CHAPTER II

QUEST
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Only those who are chaste and firm in thought, word and deed, with a fixity of purpose in life, and have a strong will, make a quest to ultimately discover and realize the best in them that God gave them. The road they travel along is long and hard, but at the end they reach the grail of peace. It was in this spirit that the Brontë sisters did never ever cease to make efforts, one after another, till the quest they had committed themselves to, finally identified their real vocation of writing which alone could – and really did – give them peace and joy, fame and fortune.

The sisters lived in a milieu when women in general did not enjoy the same privilege as men. Women had limited chance and avenue to develop themselves. The Victorian society was a patriarchal and male-dominated society but in such a society the sisters struggled to be independent and self-reliant women. The indomitable spirit in them gave them strength and courage to search for a meaningful life, and as such, they had to commit themselves to their quest through thick and thin.

In the early Victorian era, there were no proper educational institutions for girls. The few ones which existed could not give them more than the basic education. The popular notion prevalent was that a woman’s place was her
home and she was expected to be “the angel in the house.”⁴¹ Women as a result were poor victims of the society, for they could not see anything beyond their homes and family life. It was only in 1880 “that the women were for the first time allowed to take degrees at the university of London, women colleges were established at Cambridge and Oxford in 1869 and 1879 respectively, but women could not take degrees at either university until 1920-21.”²²

But until such a time came the English society was being governed by what could be called an oppressive patriarchy which denied women inroads into the complacently male-dominated literary culture. The cruel patriarchy would also suggest that marriage should be the only profession for women, and the unmarried ones should depend on their relatives. All that they could be allowed to do in this world was contained within the duties of a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother. They were viewed as creatures devoid of independent dignity, intellectual self-respect, and moral autonomy. But as the social and moral climate changed, within the domestic restraints and responsibilities imposed on women, literary interests were not to be forbidden any longer, but inevitably had to take only a second place in their life. But if they aspired after identity and self-hood, there would arise other problems and inhibitions. But with the Brontë sisters the story was to be different, for consciously or unconsciously the sisters seem to have been influenced by what Mary Wollstonecraft had said in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She challenged the traditional notion that women as an inferior species (to men)
exist only to please men, and therefore she demanded that “women should receive the same treatment as men in education, work opportunities and politics, and that the same moral standard be applied to both sexes.” But it took some time for such opportunities to come in the life of women in general.

So while most women were deprived of education, the sisters were fortunate enough to have a father who was highly qualified and was enthusiastic to give proper education to his children. In 1823, Patrick sent two of his eldest children Maria and Elizabeth to Crofton School but “the fees proved to be beyond Mr. Brontë’s means; and they were withdrawn after a few months.” They were shifted to a semi-charitable Boarding School for Clergymen’s daughters at Cowan Bridge. Here he admitted four of his daughters but the change of the school proved to be fatal as it led to the death of Maria and Elizabeth. Charlotte was a very small girl at the time but she could never forget the bitter experience. In her novel *Jane Eyre*, she recreates this experience. Cowan Bridge is projected as Lowood and her sister Maria as Helen Burns, and Charlotte Brontë speaks about the miserable condition of her sisters.

The remaining children were brought home and Patrick decided to give them home education, where he and aunt Elizabeth Branwell became the teachers. Though it was an informal education, it was a complete and all-round education. Patrick taught them “History, Geography, Grammar and Scripture”
and to his only son Branwell he also taught “Greek and Latin.” Miss Branwell took extra care for the girls and “taught them to be good housewives and needle women.” The children were happy in each other’s company at home and enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere of home. The unique experience they enjoyed was the love of their father who “treated his children as equals, allowing them unrestricted access to his library and discussing with them his literary and political interest.” This was an immense blessing to the children. They grew up to be extra-ordinary children and were very observant and receptive of what they read, heard and saw.

The need for formal education for his children was awakened in Patrick during his serious sickness in 1830, and he became anxious for the future of his children, “aged from fourteen downwards, if he died.” He hardly knew what destiny had in store for them. It was only an irony of fate that the old father outlived the children who died young. But as the circumstances then demanded he once again decided to send them to schools for formal education.

Charlotte went to Roe Head at Mirfield Moor for schooling in 1831. Unlike Cowan Bridge it was a comfortable place. Here, she enjoyed the friendship of her friends and the Headmistress. During this time an arrangement was also made for Branwell to go to London to join the Royal Academy School of Arts. Branwell went to London and explored the institution as well as the city but the grandeur of the institution and place
instead of giving him inspiration, disheartened him and he returned to Haworth vanquished. Charlotte remained in Miss Woller's school. She was an industrious girl and she excelled in her studies and at the end of her first half term she "bore of three main prizes."9

Later, Charlotte joined the same school as a teacher. She took Emily with her for education, but Emily was too homesick to stay, so she was sent home, and in her place Anne joined the school, where she stayed for "over two years."10

Having received the basic education the sisters now wanted to try their luck in search of jobs. While higher class women kept themselves away from employment, women belonging to the middle-class and lower ranks had to work hard in order to support themselves, and so the sisters also could not be immune from the harsh reality of life. Marriage was regarded as an option for a comfortable and secure life, for it meant "release from the threat of poverty or, at worst, a sharing of burdens."11 But marriage for the Bronte sisters could not be accepted as profession.

Moreover, the sisters were destined to lead a single and a lonely life. For Emily Bronte "there is no indication of her falling in love with anyone. Moreover there is no sign that, merely lacking the opportunity of meeting a man, she did not fall in love."12 As for Anne Bronte the sudden death of
William Weightman shattered her dreams of marriage and family life. Charlotte Brontë, on the other hand, got three proposals before she finally married Nicholas Arthur Bell, but she had rejected all the three because ‘marriage’ to her was not merely an escape and “she had already closed the door on marriage not founded on a tested affinity of mind and heart.”\(^{13}\) She behaved like Jane Eyre who rejected St. John, seeing in him the dangers of highly spiritual but conventional religious and moral attitudes, who sought for social approval rather than God’s approval. During the prime of her life the prospect of marriage seemed to be dim. She expresses sadly:

Life and marriage I have known:
   Things that seemed so bright,
   But now utterly has flown
   Every ray of light.

When my childhood’s hopes were fled,
   Brighter hopes arose;
   Now the last is vanished
   It set in clouds of woes.\(^{14}\)

Like any other normal human being Charlotte and Anne wished for love, marriage and a family life. Charlotte had often contemplated marriage but her dreams and wish seemed to have disappeared and left her sad and dejected. We should not forget that “both Anne and Charlotte were at various times interested in men as potential-husbands. Both fell in love, both pined for the
return of love from the men concerned...love as known to Anne and Charlotte included the elements of marriage, sex, companionship, children, womanly status and many others, combined as one emotion — love, and as one desire — to be loved in like manner.”

Anne Brontë genuinely loved William Weightman. She unmask her love for him in her poem ‘Self – Congratulation’. Weightman came to Haworth in August 1839 and remained there till his death on September 6, 1842. Through the voice of Olivia Vernon, Anne introspects and explores herself;

I’ve noticed many a youthful form,
   Upon whose changeful face
The inmost workings of the soul
   The gazer well might trace;
The speaking eye, the changing lip,
   The ready blushing cheek,
The smiling, or beclouded brow,
   Their different feelings speak.

Anne Brontë speaks like a psychologist. She could read human nature by observing the expressions indicated on the face of a person. This way she could bring out the thoughts and mind of an individual:

But, thank God! You might gaze on mine
For hours, and never know
The secret changes of my soul
From joy to keenest woe.
Last night, as we sat round the fire,
Conversing merrily.
We heard, without, approaching steps
Of one well known to me!

And yet she would maintain her emotional equilibrium:

There was no trembling in my voice,
No blush upon my cheek,
No lustrous sparkle in my eyes,
Of hope, or joy, to speak;
But, oh! my spirit burned within,
My heart beat full and fast!
He came not nigh – he went away –
And then my joy was past.

And as a woman she knew how to keep her feelings to herself:

And yet my comrades marked it not:
My voice was still the same;
They saw me smile, and o’er my face
No signs of sadness came.
They little know my hidden thoughts;
And they will never know
The aching anguish of my heart,
The bitter, burning woe!\textsuperscript{16}

These lines, no doubt, speak about her secret love for someone. Anne Brontë could conceal her feelings and emotions without allowing any suspicion from anyone. She appears calm and cool on the surface but deep inside her, her heart is filled with ‘aching anguish’ and ‘bitter burning woe’. She bears all these feelings silently and quietly. Her love for Weightman is explicit. Like Charlotte Brontë who created Frances and Jane in her fiction, Anne Brontë also expresses her wish for marriage and family life in ‘Dreams’.

While on my lonely couch I lie,
   I seldom fell myself alone,
For fancy fills my dreaming eye
   With scenes and pleasure of its own.

Anne treasures imagination and allows it to transport her to a different world, different from the real world, where she is a sufferer. She enjoys the bliss of this experience:

Then I may cherish at my breast
   An infant form beloved and fair;
May smile and soothe it into rest,
   With all on mother’s fondest care.

How sweet to feel its helpless form
   Depending this on me alone.
And still I hold it safe and warm
What bliss to think it is my own!

Anne Brontë imagines that she is married and is a mother. She speaks about the joy of motherhood, but unfortunately she could not fulfill this wish in her actual life. In the last two concluding stanza she expresses her despair:

But then to wake and find it flown,
The dreams of happiness destroyed;
To find myself unloved, alone,
What tongue can speak the dreary void!

A heart whence warm affections flow,
Creator, Thou hast given to me;
And am I only thus to know
How sweet the joys of love would be?¹⁷

Anne Brontë’s ‘dreams of happiness’ were too early destroyed in life. She had to remain a spinster. Life became a ‘dreary void’ with no human love to fill up this void. In the last two lines she raises a question to her creator, whether she was created only to dream the sweet joys of what love could be like. But the non-fulfilment was a blessing in disguise, for the poet as she was, it drove her deep to explore every nuance of love and marriage. What she could not get fulfilled in her actual life is relived as fulfilled in Agnes Grey. It is a wish-fulfilment novel, for she concludes the novel with Agnes’ words: “I became the wife of Edward Weston, and never have found cause to repent it...
Our children Edward, Agnes and Little Mary, promise well; their education, for the time being, is chiefly committed to me; and they shall want no good thing that a mother’s care can give.” It is indeed pathetic that her dream was destroyed.

The prospect of marriage being remote, the sisters had to find a way for supporting themselves. But the scope was limited because “until the last decade of the [19th] century almost the only occupation open to women of good family but reduced circumstances was limited to teaching as a school mistress or more likely, as a governess in a private family.” The Brontë sisters had no other choice but to take up the similar job, for they had to “make their own way without the aid of either inherited wealth or husbands,” and had to depend entirely on their hard work.

When Anne Brontë first went out of her home to take up job as a governess, she was full of enthusiasm. Through Agnes she says, “How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world, to enter upon a new life, to act to myself; to exercise my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing.” Anne Brontë thought that it would be a delightful experience. The main purpose thus was to relieve the family and to contribute to the family’s income and lighten the burden of her father who was the sole breadwinner. But the enthusiasm slowly
died because “the work was hard and the Teacher’s social status was as low as her pay, in most homes governesses ranked with the superior servants.”

Anne Brontë continued in this profession for almost seven years. Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë also went through the similar experience and found out that the life of a governess was “isolated, powerless and exploited.” But despite this, Anne Brontë in particular, as a Christian, tried to put her effort in practicing Christian piety into her profession. The teaching of the Bible, especially the fruits of the Holy Spirit which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,” guided her. Her own words are heard through Agnes, when she utters, “… I know (at least I believed) unremitting patience and perseverance could overcome them, and night and morning I implored Divine assistance to this end.” It was her faith in God that gave her strength to endure and become a successful governess, for “A successful governess must possess large quantities of patience, adaptability, cheerfulness and calm.” Anne Brontë possessed these qualities with God’s help.

As for Emily Brontë, her contact with the outside world was always brief. When Charlotte Brontë got a job in Miss Wooler’s school, she took Emily Brontë along with her for schooling, but Emily could not stay with her beyond three months. Charlotte Brontë later in life recorded “every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and
darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me...”

Emily Brontë stayed at home for the next two years, and in October she joined as an assistant teacher in Miss Patchett’s school at Law Hill near Halifax. However, Emily Brontë could not stay more than six months. She was overburdened with work but it was also the most fruitful period in her poetic growth, for “during her first three months’ stay there, she wrote fourteen poems, some of them her longest pieces.” Poems like ‘Lines’, ‘Gleneden’s Dream’, ‘O wander not so far away’, ‘Loud without the wind was roaring’, ‘Stanzas’, and ‘The Bluebell’ are some which are worth mentioning. The final adventure was to Brussels with Charlotte again, but fate and destiny called them back. Aunt Branwell who had been a mother to them since their childhood died suddenly, and in November 1842, they had to return home after a period of nine months.

Even the nine months’ sojourn to Emily Brontë was terribly insufferable, for “she felt imprisoned, bound and helpless and a deep sense of frustration was the result.” She expresses her inability due to captivity:

Could I have lingered but an hour
It well had paid a week of toil,
But truth has banished fancy’s power;
I hear my dungeon bars recoil –
Even as I stood with raptured eye
Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear
My hour of rest had fleeted by
And given me back to weary care.30

Emily Brontë disliked the routine life. Law Hill is compared to a ‘dungeon’. She did not enjoy her duty as a teacher. She was wearied and tired. The only consolation she had was her writing.

Charlotte Brontë and her sisters put all their effort to be self-reliant and self-dependent women. What they dreaded in themselves was to become parasites. This is explicitly indicated in John Reed’s words to Jane, “You are dependent, mamma says; you have no money, your father left you none; you ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense.”31 So to avoid such humiliation the sisters tried to earn their livelihood. But the magnitude of the workload seemed to be beyond their capacity. Teaching and governessing was a stressful job and their strength failed them. They felt exhausted and depressed and in pain cried:

Wandering and toiling without gain,
The slave of others’ will,
With constant care and frequent pain,
Despised, forgotten still.32
Anne Brontë exposes the true position of governesses, who are expected to work endlessly. All the energy in them is drained out but in return they are ‘despised’ and ‘forgotten’. Governessing was a sort of slavery. Unable to bear the joylessness and monotony of the job she again cries out:

Oh, I am very weary,  
Though tears no longer flow;  
My eyes are tired of weeping,  
My heart is sick of woe;

And again she was to deplore her lot:

My life is very lonely,  
My days pass heavily,  
I’m weary of repining  
Wilt thou not come to me?³³

Anne Brontë felt dejected and lonely. She felt exploited because though her service was accepted, her ‘self’ was rejected without any sympathy. There was none to cheer her or appreciate her value. Charlotte Brontë, who also went through the same experience, expresses her vexation:

To toil, to think, to long, to grieve, –  
Is such my future fate?  
The morn was dreary, must the eve
Be also desolate?

And the vexation deepens into depression:

Well, such a life at least makes Death
A welcome, wished-for friend;

She would therefore resign and say:

Then, aid me, Reason, Patience, Faith,
To suffer to the end?34

The fervour and zeal in them was, however, extinguished by the workload. Their frail body could not endure the heavily taxed life. The physical exertion was further deepened by the curtailment of liberty. Teaching and governessing seemed to be unsuitable to them. Moreover, staying away from home had uncongenial effect on them. But at the same time, the sisters had to think for the means of survival. The idea of establishing a school seemed to be a good plan which could offer them a decent future. They were inspired because “the East Riding of Yorkshire was perhaps less provided with schools than the industrial West, they believed the neighbourhood of Bridlington might provide a suitable site.”35 With this plan, they sought Aunt Branwell’s help to convince their father. Charlotte wrote, “Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as
ambitious as I am now." Fortunately their aunt and their father supported their plans and vision.

Now, to qualify themselves, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to get training in teaching. After a rigorous training in Brussels they returned to begin their preparation for the project, but they did not receive any response to their advertisement. This was another failure in their venture. From then on the school project became a closed chapter in their lives. But they did not cease continuing their quest for the real vocation becoming of their nature and need.

The repeated failures in their previous occupations paved a way for them to search for their true vocation. Writing was one area they had not yet given a serious thought to. From childhood they had cultivated this habit and had acquired adequate writing skills.

Charlotte Brontë had begun writing as early as when she was eight years old. Her earliest manuscript was written for her youngest sister Anne. They were highly imaginative children and were voracious and extensive readers. With their inborn talent and wide knowledge about things around them they could write beautiful poems. Moreover, when Charlotte Brontë was hardly eighteen years old, she once wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey, "You ask me to recommend some books for your perusal, I will do so in a few words as I can. If you like poetry, let it be first-rate, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson,
Goldsmith, Pope, Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Southey ... for natural history read Bewick and Aunderson and Goldsmith and White's History of Selborne, for divinity your brother will advise you there." The catalogue speaks of the huge bulk of her reading material shared by the younger sisters as well.

This letter is proof enough for her wide range of reading and is indicative of the fact that the Brontë sisters were well in advance of the children of their age. Reading and writing was the greatest thing they enjoyed most. From childhood their leisure time was wisely and well spent. Even while governessing and teaching they could still spare some time to write. To Charlotte Brontë especially, "Day means drudgery, noise, and the irritation of struggling ... Night meant escape ... She gave herself up to visions." It was during the spare time when she realized the existence of the self within herself, which is the divine in the human. The "visions" she gave herself to were those of the divine. And she would, therefore, try to strive in the quest for expressing those visions in her writing, especially in her poems of faith.

It was entirely a matter of chance that the discovery by Charlotte Brontë of Emily's volume of manuscript poems convinced her that writing could be their right vocation. Perhaps they had been successful in their quest. She said, "of course I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse. I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me - a deep
conviction that these were not common effusions.” The manuscript poems, as they have come down to us, are powerful enough to move and teach. Charlotte found them to be “condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine.” “To my ear,” she continues, “they had also a peculiar music – wild, melancholy and elevating.” 39 These positive qualities in the poems prompted Charlotte Brontë to hasten for verse-publication. Charlotte and Anne too definitely had written and had been writing verses of exquisite merit, which, on the mutual consent, were published collectively.

Through poetry they relieved themselves from their passions and feelings. Charlotte Brontë writes;

The human heart has hidden treasures
In secret kept, in silence sealed
The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures,
Whose charms were broken if revealed. 40

It is the heart which gives birth to every thought, hope, dream and pleasure. This according to Charlotte Brontë is a hidden treasure, which is to be kept in secret. But contrary to these lines, it was impossible for the sisters to repress their thoughts or retain them in their hearts. The hidden treasures needed to be brought out to the world without, recurrently. By way of pouring out their intense passions they felt purged, and experienced a kind of spiritual serenity.
Poetry indeed was their refuge and solace. It was also a means of communication to the mortal as well as to the divine. And the divine dominates the thematic strands of their poetry:

I had no one to love me there;
I knew no comrade and no friend;
And so I went to sorrow where
Heaven, only heaven, saw me bend.

These lines speak of Emily’s nature. She was an isolated character without a companion. At times she felt friendless and lonesome. It was God who alone gave her refuge and strength and with Him she could say:

Those who follow earthly pleasure,
Heavenly knowledge will not lead;
Wisdom hides from them her treasure
Virtue bids them evil – speed!

Trusting in God’s guiding hand, she wanted to abide by it. Emily Brontë’s quest for the ‘divine’ and the ‘heavenly knowledge’ is finally discovered. Thus, she renounces the earthly pleasure which is vain and meaningless, and clings to the wisdom of God which gives her insight to true knowledge:

Then do not in this night of grief,
This time of overwhelming fear,
O do not think that God can leave,
Forget, forsake, refuse to hear!

Such an utterance of faith and trust springs from the core of a protestant who believes in the religion of the heart, precisely called the Anglican Evangelicalism. Emily’s God is a merciful God who ‘forgives’ and ‘forgets’ the sins of sinners. He is a God who never ‘forsakes’ his children or ‘refuses’ to give grace and mercy to them, for they are His own creation. Emily Brontë may then be seen as having realized the nature of her quest. Likewise, Anne’s firm belief in God made her seek the divine for deeper faith, for faith is the essence of belief and existence itself. Anne Brontë needed this faith and she asks for this;

Then hear me now, while kneeling here,
I lift to thee my heart and eye,
And all my soul ascends in Prayer,
*Oh, give me – give me faith!* I cry.

Anne Brontë realized that faith is the moving force and controller of life. It is faith that guides and leads a person. Though her life was filled with weariness, discouragement, failures and a sense of futility, yet it was the determination to keep on trying uplifted her. As well aware she was, Anne Brontë expresses her faith amidst dismay:
Dangers surround them – pain and woe
Their portion here must be,
But only they that trust thee know
What comfort dwells with thee;
Strength to sustain their drooping powers,
And vigour to defend, –
Thou pole-star of my darkest hours,
Affliction’s firmest friend!

Day does not always mark our way,
Night shadows oft appal,
But lead me, and I cannot stray, –
Hold me, I shall not fall;
Sustain me, I shall never faint,
How rough so e’er may be
My upward road – nor moan, nor plaint
Shall mar my trust in thee.”

Faith alone could enable her to overcome danger, pain and sorrow. It alone had the power to sustain and strengthen. It is compared to a pole star, the symbol of constancy and steadfastness, and a firmest friend in times of affliction.

Faith alone could restrain her and hold her from falling into sin. In ‘The Three Guides’, the spirit of earth, Pride and faith woo her but Anne Brontë does not yield to the spirit of earth and pride. She could not rely on them and
so she rejects them. To the spirit of Pride she said, "I abhor thy scoffing
tongue; - / I will not follow thee." Anne Brontë finally declared that the 'spirit
of faith' alone offers her wisdom and can give answer to her search:

By thy help all things I can do,
In thy strength all things bear,-
Teach me, for thou art just and true;
Smile on me thou art fair. 42

Anne Brontë surrenders herself to her faith, and faith is synonymous
with God. Human strength is weak but faith made her strong in mind and soul.
And this is the goal of her quest.

Charlotte Brontë also, like Emily and Anne, finds comfort in poetry. It
is the voice of the divine speaking to them all the time, at every moment and
situation of their lives. Charlotte Brontë defines:

A quiet song, to solace me
When sleep refuse to come;
A strain to chase despondency
When sorrowful for home.
In vain I try; I cannot sing;
All feels so cold and dead;
No wild distress, no gushing spring
Of tears in anguish shed. 43
Sometimes sufferings made them expressionless, and they experienced numbness in their mind. But such feelings are temporary which pass away and are rejuvenated by the 'God of vision', dispelling their doubts and fears away. Charlotte Brontë is often reminded that:

A thousand early thoughts and dreams
Of heaven and hope were mine,
And musings sweet by placid streams
In childhood's vision shine.
In summer evenings mild and dim,
Oh, it was sweet to me
To sit and say some simple hymn
Beneath a lonely tree.

In the innocence of childhood, the vision that she had was of heaven and of hope. This vision gave her immense joy, and in solitude and in stillness she could sing or compose 'simple hymn'. Charlotte's simplicity and sweetness expressed here above are comparable with Anne's.

In retrospection, Charlotte Brontë expresses the sense of loss for those by-gone innocent days of childhood:

I never since have known such bliss
As then came on my mind,
And a trace of such pure happiness
I never again shall find.
My heart was better then than now,
Its hopes seemed far more free,
I felt a blind but ardent glow
Of love for piety.44

Charlotte Brontë could not forget her innocent childhood days, which had the purity of joy, of thoughts and feelings. Such joys of innocence may not be re-experienced but Poetry or the imagination brings back such memories and fills her heart with joy, as does like the touch of a magic wand. And this is the gift of poetry.

Now, the Brontë sisters were fully convinced that writing was the right vocation for them, and that there was no need for them to explore other areas of profession. Had the warning and admonition from Robert Southey and Monsieur Heger been heeded to their childhood dreams and ambition to become writers would have been suppressed. But now that they had reached the shore of their quest, their future lay in literary excellence. Charlotte’s enormous strength and courage enabled her to withstand all criticisms and failures. And as she was the source of inspiration to her younger sisters, she took the pain of convincing them to bring out a publication. Convincing Emily was the hardest task that she experienced. She said, “It took hours to reconcile her to the discovery that I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication.”
The Brontë sisters, like Aurore Dudevant before them and Mary Ann Evans after them, decided to mask their feminine identity behind male pseudonyms. Charlotte confessed later: “We veiled our names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine’ – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice . . .”

Though the Publication was not widely acclaimed, it was appreciated and it received some favourable reviews which encouraged them not to give up. The Publishers could manage to sell only two copies but the sisters were not discouraged. Charlotte Brontë later on said, “Ill-success failed to crush us: the mere effort to succeed had given a wonderful zest to existence; it must be pursued.” They pursued it, and the indomitable spirit and courage in them helped them to fight till the end in the truest Christian spirit.

As I have said in the introduction of this thesis, when their poetry did not bring them success in their literary aspiration, they took up novel writing, for writing with them was not only a passion for fame and faith, but also something to earn their fortune by. The taste of the Victorian reading public was for the novel, and the sisters wanted to write something which would
attract them. Naturally, persistent hard work and patience was finally rewarded. *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights,* and *Agnes Grey* brought them immediate success right in 1847, soon after the poor reception of the *Publication* in 1846.

Today, the Bronte sisters are widely known for their novels. Charlotte Bronte wrote four — *Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette* and *The Professor*; Emily Brontë wrote the single superb *Wuthering Heights,* and Anne Brontë *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.*

But the fact always remains that the Bronte sisters were first and foremost poets, and that they began their literary career as poets. They could not just then materialize the dream of becoming renowned poets. However, they emerged as famous novelists and through fiction they achieved success, fame and fortune and expressed their faith. Simultaneously, they kept on writing poems as well. It was the love for writing that gave them strength and courage to compete with male writers of their age. The sisters proved themselves equivalent with the male counterparts of the Victorian age. It is, therefore, remarked of them that time could not efface their greatness and worth, because

*Ages pass away, and those writers and writings which have only appealed to transient phases of thought or particular changes of society are swept away as by a resistless current,*
whilst those who defy the potency of the waves are the
gifted few who have shown the genuine power of interpreting
nature, or of dealing with the passions of the human heart.\textsuperscript{46}

The sisters are the ones who did ‘defy the potency of the waves’ of
thought responsible for creating a rift between religion and science, the soul
and the mind; a conflict between faith and unfaith. Holding on to human
nature, they wrote of and celebrated that which is perennial in man since the
creation. And the perenniality of faith for his integrated existence, though then
only a fountain of faith, and not the ‘Sea of faith’, flows ceaselessly in the
Brontë poetry. But before the sisters could realize the fullness of this fountain
in them, they had to undergo a series of agonies which I am to describe in the
succeeding chapter on “Agony”.


23 Margot Peters, *The Unquiet Soul*, (cited above), p. 68

24 *Galatians* chapter 5 verses 22, 23.


30 Emily Jane Brontë, *Poems*, p. 95.


33 Ibid., p. 25.

34 Charlotte Brontë, Poems, p. 50.


40 Charlotte Brontë, Poems, p. 54.

41 Emily Jane Brontë, Poems, pp. 116, 213, and 141.

42 Anne Brontë, Poems, pp. 38, 126, 128.

43 Charlotte Brontë, Poems, p. 49.

