Victorian society. In chapter 27, Rochester expresses his protective instincts towards Jane by asking, “You examine me, Miss Eyre...Do you think me handsome?”(200). Here, Rochester is not asking for Jane’s opinion on his appearance, rather asserting his authority in the power dynamics between them. This question of his refers to the fact that he expects her judgment align with his desired perception. In chapter 28, Rochester says, “I shall keep only to you, so long as you and I live; you shall go into the parlour with Bessie now, and play with her.” (436) Here his benevolent sexist attitude is prevalent. Rochester intend to keep Jane close is hidden in these words of care. It reinforces the traditional gender roles of the time, where women are a dependent creature on male, who are in need of male protection. Charlotte Brontë through the character of Jane, subtly questions the notions of benevolent sexism. She portrayed Jane as a strong and independent woman who desires equality in her relationship with Rochester. In the novel, the power dynamics ingrained in the character’s relationship are made clear by Rochester’s tone and word choice. Brontë’s use of expressive phrases like, “I shall keep only to you” and “you shall go into the parlour” (463) depict Rochester’s power over Jane and highlight how commonplace benevolent sexism is. In chapter 29, the events of Jane’s briefly leaving Thornfield and returning back to it. In this chapter Rochester’s protective tendencies come to the fore. He says, “I thought I could have done some good.” (323) Here, Rochester takes on the persona of the guardian. He suggests that Jane is in need of his advice and assistance. This attitude highlights his patriarchal mentality that males had towards women in Victorian era. In chapter 30, more vivid example of Rochester’s benevolent sexist nature. Rochester says, “You are my sympathy-my better self-my good angel.” (480) He says it in reference to Jane’s destiny. This statement shows that he considers Jane as a reflection of himself, rather than as a separate person. This traditional mindset of Rochester weakens Jane’s autonomy. It also upholds the social norms that women should get their sense of self and purpose from their relationships with men. By incorporating these incidents into the story, Brontë critiques the gender roles that prevailed in Victorian era. Focusing on all these incidents she highlighted the condescending and restrictive aspect of benevolent sexism and questions the idea that is a real form of care through Jane’s character. Rochester’s referring to Jane as his “good angel”, highlights the underlying power struggles in their affair. These portray the social norms of viewing women’s reliance on male. In chapter 31 Rochester’s dependence on Jane is made clear. He asks Jane, “You are my little friend, are you not?” The intention of this statement is to know that it emphasizes on the power dynamics between them, though it expresses affection. Here, actually by calling Jane “little friend” he highlighted Jane’s role as a career instead of an equal partner. In chapter 32, this power dynamics are enhanced in Rochester’s statements. He states, “My bride is here....because my equal is here.” (387). Here, he talks about equality but actually it refers to the notion that Jane’s primary function is as a supporter and caregiver. This reflects the benevolent sexist attitude of the era. The society demanded that women give up their independence to ensure the welfare of men.

In these chapters, Brontë overthrows the prevalent gender role of the era. She gives Jane a strong sense of agency and strength. But, Rochester’s dependence on Jane for emotional support and care reflects benevolent sexist attitudes.

Jane’s sacrifices are acknowledged by Rochester in chapter 33. He says, “You did right to hold fast to each other.” (421) Here, he recognises Jane’s strength. But, there is an underlying concept that is the consideration of their connection is based on Jane’s loyalty and her adherence to society’s expectations. This showcases the idea of women as they find their purpose through their commitment to men. In chapter 34, Rochester says, “I am a free human being with an independent will.”(386) Here, his earlier manner has changed to one recognition for Jane’s independence. But, in this chapter, by highlighting Jane’s nurturing role, the overall context supports the idea of benevolent sexism. In chapter 35, Rochester’s weakness as a major theme. He says, “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me.” (386) Here, the use of metaphor “bird” and “net” conveys a desire for independence. It also suggests a certain amount of entanglement. In this quote there are still limitations on Rochester’s autonomy though he tried to express his agency. Rochester considers Jane important as he says, “You are my sympathy-my better self- my good angel.”(480). Here, his statement is sentimental as it conveys affection. But, it embodies a kind of benevolent sexism because it depicts Jane as an emotional support system and



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moral advisor rather than as an equal partner. In chapter 37, Rochester's physical limitations as he talks about it. It shows how vulnerable he is. Rochester states, "I cannot get at you, nor even so much as put out my hand towards you." (510). This act of helplessness of Rochester's depicts benevolent sexist attitude. He expects care and support from Jane as she is the carer but in a kind and affectionate manner. Rochester describes Jane's significance in his life by saying, "You are my life-my better life." (644). This statement of his is complete example of benevolent sexism. Rochester describes his dependency on Jane and hopes for her emotional support but this also confines Jane to the traditional gender role that women is expected to fulfil their partners' emotional needs. His acceptance of his weakness and his reliance on Jane, along with his romanticized portrayal of Jane as his "better life", shows his love and affection for Jane. But, it also displays the power dynamic in which Jane's value is based on her capacity of caregiving.

### Female characters benevolent sexist attitudes

In *Jane Eyre* female characters show benevolent sexist attitude towards Jane, the protagonist of the novel. In the novel, the expectations of society places on Jane and Blanche Ingram's character are two prominent examples. In chapter 27, Blanche Ingram represents the expectations of society for a conventional, submissive woman. Rochester compares Jane with Ingram by saying, "Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling." (282) His statement suggests that Blanche is less intimidating because she complies with society's ideal of a subservient woman. This is an example of benevolent sexism. In chapter 28, this benevolent sexism is further enhanced. Blanche is portrayed as an object of admiration because of her beauty and achievements fits to the Victorian ideal of a "lady". The readers notice that this idea supports that women were appreciated more for their outward appearance than for their intelligence. In chapter 29, it is witnessed that, Jane defies social norms as an independent, self-assured woman, though she does not commit the act of benevolent sexism. She makes it clear that she will not submit to authority by saying "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me." (386). Her statement shows her refusal to accept the traditional gender norms of society. Tension arises from Jane's independence in chapter 30. It goes on to examine the power dynamics. Rochester states, "You-you strange-you almost unearthly thing!" (388) Here, he shows his affection to Jane and it seems like Jane's assertiveness is a strangeness he needs to accept.

In these chapter Jane's defiance of social conventions to the benevolent sexist attitudes thrust upon women who follow the norms of society. Jane is portrayed as a character who challenges the notion that woman's value should be determined only by her adherence to prescribed roles. In chapter 31, Diana and Mary Rivers show that they are kind. Diana states, "We have tried to do right, and do you think you have done right?" (411) They show that they are concerned for Jane's welfare but actually they consider that women should uphold moral principles and look to other people for approval. In chapter 32, the relationships between these characters are still being explored. Jane states about her relationship with the Rivers sisters, "They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them." (467). This statement emphasizes on empathy and emotional connection between them. This also suggests that women are expected to bond over similar experiences and feelings. In chapter 33, Diana and Mary's traditional perspective on gender roles are exposed through their conversation with Jane. Diana says, "We lifted our heads and hearts from the dust, and God gave us strength to endure the ordeal of being dressed in a clean linen." (576) In this statement, their traditional view towards gender roles. This line creates a feeling of moral superiority and the notion that living up to social norms, even if they are oppressive, is virtuous endeavor.

In chapter 34, Diana and Mary praises Jane's strength, "She sees how much she may do and dares how little." (512) This statement is a flattering one. This actually means that women should not cross the boundaries created by the patriarchal society. This statement fits perfectly as an example of benevolent sexism. Brontë explores the kindhearted sexist beliefs of the characters like Diana and Mary Rivers in these chapters. They genuinely care about Jane but their belief on traditional gender role complicates the portrayal of women in the novel. In later chapters they continue their benevolent sexist attitudes. As in chapter 35, Mary says to Jane, "You are not, perhaps, aware that I am your namesake." (585). This statement focus on the shared traits between them and is a reflection of the charitable idea that women should support and look out for one another. In chapter 36, Jane and Rosamond Oliver's interact with each other. Though Rosamond seems to be an independent and wealthy woman, she recognizes the expectations of society. Rosamond says, "I am not a beggar; any more than yourself or your young ladies." (618) Her bold character as she shows the social pressure on women to affirm their self-sufficiency by asserting her social standing and distancing herself from the idea of dependency. In chapter 37, the readers are introduced with Hannah, a worker for St. John Rivers. Hannah remarks, "He is a parson." (657). This statement of admiration betrays a benevolent sexist mindset in which women are expected to maintain conventional norms of a desirable partner of men. In chapter 38, the care of Diana and Mary towards Jane continues. Diana says, "We cannot go on living together in the same house any longer." (695) Their decision to break up with Jane is because of their concern of her wellbeing. It highlights the social norm that women should put their emotional relationships first. In these chapters, Charlotte Brontë tactfully portrays the societal expectations placed on women to follow the traditional gender roles. The sincere care and support of the female characters to each other add to the complexity of female relationships in the novel. Their traditional views on gender are disguised under their care which portrays their benevolent sexist nature.

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## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The research has found the ways the benevolent sexist attitude is depicted towards female characters and how they navigate and react to such sexist notions. In *Pride and Prejudice* marriage plays a significant role in displaying that benevolent sexism is rooted within the social construct. Among women characters of *Jane Eyre*, Jane is the only character who is totally ambiguous due to her mixture of complexities. She is the cause of her own defiled identity. In some cases, she is supposed to obey him, but in some other cases she seems her as strong, vigilant, and perfect one for which she should away from considering love and affection but responsibilities as women when he is in need of her. Apart from her, Adele, and Mrs. Fairfax are the best-suited portrayal of Victorian women who through their thoughts, senses, and ideologies hold on to what men expect from them. They could not see themselves or are seen out of biologically defined roles of women. Mr Rochester is the only dominative masculinity at Thornfield house who exhibits how strong his positions within and outside his married life. His manpower over Jane outside his married life delineates being an owner he is all in all in every respect of his life in controlling Jane psychologically and emotionally. His broken marriage with Celine Varens implies the importance of marriage to Victorian women to obey the roles of mothers, daughters and wives to be domestic being confined within four walls. As long as they perform the roles, they are well treated by societies, conventions, and cultures.

In conclusion, this research has provided with an extensive insight of the benevolent sexist attitudes towards female characters as depicted in *Jane Eyre*. Benevolent Sexism as a subtle form of sexism manipulates the female characters of the novels into adopting the traditional gender roles. The female novelists Charlotte Bronte tried to illustrate how the society with its benevolent sexist attitude creates boundaries for female agency and limits women's freedom of choice. The study has shown that almost every male character practice benevolent sexist attitude towards the female characters by taking on the roles of their provider and protector. The society encourages the female characters to adhere to the social norms to be accepted by all. On the other hands, the female characters fall prey to the benevolent sexism due to their desire to be recognized or accepted in the society. Institutions like marriage and the romantic relationship are also stained with benevolent sexist attitude where marriage is often seen as a way of survival for women and romantic relationships are unequal in terms of contribution as women are expected to show more affection and gratitude in their relationships. However, characters like *Jane Eyre* show an agency by going against the societal expectations and rejecting the traditional roles that limit their freedom of choice. But with the benevolent sexist attitude rooted deep in the social structure they can't completely escape such sexism. The findings of the research will contribute to the existing knowledge of literary and social field, inspiring more thorough research for the elimination of such kind of sexism towards women.

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