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**PORTRAYAL OF MENTAL ILLNESS OF WOMEN WITH REFERENCE TO CHARLOTTE PERKIN  
GILMAN'S "THE YELLOW WALLPAPER"**

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Charlotte Perkin Gilman's is an American short story writer published her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* during the year 1892. This short story is a prominent work by Charlotte which reflects the insanity and oppression of women during her period. It also depicts a picture about the 19<sup>th</sup> century American society where women were exploited in many ways; women were portrayed as subservient, reliant, incapable and powerless.

*The yellow wallpaper* depicts the mental health of a women particularly during her recuperative period, according to research, it is refereed women usually undergo nervous depression which is known as postpartum blues which will last for four to five weeks, otherwise when left untreated it results in postpartum psychosis which can even remain years together, through the short story *The yellow wallpaper* the author also deals about the gender issues and freedom of the women, their submissive nature during the nineteenth century period.

Gilman herself published an article in her own magazine, *The Forerunner*, in October of 1913 explaining both the inspiration for the short story and its relevance to Gilman personally:

For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia – and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to 'live as domestic a life as far as possible,' to 'have but two hours' intellectual life a day,' and 'never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again' as long as I lived. This was in 1887. I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over. ("Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper").

The story begins with the female narrator and her husband John who move to large house after the birth of their baby. Her husband John is a physician by profession; he misunderstands his wife's postpartum depression to hysteria, and also prescribes 'The rest cure' which is a kind of treatment which was prescribed in the 19th century for women who were suffering from hysteria, in this short story Jane has to be in complete rest in an isolated large house which is decorated in yellow shades. Jane is kept in absolute isolation from everyone and where she is only allowed to meet her husband John and the nurse.

Beverly Hume in her research article has explained the oppression of women, the biased treatment of woman during the nineteenth-century as, "*The Yellow Wallpaper* not only rejects, as Gilman intended, the gender-biased rest cure of the nineteenth –century, but also indicts, less successfully, gender-biased definitions of mental illness. Despite her triumphant unmasking of medical (predominantly male) gender bias in this tale, Gilman's narrator falls apart so completely in the end that she tends, unfortunately, to reinforce the common nineteenth- century gender stereotype of the emotionally and physically frail nineteenth – century woman. (Hume,12)

Postpartum depression in simple terms can be defined as an emotional state of depression, anxiety, sadness experienced by a woman after giving birth, the narrator instead of recuperating she deteriorates, where she is restricted from writing and reading and apart from that most importantly is not allowed to see her own child, this is one of the major reasons where she refers her husband to a dead paper who is one of the reasons where she is not able to recover gradually. Her reference to the medication and exercise which is prescribed to her is completely useless, whereas the narrator prefers to write and read. Gradually the narrator provides a clear picture of the house with detailed description where she describes it to be the most beautiful place, with a garden which is large and shady.

The room where the author was supposed to take rest was decorated with unclean yellow wallpaper; it was a big room which was stripped in great patches which she mentions the most horrible paper ever witnessed in her life. She even refers that her nervous condition was dreadfully depressing, and mostly her husband was not spending quality time with the narrator which is also considered as an important factor for the mental illness. She also depicts that imagination and story making is a kind of nervous weakness, where later on she starts to hallucinate an image of a woman who wants to escape from the wall. The narrator was able to experience both excitement and terror by just witnessing the walls. She is also advised by her husband that she must use her will to overcome the nervous condition. After all the mental agony she experiences; there is one thing which comforts her that her baby is happy and safely taken care of by the nurses. The narrator then and there gives a clear description of the room the yellow wallpaper and she believes the woman behind the wall and describes it as a strangest yellow which is infected with fungus. This reflects the portrayal of madness and nature of depression which was aggravating, which can also be understood as a conversation between the narrator and her conscience. At the end of the story the woman in the wallpaper is found freeing herself, which symbolizes the freedom from her boundaries.

Thus the narrator explores the oppression of women in the patriarchal society and also provides an elaborate study about the stereotype in male chauvinistic society where women were restricted to indulge in activities like reading and writing which was an act of solace. It also reflects the condition and insight of women's mental health.

The author being a feminist has portrayed her own life experiences, wanted to caution people about insanity and particularly she wanted to inform the readers about the ill effects of the rest cure method. Though it is a male dominated society women have to voice out for the betterment of her community. Thus through this short story the author has voiced out the inequality to women and gender issues which were faced by the nineteenth century woman.

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