Jane Austen
Anxiety over Authority

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Dedication

For my father *Sushil C. Mitra* and mother *Biju Mitra*

for their infinite support and boundless love

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the suggestions offered at the Ph.D. Pre-Submission Seminar given by Ms. Malabika Mitra on the topic *"Jane Austen: Anxiety over Authority"* held on 15.12.2006 have been incorporated in the final thesis.

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Declaration

I, Malabika Mitra, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/ institute. This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Malabika Mitra

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Abbreviations

E	**Emma**
LS	**Lady Susan**
MP	**Mansfield Park**
NA	**Northanger Abbey**
P	**Persuasion**
PP	**Pride and Prejudice**
S	**Sanditon**
SS	**Sense and Sensibility**
W	**The Watsons**

Introduction

> By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hir oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men more wikednesse
> Than all the mark of Adam may redresse.[1]

This comment by the astute Wife of Bath, can be compared with Jane Austen's protagonist Anne Elliot's response to Captain Harville in Bath when she tells him that

> "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story." (*P*, 221)

Gilbert and Gubar also echo this view when they say,

> When he [Chaucer] gave the Wife of Bath a tale of her own, he portrayed her projecting her subversive vision of patriarchal institutions into the story of a furious hag who demands supreme power over her own life and that of her husband : only when she gains his complete acceptance of her authority does this witch transform herself into a modest and docile beauty.[2]

Critical appraisal of Jane Austen's novels has been enormous and comprehensive. But the views have been divergent and have ranged from anti-feminist or conservative criticism to feminist interpretations. However, in the current trend governing Austenian criticism, her status as a 'feminist' has been a matter of some controversy.

Gilbert and Gubar, Margaret Kirkham, Claudia Johnson, Maaja Stewart and Mary Poovey belong to the feminist group, arguing that Austen entertained pro-feminist views and that her female characters enjoy power, authority and strength. The characters that have been deliberately deprived

of them carry some message which the author had chosen to highlight. Johnson sees Austen as a feminist who disguised her true feelings and thoughts because of the limitations which society then imposed on women. Gilbert and Gubar advocated such a view about Austen as well as about other women writers like Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Mary Shelley and others. Claudia Johnson states that Austen's novels clearly show –

> ... a consciousness of how the private is political and a sensitivity to the problem women writers encounter living and writing in a male-dominated culture.[3]

> The purpose of [her] study ... [Johnson says is] ... to reconceptualize the stylistic and thematic coherence of Austen's fiction by demonstrating how it emerges, draws, and departs from a largely feminine tradition of political novels ... [4]

On the other hand, the conservative school argues that Austen was not a feminist and that she never meant her heroines or female characters to be too powerful or domineering. This approach is represented by Marilyn Butler, whose objective,

> ... is to show that her manner as a novelist is broadly that of the conservative Christian moralist of the 1790's; that she continues to write as a Christian, with minor modifications only to accord with the prevailing manner ...[5]

She divides Austen's heroines into those who are "Right" in terms of "conservative orthodoxy" like Fanny and Anne and "Heroines who are Wrong" in the "... more spiritual-looking errors of pride and presumption ..."[6] like Elizabeth and Emma. In 1975 Marilyn Butler argued a new case:

Austen's acceptance of the 'orthodox' views of the English moralists was not neutral; it was a sign of her commitment to Burke and political reaction.

Margaret Kirkham vehemently opposes Butler and holds her views to be mistaken because they fails to take account of the extent to which Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*, and the whole line of English feminism from Astell to Austen, relies upon eighteenth century argument about ethics and uses it to promote the idea that women are accountable beings of the same kind as men. Kirkham further says,

> Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* remains a most stimulating and informative contextual study, but her conception of the war does not make sufficient allowance for the many and varied battles which made it up.[7]

She goes on to opine that F. R. Leavis's placing Austen as inaugurator of the great tradition of nineteenth century fiction of moral (social) concern also needs further consideration, for there are marked differences between her and those considered by Leavis as her successors. Her moral interest as a feminist was not shared by George Eliot, Henry James or Conrad. Her view of English society was not influenced by Carlyle since she was dead before he had begun to exercise an influence. She points out that

> The underlying argument of the Austen novels – and they are novels in which argument matters – is entirely in accord with this. It looks old-fashioned now, but it should be noted that Austen is often most radical, as a *feminist*, where she sounds most out-dated (and most like Mary Wollstonecraft)[8]

Between the two extreme views on Austen as pro-feminist or anti-feminist, critics like Alistair M Duckworth and Tony Tanner argue that she was not completely a feminist or an anti-feminist, but a skeptical progressive and a social critic who is pessimistic about the possibilities of social improvement. Duckworth in the 'Preface' states that he has,

> ... sought to identify in her ... novels an authentic commitment to a social morality and a continuous awareness and exposure of attitudes destructive of social continuity ...[9]

Tanner too, regards Austen as a socially conscious writer who was very aware of the issues faced by women then.

> As I hope will be apparent by the end of this book, ... Jane Austen does both expose and criticise the ideological assumptions which ground her society.[10]

Amongst the other prominent critics, Lionel Trilling believes that Austen is humanely sympathetic in her treatment of human beings, while Marvin Mudrick holds that Austen was not so humanely inclined and was even inhumane towards some of her characters like Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park.* Trilling's criticism makes Austen more optimistic about social change and harmony, whereas, Mudrick makes her more pessimistic. But in Austen's works Gilbert and Gubar saw how,

> Austen demystifies the literature she has read neither because she believes it misrepresents reality, as Mary Lascelles argues, nor out of obsessive fear of emotional contact, as Marvin Mudrick claims, nor because she is writing Tory propaganda as Marilyn Butler speculates, but because she seeks to illustrate how such fictions are the alien creations of writers who contribute to the enfeebling of women.[11]

In these broad categories of Austenian criticism, critics like Gilbert and Gubar, Kirkham, Johnson, Butler, Mudrick, Judith Lowder Newton, Duckworth, Tanner amongst others – no matter what their stand have been - have directly or indirectly examined the issue of power and authority in Austen's novels and some of them have made use of the terms 'power' and 'authority' too. My reading of Austen has made me aware that her views on women's relationship with power and authority was never static but changed and matured with years as is seen in the development from *Pride and Prejudice* through *Emma* to *Persuasion*. This research will outline these changes, whom she considered worthy to wield power and authority, and how at times these were mishandled. It will also analyze the all important effect of education and finances on the acquisition and exercise of power and authority. The attempt will be to show that she primarily advocated the need for limited and restricted authority for both sexes based on the intelligence and ability of women to handle it, rather than of excessive power for either. Without necessarily approving of the fact, the novels however, show men wielding greater power than women and also the fact that both the sexes are capable of grossly misusing it. The thesis will also examine how Austen's heroines come to exercise limited authority with their husbands though its degree may vary from marriage to marriage, thus

illustrating the point that women even in patriarchal society did possess the ability to wield power and authority.

It is this urge to exercise power and authority that turns human beings into likeable or disgusting characters. Austen's female characters have been categorized under 'angel', 'monster' or 'human' depending on their need to control their lives and that of others, their desire to exercise masculine power and authority and the way they ultimately handle it (terms adopted from Gilbert and Gubar). It is on the intricacy of power relationship and depending on their ability to use or abuse it that they have been so classified. The motive behind the author's own requirement to delineate such characters will also been explored, and how some of them hint at certain hidden aspects of their creator's psyche and her thought process.

In this thesis on power relationships between the sexes in Austen, reference has been made to different kinds of power and authority and how Austen expresses her anxiety over the imbalance inherent in these relationships. Here 'authority' means the right to command and control significantly other people's lives as well as one's own. This authority is vested in a member or members of the family or community and is dependent on certain factors such as his position in the family and society, his occupation, economic status and intelligence. 'Power' is used in a complementary sense with 'authority' and means to control and influence

others. 'Authority' is a more social term than 'power' for it is granted or attributed to an individual by others, whereas, power is potency which can be acquired with or without the agreement of others, like the power of money or of physical strength. Authority or power is determined by the same factors, which in turn determines the type of authority exercised by different persons. Thus, we have intellectual, moral, legal, customary, economic, paternal, social, and patriarchal authority. These powers are mentioned in the essays of Tanner, Johnson and Newton. For instance, Newton in her essay deals primarily with economic authority and she tries to establish how women like Elizabeth Bennet are not powerless because they lack economic authority.

The strongest form of authority that an individual can acquire is legal authority, for law and not convention backs it. A stronger form of social authority, it usually resides with males or widows in its stronger form and only in severely limited form with women, children and other dependents. Legal authority being a force in itself can function without intellectual or moral authority. Consequently it is easily misused. Paternal, patriarchal and economic authorities have to be backed by legal authority. Thus, on the strength of legal authority, Lady Catherine can abuse her power and authority in *Pride and Prejudice* and General Tilney misuses his patriarchal and paternal authorities grossly in *Northanger Abbey.*

The society in the novels is patriarchal: power held by men is transferred through men. Paternal authority is somewhat similar because here authority resides with the male and the father, but it differs in that it can be exercised only by a father or father-figure and not otherwise. These two authorities without economic authority and some intellectual authority can be significantly ineffectual. Patriarchal and paternal authorities are based on inheritance and belong only to men, unlike intellectual and moral authorities, which depend on the intelligence and sense of morality in either gender. Ineffectual in themselves they have to be backed by economic or social authority. Moreover, they are interdependent on each other for the influence and exercise of one without the other can lead to abuse of authority. But together moral and intellectual authorities can significantly challenge economic, parental, social and some legal authority. Thus, Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price can successfully resist economic pressures, parental and social authorities both within and without the family and thereby exercise the right to choose their husbands.

Women can acquire authority in general significantly through the use of intellectual and moral authority as Elizabeth and Fanny do in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* respectively as also other heroines of Austen, except Catherine Morland. Likewise men and women without intelligence and morality can have their authorities diminished as do Collins, Wickham

or Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and most other secondary characters in the various novels.

Economic authority can be exercised by few and primarily by males, widows or heiresses. It means controlling one's wealth and especially of one's dependents. Widows can exercise economic power, while women whether married or unmarried may exercise little economic authority themselves because they did not have any legal authority over their money or property. Economic authority can sometimes override social, paternal, intellectual and moral authority and even influence legal authority. Another factor that significantly influences the wielding of economic as well as other forms of authority is education. However, within the patriarchal set-up women are deprived of proper education and are therefore easily led to adhere to the age-old culture of subordination to the males in their society. This disadvantage of women will be discussed in an individual chapter. Similarly the notion of economic power and authority and the disparity between men and women will also be discussed in another chapter.

Membership in a particular society automatically bestows a kind of authority on a person, though the degree may vary according to circumstances. For example, a father will possess more social authority than a son and married women more than the unmarried ones as does Lydia Wickham over Elizabeth Bennet and Mary Musgrove over Anne Elliot in

Pride and Prejudice and *Persuasion* respectively. Such an authority is sanctioned by custom rather than by law. Though not a source of power in itself social or customary authority is akin to paternal authority and can often be affected by other forms of authority.

The thesis examines the use and abuse of the various authorities and their effect on the characters in inter-personal relationships. The attempt will be to show that the novels suggest the need for limited authority which results in a resolution of the tension between different powers, as when Fanny's moral authority moderates Sir Thomas's legal and economic powers when she refuses to marry Henry Crawford. Austen, however, takes care to point out that this may not always be possible for a less intelligent person. Thus, it is shown that neither the Bennets nor the Grants can share limited authority because they are intellectually incompatible. Despite this the novels maintain a balance by assigning authority among intelligent people. Because of this balance tyrannical power in any single person is kept under control. Also the initially powerless heroines are given a measure of control over their own lives. Thus, Sir Thomas in *Mansfield Park* is made relatively less powerful and a more benevolent figure of authority at the end and Lady Catherine's power too at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* is significantly restricted. In the end Austen gives Elizabeth, Emma, Fanny,

Elinor and Anne much more control over their own lives than they had at the beginning.

The various novels have demonstrated that despite the economic, societal and various other forms of impositions, protagonists from Elizabeth to Anne have always possessed authority – which is to be differentiated from power. However, devoid of attributes like financial independence which contributes to power, they possessed an authority without power. They possessed authority of a moral kind derived from native intelligence and their strong sense of justice and ethical behaviour. By endowing her heroines with moral authority, Austen places them on a higher plane than the other characters. This in a way seems to compensate them for their lack of other sources of power. The plot of the narratives is so structured that some of these heroines or survivors are portrayed as superior human beings, even superior to most men because of their moral authority.

To endow some of her heroines with superiority over most men, was in itself a daring step, unthinkable of in eighteenth century England. This naturally necessitates along with her position as a one of the earliest female novelists to write about these issues with utmost caution and sensitivity. Her concern and unconventional views over power and authority and other feminist topics were hence expressed in an indirect manner. Austen's deep awareness of the restrictions to which women were subject to and the

delicate position of a woman writer made her write with great propriety and often resorting to irony as a means to express her views. This emerges as the hallmark of her style throughout her narratives.

Besides being an artistic device, irony for Jane Austen became a vehicle of personal defence, which protected her from the wrath of the society and at the same time enabled her to say what was unsayable in public. After *Northanger Abbey*, whose publication was suppressed by publishing houses, for her open criticism of sexist bias in literary works and in reviewers; Austen learnt to camouflage her real feelings in such a manner. She henceforth chose to tell the truth through riddling irony that were either eluded or misinterpreted, except for a few ingenious readers who could read between the lines. Paradoxically she soon acquired a literary reputation among those who either did not understand, or did not think it wise to show too much understanding of the moral riddles posed in her works.

This same anxiety resulted in her emphasis on propriety bordering on prudishness is also evident from the way she lived her life. From the concealed manner in which she wrote in her drawing room covering her work with a piece of lace at the slightest intrusion, her appearance and the way she spoke and carried herself, was deliberately so cultivated that she was never suspected of being an author. People found her to be fair, elegant

and handsome but certainly not an author, except for her closest acquaintances who knew about her pre-occupations as a novelist. Her personal obscurity was deliberate and "... more complete than that of any other famous writer ..."[12]

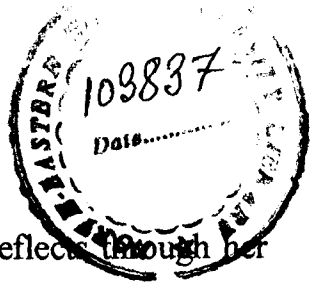
To those who knew about her pre-occupation – not an occupation – she was quick to add that it was not an attempt at literature but just an accomplishment by a lady. Too aware of the trouble in which she would find herself in, if she tried to assume the airs of a littérateur or an author, Austen perpetuated this idea among her acquaintances. Indeed, feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft had to face the wrath of patriarchs, for being a rebel and in transgressing the limitations that were imposed on the female writer. If anything, Austen publicly held her own works to be too light, bright and sparkling to be considered as serious literature. In spite of these public protestations Austen was very much an author with a mind of her own, and one is inclined to agree with Margaret Kirkham when she says:

> The lady novelist might publish anonymously, might declare her aversion to the glare of public notice, might assure the world of her lack of learned qualification and her dislike of 'masculine' women, but if she went ahead all the same and published, her actions belied her words. ... for at this period to become an author was, in itself, a feminist act.[13]

Women writers in eighteenth century England wrote under very oppressive conditions. The submissive and docile ones - who never thought of themselves as capable of any good like Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, were actually the ones respected by their society and their sex,

because they did not project themselves as literary women. Whereas, those who tried to establish their image as a literary woman and as an intellectual, like Mary Wollstonecraft (Horace Walpole referred to her as a 'hyena in petticoats') were abhorred not only by the males but even by their own gender. Women were considered as 'Cyphers', and literary women in particular were 'Cyphers' in a greater degree, they were eunuchs, because they had to be unsexed, stripped off their gender since they assumed a calling that had traditionally belonged to men.

Austen was well aware of this derogatory attitude and was herself critical of her contemporary fellow authors and thinkers. True, she made no outward observation on the treatment meted out to female writers, yet we have her comments on writers and writings in general both open and disguised in her novels; some of which will be cited in the course of this dissertation. For instance, the names and works of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron occur in *Persuasion*; Wordsworth, Burns, Richardson, again Scott and perhaps even Dr. Johnson without directly mentioning his name are referred to in *Sanditon*. Though she is critical of some of these works she nonetheless absolves herself by stating that it is the people who are at fault for letting themselves be wrongly influenced by them. Thus, in *Persuasion* it is Benwick who suffers from a weak mind and in *Sanditon*, Sir Edward suffers from "... a perversity of Judgement ... [for] not having by Nature a



very strong head" *(S in NA vol.*, 358). She detachedly reflects through her protagonist Anne,

> ... it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly. (*P*, 98)

Although Austen does mention the works of her contemporary female writers, poets and novelists, she is conspicuously silent about the radical Mary Wollstonecraft, her treatise or her novels – with or without admiration. Indeed, we cannot but be suspicious that Austen was consciously avoiding making any mention of Wollstonecraft in her works. It is worth noting that Austen's novels were first published in the aftermath of the anti-feminist reaction which followed Mary Wollstonecraft's death and the scandalous revelation of her libertine lifestyle - a time when open discussion on feminist ideals was almost impossible. Despite the lack of direct evidence that she had read any of Wollstonecraft's works, it will be pointed out in the dissertation that there are clear instances that she had been considerably influenced by her feminine ideas which have been obliquely hinted in her narratives.

> Jane Austen was born in December 1775 and was thus sixteen when the *Vindication* was published. She grew up and became a novelist in the following decade when the Feminist Controversy, in which fiction played an important part, was at its height. Many critics have noticed that feminist feeling and feminist ideas are easily apparent in her novels, yet the full importance of the Controversy, as exercising an influence upon the development of her work and its publication, has not been made apparent, nor has it been taken sufficiently into account in considering the way Jane Austen was presented to the public after her early death.[14]

Given the position of the female writer it was not for nothing that Austen's family went out of the way to protect her. Her brother Henry Austen went to great lengths to emphasize that Austen's literary accomplishments were more accidental than deliberate and this was perhaps done to fulfill the requirements of her age, although it was her literary distinction which had presumably earned her the honour of a cathedral burial. He stresses on the lack of incidence in her life and her preference for a retired, domestic existence.

> He knew that given the prejudice of the time, his sister's personal reputation might not escape embarrassing comment were the full force of her irony to be understood. No matter how blameless her life, a woman known to have avoided marriage and to have held independent views of a feminist kind might not be kindly or respectfully treated.[15]

After elaborately praising her on her "... perfect placidity of temper ..." ("Notice" in *P* vol., 4-5), on her qualities of forgiveness, kindness, impeccable manners and a "... temper ... as polished as her wit ..." ("Notice" in *P* vol., 4-5), Henry Austen arrives at the important statement that,

> She became an authoress entirely from taste and inclination. Neither the hope of fame nor profit mixed with her early motives. ... so much did she shrink from notoriety, that no accumulation of fame would have induced her, had she lived, to affix her name to any productions of her pen. In the bosom of her own family she talked of them [works] freely, ... But in public she turned away from any allusion to the character of an authoress. ("Notice" in *P* vol., 4-5)

We have Austen's own acknowledgement of her preference to limit the scope of her works and her self-conscious question, about it,

> How could I possibly join them on to a little bit of ivory, two inches wide, on which I work with a brush so fine as to produce little effect after much labour? ("Postscript" in *P* vol., 6).

This speaks most forcefully of her awareness of this confinement to which a woman author was restricted to in her society. To go beyond these limitations would not be tolerated. She no doubt made the most of this little bit of ivory and worked on it to the point of perfection. Working within the confines of the conventions of domestic comedy, she nonetheless succeeded in enlarging its scope so that they carried philosophical, socio-cultural and political resonance far beyond its surface meaning. While restricting herself to such curbs she exhibits the problems and dilemmas of her sex, in the most detached manner possible, without any partiality or prejudice towards either sex, admitting that outside the two inches of ivory lies the unchartered domain of the male writer. That despite this knowledge, Austen could write with such impartiality – without fury and rancor against men, but always maintaining a calm and poised tone is the hallmark of her intellect, genius, and sophistication.

Traditionally painting on ivory was considered to be a lady-like occupation. Significantly Austen established herself securely and comfortably within this self-imposed restriction and effectively portrayed the vulnerability (to the wider world) and confinement imposed on her sex within that limited space of two inches. Although she sought to retreat

inside this cocoon which she had woven so lovingly and caringly, yet this same cocoon failed to protect her from external attacks. Indeed, the earliest of criticisms against her were precisely because she sought to shut herself from the world at large and hide herself in her burrow.

Fellow-writers from Sir Walter Scott to Charlotte Bronte`, Edward Fitzgerald, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain to Emerson and D.H. Lawrence, have all criticized her works for going no further than the parlour, the confines of tame meadows and cottages and beyond the lives of three or four families. They have deplored the lack of passion, of fresh air, of open fields, revolutionary ideas and rebellious thoughts. However, the judgment against Austen's so-called trifling reaches its culmination, in the fact, that Mark Twain did not even bother to spell her name correctly. In a letter to Howells, her staunchest American defender, he notes her as 'Jane Austin' whom he had found totally unreadable. Both Emerson and Mark Twain had preferred suicide rather than a natural death for her – so contemptuous they were of her writings. Today, after the extensive research, discussion and debate that has gone into her works, and now that they have been acknowledged as endearing and enduring classics we see that these critics had failed to read the story within the story. However, there were some

> ... perceptive nineteenth-century critics of Austen – Whately, G.H. Lewes, Richard Simpson – found themselves comparing her with

> Shakespeare as a humourist and as a faithful portrayer of human nature. And it was her great achievement that she brought the central argument and subject matter of English feminists from Astell to Wollstonecraft under the humane influence of Shakespearian comedy ...[16]

Even modern writers like Angus Wilson have accused Austen of a characteristically English, middle-class, philistinism.

Significantly Virginia Woolf underscored the fact that

> Jane Austen wrote like that [without a room of her own] to the end of her days.[17]

while throughout making a point in her seminal essay *A Room of One's Own* that:

> ... a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; ... [18]

The difficult problem of how the woman literary artist ought to see herself as novelist and literary critic, and as feminist, re-emerged in the early twentieth century with Virginia Woolf and her own Modernist conception of the literary artist. She made Austen her chief exemplar of the individual female talent. In *A Room of One's Own,* which rightly takes the status of a classic literary essay for feminist criticism, Virginia Woolf sees Austen as the exceptional example of the female artist with androgynous mind. Some feminist critics believe that while it is not a wrong stand per se, but in doing so it simultaneously ignores everything which connects Austen with the feminist thinking of the Enlightenment. Woolf states,

> What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking. Only Jane Austen did it and Emily

> Bronte. ... They wrote as women write, not as men write. Of all the thousand women who wrote novels then, they alone entirely ignored the perpetual admonition of the eternal pedagogue-write this, think that.[19]

Woolf's treatment of Austen is completely unpatronising, and she sees Austen as a major novelist comparing her with Shakespeare.

> I read a page or two [of *Pride and Prejudice*] to see ; but I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightest. That, perhaps, was the chief miracle about it. Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote, I thought, looking at *Antony and Cleopatra* ; and when people compare Shakespeare and Jane Austen, they may mean that the minds of both had consumed all impediments ; and for that reason we do not know Jane Austen and we do not know Shakespeare, and for that reason Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote, and so does Shakespeare.[20]

Going back to the condescending attitude, it was also shared by Rudyard Kipling and Henry James. For a better understanding of the status of the female writer and the psychology of her male counterpart, it needs be mentioned that none other than Henry James, whom Kipling has called the "lawful issue" of Austen, had considered her genius as coincidental. Kipling himself was irreverential and ridiculed Austen for her over-emphasis on propriety and elegance. To quote from Kipling's "The Janeites", Jane Austen 'did leave lawful issue in the shape o' one son; an' 'his name was 'Enery James"[21]. Here he is referring to Austen's influence on Henry James which finds obvious reflection in his novels. Interesting to note that Henry James while appreciating her works simultaneously considered her authorship more as a happy coincidence rather than as a sign of her genius.

That Henry James of all others, who owes so much to this literary predecessor, should treat her works as nothing more than as an eighteenth century woman's fanciful engagement to while away her hours, points at his own sense of discomfort and anxiety about this legacy from a woman writer. It

> ... radiates James's anxiety at his own indebtedness to this "little" female precursor who, to his embarrassment, taught him so much of his presumably masterful art ...[22]

Henry James despite his indebtedness was condescending towards Austen and reluctant to give any artistic merit to her literary productions. Indeed, male authors like him preferred to stick to this belief owing to their sense of male superiority. This attempt at underestimating the contribution of women writers, and even of one to whom he had been indebted, is indicative of the attitude of male writers for generations.

These writers pointed out the paucity of subject matter and the narrowness of scope in Austen's novels since those were the times of the French Revolution. The ideals, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' left indelible marks on the literature of the times and were instrumental in ushering in the Romantic Age in English Literature. In contrast Austen's stories of three or four well-to-do families in the countryside were untouched by these changes, as she had intentionally refrained herself from venturing into those male-dominated areas which were to become the

subjects for Dickens and Thackeray. However, it would be wrong to assume that Austen was untouched by these ideals. These principles seem to be at work in the delineation of her intelligent heroines who are provided with a more equal authority, a greater control and freedom over their own lives. Political and ideological issues were also mentioned but it was done in an oblique manner and the irony was impossible to miss, as these lines from *Sanditon* prove,

> "Trafalgar House – which by the bye, I almost wish I had not named Trafalgar – for Waterloo is more the thing now. However, Waterloo is in reserve ... we shall be able to call it Waterloo Crescent" (*S in NA vol.*, 336).

This is trivializing a historic-political event but done without transgressing the limitations of a woman.

Emerson had criticized Austen for belittling domesticity. In her works he finds sterility in artistic invention accompanied by an obsession for marriage. A common misconception amongst Austen's readers and some of her critics is that her novels are overly concerned with marriages. One cannot deny the significance of marriage and that it forms an important aspect of her works because that singular event in a woman's life provides her with the only respectable option for her in the given society. Austen's critical views on equating the career of the governess with that of a slave in *Emma* are only too well-known. Without any means to gain financial independence women's education and upbringing were motivated by the

prospect of a good marriage which would provide them with respectability and also a measure of financial security.

Austen's portrayals of such marriages were undertaken with the view to present the reality of the women's situation in her society. The criticism directed against Austen on this account is that she presents the eighteenth century society from too feminized a viewpoint, as Kipling does in the "The Janeites". But this issue cannot be dismissed in the manner that Kipling does because the concerns expressed through this perspective are brought about by the suppression of the female psyche in the male dominated society. Being a product as well as a victim of such a society it is only natural that such a perspective is given prominence by Austen, the sensitive writer. In doing so she extends her efforts to comprehend the intricate workings of patriarchy as she saw it, which is inseparably linked with the complicated power play between men and women.

Despite the Romantic surge which her contemporary times witnessed, she focused her attention on these issues. Feminist critics hold that eighteenth century female writers who believed on the equality of the sexes found themselves partly or entirely alienated from the Romantic Movement. Austen's lack of interest in the Romantic upheaval only reveals her understanding of the contemporary conflict on the feminist issue. This has

been cited as the reason behind her detachment from the important and controversial currents of thought and literature in her time.

Jane Austen's feminized, pro-feminist or anti-feminist approach in her novels portrays the then society with its social hierarchy, manners, conventions and culture from a woman's restricted perspective, the only one available to her as an eighteenth century woman. This perhaps explains as to why her male characters are often flat and particularly so when juxtaposed with the more vibrant female ones. Further, the absence of the men's world from the domain of her fiction, can be attributed to her pre-occupation with the women's world. Austen presents this issue of power and authority in such a manner which can engage the interest, sympathy and understanding of even a modern reader today. The attempt in this research will be to examine Austen's anxiety in the context of the society of her times and also to examine their relevance with the current trends in feminist critical approaches.

Notes

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," The Canterbury Tales, trans. Nevill Coghill, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960) 295.

[2] Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer And The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 79. (Hereafter cited as G and G)

[3] Claudia Johnson, Jane Austen: Women Politics and the Novel (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988) XX. (Hereafter cited as Johnson)

[4] Johnson XIX.

[5] Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 164. (Hereafter cited as Butler)

[6] Butler 166.

[7] Margaret Kirkham, Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1983) 174. (Hereafter cited as Kirkham)

[8] Kirkham 46-47.

[9] Alistair M. Duckworth, The Improvement Of The Estate (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1971) IX.

[10] Tony Tanner, Jane Austen (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1986) 6.

[11] G and G 120-21.

[12] G and G 107.

[13] Kirkham 33.

[14] Kirkham 53.

[15] Kirkham 56-57.

[16] Kirkham 98.

[17] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929; Edinburgh: Penguin Books, 1945) 56. (Hereafter cited as Woolf)

[18] Woolf 5.

[19] Woolf 62.

[20] Woolf 56-57.

[21] Rudyard Kipling, The Janeites, n. pag., Online, Internet, 9 Apr. 2006.

[22] G and G 110.

Chapter I

Angel, Monster and the Human

> ... a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her. Before we women can write, declared Virginia Woolf, we must "kill" the "angel in the house."[1]

Virginia Woolf is acknowledged as a feminist, whereas Jane Austen's position as a feminist or an anti-feminist has generated tremendous discussion, debate and controversy. Irrespective of Austen's position vis-a`-vis feminism one has to admit that her concern in her novels are solely about the difficulties in which women in her contemporary society found themselves in. Through these characters she also expresses her views about the position of the female writer of that age. This chapter will focus on the issues which she raises through her characters.

Literature throughout the world, whether for children or for adults, whether purely fictional or based on reality is interspersed with angel, monster and human characters. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*[2] defines 'angel' not only as "an attendant or messenger of God" or "an attendant spirit (evil angel; guardian angel)" but also as "a very virtuous person" and "an obliging person" (40-41). Likewise, 'monster' has been described as "an imaginary creature, usually large and frightening, compounded of incongruous elements" as well as "an inhumanly cruel or wicked person"

(768). And 'human' has come to mean not merely "of or belonging to the genus Homo" but significantly implies "of or characteristic of mankind as opposed to God or animals or machines, especially susceptible to the weakness of mankind" (574). In literature, it could connote all these things and more. In this work the terms are used to encompass a broader meaning, often based on the male perspective of female behaviour.

Interestingly, these angel, monster and human figures that inhabit mature writings and children's works are found to conform to one singular principle – a principle that is governed by the ideals of patriarchy. In *Snow White* and *Cinderella* their victory comes only through the intervention of a male, thereby emphasizing the point that ultimately the power lies with the male. The defeat of the monster figures of the Step Mothers is also affected through men. These characters in the narratives are measured in terms of their adherence to the principles of patriarchy, and are consequently classified as an angel, monster or a human. Thus, it is to explore the issue of power and authority that these terms have been adopted and applied to the various characters being discussed. Indeed, literature is full of women in the shape of monsters and vice versa, and this is true for the angel image as well. Since this research restricts itself to Jane Austen, it is necessary that the discussion centers around her works, the author herself and particularly to that of her female characters. However, it is pertinent that a word be

mentioned about these prototypes of the angel, monster and human before studying them in the context of Austen's novels.

In Austen's novels it is shown that the attitude of men who want to see women as angels turns against them when their misguided expectations are not fulfilled. This she clarifies in her later novel *Emma*, when after loosing an argument with Mrs. Weston about Emma's relationship with Harriet, Mr. Knightley gives in with good but ironic grace:

> 'Very well; I will not plague you any more. Emma shall be an angel, and I will keep my spleen to myself' (*E*, 40).

Contrasted to this ideal Englishman is the anti-hero Frank Churchill whose views on women are naturally opposed to Mr. Knightley's. When towards the end of the narrative after his engagement to Jane is announced, Frank having made his peace with Emma reveals the shallowness of his regard for his future wife:

> 'She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe the eyes as she is looking up at her father. – You will be glad to hear' (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) 'that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be set new. I am resolved to have some ornament for the head. ...'
> 'Very beautiful, indeed,' replied Emma: ...
> 'How delighted I am to see you again! And to see you in such excellent looks!' (*E*, 479)

Not only is Frank mistaken in calling Jane an angel, but he makes it clear that he values her only as an object of beauty. The ornament is for "the" not "her" head, and its decoration is a subject of serious whispering. When

Emma makes a kind though reserved reply, he at once compliments her on her appearance.

These images of the angel or the monster or the human are woven in with the issues of power and authority. Since 'power' and 'authority' are the foundations on which patriarchy is based and in which its success and preservation rest, opposition to it will naturally be resented. Patriarchy, as the feminist poetics argue, has deeply influenced men's way of thinking as much as that of women. Behaviour, personality, words and actions of both the sexes are influenced and shaped by the patriarchal norms, which has not only given preference to the male articulation but has simultaneously tried to stifle the female voice, chiefly those that seem to pose a threat or challenge to it. In fact, so well entrenched and successful this process has been that women have proved to be women's greatest enemy in their attempt to please men and to fit into the mould that men have constructed for them.

Thus, in *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen mentions the two Bertram sisters – Maria and Julia – who although initially rather fond of each other, turn into rivals in their attempt to gain the attention and favour of a charming young gentleman.

> The sister [Maria] with whom she [Julia] was used to be on easy terms, was now become her greatest enemy; they were alienated from each other ... [they were] very good friends while their interests were the same, the sisters, under such a trial as this, had no affection or principle enough to

> make them merciful or just, to give them honour or compassion. (*MP*, 132)

In *Pride and Prejudice* too, Austen through Miss Bingley mentions,

> '... of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art.' (*PP*, 34)

The irony lies in that these words of Miss Bingley directed against Elizabeth, are but reflective of her own behaviour towards her sex, while she herself indulges in such behaviour in order to captivate Darcy. Although Austen ridiculed this hostility between young women she was conscious that women had no alternative but to compete in the marriage market. In *The Watsons*, one sister warns another sister about a third,

> 'There is nothing she would not do to get married. ... Do not trust her with any secrets of your own, take warning by me, do not trust her.' (*W* in *NA* vol., 277)

Thus, Emma is jealous of Harriet and Jane over Mr. Knightley, Lucy of Elinor for Edward, the Musgrove sisters are transformed into rivals for Wentworth as they all engage in a fierce female competition.

Austen's contemporary society and literature on female morals and manners had stressed the need for women to be perfect angels in the house to the point of becoming non-entities, their lives dedicated to the well-being of others, particularly the men. And this entails even sacrifice of personal comforts and desires. Austen's angelic characters, however, do not totally conform to this image of the perfect angel. Thus, Anne the most perfect

angel in Austen's novels at the end of *Persuasion* comes out of the mould into which she was fitted, that is the landed aristocracy and begins a new kind of life through her marriage to Wentworth.

When a woman tries to overcome the restrictions set by the patriarchs, she is then categorized as a monster since she poses a challenge and a threat to their authority. She is therefore viewed as an evil character. In contrast to such an aggressive and assertive woman is the angel, who is selfless in her dedication towards men and never questions the power or authority of the patriarchs, irrespective of whether she is aware or unaware of their faults. Unlike the evil monster whose primary flaw is that she wants to write her own story and live life on her own terms, the angel has no story of her own and neither does she want to tell one. Her existence is more of a process of self-effacement dedicated to the pleasure and satisfaction of men. An antithesis of the angel, the monster woman is presumptuous, devoid of angelic humility and seeks authority and autonomy, conventionally believed to be masculine rights.

'Humans' are those characters who stand the risk of evolving into monster figures, but whose superior moral authority, innate goodness and ability to see their own faults save them from such a fate. Though characters like Emma and Elizabeth might initially try and challenge patriarchy, they ultimately realize their mistake and make amends. However, their male

counterparts recognize the sleeping monster in them and impose checks and balances on them so that it will not awaken again. The situations in which these three types of women find themselves are widely varied, but it is on the basis of the quintessential element of their nature and personality that they are so classified.

Austen's angel characters like Anne, Elinor and Fanny although placed in different circumstances come quite close to the conventional picture of a Snow White, for they too can do no wrong. However, for Fanny though she does no wrong, she can feel and think wrongly, thus setting her slightly apart from the other two. The most significant contrast of these three protagonists from the traditional angel image lies in their deep-seated awareness of the defects of society and its established norms. Nonetheless, they are still angels in the eyes of men as also of women because while remaining conscious of its defects they are its greatest followers and advocates and never do anything against it. Fanny, Elinor and Anne all uphold the traditions of patriarchy and never question its ways, in spite of their being aware of its deficiencies. Only Anne by choosing to marry Captain Wentworth breaks away from the class of the landed patriarchs, and substitutes the *Baronetage* with the *Navy Lists*. But the *Navy Lists* is also a book in which women find no mention. These women characters belonging to the literary tradition of the Snow Whites – are born, live and die for the

glorification of their men folk and the welfare of others. Therefore, seen from the perspective of the patriarchal upbringing and mindset, they are everything that is good and right, as they would never oppose but yield to the male guardian – be it a father or a husband.

Elinor Dashwood, the eldest of the Dashwood sisters is truly an angel for she fulfills one of its most important criteria, in that, she never attempts to write her own story. She is totally selfless in all her actions and seeks the well-being of the man she loves, while cherishing no ambitions - not even recognition for the act of goodness done. Thus, Elinor is an ideal who upholds patriarchy, and men in turn like her, although we see neither Edward nor her step-brother Mr. Dashwood make any sort of concessions for her or try to make her comfortable. Elinor fits into this angelic role, for even when she looses all hopes of a marriage with Edward, she uses her good offices with Colonel Brandon and secures him a parsonage. But at the same time, her earnest request to Colonel Brandon is for an assurance that her involvement in this regard should be kept a secret. Elinor is like the conventional selfless angel figures of Snow White or Cinderella whose interests are to promote the welfare of others and who willingly fade into oblivion, and throughout remains a frozen picture of perfection.

Besides Elinor Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility*, who perhaps can be considered as having been placed in the most difficult position among all

the female protagonists of Austen's mature narratives it would be interesting to juxtapose Lady Susan of the novel of the same name, who presents an opposed and controversial method of survival in a man's world. Although Lady Susan's well hidden Machiavellian method is nowhere explicitly approved by Austen, but the way her character sparkles while the other female characters pale into insignificance has made critics doubt as to where the sympathy of the author actually lies. Women authors have often shown a tendency of losing control over their monster-woman characters owing to deep-seated psychological reasons, and this is marked in Jane Austen's delineation of Lady Susan's character. To borrow Blake's famous dictum from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* about Milton in the context of *Paradise Lost*, Austen too has been suspected of belonging to "the Devil's party without knowing it".[3]

Lady Susan's method of dealing with men appears nothing short of a monster behaviour – typified through such conventional female monsters like the Step Mothers of *Snow White* or *Cinderella* who try to usurp the roles usually allotted to males. However, Lady Susan is by far the cleverest and most consummate actress and knows how to make the right moves without ruffling feathers – which is why, unlike the Step Mothers she emerges victorious. Men become putty in her hands and see sense only in the way she wants them to see it and this feature in her poses a threat to the

very foundations of the patriarchal society. In making men obey her wishes as commands she subverts the first rule of the male dominated social order. True, given Lady Susan's behaviour and the way she manipulates men, she appears to be nothing short of a monster according to the established standards of her society. By cleverly flouting the social conventions she poses an implicit threat to the power and authority of men. Lady Susan 'the most accomplished Coquette in England' (*LS* in *NA vol.*, 211) is a monster, but a very interesting and captivating one at that. She conforms to the concept of a monster within the patriarchal conventions, since she too attempts to assert her own self and lead a life on her own terms, not dictated by the wishes of men.

The patriarchal frame of mind also believes that

> ... the monster may not only be concealed *behind* the angel, she may actually turn out to reside *within* ... the angel.[4]

Lady Susan and the similar character of Lucy Steele of *Sense and Sensibility* conform to this notion, since both of them appear to be deceptively sweet and angelic in their words and behaviour. Lady Susan's true monstrous self is known to us because Jane Austen lets us into her mind through the venomous letters that she writes to her close friend, Mrs. Johnson. Her angelic mask before her male acquaintances is so convincing that she can fool just about anybody she chooses to.

For Lucy Steele however, her angelic demeanor is relatively short-lived since her actions very soon expose her true self to the society at large. This method of hiding the monster behind or within an angelic personality is a very calculated behaviour in such women like Lady Susan and Lucy Steele, designed for survival in a man's world. These women find themselves with no options but to conceal their true selves or else they will be castigated and rejected by the society. They have to hide their real nature behind a pleasing mask if they are to survive because they are dependent on the men. On the contrary, a monster-man like General Tilney need not wear the disguise of an angelic form because he is dependent on none and wields power himself. Thus, the monster-woman seems to be a greater danger to the patriarchal society.

It is ironic that where Lady Susan's character appears as vibrant and glamorous, two out of three of Austen's angel characters, that is Elinor and Fanny appear to be cold and unattractive. Anne remains the only exception. It is worth noting that *Lady Susan* and *Elinor and Marianne* (the earlier epistolary version of *Sense and Sensibility*) were written in 1795, although these novels contain two totally different approaches to the problem of women's survival. That Austen conceived of a character like Lady Susan - at around the same time she created Elinor - who remains the first and greatest illustration of this type of malicious, calculative protagonist in all

her mature novels, could suggest something about the darker recesses of the author's mind. Perhaps, *Lady Susan* with a monster woman as a heroine is that one instance of a novel in which while feigning an outward level of propriety, Austen had let her guard down in a veiled manner through her protagonist. True, Lady Susan's actions and pretensions have been criticized in the narrative but the criticism appears half-hearted and more for the sake of conforming to the societal norms, rather than to any real disapproval of her nature and behaviour. In *Lady Susan,* Austen seems divided between her delight in the vitality of a talented libertine lady and her simultaneous rejection of the sexuality and selfishness of her heroine's role who also knows how to play a number of parts convincingly. Her daughter only plays a foil to make her unattractive - through her cruelty towards her – which can be seen as the author's way to suppress her interest in such willful women.

Indeed, *Elinor and Marianne* written about the same time appear more as a deliberate act to placate her own conscience, conform to the expectations of her family and friends (who were her earliest readers) and to create an image of herself as a maker of human beings and not of a monster. But it would also be wrong to assume that Austen ever strove to be an angel maker. That she finally creates two perfect angel characters – Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot and to some extent an imperfect one in Fanny Price – is a different matter altogether.

Having found a measure of psychological release through characters like Lady Susan and Lucy Steele, Austen comfortably settled down to delineate characters like Elizabeth, Emma, Marianne and Catherine Morland. These figures who combine goodness with flaws and attractiveness with mischievousness belong to what can be categorized as the truly human ones. However, all of Austen's characters irrespective of which category they belong to, possess endearing qualities because they are portrayed as flesh and blood characters. Even the monstrous characters, no matter how evil they seem, are so on a very realistic level in that they resemble the evil characters that we meet in our day-to-day life. They are to be distinguished from the artificiality that is associated with the monster figures of the gothic novel or the fairy tale, who are often crude and appear to be literal personifications of evil.

In the figures of Lady Susan, Lucy Steele and Lady Catherine, to mention some, the writer maintains all her polish, sophistication, subtlety and irony, and marks them as complex characters whose so-called monstrous actions are motivated by their need for survival. It is their desire to live their lives on their own terms that make them monsters from the patriarchal viewpoint and not because they are mere representatives of evil in that simple sense the gothic novels employ. They are complex figures because their monstrosity is induced by their survival instinct. Women like

Lady Catherine, Lady Denham and Mrs. Norris can demonstrate that very rebellious anger which is often repressed by the heroines. These widows, aunts, mothers and surrogate mothers are powerful and dominating because they have out-lived the male authorities in their lives through which circumstance they have gained enough financial power and a certain degree of independence.

The novels that follow *Lady Susan*, except *Persuasion* deals with monster characters although their roles have been relegated to that of secondary characters from that of the heroine. *Persuasion* alone differs in that there is no monster of a mother, widow or aunt; but instead we have the rather likeable Lady Russell, who is cut out to be dissimilar from the shrewd, manipulative, cunning or dictatorial dowagers of the other novels. She is thoroughly human with grave faults and merits that touch one's heart. And though not given to mishandling her power and authority, she does make wrong judgments. Kind, benevolent, intelligent and loving she still presents some glimpses as Austen's last pushy widow, though she comes nowhere close to Lady Catherine, Mrs. Norris or Mrs. Churchill. *Persuasion* depicts the evolution of a possibly assertive widow into a compassionate understanding one who will not dominate but exercise her powers with a sounder head and nobler heart than her predecessors. Austen in her attempt to do so portrays Lady Russell as a frozen, lackluster character when

compared to the other dowagers because for the first time the author was faced with a challenge to portray an aging rich powerful widow who is neither an angel nor a monster. For the absence of a model past fifty who is neither exceptional, ludicrous, silly, fierce nor nasty, Austen had none on whom she could build Lady Russell's character.

In the earlier works, angry dowagers like Lady Catherine, Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Churchill are seen as posing a threat to the hero, who is ultimately shown as successful in winning the heroine. But before this happens the heroines too are substantially scaled down from their almost excessive energies of sexuality, capriciousness and loquacity, as does Elizabeth, Marianne and Emma. Mrs. Ferrars even goes to the extent of tampering with the patriarchal line of inheritance by refusing to give her elder son his rightful inheritance. These early novels explicitly confirm that young women – even if they are as intelligent or as compassionate as Elinor must yield to the powerful societal conventions, as in getting married to ensure male protection. It simultaneously goes on to establish that schemers and manipulators like Mrs. Ferrars and her protégé Lucy Steele can themselves become frightening agents of repression, subverters of conventions and still triumphantly emerge as dominating survivors in a patriarchal world.

Despite being repressive these unfit figures of authority can occasionally be right as when Lady Catherine opposes entailing landed

estate in favour of a distant male relation, in the absence of a male in the family. One might presume that this would have been the opinion of Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Churchill too. They too would have agreed in seeing "... no occasion for entailing estates from the female lines ..." (*PP*, 146). While giving Lady Catherine this judicious stand, Austen in keeping with her sense of propriety continuously portrays her as officious, arrogant, rude, patronizing and egotistical. This widow who belongs to the aristocracy opposes the very basis of patriarchy by questioning the exclusive right of male inheritance. This she does partly because of her ignorance about the consequences of her actions in the patriarchal society which illustrates how ill-equipped such a character is to wield power which accrues to her as a widow. This seems to be the pattern of delineating Austen's monster characters in succeeding novels.

However, not only widows but a character like Mrs. Churchill assumes tremendous power even when the husband is still alive, for Mr. Churchill is "... an easy, guidable man, to be pursued into any thing ..." (*E*, 351) was consequently "... feared by nobody ..." (*E*, 351). Significantly, such female characters in positions of power occupy very little space in the narrative – they appear less, speak less and remain almost a secret presence – for we get to know about them indirectly through other characters. Their creator has deliberately underplayed the importance of their role in the narrative and has

tried to push them away till in the end they are finally banished, buried or killed. Lady Susan, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Churchill are all bad influences on their charges, be it in the capacity of mothers, surrogate mothers or aunts.

Like Lady Catherine, Aunt Norris has survived the paramount authority in her life – her husband – but has to submit before another powerful male authority, her brother-in-law Sir Thomas. She finally achieves freedom of sorts when she is banished from Mansfield Park to a distant country along with her favourite protégé Maria. Although these women exercise power, yet they cannot legitimize their claim to power – not only because society does not approve of it – but also because they cannot handle it properly on account of their lack of intellectual and moral authority. These assertive monster women suggest what some of the heroines could have turned out to be without the sobering influence of their husbands. Elizabeth and Emma, it can be surmised were Lady Catherine and Mrs. Churchill in the making respectively, and Lucy Steele is undoubtedly the future Mrs. Ferrars. Gilbert and Gubar rightly points out that

> Aunt Norris, is clearly meant to be a dark parody of Mary Crawford.[5]

As opposed to the misguided authority in *Mansfield Park*, the vitriolic shrew Mrs. Churchill is deliberately hidden in *Emma*. One only hears about her from the opinions and conversations of others. We are informed

that she "... rules at Enscombe, and is a very odd-tempered woman ...", "... an ill-tempered person ..." and "dreadful" (*E*, 110). As a woman, who is "... not capable of being fond of any body, except herself ...", (*E*, 109) she has "... no more heart than a stone to people in general, and the devil of a temper ..." (*E*, 109). Ironically, though "... she is so very unreasonable; ... every thing gives way to her." (*E*, 111)

But like Mrs. Norris she is the casual agent of the plot, influencing Mr. Weston's life, causing him and the late Miss Churchill grief, dominating Frank Churchill's existence, making him deceitful and forcing him to hide his engagement to Jane Fairfax that leads to the series of misunderstandings and various comic and not-so-comic developments. Proud, whimsical, arrogant, bitter and hurtful like Lady Catherine, Mrs. Ferrars or Mrs. Norris, she unlike them however uses her poor health to elicit attention and obedience from her family, when it is not attainable otherwise.

Mrs. Churchill illustrates how a person endowed with tremendous power and authority can become without the aid of intellectual and moral competence. She also represents the initial tendencies of other heroines of Austen and the inherent danger of becoming characters like her but for their intellectual and moral authority. In her feminine qualities, ladylike polite behaviour and reserve, Mrs. Churchill hides her monstrous self, born out of manipulation and deceit in order to attain power in a man's world. But she

also ends up as a victim of her own selfish, deceptive, hypocritical methods. Her silences, evasions and lies ultimately take as its toll - her life. Given to exploiting her poor health conditions to secure her own selfish ends and exact obedience from others -

> Poor Mrs. Churchill! No doubt she had been suffering a great deal: more than any body had ever supposed ... (E, 351).

In her final stage no one believes in her sincerity and considers it as mere manipulative tactics.

> She had never been admitted before to be seriously ill. The event [death] acquitted her of all the fancifulness, and all the selfishness of imaginary complaints. (*E*, 351)

However, Austen with her sense of balance went on to create other characters who were human. In her portrayal of the likes of Elizabeth, Emma, Marianne and Catherine they are characterized more by the mistakes they make than by their right moves. All four of them believe themselves to be in the right till they are proven wrong and are guided in the correct direction by the men they love. It is their faults that make them human and are therefore, to be differentiated from the most perfect angels as Anne and Elinor. Their flaw lies in their over-confidence, inexperience and ignorance about themselves and others. Elizabeth and Emma believe themselves to be as intelligent as their male counterparts, in comprehending the man's world and of human nature; while Catherine's faults lie in her lack of intelligence and understanding of the world and its ways. Emma and Elizabeth, Austen

points out to be wrong, but their shortcomings are the corrigible ones which can be forgiven by the men. It is under the loving influence and attention of a Mr. Knightley or a Mr. Darcy that they can be fitted into the mould of more likeable characters.

Although Elizabeth and Emma had the potential to be become monster women, it is their goodness and moral authority coupled with the love and guidance of worthy life partners that prevents them from becoming a Lady Catherine. Emma and Elizabeth are more intelligent than most men but their intelligence is of a moral kind. Their weakness lies in that they fail to recognize their own moral strength and instead emphasize on their practical intelligence gained through limited experience in situations over which they have very little authority. Throughout the narrative and particularly in the conclusions of *Pride and Prejudice, Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*, Austen suggests that to wield this kind of authority they will have to rely on their husbands for ultimately such an authority belongs to men only in their world.

Sense and Sensibility, besides presenting an angel, monster and human character in Elinor, Lucy Steele and Marianne respectively, also presents the character of Eliza Brandon, Colonel Brandon's first love, who does not fit into any of these categorizations. She does not belong to the stereotype of the angel, monster or the human but is nonetheless a victim of patriarchy.

Eliza must be distinguished from a monster, since her attempts to lead her own life were not intentionally directed against male power and authority. But given the circumstances she was unsuccessful. After having lived a life of disappointment in love, in being forced to marry Colonel Brandon's brother against her own will, at whose hands she "experienced great unkindness" (*SS*, 150), Eliza finally ends up in a divorce – considered scandalous in Austen's contemporary society. Thereafter, she is thrown into situations where she is forced to write her own story. In her weak and futile endeavours to chart the course of her own life she only ends up in greater misery. It is from that moment onwards when she is independent of male power and authority her process of debasement commences. Ultimately she falls in stature from a decent human being to a highly degenerated woman.

The patriarchal voice through Colonel Brandon judges,

> "She [Eliza] resigned herself first to all the misery of her situation; and happy had it been if she had not lived to overcome those regrets ..." (*SS*, 150).

In other words, even her death would have been preferable than an assertion of herself. Having been educated and brought up in a manner where women were taught to submit to the authority of men, Eliza was ill-equipped when it came to taking control over her own life. The consequences were disastrous as she was "... to sink deeper in a life of sin ..." (*SS*, 151) and finally wasted away without money and love, a victim of consumption.

Even her appearance underwent a change, from the beautiful looks in her earlier days to that of a faded beauty. Colonel Brandon recalls,

> "So altered – so faded – worn down by acute suffering of every kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming healthful girl, on whom I had once doated" (*SS*, 151).

Comparisons between Mrs. Eliza Brandon and Marianne Dashwood by Colonel Brandon occur quite a few times in the narrative which strongly suggests that Marianne too might become someone like Eliza. Too human and attractive a woman with major flaws, Marianne stands the greatest risk of loosing her human character. That she is saved from doom unlike Eliza Brandon and can be categorized as a human is primarily because of her goodness of personality and owing to the stabilizing influence of her angelic sister Elinor. Marianne, like Eliza Brandon stood the chance of being reduced to a degenerated self, but not a monster woman, because these two characters unlike Lady Susan and Lucy Steele are not inherently evil, but more victims of their own flawed nature and circumstances. This was further worsened by their inadequate education that otherwise could have supported them through their trials and tribulations.

In *Mansfield Park* too, we see how society treats a woman who shows a willingness to lead life her own way. However, unlike Eliza, Maria was not mistreated by her husband, although the obstinate choice of marrying a

foolish man has disastrous effects on her life. Maria with "high spirits and strong passions" had the boldness, foolishness and audacity,

> ... not to be prevailed on to leave Mr. Crawford. She hoped to marry him, and they continued together till she was obliged to be convinced that such hope was vain ... and then induce a voluntary separation. (*MP*, 378)

She consequently had to face all the indignity and humiliation of this adulterous affair whereas, Henry goes scot free. Such an action naturally led to her divorce from her husband Mr. Rushworth. Though she does not die like Eliza nor is ultimately redeemed like Marianne, she comes across as someone who though definitely not an angel or is also not a total monster, but in whom her self-destructive will is dominant and which society perceives as evil in her.

However, regarding the comparative fates of Maria and Henry, Austen comments with sharpness, sarcasm and perhaps a hint of sadness:

> In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished (*MP*, 382),

thereby, criticizing society's approbation of such justice which is always biased against women. By comparing their fates Austen questions whether 'virtue' was to be thought of in the same way for both the sexes or as different in kind and quality for men and for women.

Austen's creation of these types of characters of the angel, monster and human was meant to fulfill distinctive functions. Although the portrayal of these angel characters might create an impression of Jane Austen as an anti-feminist, they actually project a feminist standpoint. Austen expresses

her greatest disenchantment about patriarchy within these novels through the judicious and intelligent women who no matter how deserving of power and authority, will never acquire the power that they truly deserve in a patriarchal society. Except Wentworth and Edward no other man can genuinely appreciate the worth of Anne and Elinor respectively and as for Fanny, one cannot be very sure that Sir Thomas or Edmund can comprehend her genuine value, for in the end of *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas still continues to have the ultimate say. Interestingly, Austen through her angel characters – whereby, they are denied of power and authority that they deserve – reveals most staunchly her lack of faith in patriarchy. On an outward level these angel characters sincerely adhere to patriarchal standards but through these characters the author is taking a feminist stand by obliquely questioning why the deserving are deprived of the power and authority that should have been theirs. Where Austen most seems to conform to the patriarchal expectations, that same area contains her most scathing criticism of it.

It is this irony that pervades throughout her narratives and allows her to express her criticism of the society which denies the woman her rightful place. But it is the same society with allows unappealing characters like Lady Susan and Lady Catherine to exercise power and authority when they do not deserve it. Herein lies the significance of her equivocation as she

expresses her lack of faith in society and exposes the biases against women. This is however not to say that Austen is an avowed feminist for her style throughout remains very subtle.

> It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. ... Hence, perhaps, the peculiar nature of woman in fiction ; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror ; her alternations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity-for so a lover would see her as his love rose or sank, was prosperous or unhappy.[6]

In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* the author has exhibited great faith in women like Elinor, Fanny and Anne respectively, who are more capable of handling authority than their male counterparts. But at the end of these narratives, despite their higher claims to intelligence and moral authority than most men, they are not allowed to exercise power. Throughout the novels we see these women obligingly accepting the flawed set-up, either of Mr. Dashwood, Sir Thomas or Sir Walter. But being angel figures they seldom question or contradict their ways - except in extremely rare outbursts as Anne does towards the end of *Persuasion.*

Austen's wavering between the angel, monster and human characters about whom she shows an in-depth understanding of their psyche and situation, also suggests something about her own weakness and how she related towards them. Through the dominating, determined and ambitious women – the author found the means of artistic liberation. Her novels

provided her with the unique opportunity whereby she could create, escape as well as censure. Austen apparently seems to reject as improper and indecent the attractively dangerous Lady Susan, Emma with her witty retorts and Mary Crawford vibrant, attractive and able to compose witty letters. She might have done this with the purpose of safeguarding her role as an author. But through them she escaped those restraints which she had herself imposed on her female characters. In her narratives she throughout remains witty, brilliant, assertive, spirited, independent and occasionally even arrogant and severely scathing and satirical. Caught in a contradiction she outwardly submitted to docility like her heroines while beneath the seeming acquiescing surface she delighted in assertion and rebellion. This anxiety and conflict is evident in all her narratives, as when she is caught between the opposing types like Lady Susan and Frederica in *Lady Susan*, Elizabeth and Jane in *Pride and Prejudice*, Marianne and Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility*, Emma and Jane in *Emma*, Mary, Maria and Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, and so on. That Austen wàs an intelligent vibrant and even flirtatious woman with a scathing sense of sarcastic humour is amply evident from her letters and opinions, but her family always wanted to project an image of her as a good Christian – and in that they exaggerated the religiosity and goodness of her character.

Henry Austen in his "Biographical Notice of The Author" did exactly that which have been pointed out by Chapman.

> But the [Austen's] letters, ... were deliberately robbed of much of their significance, and the surviving letters, like the novels but even more so, have given their readers impressions of the writer's character which are widely divergent. If we wish to know Jane Austen as she was, we are bound to consider the accounts of her by those who knew her. Allowance for family partiality and family loyalty may have to be made.[7]

Most of Austen's letters were addressed to her sister Cassandra to whom she was very close, and Cassandra in turn did everything to keep them a secret. Caroline Austen has stated that Cassandra "... burnt the greater part [of the letters] ... three or four years before her death" and those that survived several "had portions cut out".[8] In many of the Brabourne letters, sections were carefully removed with scissors. However, her letters still leave traces of a person who appears not so agreeable when she can be herself, and as possessing a wit which is sharp, bitter, scathing, sparing none who is at fault.

Chapman has rightly stated,

> ... when we turn to Henry Austen's *Notice* of his sister, we know we have to be on our guard – for Jane herself has warned us – against his 'brotherly vanity and love' ...[9]

Henry Austen states that hers was

> A life of usefulness, literature and religion ... ("Notice" in *P* vol., 1),

and literature is mentioned only in passing along with her other qualities. Indeed, throughout the *Biographical Notice* the emphasis is more on all the different aspects than on literature, and he goes on to emphasize her

accomplishments as a painter, musician, dancer and a beautiful woman in the same breath as an author. It is replete with passages like, "Neither her love of God, nor of her fellow creatures flagged for a moment ..." ("Notice" in *P* vol., 2) and that she was "... a brighter genius or a sincere Christian" ("Notice" in *P* vol., 3). Henry Austen as expected concluded his piece by emphasizing on her religiosity and goodness –

> She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature. On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church. ("Notice" in *P* vol., 6)

But the letters give enough indication that she was not the very pious person that her family wanted to portray, and certainly not the boring personality that Henry Austen has drawn. In her real life there was more that was interesting about her, and thus, there was also that which was less pleasing.

Jane Austen's own life can be surmised as no better than her fictionalized female characters. Like them, she too, was physically restricted in her movements by social considerations, and had to be dependent on the goodwill of her brothers and relatives. Moreover, like her characters, these restrictions acted as shackles because of the lack of economic independence. Perhaps it is only Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* who to a certain extent is shown to overcome such restrictions when she resolves to visit sick Jane braving the bad weather, the difficult terrain and ignoring the insinuations of others. Indeed, such a behaviour asserting the freedom of

movement and bordering on rebellion did not go down well with others, and particularly not with her female acquaintances.

> That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it. (*PP*, 28)

Deeply conscious of the predicament of the women of her times, Jane Austen expressed her anxiety over it through her various female characters, whether it is the rich and handsome Emma or the not so rich and not so handsome Elizabeth Bennet, the clever and moralistic Fanny Price or the unethical Mrs. Clay or Lucy Steele, the rich and so-called powerful widows like Lady Catherine or Lady Russell or the aging and non-influential spinster like Miss. Bates. Besides her own personal circumstances which were somewhat similar to those of her own characters, Austen had to cope with the burden of being a female writer in an age where writing was also considered to be a male prerogative. It may however be stated that women were gradually beginning to write and attempting to have their voices heard, which was almost revolutionary for those times. This led to the evolution of a new social phenomena which would for a long time be viewed by men as a threat to their authority. Being sensitive to such a male attitude Austen veiled her personal prejudices through her creative sensibilities and was hence not as outspoken a writer like Mary Wollstonecraft.

Her novels may not be as vocal in feminist views like *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in manner, style, presentation or language but they testify to the fact that she was acutely aware of the position of women in the literary tradition and of herself as a woman writer. During her own lifetime she had shown an interest in the writings of contemporary female writers and their thoughts and had read the works of Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth amongst others. Burney and Edgeworth she regarded as her teachers for she saw that their works demonstrated that women had those powers of the mind which were earlier accorded only to men. In fact, Fanny Burney had influenced Austen to such an extent that *Northanger Abbey* reflects certain elements of Burney's works like *Evelina*, *Cecilia* and *Camilla*. *Sanditon* too, makes comments on *Camilla* – the protagonist Charlotte,

> ... took up a book; it happened to be a volume of *Camilla*. She had not Camilla's Youth, and had no intention of having her Distress, - so, she turned from the Drawers (*S* in *NA vol.*, 345).

Persuasion too, has a direct reference of "the inimitable Miss Larolles" (*P*, 179) from *Cecilia*, although she had trivialized these works. Ironically, Austen's works are more well read today than any of her contemporary women writers, although Burney and Edgeworth were the more popular novelists during her times. Austen was highly critical of gothic and

sentimental literature too. One such criticism is found in the over-sensitive character of Captain Benwick in *Persuasion*, to whom Anne had to –

> ... recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study ... works of our best moralists, ... finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering ... (*P*, 98).

But Jane Austen had an acute sense of anxiety over authorship and her awareness which she experienced as a woman. This is most poignantly expressed through Anne in *Persuasion* where in one of the most memorable lines, she expresses the predicament of women during her times – their anxiety not only over authority, but over every sphere of life be it that of a writer, a wife, a marriageable woman or a spinster. Austen through Anne – her most mature heroine - makes her point,

> 'Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.' (*P*, 221)

Through her heroines Austen clearly suggests that in a patriarchal society the women's voice is often stifled. It can be seen that the author upheld the views of the heroine of *Persuasion*, than of any of the other characters in the novel. While Anne is almost revered, Catherine Morland is the butt of Austen's irony, but despite that in her ignorance she is made to utter words of profundity on the condition of women.

> 'But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in ... The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull,' (*NA*, 84).

History and politics as the author perceived were deliberately kept beyond the reach of a woman's experience. But a history which is written at the cost of ignoring half the population in itself can be considered a fiction conveniently woven by patriarchy. If at all, such history treats women with indifference, who never participate in the scheme of things and are almost completely absent from its pages. As Virginia Woolf rightly observes,

> Imaginatively she [woman] is of the highest importance ; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover ; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction ; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents force a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips ; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.[10]

Therefore, Austen asserts that women see male-dominated history from the disillusioned and disaffected perspective of the outsider as Catherine does.

Jane Austen's anxiety over authorship and her awareness of the limitations to which a female writer had to restrict herself to, is best revealed in the circumstances under which her novels were written. She wrote her novels in the common sitting room and hid her manuscripts or covered them with a piece of blotting paper or a piece of lace. In fact, she was glad that a hinge creaked which provided her with the warning that someone was entering the room, and thereby, providing her with the timely opportunity to hide her composition. She had not 'a room of one's own", to borrow Virginia Woolf's phrase – for her literary pursuits, and till the end of

her life she had no separate study and did most of her work in the general sitting-room subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. In fact, Austen was very careful to ensure that not even the servants, nor any visitor, except her family members and friends should have the slightest inkling as to her literary pre-occupations. That she produced literary classics of such enduring worth and greatness under difficult and disturbing circumstances is indeed remarkable.

In creating the characters whom Jane Austen had taken from the reality around her, and who too can be categorized into the types of the angel, monster and human (especially the female ones), the author has not only revealed her own anxiety as a woman and as an author, but at the same time has shown her ability to come out of the male structured text by producing texts of her own. In spite of strong patriarchal influences she created a new world within patriarchy in her novels and delineated characters who embodied her own anxiety over authority and authorship and at the same time achieved a kind of liberation for herself. The woman's voice that had been suppressed since ages was slowly but surely getting to be heard towards the end of the eighteenth century because of writers like Jane Austen who spoke through characters like Anne Elliot, Lady Susan and Elizabeth Bennet.

Notes

[1] G and G 17.

[2] The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 8th ed. (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990).

[3] Margaret Drabble, The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 5th ed, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 654.

[4] G and G 29.

[5] G and G 70.

[6] Woolf 68-69.

[7] R.W. Chapman, ed., Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1952) 90. (Hereafter cited as Chapman).

[8] Chapman 142.

[9] Chapman 94.

[10] Woolf 37-38.

Chapter II

Interchangeability of Selfishness and Selflessness

> She ... leads a life ... in considerable isolation on a country estate ... a life without external events – a life whose story cannot be told as there is no story. Her existence is not useless. On the contrary ... she shines like a beacon in a dark world, like a motionless lighthouse by which others, the travelers whose lives do have a story, can set their course. When those involved in feeling and action turn to her in their need, they are never dismissed without advice and consolation. She is an ideal, a model of selflessness and of purity of heart.[1]

This is Goethe's description of Makarie, supposedly one of the noblest figures of femininity according to him that features in one of his later novels. Her qualities are those which make up the essential characteristics of the angel women down the ages – a type that has been loved, patronized and praised by the patriarchal society. Significantly, this elaboration of Goethe's eternal feminine is epitomized by these words –

She is an ideal, a model of selflessness and of purity of heart.

His comments are relevant in the context of this thesis, because such an account fits the description or varies from it, in some of Jane Austen's heroines and other female characters.

Among Austen's angel characters Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood fit perfectly into this description ascribed to Goethe's Makarie, whereas, Fanny Price while outwardly seems to conform to this picture presents some contradictions at a deeper level. In so far the human characters of Elizabeth

Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are concerned they too bear resemblances to Goethe's eternal feminine at certain points while differing at others. As far as the monster types of Mrs. Norris, Lady Catherine and Lady Denham are concerned, the interest in them arises not in their similarity but in their differences, and how despite such differences they successfully maneuver their male counterparts and wield power over them.

In all of these characters, selflessness or selfishness either in a revealed or disguised manner, is often consciously or unconsciously a vehicle of securing authority. Thus the qualities of selfishness or selflessness are invariably related to the larger societal issues of female power and authority in Austen's world and in the eighteenth century society. In *Sanditon*, however, the author's treatment of this topic acquires an altogether unique position, which distinguishes this incomplete novel from her earlier works.

A day in Makarie's life one can imagine, in spite of the differences in situation and circumstances cannot be very different from Anne Elliot's in its essence, for it is the same quality of "selflessness and of purity of heart" that governs her activities and gives direction to her life. Thus from the beginning of *Persuasion* the reader is provided with an idea of the kind of activities that keeps the female protagonist engaged:

> It was an afternoon of distress, and Anne had everything to do at once – the apothecary to send for – the father to have pursued and informed – the

> mother to support and keep from hysterics – the servants to control – the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe; - besides sending, as soon as she recollected it, proper notice to the other house, which brought her an accession rather of frightened, enquiring companions, than of very useful assistants. (*P*, 54)

This passage is meant to give the reader a fairly clear picture about the heroine's personality, highlighting her selfless nature, about whom Austen admits in a letter as "almost too good for me" (*P*, cover page). It is in this sense that one can say Anne, Elinor and Fanny lead "a life whose story cannot be told as there is no story". They, as it were, live more for the sake of others than for themselves. It is Austen's perception about the inner life of such women in her contemporary times that makes a story possible out of their otherwise uneventful lives.

Throughout, *Persuasion* abounds in instances of what this most perfect angel of Austen – Anne does, thinks or feels. Being an angel, whatever she does is for the sake of others, her family, friends, acquaintances and rarely for herself. When we see Anne in action it is usually in these moments devoted to the comfort and benefit of others. For instance, on dancing being proposed one evening at the Great Hall,

> Anne offered her services, *as usual*, and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved. (*P*, 71) [Italics mine]

Henry Tilney the male protagonist of *Northanger Abbey*, aptly sums up the root of the dilemma when he states, "... man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal" (*NA*, 57).

Anne, the demure protagonist of *Persuasion,* "has quite given up dancing" (*P*, 71) which suggests the suppression and renunciation of the self. This anxiety over selfhood which in turn is connected with authorship has found expression in the works of female writers down the ages – Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Shelly, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the three Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Louisa May Alcott, Emily Dickinson, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, to name a few prominent ones, besides of course Jane Austen. Some like Anne Sexton, Margaret Atwood and even the fairy tale tradition (*The Red Dancing Shoes*) have associated the red shoes or the dancing shoes as the symbols of art which women writers have associated with anxiety of selfhood. Anne had once desired to write her story during her youth in seeking to carve a future with Wentworth – it was suppressed by hands stronger than hers. Henceforth, she never attempted it again.

Angelic women's *self-less*ness ensures that they have no story to tell because they have to suppress the *self.* The literary tradition also implies that if a woman wears a red shoe and dances, the good man would go away. Alternatively she could have the love of a good man if she refrained from it.

Louisa Musgrove's assertion of the *self* could be compared with a feverish dance, the suicidal tarantella, which ultimately leads to her almost fatal fall, leaving her extremely nervous. It is only after being duly punished and as it were, literally shorn of her dancing shoes, when she becomes the opposite of her former assertive self, does she secure the love of a good man.

> After all, dancing the death dance, "all those girls / who wore the red shoes" dismantle their own bodies, like anorexics renouncing the guilty weight of their female flesh.[2]

This statement points out the anxiety of female selfhood, or the anxiety that a woman undergoes when unable to renounce the *self* to become *self-less*.

Anne, unlike Louisa had given up dancing long ago. Thus, while those around her dance and sing, she fades into oblivion amidst the din and bustle of the crowd surrounding her, as if silenced by their gaiety, laughter, confusion and lively conversations. When not required to be of aid to others, she retreats into her solitary self or into a quiet corner of the room. Others are hardly aware of her, whereas, she always has time and attention for everyone. In return,

> She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary. (*P*, 47)

Such a life can be compared to Goethe's Makarie. To Lady Russell alone she somewhat reveals her heart. Passages as this largely summarize Anne's existence –

> ... Anne glad to be thought of some use, glad to have anything marked out as duty. (*P*, 36)

Another quotation from an early chapter also reinforces this point, in which Anne tells her younger sister as to why she could not come to her earlier,

> 'A great many things, I assure you (that I have been doing). More than I can recollect in a moment: but I can tell you some. I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. I have been several times in the garden with Mackenzie, trying to understand, and make him understand, which of Elizabeth's plants are for Lady Russell. I have had all my own little concerns to arrange – books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack, from not having understood in time what was intended as to the waggons. ... going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. I was told they wished it.' (*P*, 41)

Austen's emphasis is evidently on the numerous tasks that Anne carries out for others, whereas, what she does for herself comes later and occurs as an insignificant aside. The last remark about her house-visits is cleverly incorporated to show the protagonist's moral authority above the rest. Indeed, Anne possesses this quality in a far greater degree than any of the other characters in this novel. These details of her selfless activities which are interwoven throughout the entire narrative, is more than a recounting of Anne's pre-occupations, but also serves as a means whereby, our attention is drawn to her superiority of character which distinguishes her from her friends and family.

There is no mention of either Sir Walter or his favourite eldest daughter Elizabeth performing the duty – which should have been theirs – of "... going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave ..."

(*P*, 41). Austen's portrayal of them, leaves us with enough room to fairly surmise that Sir Walter and Elizabeth, are not the sort of people to be bothered with such duties and responsibilities. Anne's moral superiority over the rest, her selfless service towards the society and family go unrecognized and unacknowledged by her family, who takes it for granted. This is not to suggest that Anne expected any acknowledgement or gratitude from her family whom she understood perfectly well. It is her sense of rightness of actions that motivates her judgment and activity, not the desire to be praised which distinguishes her from the insipid heroine of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price. In return all that her father the "foolish, spendthrift baronet" Sir Walter,

> ... could give his daughter ... [was] but a small part of the share of ten thousand pounds which must be hers. (*P*, 234)

Needless to say, the rest of it has been squandered away in supporting his lavish lifestyle.

Through the Elliots, Austen has once again portrayed the aristocracy in a very poor light, full of vanity and show, lacking in genuine qualities of goodness, talent or sense of responsibility. It is Anne alone who can discern their shallowness. Thus, it is she and none of her sisters or father who can comprehend the change in status that they have undergone by shifting to Bath. Anne on reaching Bath perceptively

> ... sigh(ed) that her father should feel no degradation in his change; should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident land-

> holder; should find so much to be vain of in the littleness of a town; ... and wander too, as Elizabeth ... who had been mistress of Kellynch-hall, finding extent to be proud of between two walls, perhaps thirty feet asunder. (*P*, 130)

Anne had realized long ago that "... they were nothing. There was no superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding" (*P*, 141-42) and here her opinions are as much about the Dalrymples and the Elliots as for the degenerate aristocracy in general.

Despite this awareness of their nothingness, it is the sense of duty that compels Anne to go to almost every house in the parish, fulfilling a social obligation of the aristocratic Elliots, thus, maintaining the dignity of her family in such a society. The irony lies in her awareness of "... knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle" (*P*, 44), but this "nothingness" has not prevented her from doing what ought to have been done by them. Her act is totally selfless, because she has nothing to gain from this male dominated socio-political institution of rank and hierarchy, except goodwill.

The reward is, indeed, ironic. Although Anne and not Elizabeth visits the parishioners, it is the latter who will be the

> ...mistress of Kellynch Hall, presiding and directing ...doing the honours, and laying down the domestic law at home (*P*, 12-13),

as long as Sir Walter is alive or till she gets married. The irony is implicit in the situation, in the socio-political aristocratic structure which does not give honours to the most deserving but is based on the law of succession, rewarding not the ablest but the eldest. Elizabeth, although far inferior in

moral and intellectual authority to Anne, had occupied Lady Elliot's place since her death thirteen years ago, and William Walter Elliot, Esq. no better or more deserving than Sir Walter himself, will finally inherit Kellynch-hall. Anne the voice of propriety,

> ... could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners (*P*, 119),

when Sir Walter rents it out and he himself retires to Bath. Admiral Croft and his wife who are merely the tenants of Kellynch-hall will ultimately go away, as it would pass on, into the hands of William Elliot, although the Crofts are far more deserving than the Elliots.

Anne's genuine selflessness whether for her family, friends or society finds mention right from the beginning to the end of *Persuasion*. Never does she perform them with disinterest or malice, a little regret maybe in certain exceptional situations, as when she is asked to explain an Italian song to Miss Carteret, at the cost of being separated from Wentworth. It is her innate goodness wishing well for all - that differentiates her actions from the seemingly selfless deeds of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* which will be discussed later in this chapter. Anne's goodness of nature and selfless behaviour is not of a cloying kind as it is with the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, but possesses an unsentimental quality that is combined with stoicism and integrity.

Anne alone, of all of Austen's female protagonists possesses those purely selfless qualities which perhaps only Elinor Dashwood can claim to possess. But in Anne's case more than in Elinor's, her goodness is defined in terms of her selfless activities for others. Significantly unlike Elinor who is the eldest and hence has to shoulder the responsibility of her family, Anne technically need not bear any. Qualities like kindness, generosity, virtuousness, patience etc. are borne out by what she does for others.

Wentworth always recognizes Anne's superiority over the rest of her acquaintances. But Austen nonetheless explains that it is "...the scenes on the Cobb, and at Captain Harville's, [which] had fixed her superiority" (*P*, 228). These episodes displayed her capacity to provide instant comfort and useful service more efficiently than any of the gentlemen or ladies. Thus, after Louisa's fall on the Cobb, Wentworth with deep feelings implores her, "... but, if Anne will stay, no one so proper, so capable as Anne!" (*P*, 111). Clearly, the faith and confidence he can repose on her and on nobody else comes from his knowledge of her from the past - be it her attending the young sick little Charles, her behaviour at the Great House or the numerous small acts of goodness. It is by chance that he had been a witness to a few of such acts, though many more were carried out in his absence. Even her decision not to be engaged to Wentworth at nineteen,

> ... was not a merely selfish caution ... Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given

> him up. - The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for his advantage, was her chief consolation, under the misery of a parting – a final parting ... all the additional pain of opinions on his side (*P*, 31).

Her selflessness had only afforded her pain, hurt and suffering for the next seven long years.

It is more than mere coincidence or a matter of irony that such gestures shape the destiny of the protagonist, paving the way for Anne's escape from the cloistered confines of the aristocracy and gives her the authority – no matter how little - that she can exercise through her marriage to Wentworth. The turning point in her fortune and her relationship with Wentworth commences in *Persuasion* from the point where her usefulness at Lyme stands in sharp contrast to the uselessness and confusion of others during Louisa's accident. Also when the eldest Musgrove boy suffered from a dislocated collar-bone, she once more takes up a similar position, displaying more calmness, sense and control than any of her female or male counterparts.

Hence Wentworth's public avowal of confidence in Anne. This is also one of the first instances where Wentworth betrays his emotions for her. This incident is the centre of the narrative for it is from now on that they, the once engaged pair moves again towards love, understanding and respect, culminating in marriage. Austen comments

> ... but he was obliged to acknowledge that only at Uppercross had he learnt to do her justice, and only at Lyme had he begun to understand himself. (*P*, 228).

Lyme also marks another highpoint in *Persuasion* in a different way. It has a sobering effect on Louisa which ultimately paves the way for her marriage with Captain Benwick. Wentworth, who was at one time attracted to Louisa, once expressed his view of what should characterize an ideal woman;

> 'To exemplify, - a beautiful glossy nut, which blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn' (*P*, 86),

suggest all praises for Louisa's "character of decision and firmness" (*P*, 86) while being critical of Anne's lack of it. But he confesses to Anne in the denouement of the narrative,

> ... he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind (*P*, 228).

This shows that Wentworth recognizes Anne's true personality of selflessness as opposed to Louisa's shallow personality. Louisa never goes on to become the perfect 'nut' the way Anne is, and hence will have to settle for a groom who is less worthy than Wentworth. She pays dearly for her "self-will" (*P*, 228) when she falls from the steps at Lyme. It tames her spirit and curbs her zest by leaving her only slightly better than a cripple. Louisa does not suffer the fate of a Mary Crawford or a Maria Bertram, but her rewards have been proportionately less than that of Anne's – for she ends up with a second best husband like Captain Benwick. The fate that Louisa suffers from, exhibits the author's ambivalence. Although Austen

often presents a judicious balance between the two extremes but she can be occasionally unkind to her vocal and spirited female characters as seen in her treatment of Louisa in this novel and Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park.*

Although it is Anne's genuine qualities of head and heart – and primarily her selflessness - that wins Captain Wentworth's love, her actions are never motivated by such a reward in mind. She never displays any desire to attain or exercise power and authority nor has the slightest hope for love and marriage. "Anne, at seven and twenty, thought very differently" (*P*, 32) cherishing little hope for love or romance, is instead reconciled to her destiny of spinsterhood. With her decision not to marry Sir Walter's successor she forever losses the opportunity of becoming the mistress of Kellynch-hall, that would have conferred on her the maximum powers that a woman can exercise within the landed aristocratic set-up. Significantly, this decision is taken by Anne with promptness and without regrets.

> For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of 'Lady Elliot' first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist. (*P*, 151-52)

But it was only for a moment and despite such tantalizing prospects she was sure that

> ... she never could accept him ... her judgment, on a serious consideration of the possibilities of such a case was against Mr. Elliot. (*P*, 152)

Selflessness is not just another virtue in Austen's scheme of things. Perhaps the same can be said for her contemporary eighteenth century society. It is interesting that Anne was the choice of both Wentworth and William Walter Elliot. That this should be so can be construed as more than a narrative device to enhance the climax through the element of jealousy. Both the gentlemen are shown to be superior in intelligence than most others, in the case of William it can be described as shrewdness. That they with a better understanding than most men should have Anne as their preferable choice, points out that Anne despite being "faded and thin" with "little to admire in her [looks]" (*P*, 12) was still attractive to sensible men, and also women, by virtue of her "... elegance of mind and sweetness of character" (*P*, 11). Also beautiful are her "mild dark eyes" (*P*, 12) which are the windows to her soul. Earlier Wentworth had described to his sister Mrs. Croft that –

> 'A strong mind, with sweetness of manner,' made the first and the last of the description (*P*, 62),

of what he wanted in a wife. He was reacting against what he accused Anne of - "feebleness of character", "weakness and timidity" (*P*, 62), little conscious that the qualities that he would prefer in his would-be wife are the very qualities which Anne possesses. An integral and important part of this "sweetness" is her selflessness, amongst "her merits" (*P*, 227). Thus, in Jane Austen selfish or selfless qualities to a significant extent can endear or

remove women from patriarchal patronage. "Mrs. Clay's selfishness" (*P*, 202) in her attempts to secure Sir Walter or his successor is disguised under her " ... affections ... [that] may finally carry the day" and she hoped that Mr. Elliot might "... be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William." (*P*, 236). Austen's other novels too, present glimpses of women who don the mantle of selflessness to further their selfish objectives.

Anne and Elinor in being selfless, approximate a status where they are almost *self-less.* As has already been observed in the case of Anne, her thoughts are directed more at the well-being of others than of her own. The same is true for Elinor. However, in her case they are more for her immediate family, particularly her sister Marianne, her mother and Edward, than for the wider circle of friends and acquaintances. In some degrees Anne is closer to the ideal than Elinor, for her selflessness crosses all social boundaries, as is amply illustrated in her actions towards the Musgroves, Mrs. Smith and the parishioners amongst others.

Significantly, unlike die-hard feminists who hold that being *self-less* includes within its ambit moral and psychological implications that the term can imply, Austen's protagonists, however, do not totally conform to this extreme. Neither Anne nor Elinor are morally or psychologically *self-less*, for they constantly have an awareness of what is right and not right. They

very much have a mind of their own, and in being gifted with superior intelligence and understanding they can often recognize people for what they are. Otherwise Anne would not have reflected about her family on reaching Bath or felt about Mr. Elliot the way she did, if she had been morally or psychologically unaware. This is further evident in her choice of Wentworth over William. Anne seems almost too perfect for an Austen heroine, but careful distinctions, separating her from the sentimental ideal are made. Although she is not witty in the striking way that Elizabeth Bennet and Emma are, there are moments when she shows a quick, critical mind and sharpness of tongue as in her conversation with Captain Harville.

But it is true that Anne and Fanny are generally scared at the prospect of being heard or noticed in public. About Anne's utterance Austen tells us,

> She had spoken it; but she trembled when it was done, conscious that her words were listened to, and daring not even to try to observe their effect. (*P*, 212)

Even while making a case for women her tone is not one of confidence or assertion but of *self-less* submission:

> 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it)' (*P*, 222).

This is even more true and pronounced in Fanny Price who "... seemed almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of neglect." (*MP*, 159) This selflessness is related to the patriarchal belief that to please man should be the fair sex's greatest pleasure. This in turn denies her any

scope for writing her own story or of living her life the way she desires. Therefore, the art of pleasing men is not only an angelic quality but one that was considered proper of a lady. This selflessness, the need to negate oneself when taken to an extreme level, can also lead to a form of renunciation in the angel women. Thus, Anne and Fanny are both thin and delicate. They are angel characters because by surrendering their self, that is, their personal comfort and desire they reach the position of the ideal feminine. Feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar further explicates that

> ... it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her [a woman] both to death and to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead.[3]

The feminist school also holds that physical frailty as also religiosity are consciously or unconsciously means of making women attractive to the opposite sex, by which they gain an ambiguous power over men. Citing Fanny's example, Margaret Kirkham says,

> Fanny's apparent innocence and religiosity is an aspect of her sexiness, a veneer of the 'angelic' which makes her sexually exciting to men like Crawford, who wish to find in their wives such vulnerable 'virtue' as will excite both sexual passion and manly protectiveness. The conduct-book genre included works like Fordyce's *Sermons*, in which religiosity in pretty young women was thought of in a salacious way.[4]

Thus, in Austen 'selfless' means the opposite of being 'selfish', that is, to be 'unselfish'. But additionally, in the context of her novels, to be 'selfless' is unavoidably and intricately connected with being 'self-less', in a sense the patriarchal society wants women to be. In being stripped of their selves, women are expected to take little interest in themselves, but devote

themselves to the gratification of others, particularly the men folk. Only if they live up to this ideal will they be rewarded by the patriarchy, or else punished for being an over-reacher. According to standards of this society, the reward for this is the love of a good man. Fanny Price does this over and over again to please Sir Thomas, her guardian. After facing several trying situations she still does not falter – at least outwardly – in being a selfless angel, perhaps a feminine ideal, ultimately securing for herself the love of the most deserving and best man, the cousin she always loved. Significantly she also gains the blessings of one of the most dominating patriarchal figures in Austen's works - Sir Thomas. It is Maria and Julia Bertram and Mary Crawford who are punished in proportion to their willfulness or stubbornness in their pursuit to gratify their wishes.

Fanny Price is a classic instance where the need to be selfless is constantly in conflict with the basic, unacknowledged and sub-conscious instinct to be selfish – unlike most of Austen's other protagonists. This is most pronounced during Fanny's reaction to the staging of a theatrical in Mansfield. She opposes it because,

> ... she could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering only her uncle, she must condemn altogether. (*MP*, 130)

Fanny's quiet resistance to the play was ostensibly on ethical grounds, but at the same time she was motivated by the desire to remain in Sir Thomas's favour.

However, her decision does not make her happy.

> Every body around her was gay and busy, prosperous and important, ... She alone was sad and insignificant; she had no share in anything; she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the East room, without being seen or missed. She could almost think anything would have been preferable to this ... in some danger of envying. (*MP*, 129)

Anne too often felt lonely in a crowd but that never evoked bitterness and envy in her, the way it does in Fanny. Unlike Anne and Elinor, she appears as cold, jealous and unhappy at the happiness of others.

Fanny's complex character is due to her upbringing in the Bertram household where she is the poor niece totally dependent on the kindness of her benefactor, Sir Thomas. That is why she consciously places her first loyalty on the patriarch. Although Sir Thomas is a strict authoritarian he is not unkind, and is quite capable of appreciating the worth of an individual. Though he has taken in his poor niece Fanny under his care, he nevertheless insists that

> the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*. (*MP*, 7)

Fanny Price is constantly aware of the nature of her indebtedness to Sir Thomas and to Mansfield to such an extent that even in his absence when he is in far away Antigua she does not loose sight of it. This sets her apart from his own children who often have no such feelings regarding filial piety, except Edmund. Fanny's excessive fidelity is often attained at the cost

of self-effacement, by stifling her own likes, dislikes, desires, wishes and even hopes. But Fanny is not totally unselfish in her intentions, for her outward act of selflessness is motivated by her desire to be indispensable in the Bertram household, be the favourite of Sir Thomas, and be loved more than he loves any of his children, especially his daughters Maria or Julia. Therein lies the conflict between the two sides of her personality – self-less and selfish.

Ironically, the protagonist is unaware of this conflict within her and never thinks her behaviour to be stimulated by ulterior motives. Instead she convinces herself that her judgment is based on ethical grounds only. She defends her opposition against the staging of *Lovers' Vows* on the grounds that it

> ... appeared to her ... so totally improper for home representation- the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty ... (*MP*, 112).

Although incapable of perceiving the relationship between her sub-conscious desires and the self she can see it in the action of others.

> Fanny looked on and listened, not amused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all ... (*MP*, 107).

To a certain extent Fanny's behaviour and speeches can be placed in the same plane as Anne's, but further comparison between the two makes it increasingly clear that she is rather removed from the truly ideal, unadulterated angel that the latter is. Like Anne who is

> ... being treated with too much confidence by all parties, and being too much in the secret of the complaints of each house [Uppercross Cottage and Great house] ... (*P*, 45-46),

as also of her friends and relatives; Fanny too is

> ... always a very courteous listener ... came in for the compliments and distresses of most of them. (*MP*, 133)

Fanny's activities, apart from whatever little time she spends in the company of books are arranged to be at the beck and call of others, just like Anne. Indeed, Lady Bertram repeats again and again, "I cannot do without Fanny" (*MP*, 62) and even adds with an emphasis, "but I *cannot* do without her" (*MP*, 63). Always ready to be of service either to her aunts or any of her cousins, we find that

> ... Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand, for the habit of employing her in that way. (*MP*, 119)

Furthermore, her personality and bearing conform to the typical characteristics of an angel woman; we often find her "nearly fainting" (*MP*, 141), in the habit of "excessive trembling" (*MP*, 141) and often making an attempt "to collect herself" (*MP*, 142).

Fanny is not a paradigm of selflessness – despite appearances she has her own opinions but is too shy and frightened to express them. Thus, when Edmund says, "I want to consult. I want your opinion." (*MP*, 125) - regarding the play, Fanny is taken by utmost surprise. Her shocked response is - "'My opinion!' she cried, shrinking from such a compliment, highly as it gratified her." (*MP*, 125) She does not give her opinion on various subjects

as Mary Crawford does. Nonetheless she declines Henry Crawford's marriage proposal, decides about the play and other matters, although it is done humbly and timidly. Anne and Elinor too, possess an ability to think, but their thoughts have warmth and genial goodness, in opposition to Fanny's which can be associated with coldness.

It is worth mentioning that not Anne, not Elinor but Fanny alone who has been given an 'attic' of her own by Austen. The author informs that she was the mistress of "the little white attic" (*MP*, 122), in addition to,

> The East Room as it had been called ... was now considered Fanny's, almost as decidedly as the white attic. (*MP*, 123)

The significance of the 'attic' either symbolically or otherwise, in English literature during those times and the following years as manifested in the Gothic works is too well-known. Perhaps, it would not be wrong to surmise that Austen too had suggested a space of one's own – not just a room or a study in the simple sense – but one where the mind could learn to think independently. It is towards this end that Fanny uses it – she has literally two of them, the white attic and the East Room - but these are liberating spaces unlike the attics in the works of Charlotte Bronte or other Gothic novelists.

For Fanny it is a place that affords her solace and respite, an image that is in striking opposition to the dungeon-like attics where eccentric, mad and ambitious women having lost their minds find themselves trapped in,

with no way of escaping except by death. On the contrary, the attic in Mansfield presents, an

> ... aspect so favourable, that even without a fire it was habitable ... to such a willing mind as Fanny's ... she hoped not to be driven from it entirely ... The comfort of it in her hours of leisure was extreme. She could go there after anything unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand.-Her plants, her books- ... Every thing was a friend ... and though there had been sometimes much of suffering to her ... so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction had its charm. The room was most dear to her. (*MP*, 123-24)

Mary Crawford on the other hand, has not been gifted with an attic to brood and ponder over, but she is a foil to Fanny because she is the only woman in this novel who has no hesitation about expressing what she thinks. She is uninhibited and expresses her opinions with such frankness that at times her utterances are unpalatable. Mary, "mostly used to London" (*MP*, 32) brings along the corrupting influence of the bad city life, to the supposedly pure rural countryside. Austen excels in her characterization, so much so that she appears as the most attractive female character, over-shadowing Fanny. In contrast Austen's insipid characterization of Fanny has drawn severe criticism from readers and critics alike because of the preponderance of her prudishness.

Mary though brilliant in her own rights, is a character who falls somewhere between the human and monster. Her excessive outspokenness in public at times borders on vulgarity, "What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?" (*MP*, 117) - is unacceptable in any

society. Her overtly sexual comments, her ideas about the church and the clergy are outrageous. She declares in public that "A clergyman is nothing" (*MP*, 74), and shows little respect for the institution of the church, prayer services etc. The author states that "Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty" with a "lively and pleasant" (*MP*, 32) nature and possessed "... lively dark eye, clear brown complexion, and general prettiness", although not "... tall, full formed, and fair ... she was most allowably a sweet pretty girl" (*MP*, 34). Further, Mary "seriously" thinks that "Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well" (*MP*, 33) and unabashedly declares, "I am not at all ashamed of it ... every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage" (*MP*, 34).

Unlike Goethe's heroine, Anne or Fanny, Mary is a woman of the world, and has no hesitation about declaring it. She is forthright about the mercenary designs in marriage deals, nor does she behave like a hypocrite regarding other matters. On the other hand, the seemingly angelic Fanny often behaves like a hypocrite. She professes to be happy, subdued, grateful and content, when we actually find her envious, critical and the biggest pretender in the novel. Thus, when the occupants of Mansfield were facing shame and distress owing to Maria's elopement and Tom's almost fatal illness, Fanny alone, was capable of feeling disgustingly joyful.

> She was, she felt she was, in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable. The evil [Maria's elopement with Henry] which brought such good to her. (*MP*, 361)

Mary Crawford makes no attempt to hide herself behind a facade. She is adept at the techniques of seducing men and makes no endeavour to hide it. Instead like a siren she beautifully plays the harp and successfully seduces Edmund:

> A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both placed near the window, cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, ... was enough to catch any man's heart. (*MP*, 52)

Therefore, though often,

> Edmund was sorry to hear Miss Crawford [speak so outspokenly], whom he was much disposed to admire ... It did not suit his sense of propriety, and he was silenced, till induced by further smiles and liveliness, to put the matter by. (*MP*, 46)

Instead, Edmund with all "his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity" (*MP*, 53) makes concessions for Mary to Fanny, by defending her behaviour as "The right of a lively mind" (*MP*, 51), and emphasizes that "She is perfectly feminine" (*MP*, 52) - signifying the influence she has over him. Interestingly Edmund's speech goes on to manifest the qualities that men conventionally associate with femininity – which are, "nothing sharp, or loud, or coarse" either in countenance or manner, "untinctured by ill humour or roughness" (*MP*, 52).

Mary however, is not only "sharp", "loud" but also has a scathing sense of humour – contrary to what Edmund has to say under her influence.

Though definitely not angelic, one nonetheless cannot ignore that it is she who comes to Fanny's rescue with genuine good humour and kindness when she is slighted by others and particularly ill-treated by Mrs. Norris because she refuses to oblige her cousins and the Crawfords by acting in the play. At that moment it was Miss Crawford who,

> moved away her chair to ... the table close to Fanny, saying to her in a kind low whisper ... 'Never mind, my dear Miss Price-this is a cross evening,-everybody is cross and teasing-but do not let us mind them'; and with pointed attention continued to talk to her and endeavour to raise her spirits, in spite of being out of spirits herself.-By a look at her brother, she prevented any further entreaty from the theatrical board. (*MP*, 120)

Such genuine selfless act of goodness, without drawing the least attention to her actions is rarely seen even when it comes to Fanny. Significantly Mary here thinks of others at a time when she herself is feeling low.

It is such gestures as this that blur the distinction between a selfless pale angel and the attractive semi-monster woman. This point to the possibility of interchanging the two reverse virtues that adds to the difficulty of maintaining the distinctions between the two. In appearance, vitality, vigour of life and actions Mary appears to be the monster woman, but how do we explain the softness in her, the good and selflessness that surface occasionally? It is this that makes her neither completely a monster, nor an angel, while she does not even belong to the type of the humans like Elizabeth or Emma. Importantly, unlike the monster women who often

resort to disguise, acting, and hide their true selves behind a mask, Mary does none of these. Where angelic Fanny can be accused of a high degree of hypocrisy and acting, Mary might act in a theatrical, but refuses to do so in real life. This accounts for her outspokenness, though its vulgarity is not excusable. Mary Crawford, perhaps more than any of Austen's female characters, signifies most strongly the blur between the angel and the monster, selflessness and selfishness.

It is through Fanny and Mrs. Norris that Austen brings out a connecting link between the angel and the monster. Fanny and Mrs. Norris may seems poles apart but are very similar in so far as their use of selfless behaviour serves as a vehicle for securing authority and power in the form of importance and indispensability to others. *Mansfield Park* abounds with instances of the aunt and niece's endeavour to dedicate their lives for the comfort of others. Indeed, it is in this urge to be of service that they are engaged in an unacknowledged competition, with prospects of rewards for the one who excels in this art. The reward will be Sir Thomas' appreciation which in turn will strengthen their position in the household.

Mrs. Norris's real selfish nature behind the façade of selflessness is exposed over and over again through her speeches, her neglect and mistreatment of Fanny and her response to the various incidents that unfold in the narrative. We find her bustling with life, activity and spirit, more than

anyone else within the grounds of Mansfield. Austen caustically remarks about her,

> ... trying to be in a bustle without having any thing to bustle about, and labouring to be important where nothing was wanted but tranquility and silence. (*MP*, 144)

When Sir Thomas returns safely from Antigua without prior announcement she feels let down instead of joy

> ... by the manner of his return. It had left her nothing to do ... Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office ... whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded ... (*MP*, 144).

Her need to be important through service to the Bertram household is an obsession which obliterates all considerations of right and wrong.

With Mrs. Norris the appearance of selflessness was all pretence while with Fanny it was a genuine attempt. With Mrs. Norris her selflessness was a means to an end, that is, to acquire power and authority, but with Fanny it was an end in itself that is to please Sir Thomas. Nonetheless, their selflessness can be construed as an outcome of their selfishness.

Austen's ironic attitude becomes unsparing and pungent when it comes to characters like that of Mrs. Norris, the interfering aging aunt. The same attitude is displayed against similar women characters in *Sanditon*. Monster women like Mrs. Norris endeavour to employ their intelligence and imagination in plotting and planning to outwit men to get what they want – authority. Some of them like her and the Parker sisters go on to become

masters in this art, because for them achievement lay in getting what they wanted by tricking the men who controlled their lives. It was survival in an unequal world.

In *Sanditon* her incomplete novel, Austen directs her irony and sarcasm against similar women characters but with a difference for it reveals a new depth and breath of comic insight of the author. In the case of Mrs. Norris the irony is bitter, scathing and totally unsparing, but when it comes to the two Parker sisters, the bitterness and gall is toned down for the author emphasizes more on the element of the ridiculous, where they are treated as eccentric creatures. These following lines sum up the author's treatment of them:

> Disorders and Recoveries so very much out of the common way, seemed more like the amusement of eager Minds in want of employment than of actual afflictions and relief. The Parkers, were no doubt a family of Imagination and quick feelings ... (*S* in *NA* vol., 365).

The first impression of the Parker sisters is formed through the words of their brother:

> They have wretched health ... are subject to a variety of very serious Disorders ... they know [not] what a day's health is; - and at the same time, they are such excellent useful Women and have so much energy of Character that, where any Good is to be done, they force themselves on exertions which to those who do not thoroughly know them, have an extraordinary appearance. – But there is really no affectation about them. They have only weaker constitutions and stronger minds than are often met with ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 340-41).

But Mr. Parker's remark connects two things – selflessness with weak health – the essential characteristic of the angel women. Austen comments on this behaviour,

> The *whole* of their menta. vivacity was not so employed [in sickness]; Part was laid out in a Zeal for being useful. – It should seem that they must either be very busy for the Good of others, or else extremely ill themselves. (*S* in *NA vol.*, 365)

Whereas, the angel women genuinely possess these qualities, the monster women too attempt to display them, using them as a convenient mask to hide their real nature. In the case of Diana and Susan Parker they do it so well and for so long that it convinces themselves and those gullible enough to believe them.

Although the fate of the two ageing spinsters Diana and Susan remains unknown, because *Sanditon* remains incomplete and unedited owing to Jane Austen's death, the author's treatment of them is quite in line with Mrs. Norris. Diana Parker, more than her sister, is officious and irritating as the Aunt at Mansfield, but certainly appears less of a monster character since she has lesser potential to harm and has been portrayed less bitterly. The more dominating older sister Miss Diana Parker is clearly conceived as a figure of satire. The Parker sisters like Mrs. Norris are equally lacking in rational, self-critical powers of mind. Women like them throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, held on to such a simplistic notion of female 'usefulness' in which intelligence and common sense

played no part. Had they the comprehensive education like men or been fully employed, persons like Diana Parker and Mrs. Norris might have turned out to be different persons. Austen endorses this view when she suggests that the "... want of employment" (*S* in *NA vol.*, 365) is the cause of such behaviour.

This constant drawing of attention to their health, can be interpreted in the same way as Mary Musgrove resorts to it for want of an employment and to attract the attention of the men folk in *Persuasion.* Austen through these characters not only discredited such tactics, but also made it clear that she was no admirer of physical weakness, ill-health or ignorance in young women. Diana and Susan Parker like Mary Musgrove are far from sick; their's is more of a psychosomatic illness to attract attention. However, feminist critics argue that sickness in women, particularly headache, can be triggered off by suppression and can be the side effect of the restrictions that society imposes on women. Gilbert and Gubar hold,

> Given this socially conditioned epidemic of female illness, it is not surprising to find that the angel in the house of literature frequently suffered not just from fear and trembling but from literal and figurative sickness unto death ... suffers from migraine headaches. Implying ruthless self-suppression, does the "eternal feminine" necessarily imply illness ...[5]

Whether Jane Austen was aware of such implications or was convinced by it cannot be ascertained, for she shows little sympathy and instead mocks at such malingering characters. Fanny's frailty and headaches

however, have been treated sympathetically and without irony by the author. But social scientists argue that patriarchal socialization literally makes women physically and mentally sick. Hysteria, anorexia, bulimia, claustrophobia, agoraphobia (as in Fanny Price and Anne Elliot), headache (as in Fanny and Mary Musgrove) were particularly frequent with women, as was crippling rheumatoid arthritis found in middle-aged housewives (Mrs. Smith). There was also the popular misconception in circulation that most of them were caused by the female reproductive system. But modern studies have shown that these diseases were often caused because of their habitual docility and submissiveness perpetrated by patriarchy, whereby they were taught to renounce their pursuit after pleasure and self-assertion.

However, it is an established truth that Austen's contemporary, the famous gothic novelist, author of *Castle Rackrent* and one of the most popular and influential writers of her times, Maria Edgeworth suffered from chronic headaches. This is believed owing to suppression and submission to her dominating father Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who had an overbearing egotism, was an Enlightenment Theorist and had fathered twenty-two children by four wives. Maria Edgeworth was the third of twenty-two and the daughter of the wife most completely neglected. She tried to gain attention and approval of her father through her writing. This analogy could be extended to the relationship between Fanny and Sir Thomas.

Sanditon besides the Parker sisters, presents another character in a similar context, though in comparison to the sisters she appears to be only a peripheral character. Nonetheless, this character, Clara Brereton is more full of intrigue, therefore, more interesting. She is a poor niece and a companion to Lady Denham – like Fanny – who appears to be perfect in her disposition and manners, that she can be almost categorized as another Fanny Price. Mr. Parker describes her,

> ... to be lovely, amiable, gentle, unassuming, conducting herself uniformly with great good sense, and evidently gaining by her innate worth, on the affections of her Patroness. (*S* in *NA vol.*, 334)

On her first meeting with Clara, even Charlotte is thoroughly impressed by her –

> Charlotte thought she had never beheld a more lovely, or more Interesting young woman ... could see in her only the most perfect representation of whatever Heroine might be most beautiful and bewitching ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 346).

It is not surprising that with qualities like 'Interesting' and 'bewitching' – monster-like qualities at that - she soon becomes a companion to Lady Denham. In her relationship with Sir Edward too, she is very circumspect in public but is capable of making herself attractive to him in private away from the gaze of others, and protected by the mist at the foot of the banks. Charlotte, who recognizes this subterfuge however, expresses sympathy, "... hers was a situation which must not be judged with severity ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 378). But this raises certain doubts about her integrity. By then

though Clara had come to occupy such favour with Lady Denham that it was the general expectation that she would, "... be the very companion who would guide and soften Lady D. – who would enlarge her mind and open her hand ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 335). The irony of Clara becoming "worthy of trust" (*S* in *NA vol.*, 335) is highlighted by Austen.

Lady Denham's position, with the additional power that she wields in the absence of her husband, makes her a figure who occupies the place of patriarchy. She assumes the role of a patriarch, carries out the same functions, duties and responsibilities and wields as much power and authority, in spite of being a woman. In order to influence such a person who possesses all these, one needs to be more than clever. Through this cunning which was very skillfully veiled behind a carefully 'acted out' front Clara was able to win over Lady Denham's approval and thus, avoid a situation where she could have been "ill-used" (*S* in *NA vol.*, 346).

It is apparent that an integral part of her pleasing manners is her seemingly selfless service to her patroness like the way Mrs. Clay is seen doing to Sir Walter and Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion.* Clara like her appears to be adept in the art of pleasing. Just as Mrs. Clay's reward could have been her marriage to Mr. Elliot, Clara too - one might surmise since this novel is incomplete - could acquire a handsome share of Lady Denham's riches and could become the wife of Sir Edward.

Characters like Mrs. Clay and Clara survive by their pretence of a selfless attitude, their dedication to the comfort of others, and their clever disguise of their deep-rooted desire for wealth and status and all the power and authority associated with it. They seem to be compelled to do it because of their poverty and dependence, lack of a suitable education which could have otherwise found them in a more respectable employment. But in the patriarchal society they were given an education that made them dependent on others. Therefore, their actions can be attributed to their ambition to over-come this constraint and acquire some measure of power and authority.

The characters studied so far in the context of selfishness and selflessness fall under the category of the angel and the monster characters. Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* has been chosen because she seems to embody all the qualities that make her the most human among the characters who have been placed in this category. In all her dealings within the family and outside Elizabeth is free from all pretence and speaks her mind freely although it does have the potential to occasionally hurt someone without intending to. Her actions at Netherfield come directly from the heart, with no intention whatsoever of attracting Darcy's attention, nor pleasing anyone else. On the contrary till the first half of the novel she made no conscious effort to please him. At Rosings she emphasizes this,

> "I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly ..." (*PP*, 169),

when Darcy proposes marriage to her. Whereas, even Elinor and Anne attempt to hide their true emotions and sentiments at times from others, which can be termed as 'sensibility', Elizabeth alone makes no such endeavour at pretence. If she is good to someone it is without any hidden intentions or ulterior motives. She has the courage and ability to turn down an offer as when she refuses to dance with Darcy in spite of several requests by him. She even rejects his wedding proposal as she had Mr. Collins's.

Even with her dealings with formidable characters like Lady Catherine she displays this forthrightness. Though she herself is indifferent to Lady Catherine and at times disparages her in private she realizes that family relationships must be respected. Therefore, it is seen that it is owing to Elizabeth's genuine efforts and goodness of heart that Darcy and his aunt are reconciled.

> But at length, by Elizabeth's persuasion, he was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation ... (*PP*, 345).

The fact that Elizabeth was instrumental in bringing about this reconciliation is ironic, because Lady Catherine herself was opposed to her marriage to Darcy. Yet through this gesture Elizabeth's goodness of heart and the absence of any ulterior motive in her actions are revealed. This in a sense can be termed as an example of selflessness.

However, there is another side to Elizabeth's personality which makes her as fallible as any human being – most of the time she thinks highly of her own intelligence and believes that there are few who understand human character as well as herself. The truth however is that she is quite prejudiced. Although she sees herself as "a studier of character" (*PP*, 37) she proves very wrong in her understanding of complex personalities like that of Wickham and Darcy. By her own admissions, "Yes; but intricate characters are the most amusing..." (PP, 37).

On the other hand, she misunderstands Darcy and accuses him of cruelty towards Wickham,

> 'You have reduced him to his present state of poverty, ... You have withheld the advantages, which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life, ...' (*PP*, 171).

But her accusations do not end here,

> 'From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; ...' (*PP*, 172).

'Succeeding events' that shortly follow instead make her clearly see that she is fooled, compelling her to revise her reading of some characters like Wickham for whom she had earlier great liking, trust and compassion. But he elopes with her sister proving her wrong in judging his character. But it is

her ability to acknowledge her mistakes and try to rectify herself that makes her so appealingly a human character.

A part of her attractiveness even for Darcy lies in her genuine selflessness. In the end of the novel when Elizabeth playfully questions him about the moment when he fell in love with her – "... but what could set you off in the first place?" (*PP*, 337), he although unable to pin point the exact moment, does make mention of two things which attracted his attention. They were "... the liveliness of your [Elizabeth's] mind ..." and the "... good in your affectionate behaviour to Jane, while she was ill at Netherfield", that revealed to him the "actual good" (*PP*, 338) signifying her truly selfless behaviour. The former adds to her charming appeal that captivates Darcy, and the latter constitutes her genuine worth as a human being that he recognizes, admires and loves. Darcy despite all his faults of pride and arrogance is among those few Austenian characters who is able to recognize, respect and appreciate genuine acts of kindness and unselfish behaviour. His choice of Elizabeth is not based on the normal expectations of men in his society but out of a true perception of her worth as a good human being

In Jane Austen, the concept of selfishness and selflessness are intricately connected to the acquisition of power and authority in a patriarchal society. However, the rewards are often not what they are

expected to be. Thus, the truly selfless characters like Anne and Elinor get less than they actually deserve, whereas, the less deserving ones like Lady Catherine and Lady Denham gets much more. The only exception is Elizabeth Bennet when she is rewarded with what she deserves. Mary Crawford on the other hand, suffers a fate which seems to be unjustified. As for the fate of Mrs. Norris, though justifiable, seems to have come too late. The realism of Austen's works does not always allow good to win over evil nor are the angel and human characters made victorious over the monster characters. There is no approbation of selfish characters and their behaviour which ultimately determines their fate. But it must be noted that Austen goes beyond mere disapproval and probes into the reasons why some of these characters were made to behave in such a manner. She puts much of the blame on the patriarchal society which made women dependent on men - socially, financially and legally. In order to survive in such a circumscribed world many of Austen's women characters are seen to adopt means such as overt selflessness as in the angel characters and selfishness cunningly disguised as selflessness as in the monster characters. Such behaviour is motivated by their conscious desire to acquire patriarchal approval or by their deliberate or unintentional attempt to get as much of power and authority within the patriarchal set-up. It is in this sense that the two opposite concepts centering around the 'self' are interchangeable as

virtues or vices. It is only in human characters like Elizabeth, Emma and Marianne where such an analysis seems to be inapplicable.

Notes

[1] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Travels, n. pag., online, The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction 1917, Internet, 9 Apr. 2006.

[2] G and G 57.

[3] G and G 25.

[4] Kirkham 102.

[5] G and G 55.

Chapter III

Women and Education

> The claim that women of the middle and upper classes should be taught to think may not now seem particularly revolutionary, but, ... it opened the possibility of social change far beyond the schoolroom of the country house, and the drawing-rooms of the well-to-do. If it were true that natural endowment with powers of mind in women constituted a proper claim to the right to think and to judge, what was to be said of the basis of authority in marriage and the family? In an age that made Reason a God, and turned God into The Rational Being, it was widely accepted that authority rested on rational judgement. [1]

The relation between women's education vis-à-vis their dependence on their men folk, financially, morally, legally, socially, in short in every aspect of their existence in society that often rendered them so selflessly selfish, is of great significance in understanding their response and ability to wield power and authority. A closer look into the matter reveals that their dependence can primarily be attributed to three factors – firstly, a lack of proper education for women, secondly, their lack of financial rights and independence and thirdly, the absence of legal protection regarding education, finances and other areas that could have ensured women some measure of equality with men. Neither the laws of the land nor the customs of the age provided protection to women as equal citizens. Thus, though their lives were protected they could not live life to the full as the men did because of the constraint and restrictions imposed on them. When they got married they and all that they possessed became the property of their

husbands. Given this situation, it is necessary to discuss the kind of education that women received in Austen's time.

Our study of the various female characters all seem to follow a pattern which have governed their behaviour down the ages for generations. The majority of them are shown to be unworthy of power and authority and undeserving of respect. This seems to be largely owing to the lack of role models in the form of mothers or aunts who could have set an example for them. The younger generation of women in turn themselves became the agents for transmitting such inadequate training to their daughters and charges. The continuation of this vicious circle can be attributed to the fact that women were deprived of the right kind of education. They lived in a society that put a great deal of importance on men's education, while in the case of women the emphasis was more on their accomplishments in the feminine arts rather than on formal education. Because of this lop-sided emphasis on education the women were left in a position where their formal education was left incomplete and therefore, they could not develop into 'rational' beings.

Well-to-do ladies from rich, ranked and supposedly cultured families, like Lady Catherine, Lady Bertram, Lady Susan, Maria and Julia Bertram, Mary Crawford, Emma Woodhouse, Georgina Darcy, etc. are all shown to lack a sense of proper judgment because of which they commit mistakes

which adversely affect their own lives as well as those of their charges. But one has to remember that they have received the best of upbringing and education that was allowed to women in their age. This leaves a lot of room for doubt regarding the kind of education and nurturing that was imparted to the formative minds. Austen raises certain questions about female education through the behaviour of her characters and never fails to remind us that no amount of fortune or rank can ever be an adequate compensation for the lack of proper education leading to intellectual and moral development.

In judging the characters one has not only to remember the inadequate education that they received but also the male-dominated restricted environment in which they grow up. In certain cases their shortcomings and achievements can be attributed to their innate nature. For example, Lady Catherine and Lady Denham are shown as incapable of properly exercising their power and authority and they are totally indifferent to such considerations. In Lady Bertram's daughter like in most other daughters in Austen this deficiency is apparent too because they like their mothers are the products of the same defective system and have been brought up in the absence of a role model, which otherwise could have had some right influence. Yet there are a few women among Austen's heroines, who stand out not because they are the products of some faultless education and great

upbringing, but because of their superior moral and intellectual capacity and innate qualities of head and heart.

A classic example is the very human character and Austen's most charismatic and attractive heroine Elizabeth Bennet. With neither a mother nor a father who can set any example, and in the absence of a right kind of upbringing, she nonetheless stands out because of her superior intellectual and moral strength. True, she makes a lot of mistakes at the beginning in her judgment of others, but what is important is that she learns and grows from her experiences and as the novel progresses "... becomes the central intelligence ..."[2]. At the end she becomes a more responsible person, and unlike her parents or Lady Catherine skillfully manages the power and authority that she comes to exercise as Darcy's wife and the mistress of Pemberley.

In Austen's eighteenth century England, education to women was primarily provided at home as part of their upbringing, unlike the gentlemen of the well-to-do families who were sent to Oxford and Cambridge like Edmund Bertram, Edward Ferrars, Henry Tilney, Darcy even the utterly foolish Mr. Collins and wicked Wickham. Thus, in *Emma* we are informed that Mr. and Mrs. Weston's little daughter Anna will -

> ... have his [her father's] fireside enlivened by the sports and the nonsense, the freaks and the fancies of a child never banished from home; ... (*E*, 419)

meaning that she would never be sent away to a boarding school, as a son would normally be.

Anne Elliot, however, was not only brought up under the care of a governess but also went to a school, for when in Bath we are informed that she

> ... called on her former governess, and had heard from her of there being an old school-fellow in Bath ... (*P*, 144).

Further "Anne's dislike of Bath" can be attributed from

> ... arising first from the circumstance of her having been three years at school there, after her mother's death ... (*P*, 20).

We are also told that the Musgrove girls Louisa and Henrietta had been away in a "school" (*P*, 87) which coincided with the period when Anne turned down Charles Musgrove's proposal of marriage.

But these schools instead of developing their personality and making them capable of facing the world – as Oxford and Cambridge did for the men – were more in line with the finishing schools, teaching them instead fancy refinements of being a woman rather than making them independent and self-reliant. With such inadequate education they were still vulnerable and subject to exploitation in the marriage market. Since they lacked the means to earn their bread, they had to marry for support, as Charlotte Lucas does in marrying the idiotic clergyman Mr. Collins. The position of these young marriageable women can bear comparison to men choosing job options. But unlike men, their employment in a married life instead of

liberating them – the way employment did for men – only aided in further restricting them. In Austen's society women were deprived of the right to earn their own livelihood and the only job open to literate women of decent families was of a governess, an employment generally looked down upon by society. In *The Watsons* when one sister says,

> '... To be so bent on Marriage – to pursue a Man merely for the sake of situation ... Poverty is a great Evil, but to a woman of Education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest. – I would rather be Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like.' – 'I would rather do any thing than be Teacher at a school' – said her sister. 'I have been at school, Emma, and know what a life they lead; you never have. ... I think I could like any good humoured Man with a comfortable Income'. (*W* in *NA* vol. 278)

Austen in *Emma* compares the job of a governess as equivalent to intellectual slavery. In a conversation that takes place between Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Elton, the former opines,

> '... I am not at all afraid of being unemployed long. There are places in town, offices, where enquiry would soon produce something – Offices for the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect.'
> 'Oh! My dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade,...'

Jane clarifies:

> 'I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade ... governess trade was all I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies.' (*E*, 300-1)

Significantly, *Emma* presents a glimpse of a different educational institution in Mrs. Goddard's school, where a poor orphan girl like Harriet Smith had been fortunate enough to be placed by "somebody" (*E*, 19). It is

worth noting the author's comment on schools and education that distinguishes a good one from a bad one. Talking of Mrs. Goddard's school Austen says that it was not like-

> ... any thing which professed, in long sentences of refined nonsense, to combine liberal acquirements with elegant morality upon new principles and new systems-and where young ladies for enormous pay might be screwed out of health and into vanity-but [Mrs. Goddard's was] a real, honest, old-fashioned Boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price ... Mrs. Goddard's school was of high repute- and very deservedly ... she gave the children plenty of wholesome food, let them run about a great deal in the summer, and in winter dressed their chilblains with her own hands. (*E*, 18).

The author praises such an education – which any woman of sense ought to value – in an age which idolized frailty in women and preferred to see them either as an angel or a monster, but not as a human being.

Often wealthy young ladies, like Emma Woodhouse and the girls of Mansfield were exclusively brought up under the care of governesses. But since governesses can differ in personality and can be influenced by the nature of their employer's household, their relationship with the students can vary accordingly. The Bertram girls had a very formal relationship with their governess, and she hardly finds mention in the narrative; Emma's on the other hand was a warm and loving one. Austen informs that Emma,

> ... had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen a little short of a mother in affection. (*E*, 3)

The author also tells us that Miss Taylor has been –

> ... less as a governess than a friend, very fond ... particularly of Emma. Between *them* it was more the intimacy of sisters. Even before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness

> of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached, and Emma doing just what she liked; ... (*E*, 3).

Nonetheless, there are still others like Elizabeth Bennet and her four sisters, who did not have the advantage of a governess. The Bennet girls received most of their education at home from their parents, but as is generally the case, mothers are believed to play a greater role in the education of their daughters than the fathers. The intellectual superiority of Elizabeth and Jane over their other siblings cannot be actually attributed to any special instructions from their parents; though Mr. Bennet instilled the love of reading books in his favourite daughter Elizabeth. Given Mr. Bennet's financial and social position, and his acute awareness of his wife's inferior qualities, it is rather surprising that he had not employed a governess for his five daughters, but left them all to the care of his wife who he knew was pathetically incapable of the task. It was expected of people of rank and fortune, and of the class of Mr. Bennet to employ a governess for the education of their daughters. His failure to do so perhaps indicates a father's lack of interest in the education of his daughters.

Keeping this usual norm in mind, it is not surprising to read Lady Catherine's reaction on her discovering that the Bennet daughters have grown up without a governess. At Rosings, Elizabeth surprises Lady Catherine when she declares,

> 'We never had any governess.'
> 'No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! – I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education.'
> Elizabeth could not help smiling, as she assured her that had not been the case.
> 'Then, who taught you? Who attended you? Without a governess you must have been neglected.' (*PP*, 147)

Lady Catherine's astonished reaction is natural because governesses seem to play an important role in society as testified by the presence of so many of them as heroines in the literature of the times. Elizabeth's smile on the other hand, is ironic because she is well aware of the kind of education that her mother was capable of providing, if it can be called an education at all.

Lady Catherine, full of interference in the affairs of others and over-imposing in her opinions, on whatever the topic might be, herself cuts a sorry figure as a mother. Thus, where she is described as, "... a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome ..." (*PP*, 144), her daughter presents a contrast. "She is quite a little creature. Who could have thought she could be so thin and small!" (*PP*, 142) and to Elizabeth, "She looks sickly and cross." (*PP*, 142) But physical appearances matter little for even persons of small frames can possess strong, indefatigable spirit, as Mrs. Ferrars and Fanny Price do. But it is not so between Lady Catherine and Miss Anne De Bourgh, for the mother-daughter duo could not have been more dissimilar in appearance and in personality. Lady Catherine's,

> ... air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank ... whatever she said, was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance ... (*PP*, 142),

which stood in great contrast to her frail, sickly and extremely shy daughter who appears absolutely terrified.

Elizabeth herself was not unaware of the great contrast between them and she naturally reacted with considerable surprise, as

> ... she turned her eyes on the daughter, she could almost have joined in Maria's astonishment, at her being so thin, and so small. There was neither in figure nor face, any likeness between the ladies. Miss De Bourgh was pale and sickly; her features though not plain, were insignificant; and she spoke very little, except in a low voice, to Mrs. Jenkinson [her governess] ... (*PP*, 145).

Again where the mother talked a great deal,

> ... delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner as proved that she was not used to have her judgment controverted ... (*PP*, 146),

Miss De Bourgh hardly spoke to others and, "said not a word to her [Elizabeth] all dinner time" (*PP*, 145). Her extremely introverted and shy nature is owing to the over-dominating presence of the mother, and perhaps it would not be wrong to conclude that this had also adversely affected her physic and health. Her cold and authoritative administration of all aspects of her daughter's life and her over-bearing personality has this unhealthy effect on her child's growth. In her it is amply proven that authoritative management of a daughter's life cannot be identified with nurturing love. Lady Catherine's influence on her daughter is a complex one. While on the

one hand she reduces the daughter into a voiceless non-entity, on the other hand the daughter imbibes the mother's pride born out of the consciousness of her status and fortune. In a society where a daughter's education was often left to the mother, this is an example where the mother's inadequate education and unsavoury personality traits are passed on and perpetuated in the younger generation.

Lady Susan and her daughter Frederica are also portrayed in a similar situation. Lady Susan is lively, vivacious, attractive, shrewd and manipulative, whereas Frederica is pale, thin and delicate with

> ... restrained Manners, the same *timid Look in the presence of her Mother* as heretofore, assured ... of her situation's being uncomfortable, ... (*LS* in *NA* vol., 270) [Italics mine]

It is a fortunate turn of circumstances, her mother choosing to marry a rich foolish man that saves her from her oppressing domination. Though full of outward concern for her daughter, she is too selfish to think of anyone besides herself, which explains the neglect with which Frederica is treated throughout, and conveniently forgotten after her second marriage.

The surviving mothers show that they are prone to either neglecting their children or of spoiling them with improper indulgences but fail to provide them with any enlightenment or proper guidance. Austen specifically focuses on those mothers who fail in nurturing their daughters

properly. In *Mansfield Park*, one perhaps hears the voice of the author through Mary Crawford, when she says,

> 'Mothers certainly have not yet got quite the right way of managing their daughters. I do not know where the error lies.' (*MP*, 40)

But Jane Austen knew quite well where exactly the "error" primarily lay, that is, in the very defective education for women. Only unlike Mary Wollstonecraft she did not choose to be a vocal critic of the system, but used her art to voice her criticism in a more circumspect manner.

Ironically, *Northanger Abbey* which is primarily concerned with the theme of female education has a mother assuming the dual role of educating, as well as bringing up her ten children. As opposed to Lady Catherine and Lady Susan, Mrs. Morland is a good mother. Although she is not accorded much space in the narrative, she displays some splendid qualities in the very opening pages which set her apart from the other less endowed mothers like Mrs. Bennet or Lady Catherine. The opening paragraph itself points out that Catherine's

> ... mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution ... (*NA*, 1).

Unlike Mrs. Bennet of an "uncertain temper" (*PP*, 3), who appears to be perfectly healthy and robust but constantly seeks compassion for "my poor nerves" (*PP*, 3), for "When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous." (*PP*, 3); Mrs. Morland even after giving birth to ten children, "... lived on ... to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health

herself." (*NA*, 1) The author's mockery of Mrs. Bennet carries indictment against the often wrong education provided by mothers and fathers to their daughters, where they were encouraged to be bodily frail – at times even resulting in damaging their constitution. For such were then the mistaken notions about female attributes, that female physical weakness was considered as a means that could enhance a girl's sexual attractiveness. Austen negates such a view through Mrs. Morland.

This "very good woman" (*NA*, 3) Mrs. Morland, who despite wishing everything well for her children, had

> ... but her time ... so much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones, that her elder daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves ... (*NA*, 3).

Thus, Catherine did not have a governess, her father being only a clergyman. She did not even get the engrossing attention of her mother. Instead she was herself involved in educating her younger siblings much to her affliction and boredom. In short she was partly educated by her parents and partly self-taught, till the point when the narrative begins, from where on her process of education is taken over by the hero. Only the instructions that Henry imparts to her through opinions, suggestions and sometimes even holding her up to ridicule, can make her education complete in the sense that patriarchy wants women to be. Austen's satire here is directed against patriarchy itself, for how can one forget the domineering mindset of General Tilney who unjustly banishes Catherine and proves that even the father

figures of patriarchy lack proper education. The author through her male characters, their behaviour and treatment of their wives and daughters implicitly questions the worth of formal male education also, if it ensures only their right to exercise power and authority. Through this Austen exposes a basic flaw within the prevailing education system.

Because of the greater emphasis put on men's education the expectations of such a society was that the formally educated men would be better informed and would be able to instruct the ignorant, ill-informed and poorly educated womenfolk. But Austen goes on to show that Henry Tilney can be as ill-informed as Catherine. Woolf too had commented on this,

> They too, the patriarchs, the professors, had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with. Their education had been in some ways as faulty as my own. It had bred in them defects as great. True, they had money and power, but only at the cost of harbouring in their breasts an eagle, a vulture ...[3]

Austen's irony and sarcasm is evident in the way she challenges Henry's comprehension, who had always been vain and arrogant about men's superiority over women when it comes to knowledge, education, history and personality in general. This appears in quite a few instances. The most scathing exposure of his inadequacy is about Henry's understanding of his own father as contrasted to Catherine's views of General Tilney. She had wrongly believed that the General had secretly murdered his wife or had locked her up in an attic for years. Henry chastises her for using her fertile imagination on his father,

> 'What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians ... *Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?* Do our laws connive at them?' (*NA*, 197-98) [Italics mine.]

True, the General does not live up to her gothic fantasy which is a result of reading too many popular gothic novels, nonetheless, the General's behaviour reveals him as a thoroughly wicked person, which Catherine had rightly believed him to be. The condition of the General's wife, during their years of marriage was tantamount to an imprisonment – in a more complete sense than being physically locked up in an attic. But the truth remains that

> General Tilney is allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and he does so as an irrational tyrant.[4]

Austen makes allowances for Catherine when she states that

> ... in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty. (*NA*, 201)

When compared to the General's behaviour, her Gothic fantasy appears a very forgivable mistake. Austen adds a twist in the tale when Henry had to admit that Catherine was not totally wrong in her perception, thereby implying that she too, no matter how ignorant, can be right at times. Austen is suggesting that occasionally Henry (no matter how grudgingly) might have something to learn from her – in which case, it is not him, but she who will take up the role of a teacher. However, Kirkham's above mentioned comment holds good for all fathers and husbands, as the fate of the wives

and daughters were greatly dependent on their discretion, which usually appears to be more in the wrong than right.

Even thinkers like Rousseau had recommended that girls should be obedient to their mothers, despite his knowledge and understanding that the mothers might be wrong, because the habit of obedience was so important in a wife. For the mother, along with religion, also teaches her daughter that upon marriage she must follow the instruction of her husband. Austen through her parent figures is precisely attacking such an education.

Being 'educated' whether under a governess or a mother or at school must be distinguished from being 'literate', for the former encompasses a broader meaning. While to be 'literate' would only mean to be able to read and write, to be educated implies to be a good human being and a responsible member of the society. It also tries to inculcate higher intellectual and ethical qualities like respect for genuine goodness in oneself and others. It teaches the worth of goodness and warmth of heart over material pursuits after money and position. Proper education endows one with a capacity to understand oneself and the world better. Acquiring such an education is not easy but is possible if the person in question is gifted with intellectual and moral qualities. This is best exemplified by Mrs. Bennett's father who in spite of being a lawyer failed to safeguard his daughter's interest regarding the entail. He could have nullified the entail

when she married Mr. Bennet, but he seemed to be lacking in any genuine concern for his daughter's future.

A feminist critic like Margaret Kirkham argues that Austen's views on female education were the same as shared by the nascent feminist tradition of the times and those aired by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* These views expressed strong opposition to the kind of education that was provided to women. In *The Vindication* she strongly held:

> ... women who, not led by degrees to proper studies, and not permitted to choose for themselves, have indeed been overgrown children ...[5]

As opposed to this, thinkers and writers like Rousseau, Dr. Fordyce, James Hervey, Dr. Gregory and August von Kotzebue had felt that men and women should not be educated in the same manner, and that of the latter should be subordinate to the education of the former. For them women were to be treated more as objects of pity and contempt. The spirit of the age as regards to a woman's education can be best summed up by what an influential and well-respected man of the time Rev. John Sprint had to say about it.

> But she that is married careth for the things of this world, how she may please her husband ...[6]

Any intelligent and rational woman would react to it as Austen did, for this comment reduces woman to the status of her husband's slave which negates the rational, moral, intellectual, social or political aspects of her

personality. Austen's contempt for such discrimination in matters of education is further evident in *Mansfield Park*, in the response of the hero and the anti-hero, that is Edmund Bertram and Henry Crawford respectively, in a discussion about Shakespeare. Henry speaks of him as "... part of an Englishman's constitution ...", (*MP*, 338) Edmund avoids a terminology which excludes women and replies, "His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody ..." (*MP*, 338). Henry shows through his language an attitude of mind which excludes women from the liberty which belongs to those who speak Shakespeare's tongue, Edmund does not. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Austen brings forth the void created in the lives of women due to an inadequate education when she sarcastically comments:

> When the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room after dinner, this poverty was particularly evident, for the gentlemen had supplied the discourse with some variety – the variety of politics, inclosing land, and breaking horses – but then it was all over; and one subject only engaged the ladies till coffee came in, which was the comparative heights of Harry Dashwood, and Lady Middleton's second son William, ... (*SS*, 172)

Looking at the various women in Austen's novels, the author's contempt for the kind of education that reduced women to her husband's most obedient servant cannot be more evident. Ironically, these women failed even at being perfect servants or good wives to their husbands, which in turn affected patriarchy adversely. Austen gives all her attention to women in the role of daughters, wives and mothers because it is precisely in these roles that the majority of them play their part in society. Significantly,

she shows that the education imparted to them does not equip them to acquit themselves creditably in these roles. Their education teaches them to be idle and unself-critical which makes them poor mothers. Wollstonecraft too, had expressed similar sentiments when she says,

> One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, ... written by men who, considering females rather as women than as human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers ... [women] are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.[7]

Austen through her satiric treatment of both men and women ridiculed the image of such patriarchs who adhered to these beliefs. Thus, she did not create any exceptional father figures to be worshipped as heroes nor did she advocate any kind of idol worship of the husbands.

The adverse effect on patriarchy through a woman's faulty education is best exemplified in Lady Bertram. Thus, owing to

> ... a little ill-health, and a great deal of indolence, [she] gave up the house in town, ... leaving Sir Thomas to attend his duty in Parliament, with whatever increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence. (*MP*, 15)

It is not for nothing that critics and readers have time and again considered her to be a cipher. Throughout *Mansfield Park* we see her paying scant attention to her domestic responsibilities and displaying an indifference towards bringing up her four children and niece. Weak in intellectual authority, feeble in personality and extremely unenthusiastic by nature, Lady Bertram is rather so fond of ease and leisure, that she lets her sister

Mrs. Norris take up those duties which ought to have been carried out by herself. But Mrs. Norris too with her tyrannical manners towards Fanny and her over indulgence for the Bertram children, proves herself miserably incapable of running Mansfield. However, we cannot overlook that Lady Bertram is Sir Thomas's choice for a wife, a baronet who is a slave-owner abroad. Austen by exposing the nature of his wife in England draws an analogy between the slaves in the colonies and women, especially married women, at home. Women like slaves were denied status as an independent being. The expressions 'capture' and 'captivation' as applied to marriage and sexual relationships are shown to be related to the language of law and property as well. The opening sentence of this novel, in which the captivation of an English baronet by a Miss Ward reinforces this,

> About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to *captivate* Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income. (*MP*, 1) [Italics mine]

But these luxuries come with marriage to a person who holds,

> '... that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern times, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence.' (*MP*, 318)

These words of Sir Thomas against freedom of expression were directed at Fanny, on her refusal to accept Henry Crawford as a husband, nonetheless, reveals Sir Thomas's strong disdain for those members of the fair sex who show any inclination for making judgments for themselves, stand by it and

behave as rational beings. So Sir Thomas chooses a wife who is beautiful but weak-willed whom he pampers within the luxurious confines of Mansfield, and who in turn loves to be pampered.

Sir Thomas faces the consequences of such a choice for he lives to see his children disadvantaged through the ill effects of an unequal marriage, in which his wife lacks the ability to educate her daughters. Austen's mocking portrayal of Lady Bertram shows her disgust for such good-for-nothing trophy wives. Thus, Lady Bertram, "... a woman of very tranquil feelings, and a temper remarkably easy and indolent" (*MP*, 2), is also portrayed as an equally bad mother and wife, but more or less well-suited to Sir Thomas's requirement of a wife.

> To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in every thing important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. (*MP*, 14-15)

Having chosen such a wife, it is surprising as to why a person as intelligent as "Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting" (*MP*, 14), in the upbringing of his children. A "truly anxious father" (*MP*, 14), and an officious aunt, the author suggests might not be enough when it comes to the balanced education of young minds, just as for Emma the absence of a mother who could have guided her is most palpably felt, although she is

lucky not to have such an aunt or as frightening a father, like those in Mansfield to watch over her every step.

Lady Bertram gives Fanny only one advice that is to marry Henry Crawford.

> 'And you must be aware, Fanny, that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very exceptional offer as this.' (*MP*, 268-69)

The protagonist thus reacts:

> This was almost the only *rule of conduct*, the only piece of advice, which Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half.-It silences her. She felt how unprofitable contention would be. (*MP*, 269) [Italics mine]

Austen had perhaps deliberately chosen the phrase "rule of conduct", which was in much circulation then. It is worth noting that it was the period when maximum number of conduct books on the ideal code of conduct for women were written. All of them preached the same message that the sole objective of a woman's life is to please men.

Austen's novels abound in mothers who with inadequate education fail to set the right standard for their next generations. Thus, Lady Bertram fails with Maria and Julia, Mrs. Bennet misleads Lydia, Mrs. Dashwood misguides Marianne, Lady Catherine nurtures a flawed Anne and so on. Mrs. Price, Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Bennet are as immature and silly as their youngest daughters and are in no position to guide young women into maturity, whereas others like Mrs. Bates, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Musgrove' because of their ignorance, indolence and folly instead become a burden on their children. Still there are aunts like Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Jennings and the

Parker sisters who are no better because of their officiousness, undue indulgence and smothering love. Again there are young mothers like Lady Middleton and Fanny Dashwood who though indifferent to the need of their sons, can only transform them into bothersome, noisy, unruly boys through indulgence.

Mrs. Dashwood the mother figure of *Sense and Sensibility,* is nowhere near as awful as Mrs. Norris, nor lacking in interest or understanding for her daughters like Lady Bertram, or as inept in managing her household like Mrs. Price, or as childish as Mrs. Bennet. Yet she fails to teach her daughter how to distinguish between evil and good, and exercise restraint over one's emotions, passions and sensibilities. Further, Mrs. Dashwood does not possess practical wisdom or prudence to protect the financial interests of her children, and secure their future after the demise of her husband. All that she is good at, is in sulking and nursing her hurt ego as when she is dislodged from the position of privilege at Norland Park by her step daughter-in-law.

Elinor who "... possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment ..." (*SS*, 3) clearly saw through her mother's faults. Yet she shows enough delicacy not to hurt her sentiments, while ensuring within the means available to her as the eldest daughter to protect her siblings and her

mother's interest. Thus, when Mrs. Dashwood's daughter-in-law is rude and disrespectful towards her and her family,

> ... she would have quitted the house forever, had not the entreaty of her eldest daughter induced her first to reflect on the propriety of going, ... (*SS*, 3)

Mrs. Dashwood's primary fault is that like her second daughter Marianne, she is too much influenced by heart than by head, by sensibility than by sense. Only under Elinor's influence, who "... though only nineteen ..." (*SS*, 3) possessed superior moral and intellectual authority and was therefore qualified to be, "the counsellor of her mother" (*SS*, 3) that

> ... enabled her frequently to counter-act, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. (*SS*, 3)

Elinor initially fails in extending her sensible influence beyond her mother to her younger sister Marianne who was very much like Mrs. Dashwood. Elinor is rightly full of "concern" (SS, 4), at

> ... the excess of her sister's sensibilities; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other ... (*SS*, 4)

But by being just a sister without a mother's authority Elinor can only watch with sadness the pain, heartache and Marianne's near fatal illness which could otherwise have been avoided had the mother been properly educated. However, Elinor is not an exception because other daughters like Fanny Price, Elizabeth Bennet or Anne Elliot face similar predicaments.

However, Mrs. Dashwood is partly redeemed because of her genuine concern for the welfare of her children and it is Mrs. Ferrars who is the worst mother figure in *Sense and Sensibility*. She has been described as:

> ... without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature. (*SS*, 171)

She teaches her daughter to be thoroughly mean and greedy, while her sons she controls dictatorially – even in their choice of a wife - without any concern for their happiness.

The behaviour of women - young or old, rich or poor which is presented more in a bad light than good, reflects the author's views on the important issues of female education and their impact on the question of marriage, authority and family affairs. Austen's concern with the theme of female education has been rightly endorsed by Margaret Krikham. She points out,

> ... we can see that Austen's subject-matter is the central subject matter of rational, or Enlightenment, feminism ... and the representation of women in literature [Austen's] is strikingly similar to that shown by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[8]

Wollstonecraft's views on female education, which were considered radical, revolutionary and against the set patriarchal standards of the then society are too well-known to require further elaboration here. The difference in style and manner of Wollstonecraft from Austen is pointed out by this critic:

> The received images of Wollstonecraft and Austen are so different that it may still seem far-fetched to suggest that they were both feminist moralists of the same school.[9]

However, Austen being a master of style might not have found it difficult to conceal a subject-matter which bears some striking resemblance with this feminist champion. Austen's style had very effectively served its purpose by concealing her motives successfully for many years. Kirkham further states:

> We see that Austen was an anti-Romantic, in an age which, so far as literature is concerned, we characterise as 'Romantic', and do not ask why Austen follows Wollstonecraft in pointed hostility to the new impulse.[10]

In spite of the surface differences Austen appears to go against the trend of romanticizing literature.

Terry Castle in his "Introduction" to *Northanger Abbey* too mentions of this sameness in differences between Austen and Wollstonecraft,

> We have no direct evidence that Austen had read Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – no reference in surviving letters, no explicit comments in any of her novels. Yet to judge by Austen's powerful meditation on the problem of female enlightenment in *Northanger Abbey*, it is almost impossible to believe that Wollstonecraft's impassioned feminine treatise, first published to scandalized outcry in 1792, was unknown to her.[11]

In her treatise she decried the way women were taught to be dependent on men, and thereby, failed to develop their powers of judgment and understanding and were often foolish and ignorant. She therefore, called for a revolution in female attitude and asked women to come out of their childishness and act sensibly and demanded that men treat them as rational humans with an equal power of understanding as men.

Given Austen's preoccupation with issues related to women we can surmise that she did not restrict her works to a moral interest of a purely personal nature that was unconnected with the general changes and awareness of her times. Women's education among others was being hotly discussed and Austen could not have kept herself detached from it. During the eighteenth century,

> Among the new topics, the moral nature and status of women was one of the most important. Among the new authors were women. Among the new readers women were numerous and influential, both as purchasers of books and as subscribers to circulating libraries.[12]

The women of Enlightenment be it Mary Astell or Mary Wollstonecraft were not concerned merely with the political equality of women, but about the inferior status accorded to them as moral and spiritual beings – something that even Austen was concerned about. It is worth noting that women had been excluded from the new Constitution in France, and Wollstonecraft in the 'Dedication' of her treatise makes a plea to Talleyrand to get this changed. However, before the Great Wollstonecraft Scandal of 1798, there was a prominent distinction between those who advocated political rights for women and those who merely advocated that they be educated like rational beings. These women writers including Austen, the 'daughters of gentlemen' as Virginia Woolf called them were in their own way making claims for the rights of women. Austen did it but in a language

which was neither racy nor virulent in its criticism of male prejudice, but with a lot of subtlety and concealment.

Nonetheless she proved through her less worthy females that they were neither deserving of respect nor could be regarded as rational beings until they changed themselves. She endeavoured to show that this change can be achieved only through the right kind of education. Her human characters like Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse and Catherine Morland are projected as signifying her rejection of the inferior role of passive obedience for women claiming for them moral equality with men. Lionel Trilling had also agreed that Emma "... has a moral life as a man has a moral life, ...".[13] True, Austen's mature heroines make mistakes like Emma does for which they are ridiculed, yet from the beginning they are conceived as amongst the most enlightened minds in the narratives. That they make mistakes and find themselves in difficulties is partly because of the curbs and restrictions imposed upon them by their society. In such a society intelligent young women do not have the license to act according to their abilities.

Emma Woodhouse with her good heart but an equally good yet faulty head is very much at the centre of moral concerns in the novel. She is however, contrasted with Jane Fairfax, and it is Austen's command of narrative technique that enables her to distance Jane from the reader's

attention and sympathy without censuring her. The contrast between Jane and Emma – between the head and heart - and their difficult relationship goes back to *The Watsons.* Austen's interest in contrasting pairs of heroines, the one representing 'Sense', the other 'Sensibility', which of the two is more important and how to achieve a judicious balance between them has been a recurring concern. The art of achieving this ideal evidently rests upon upbringing and training. After revising *Sense and Sensibility,* she perhaps became aware of the dangers of this dichotomy as likely to dehumanize both heroines. But she did not altogether abandon this issue. Even before that in *Lady Susan,* she presented Frederica as a foil against her mother who is described as the "Mistress of Deceit" (*LS* in *NA vol.*, 245) Instead, she sought in the revised *Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park* and *Emma* to modify it. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth is given both a good head and a warm heart; Jane in whom heart is stronger than head is relegated to the periphery though without being censured. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny's incongruously strong head surmounting an all too vulnerable heart is treated delicately, with Mary Crawford's head and heart shown as culpably corrupt. In *Emma* she again distances Jane and endeavours throughout to teach her protagonist how to achieve a more appropriate balance between the two.

Although Austen with her mastery over the narrative form presents the attainment as if it were effortless, and that it was perfectly natural for

young women to behave so, in the world of reality it could not have been so, for women definitely were not treated as equals or partners in life. However, Emma as well as other heroines act as independent moral agents because that was how Austen had intended them to behave. They are exceptions in that they are endowed with the power of reason. That they set a worthy example even though they are recipient of the same kind of education as the other peripheral characters, is because they are endowed with the important qualities of head and heart and not because they had made the best of what has been taught to them. But eventually Austen's female protagonists bow to the authority of 'reason' be it the patriarch as a husband or the father.

Austen's protagonists like Elizabeth, Emma, Catherine, Marianne, and even Fanny, Elinor and Anne learn from their experiences whereas their inferior counterparts fail. In them Austen gives us heroines who are capable of learning morals through experience and prove capable of exercising their own judgment. Eventually not only does the angel heroines, but the humanly faulty ones too come to occupy a position of central moral intelligence in the novels. They reveal that women are competent enough to penetrate into the depth of a subject matter, but it is their limited knowledge that seriously curtails their ability to do so.

Jane Austen traces the cause of inequality between men and women to the inadequate education provided to women of her times. *Northanger*

Abbey which has as its central theme - female education, is a novel dominated by the negative consequences of such an education. For instance, when Catherine questions Henry on politics in the famous conversation in Beechen Cliff, it shows the patronizing attitude of the men because they believe that those are subjects beyond a woman's comprehension.

> Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline, ... he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. (*NA*, 87)

Politics, naturally was assumed to be beyond the understanding of a woman's limited intellectual abilities. Given the strong stand that the author takes against patriarchy, not only in the person of General Tilney but also against the very system of female education and the attitude of men towards women - including that of the hero himself, it comes as little surprise that though this is one of her earlier novels written in 1797-98 and sold to Crosby & Co. in 1803, it was not printed till after her death. Only in 1817 *Northanger Abbey* was posthumously published with Austen's last complete novel *Persuasion*, as Crosby & Co. had already returned the manuscript to the author, expressing their inability to print it. For after all here Austen as opposed to her gothic counterparts shows that it is an inadequate education and financial dependence rather than the walls of the house or an abbey that most effectively imprisons women.

Mansfield Park too expresses Austen's disenchantment with women's education. Here too patriarchy imposes restrains on the thoughts and deliberately limits the knowledge of women. This is most glaringly evident during Fanny's enquiry to Sir Thomas about the slave trade and his plantation in Antigua that is run by slave labour. On being accused by Edmund of remaining "too silent in the evening circle" (*MP*, 159) Fanny defends herself thus, "Did not you hear me ask him [Sir Thomas] about the slave trade last night?" (*MP*, 159) Edmund further adds, "I did – and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others ..." (*MP*, 159), to which Fanny answers, "And I longed to do it – but there was such a dead silence!" (*MP*, 159)

Such an attitude towards women, Austen as also Wollstonecraft believed, restricted their ability to think, resulting in their limited knowledge of the outside world. Austen has been criticized by writers and critics over and over again for the limited scope of her novels because in them the outside world of men finds no mention. This male dominated society by restricting the role of women and in conceiving them as beings whose prime objective was to look after men's happiness, has reduced their significance in the social scheme of things and which adversely affected their thoughts and imagination. Middle class women in particular more than their counterparts from the upper classes were kept away from major schools and

universities and most of them received only a nominal education. However, they were avid readers of novels and major patrons of the circulating libraries. Such an education primarily emphasized on the so-called 'ladylike accomplishments' and provided only a restricted glimpse of the real world of men. That Jane Austen exposed such a social and mental set-up and its consequences on women can be construed as a criticism on female education of her times through her fiction, just as other critics like Wollstonecraft were asking the same questions in their own ways.

That Austen believed women were endowed with an equal measure of moral superiority as men is evident through heroines like Anne, Elinor, Marianne, Elizabeth and Emma, whom she gives sound heads as well as warm sensitive hearts. However, she was aware of the eighteenth century social conventions and was constantly on guard to maintain her propriety as a woman writer. Though she professed similar views on female education with Wollstonecraft she never transgressed the bounds of decorum and the tenor of her narratives always remained subtle even at the most critical moments. Austen was also well aware that it was this inadequate education coupled with lack of financial rights that rendered women dependent on men and made their position vulnerable. In a way their restricted education prevented them from realizing their full potential in becoming equal to men because in the first place they had to depend on men for financial support in

acquiring a more complete education that could have made them self-reliant. In this vicious circle, where there were many prosperous colleges and universities in England for men, it was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century (1886) that two colleges for women were finally established. Virginia Woolf's sarcastic remark on this that "... there have been at least two colleges for women in existence in England since the year 1886; ..."[14] delivered during a lecture (1929) is a bitter commentary on the lack of facilities for even educated women and the blatant discriminations practiced against them in the highest seats of learning.

Notes

[1] Kirkham 4.

[2] Kirkham 91.

[3] Woolf 33.

[4] Kirkham 89.

[5] Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, ed. Miriam Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1975) 185. (Hereafter cited as Wollstonecraft)

[6] Kirkham 8.

[7] Wollstonecraft 179.

[8] Kirkham X.

[9] Kirkham X.

[10] Kirkham XVI.

[11] Terry Castle, introduction, Northanger Abbey, by Jane Austen (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) XVIII.

[12] Kirkham 3.

[13] Lionel Trilling, The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism by Lionel Trilling (New York: The Viking Press, 1955) 82.

[14] Woolf 93.

Chapter IV

On the Power of Wealth

You could not shock her more than she shocks me;
  Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.
It makes me uncomfortable to see
  An English spinster of the middle-class
  Describe the amorous effects of 'brass',
Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety
The economic basis of society.[1]

In the above quoted lines W. H. Auden most aptly points out Jane Austen's handling of a crucial issue – 'The economic basis of society' - that has been done in an implicit style and yet '... so frankly and with such sobriety'. One might just mention in passing that Austen had explained in a letter to her favourite niece, "single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor"[2]. This was so because firstly, in her society it was impossible for women to earn money and secondly, had it been possible the law denied them the right to possess what they earned. It must be mentioned that property or money inherited by a woman according to the prevailing laws then came under the control of the husband after marriage, over which a woman had little or no say. Therefore, Austenian characters like the spoilt spendthrifts Willoughby or Wickham marry with an eye on the wealth of their prospective brides. Austen condemns such financial calculations in marriage where dowry becomes the purchasing price of a husband and an establishment. It is against the ideal where marriage is supposed to be a union of hearts. However, morals in Austen are learnt not in flashes of

inspired revelation, but through experiences and realization which require a sound head and heart. Thus, her heroes and heroines who are gifted with a superior consciousness never succumb to economic pressures, which is often the fate of her secondary characters.

In Austen's times women are seen as inheriting cash rather than landed property which usually went to men, more particularly the eldest son. Often this amount for women was given away lump-sum as dowry on their wedding. It was only

> ... after the year 1880 a married woman was allowed by law to possess her own property ...[3]

Moreover,

> Such was the economic, social and political power of land that owners of all kinds sought to extend their property, even when the return in money terms did not justify the cost of purchase. Precautions were taken to ensure that land remained in the family, and carefully arranged marriages between landed families became a means of adding to a family's wealth and of cementing political alliances.[4]

According to eighteenth century economic dynamics, land was the most important source of wealth giving its owners a significant role in politics, government and society. The incomes of the largest landowners were rivaled only by those of a small number of leading merchants and contractors. Land conferred social status, and generally the larger his estate the greater the landlord's title and influence. In most European counties land supported numerous aristocracy whose political power rivaled or exceeded that of the monarch. Many functions of central and local government were

carried out by the landowners, whose services were rewarded by control of patronage and an extended influence over the population at large. The value of landed estates, which represented the largest accumulations of capital of the time was in general seen only as a means of supporting an elevated life-style and of sustaining their owners' position in society.

In Austen's novels we find these issues centering around estates, inheritance, the significance of inherited cash on women's lives and their happiness, the fate of younger sons, the misuse of wealth etc. being raised and scrutinized. Surprisingly her concern with wealth has often been glossed over by critics. However, a closer reading of her works reveal that she was very preoccupied with wealth and the implications of possession or lack of it on men and women. It is amazing that most critics have failed to recognize this aspect, when a popular novel like *Pride and Prejudice* opens with these lines,

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. (*PP*, 1)

Mansfield Park too mentions in its opening page:

> But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them. (*MP*, 1).

Other mature narratives like *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* also mentions wealth on its first page.

The irony with which these opening lines from *Pride and Prejudice* are stated may perhaps have over-shadowed the material emphasis but the

author is undoubtedly drawing our attention to the relation between wealth and marriage - a concern that is predominant in all her novels. The irony lies in that for a man "... of a good fortune ..." is not so much in "... want of a wife ...", but more sought after as a potential husband. However, there is another kind of irony at work here because the very point that Austen wished to highlight has been lost in the appreciation of the surface irony of her style. Given Austen's style and manner it is natural that things which are close to her heart have often been over-looked by the manner of their presentation. Considering the fact that this was Austen's usual technique of highlighting other vital issues too, one can state that she recognized the importance of wealth in the entire social framework.

Austen's own financial position enabled her to create characters whose lives were determined by their wealth or lack of it. Her own income was the paltry royalty she received from her works which amounted to a few hundred pounds only. Living under such circumstances she must have felt how desirable it would have been to have a little more money so that she and her sisters would be less dependent on their brothers. It is therefore not difficult to see how Austen came to understand the power of wealth in one's life and how it governs human relationships.

Matters of finance form one of the core issues of her novels. But the financial implications on the lives of her major and minor characters are

often not given due critical attention. Such concerns are very rarely voiced by her intelligent heroines or morally superior heroes. On the other hand, it is mentioned directly only through her inferior characters. Thus, in *Pride and Prejudice* the lack of financial security of the Bennet girls, because of the entail which holds their future at stake, is discussed by the ludicrous Mrs. Bennet, the dictatorial Lady Catherine and the pathetic Mr. Collins. Elizabeth and Jane do not express their anger over the entail but Mrs. Bennet who is "... a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper ..." (*PP*, 3) is most vocal with her anger and frustration.

> How any one could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one's own daughters I cannot understand; and all for the sake of Mr. Collins too! (*PP*, 118).

Although

> Jane and Elizabeth attempted to explain to her the nature of an entail ... but it was a subject on which Mrs. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason; and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about (*PP*, 54).

Mrs. Bennet's outburst is a natural human reaction to the perceived cruelty and injustice to her family. However, Jane and Elizabeth's subdued and rational behaviour can be seen as Austen's attempt to maintain decorum in manners of eighteenth century women. D. H. Lawrence for one, criticized Austen for such over-emphasis on propriety which he claimed left the delineating of her characters wanting in some aspects. Foolish as she is, Mrs. Bennet is perhaps unaware of the seriousness and significance of what

she says. It is these circumstances that result in her obsession to get her daughters married – even if it is to someone as stupid as Collins. Thus, she overcomes her dislike for Collins the moment she learns that his intention of visiting them is to marry one of her daughters. Her daughters she considers to be a burden. She threatens Elizabeth to accept Collins's proposal. She assures him,

> But depend upon it, Mr. Collins ... Lizzy shall be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it myself directly. She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know *her own interest*; but I will make her know it. (*PP*, 99) [Italics mine]

The "interest" in question is mercenary, and her criticism of her daughter to someone recently acquainted reveals her shallowness. Her behaviour towards Elizabeth and her dramatic change from hatred to fondness for Collins shows how easily Mrs. Bennet yields to economic pressures. Elizabeth in refusing to accept Collins shows that she does not.

Through these two distinctive reactions between the mother and daughter the author tries to show how rational beings with head and heart react to wealth and other materialistic concerns as opposed to those who do not possess these qualities. This is shown in relation to marriage, one's choice of a life partner, treatment towards the rich and not-so-rich, the fate of widows, single aging aunts, poor daughters or nieces, sons and nephews too, independent or dependent. Throughout she has consistently portrayed how those with stronger intellectual and moral authority are less awed by

the power of money. But living within society they too cannot remain untouched by it. The difference lies in that these worthy individuals do not let mercenary interests cloud their judgments or influence their decisions. Yet, given the obligations of the patriarchal society within which they must live, they cannot be free from the scrutiny or comments of others. We see all of Austen's heroes and heroines subjected to pressures of judgment. But with their superior understanding it does not take them long to ignore monetary considerations and assert what they believe to be true. Such a period is always crucial for the narrative as well as in the development of the character.

Though economic implications on the lives of her major and minor characters are dealt with without much elaboration, yet her brief statements touch upon every aspect of their lives - affecting their power, authority, judgment, preferences, etc. The power of wealth (and rank too) that largely determine the status of a person in Austen's very English society - no matter how unjust a barometer for measuring a person's worth it remains – was too clear to the writer, whose critical comments on this are noted in all her novels. The same criteria of wealth in choosing a husband is often true of many societies as it was in Regency England.

Indeed, such are the powers of wealth that had Austen chosen to replace the words 'a single man' with 'a single woman' in the opening

sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, it would not have been very wrong. It would have considerably eroded the differences of power and authority between the sexes. Fortune is powerful enough in itself, but the same cannot be said of rank; as rank without the backing of wealth can be considerably weakened to exert any power and authority. Wealth is the single criterion that allows such concessions to a woman which otherwise would have been totally denied to one without wealth. Thus, rich widows like Lady Catherine and Lady Denham get away with their sort of behaviour that would have invoked the wrath of the patriarchs had it come from a poor widow like Mrs. Dashwood or a poor spinster like Miss Bates.

In *Emma*, Miss Bates is submissive and goes out of her way to please others, because she is to an extent dependent on the kindness of her wealthy neighbours - the Knightleys, the Woodhouses and the Eltons. Very much in "... her middle of life ..." (*E*, 18), Miss Bates spends her days,

> ... devoted to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible. And yet she was a woman whom no one named without good-will .... (*E*, 18).

Given her financial situation she anticipates what Jane Fairfax would go on to be if she too remains single. In this her position is more similar to Jane's than the wealthy intelligent Emma, despite some critics' emphasis on the similarity of their positions. But Miss Bates continues to be a popular figure because of her pleasing manners

> ... she enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married. (*E*, 17)

By using words like 'rich', 'married', 'young' and 'handsome' *in this short* sentence Austen has been able to encapsulate the desirable qualities for a woman.

With "... no intellectual superiority ..." (*E*, 17) Miss Bates's soft and gentle nature of "... simplicity and cheerfulness ..." (*E*, 18), ensures that her welfare and comfort are looked after by those who have power and authority like Mr. Knightley, Mr. Woodhouse and to an extent even Emma. Instead,

> Miss Bates stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour ... (*E*, 17).

This is not restricted to sending over a carriage for her, inviting her for dinners or sending produce from the garden and the like, but extends further as when the rich and clever Emma has to bow down to her authority – social and customary – and be apologetic and repentant for having disrespected her at Box Hill.

Critics have often drawn comparison between Miss Bates and Jane Austen. The author herself might have been conscious of the similarities of social circumstances, financial position, power and authority and background amongst others. Both of them were daughters of clergymen, economically handicapped spinsters, dependent on the kindness of others, aging aunts, devoid of power, limited in authority as females, etc. But that's where the similarity ends for neither was the author poor in intelligence nor

a senseless chatterbox like her fictional character. It was Austen's intellectual prowess, her sharp wit and an equally sharp tongue that must have made her daily life and interaction with others quite different from Miss Bates's. However, there is no denying that both were restricted by the same limitations. The difference is that Miss Bates is simple, naïve and foolish enough to be hardly conscious of the limitations imposed by patriarchy, unlike the author who was aware of these at every turn in her life.

Contrasted to Miss Bates in circumstances are the rich aging women – married or widowed, some of them typifying as the monster characters. Perhaps, the only widow of fortune who deserves admiration despite her fallacious judgment of men and women, is Lady Russell. Yet she too, inspite of being

> ... benevolent, charitable, good woman, and capable of strong attachments; most correct in her conduct, ... notions of decorum ... had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them ... (*P*, 17).

Because of these she somehow overlooks Sir Walter's faults, is biased against Wentworth and partial towards Mr. Elliot.

Marriage was seen as the best option for women in the absence of a respectable profession, yet it was not considered to be so essential for the wealthy ones. Thus, elderly rich widows following the death of their husbands would have no problem in securing another one (Lady Denham

had been widowed twice), yet they often choose not to. For as Austen tells us in *Persuasion*, woman "... of steady age ... and extremely well provided for ... needs no apology to the public ...", for giving "... no thought of a second marriage ..." (*P*, 11). Lady Russell "... did not marry ..." Sir Walter, "... whatever might have been anticipated ..." (*P*, 11) by others; and even after thirteen years of Lady Elliot's death,

> ... they were still near neighbours and intimate friends; and one remained a widower, the other a widow (*P*, 11).

Being "... extremely well provided for ..." (*P*, 11) Lady Russell shows wisdom in not marrying someone as shallow as Sir Walter, who would have been a liability instead of a good husband.

But for a widow of rank though not of fortune - Lady Susan must marry, and marry wisely to sustain herself. Thus, she marries the rich but foolish Sir James Martin, whom she had at one point of time forced her daughter Frederica to accept as a prospective groom. The clever, shrewd monster woman that she is, she readily seduces him to make him propose to her, when her daughter shows no interest in him. Instead of losing a price catch because of her daughter's disinterest, she herself joins in the competition and wins the rich reward in the person of Sir James. Regarding their respective fate Austen comments,

> Whether Lady Susan was, or was not happy in her second Choice – I do not see how it can ever be ascertained ... (*LS* in *NA* vol., 272),

whereas for Sir James she says,

> Sir James may seem to have drawn a harder Lot than mere Folly merited. I leave him therefore to all the Pity that anybody can give him. (*LS* in *NA* vol., 272)

It is his wealth that makes him a prey to a conniving widow much older than him, than endowing him with power and authority. That his wealth makes a victim of him is owing to his lack of intellectual and moral discretion.

For the very well-to-do Lady Catherine with her extremely commanding, self-important, condescending nature, a sickly daughter and past the prime of life, securing a husband of equal status would have posed major difficulties, her wealth notwithstanding. However, she too expresses no intention of remarrying after having a taste of independence and power of her widowhood. Her position and wealth makes her a formidable figure.

The elderly widow Mrs. Ferrars endowed with huge financial powers is another powerful figure. Both she and her daughter are shown to be notoriously clever, manipulative with an insatiable greed for wealth. Having invited Elinor for dinner she openly shows her dislike for her because she felt that Elinor wanted to marry her son and displays a preference for Miss Morton because

> Miss Morton was the daughter of a nobleman with thirty thousand pounds, while Miss Dashwood was only the daughter of a private gentleman, with not more than *three* (*SS*, 328).

Mrs. Ferrars

> ... drawing herself up more stiffly than ever, pronounced in retort this bitter philippic; 'Miss Morton is Lord Morton's daughter.' (*SS*, 173)

However, at the same dinner she is overly nice towards fortuneless Lucy Steele. Thus, in matters of conflicting interests wealth may occupy a place of secondary interest. This monster woman manipulates her economic powers as she enjoys absolute control over the Ferrars' wealth by disinheriting her elder son at will for daring to displease her, while being very partial towards the spoilt and corrupt younger Robert.

Mrs. Churchill is a close replica of Mrs. Ferrars, who while living would have never allowed Frank to marry poor Jane without disinheriting him. The Churchill is the family name of the Duke of Marlborough, and hence are very high up in the social register and are amongst the wealthiest. With her awareness of status and money, she would never have consented to such a match for the same reasons Mrs. Ferrars rejects Elinor – her poverty and lack of rank, although both Jane and Elinor are daughters of gentlemen.

Different from them but displaying the same hunger for wealth is Lady Denham who chooses to marry twice because she stood to gain from them. Practical and of astute judgment in financial matters, she handles her wealth, title and position with more shrewdness than most men. With a hint of subtle irony, Austen introduces her thus,

> Every Neighbourhood should have a great lady. – The great lady of Sanditon, was Lady Denham ... she was a very rich old Lady, who had buried two Husbands, who knew the value of Money ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 331).

In this world her being 'great' is not owing to some great personal qualities, but because of her fortune – an unfortunate measuring barometer that society, too often than not, resorts to – and rightly ridiculed by the author. Lady Denham, formerly "... a rich Miss Brereton, born to Wealth but not to Education ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 331,) does raise our eager curiosity even regarding her first marriage. It is worth noting that the words – Husband, Money, Wealth and Education – are in capital letters, as are many other words carrying economic connotation or importance which Austen wished to emphasize.

About her first marriage it is impossible to overlook that Lady Denham's first husband Mr. Hollis,

> ... had been an elderly Man when she married him; - her own age about thirty. – Her motives for such a Match could be little understood ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 331).

Interesting still is her devoted nursing of him, which leaves such a mark on the aged husband, that "... at his death he left her everything – all his Estates, and all at her Disposal." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 331-32) A seemingly selfless gesture wins over the heart of a man, so completely! And his fortune consisted

> ... of considerable Property in the Country, of which a large share of the Parish of Sanditon, with Manor and Mansion House made a part. (*S* in *NA* vol., 331)

This was quite a gain and a substantial addition to her wealth. With now a position of privilege and control over her husband's property and her own, she chooses to marry again.

Lady Denham's motive of service and selflessness towards her first husband Mr. Hollis is questionable. It is strengthened when Charlotte observes echoing the author's characteristic humour and sarcasm on entering the Mansion House,

> ... that the whole-length Portrait of a stately Gentleman, which placed over the Mantle-piece, caught the eye immediately, was the picture of Sir H. Denham – and that one among many Miniatures in another part of the room, little conspicuous, represented Mr. Hollis. – Poor Mr. Hollis! – it was impossible not to feel *hardly used*; to be obliged to stand back in his own House and see the best place by the fire constantly occupied by Sir H.D. (*S in NA* vol., 379) [Italics mine]

These last lines of Austen's incomplete novel questions Lady Denham's intentions of marriage and seemingly selfless service towards an old man in his death bed. Moreover, the author remains completely silent about *love* – whereas, a lot of reference to her *love* of money, is meant to highlight that her marriage was motivated by shrewd economic calculations.

Regarding her second marriage, it is openly acknowledged "For the Title, it was to be supposed that she had married ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 332). Having enhanced her fortune substantially the widowed Mrs. Hollis next turns her attention towards improving her status, when opportunity provides itself in the shape of Sir H. Denham. Allegedly Lady Denham had boasted to a friend about this second match,

> '... that though she had got nothing but her Title from the Family, still she had given nothing for it.' (*S* in *NA vol.*, 332)

In keeping with the laws of the land, Sir Harry Denham "... had succeeded in removing her and her large Income to his Domains, ..." but with her higher economic intelligence and authority she had carefully avoided in not "... put[ting] anything out of her own Power ..." although it had been Sir Harry's intention to do so, "... but he could not succeed in the views of permanently enriching his family, which were attributed to him." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 332)

Although wanting in education, culture and refinement, Lady Denham's wealth made others ignore these shortcomings in her, including her meanness and air of self-importance. Moreover, her relatives groveled at her feet. For once Austen discards her usual subtlety when she states explicitly,

> Lady D. was indeed a great Lady beyond the common wants of Society – for she had many Thousands a year to bequeath, and three distinct sets of People to be courted by; her own relations, who might very reasonably wish for her Original Thirty Thousand Pounds among them, the legal Heirs of Mr. Hollis, who must hope to be more endebted to *her* sense of Justice than he had allowed them to be to *his*, and those Members of the Denham Family, whom her second Husband had hoped to make a good Bargain for. – By all of these, ... [she] still continued to be, well attacked ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 333).

Well aware of her economic power and authority she uses it to her advantage. She exerts her power and authority over others to the fullest extent possible, and it matters nothing to her, if in the process her relatives feel insecure or uncomfortable.

But not all women of fortune are as shrewd as Lady Denham or possess great sense of the value of money. Lady Denham like Lady Susan makes wealthy catches, both of them are widowed and marry twice, but whereas the lady of Sanditon goes for the older ones, the latter chooses younger ones, the kind who are more easily malleable. In short, just as a wealthy husband is highly coveted so too is a rich wife, whether a spinster or a widow.

As opposed to them Austen's novels capture the predicament of plenty of women who are young, of a marriageable age and no less deserving but are rejected because they are not wealthy enough. *Sanditon*, perhaps presents a worthy match for the manipulative and greedy Lady Denham among one of her younger relatives. Clara Brereton, brought up in poverty but full of tact and sweetness, is the only one among the hoard of relatives, who in little time makes her way into Lady Denham's heart, so as not only to secure a shelter in the comfort of her mansion, but it is guessed would soon have made her way into her treasury too. It might be guessed that Clara Brereton would have turned out to be a little sly, as well as having the proper air of a heroine of sensibility, and that she might well have displayed the cunning Rousseau thought proper to her sex, but to Sir Edward's disadvantage. However, this must all be guessed for the story remains incomplete.

Clara Brereton of *Sanditon* presents a case where "Poverty and Dependance joined to such Beauty and Merit" (*S* in *NA vol.* 346) is reminiscent of Jane Fairfax in *Emma*. Both of them are handsome and gifted but victims of economic circumstances, and dependent on the kindness of others. Following the footsteps of Jane one is tempted to guess a secret engagement likely between Clara and Sir Edward Denham too – though there is no way of ascertaining it. One might surmise that like Jane and Frank, Clara and Edward's liberation too might happen only with the demise of Lady Denham, under whose powerful presence they can have no freedom to express their feelings openly. Lady Denham in the way she exercises control over the lives of those dependent on her financially, appears no less frightening than Mrs. Churchill. Lady Denham like Mrs. Churchill is appropriately described by Charlotte as "... thoroughly mean ..." (*NA*, 356) and she does not hesitate from making wedding plans for another not wealthy young woman, Miss Esther Denham with the ulterior motive of facilitating certain other wealthy catches.

> 'And Miss Esther must marry somebody of fortune too – She must get a rich Husband. Ah! Young ladies that have no Money are very much to be pitied ...' (S in *NA vol.*, 355).

Her calculations are devoid of love as the concern for money overrides all other considerations.

Despite being financially vulnerable and powerless both Jane Fairfax and Clara outwardly behave with dignity, authority and intelligence. On account of their positions they are reserved and secretive in their social behaviour. Clara hides with Edward in the mist and Jane agrees to a secret engagement with the charlatan Frank Churchill. Young inexperienced girls in Austen are often vulnerable to such mistakes, but given their position the author is not too harsh in her treatment of them. The fault also lies in their choice of partners, another excusable mistake where Jane chooses the totally undeserving Frank. Because of this they lead very unhappy lives. Austen is said to have disclosed to her family that Jane Fairfax survives for only six years of her marriage to Frank, suggesting that so unhappy had she been that it took its toll on her fragile health. But Jane though physically weak refuses to succumb to the pressures of wealth, power or status. Rather than carrying on with a dishonourable engagement she shows a preference to become a governess and never flatters the rich Emma.

Austen's heroines are never shown as succumbing to financial pressures. Thus, Fanny Price without fortune, beauty or health but with higher moral and intellectual authority believes that money cannot ensure happiness within marriage. In this she is contrasted to Mary Crawford the anti-heroine, as the two have different attitudes towards the artificial distinctions created by rank, status and wealth.

Margaret Krikham observes –

> Jane Austen satirises Kotzebue's [author of Lovers' Vows] (and Rousseau's) attitude to women through her portrayal of Fanny Price and Lady Bertram. Keeping her representatives of the rich and the poor within the same broad social class – Sir Thomas Bertram being the richest, Fanny the poorest – she deals with some of the unnatural distinctions in society in a more realistic way than Kotzebue, avoiding a fairy-tale happy ending. Fanny does not, as some critics have said, inherit Mansfield Park, for she marries the younger son, the heir being pointedly restored to health. Edmund will have a comfortable home and income, but compared with his older brother's wealth it is quite modest. Fanny will be much less well-off than she would have been had she married Crawford, and bids fair, with her husband, to fulfil a role she admires: "To be the friend of the poor and oppressed! Nothing could be more grateful to her" (MP, 404) – albeit in an unmelodramatic way.[5]

With an insecure future, unable to return to her own family or call Mansfield her home, and without money, a life of spinsterhood would be nothing short of an ordeal for Fanny Price made even more difficult due to her poor health. Besides, her upbringing and physical conditions make her unfit for the position of a governess, an option that never enters her mind either. Instead she is happy to attend to her Aunt Bertram and be of assistance to whoever needs her service. Most girls in her condition would readily settle down for a marriage - any marriage for that matter – as Charlotte Lucas does (albeit her position is better), simply because it provides security of a social, customary, legal and economic kind, besides enhancing her status in the society. But Fanny like other Austen protagonists firmly refuses to be awed by wealth and splendour, be it regarding the choice of a spouse, or in opposing the idea of a questionable

play preferred by her wealthy cousins, to whom she is obliged for their generosity – because it is morally incorrect.

Fanny enjoyed the covetous position of being sought after by Henry Crawford who went to the extent of wanting to marry her – a proposal that he did not consider for either of the Bertram sisters. Maria and Julia Bertram would have done anything to become Henry's choice. Henry is a young man of fortune of "... four thousand a year ..." (*MP*, 96), the owner of "... a good estate in Norfolk ..." (*MP*, 31), smart, charming, intelligent and indeed, of every other quality that makes him the 'most charming young man in the world'. But he is a thorough womanizer, a quality in which he however takes pride. Only Fanny and his sister can see through his faults. Her moral authority prevents her from accepting Henry, who a few months ago shamelessly flirted with the engaged Maria while simultaneously trying to attract Julia's affections.

By turning down Henry's proposal, Fanny attains greater moral authority, but looses out in economic, customary and social power and status for some time. Yet without a second thought she turns him down. Of course, she loved Edmund which she was unable to express, nor was there much hope that her affections will be returned. Nonetheless, she remains steadfast in her feelings for Edmund even under psychological pressures from Sir Thomas and others to accept Henry. The patriarch goes on to label

her as vocal and ungrateful – two very unfair allegations – besides sending her away to Portsmouth, to make her understand her real situation and status, and of the value of money and comfort that she had become accustomed to. But for holding on to her belief she is ultimately rewarded with enhanced authority in the form of limited powers within Mansfield and the approval of the patriarch.

Henry's money and estate are not the determining factors for Fanny, although she has nothing to call her own. Marriage with Henry would have improved her position manifold; as the mistress of his Norfolk estate it would have bestowed her with power and authority over the lives of many. And financially she would be liberated from being dependent on the kindness and generosity of Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram or her cousins. She would also be rid of the daily humiliation at the hands of Mrs. Norris. In refusing the wealthy charismatic Henry because he did not possess any of the qualities she wanted in a husband, Fanny displays high moral and intellectual discernment.

By finally marrying Edmund a clergyman, the younger son of a baronet, without estate, title or much wealth but of higher human worth, Fanny remains loyal to her love and her values. This alliance will give her far less power, luxury or comfort than she would have had as Henry's wife. Unfortunately for Edmund his expected fortune stands depleted owing to

Tom's extravagant lifestyle. But Fanny realizes that wealth or fortune, and the consequent economic power can never compensate for the genuine qualities of a human being.

In contrast her rich young cousin Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford lack the moral and intellectual authority owing to their flawed character and are consequently over-whelmed by the power of wealth. Miss Bertram rich and very beautiful, is nonetheless, arrogant, mean, even gullible, as seen in her relationship with Rushworth and Henry Crawford. Lacking in moral authority she is cold to Fanny – for being a poor cousin; and her own sister Julia – for being attracted to Henry; and also gets into an intimate relationship with Henry while being engaged to Rushworth. Yet she is intelligent enough to notice that Rushworth is a fool but overlooks it and marries him because he is wealthier than her own father and is the owner of one of the finest estates in England. Totally lacking moral strength and intellectual authority unlike Fanny Price, Elizabeth Bennet or Elinor Dashwood, she marries for more money.

> Being now in her twenty-first year; Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object ... (*MP*, 30)

This greed along with the need to escape her dominating father's house leads to her marriage to Rushworth, but by eloping with Henry shortly after her marriage she brings about her catastrophe and downfall.

This same greed for wealth is seen in Mary Crawford too, who herself is the inheritor of twenty thousand pounds. She holds money as an important criterion for marriage. She says,

> 'I am not at all ashamed of it ... every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage ...' (*MP*, 34)

Thus, though conscious of Edmund's superiority she is unwilling to marry him till he renounces the idea of being a poor clergyman, and takes up a more promising profession in the navy or in politics. Edmund's fate here is similar to those of women of less fortune who lose the person they love because they are not rich enough. Thus, both the genders have to face the predicaments of not being rich enough.

The question of wealth in marriage is of great significance and hence Austen emphasizes this in all her novels. Another young woman who marries for financial security is Charlotte Lucas of *Pride and Prejudice*, who unlike Maria and Mary is neither wealthy, attractive or pretty but is "... a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven years ..." (*PP*, 14) and "Elizabeth's intimate friend" (*PP*, 14). Elizabeth misunderstands that like her, Charlotte possesses the same authority to resist the power of wealth. The two friends share so much similarity of views that Elizabeth's "... astonishment was consequently so great ..." (*PP*, 112) when Charlotte accepts Collins. Particularly so, since she respects Charlotte and knows that her friend is aware that she is marrying a fool.

But Charlotte calmly asks,

> 'Why should you be surprised, my dear Eliza?' (*PP*, 113),

and goes on to explain:

> I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (*PP*, 113)

For a woman neither beautiful, young nor wealthy she makes a choice not governed by those factors which should ideally bring about a union, but is ruled by more materialistic concerns. Elizabeth is mistaken in assuming her to have the same moral and intellectual authority that she herself possesses. Although in intelligence both are at par, in exercising their intellectual authority, Charlotte fails miserably. However, given her society she cannot be entirely blamed for her choice. Charlotte's behaviour is an act of desperation that a twenty-seven year old spinster without much wealth naturally makes.

Marriage is crucial in patriarchy because it is the only accepted form of self-definition for women in that society. Perhaps, the author focuses so much on it as she herself experienced the difficulties of being unmarried and living as the women did within the unequal and inadequate social parameters. Thus, like Charlotte Lucas, many women in her fiction, "Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, ..." (*PP*, 111) still consider marriage as their "object"

> ... the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want ... (*PP*, 111).

Even marrying without love or fondness was preferable to being a governess or a school teacher. This awareness notwithstanding, the female protagonists unlike their inferior counterparts do not succumb to the lure of money.

Like Fanny, Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood refuse to be swayed by financial considerations and reveal the same grit and determination, although they could not have been more dissimilar in personality. The sole point of commonality between them is their intellectual and moral authority. All of them lay greater emphasis on the worthwhile qualities in their husbands rather than on their bank balances. In spite of facing an insecure future Elizabeth refuses to consider marriage unless she is convinced of the worth of the man. Although brought up in reasonable comfort the future of the Bennet daughters is uncertain. Even the house where they have grown up will pass on to a cousin – who is a stranger – after Mr. Bennet's death as a part of the entail.

Yet Elizabeth not only refuses Mr. Collins but also Darcy of "ten thousand a year." (*PP*, 7) and the owner of Pemberley because she did not feel it right. This strength unparalleled by any other character in the novel proves her superior worth. By accepting Collins she could have become the future mistress of Longbourn, but by refusing him she and her siblings face

the prospect of being turned out of the house by Mr. and Mrs. Collins (who ever she might be), in just the same manner Mrs. Fanny Dashwood and her husband turn out Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her daughters from Norland Park in *Sense and Sensibility.* Elizabeth is well aware of such consequences, and on the face of this, it requires a lot of courage to turn down such an offer, even when the future is uncertain.

However, Elizabeth's strength of character lies in her rejection of the extremely well-to-do Darcy and not merely of Collins who occupies the parsonage of Rosings. Most women would have jumped at Darcy's proposal but not Elizabeth. The author tells us,

> ... the mere stateliness of money and rank, she thought she could witness without trepidation. (*PP*, 144)

She is willing to live without the luxury of Pemberley, risk dying a spinster without power or authority and even bear being thrown out of Longbourn, but not willing to marry one for whom she has scant respect and no love, no matter how wealthy he might be. Possessing only the power of her own convictions and the authority of a sharp intelligence Elizabeth reveals a tremendous sense of authority and a capacity to wield power. Her authority is also felt strongly, when one encounters a changed Darcy later, humbled after being forced to self-introspection by her rejection. For a young girl without other prospects this is indeed a remarkable behaviour.

Interestingly, later when Elizabeth accepts Darcy's second proposal, Jane asks her playfully, "Will you tell me how long you have loved him?" (*PP*, 332) Eliza replies, "But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." (*PP*, 332) Of course, she is being playful, for Austen soon adds,

> Another intreaty that she would be serious, however, produced the desired effect; and she soon satisfied Jane ... (*PP*, 332)

By this the author is making an ironic comment at all those anxious mothers and eager daughters whose choices are determined by their mercenary considerations.

Like Austen's other female protagonists Anne Elliot too is aware of the value of superior human qualities over wealth. Yet she rejects Captain Wentworth, a

> ... remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy ... [who] had *no fortune*. (*P*, 29-30) [Italics mine];

only to marry him seven years later - a wealthier Captain Wentworth, a potential knight with bright prospects. However, she had turned down his proposal for "his good, even more than her own" (*P*, 31). One rarely comes across this kind of selfless reason in young marriageable women or women in love, so much so that Wentworth too misunderstood her. But to her father it was "... a very degrading alliance ..." because Wentworth possessed "no fortune". Whereas for Lady Russell a friend and mother-figure:

> Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen ... *who had nothing* but himself to recommend him, ... would be, indeed, a throwing away, ... (*P*, 30) [Italics mine].

But seven years later

> Sir Walter made no objections ... (*P*, 233)

because

> Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody ... (*P*, 234),

Lady Russell, however had to "... admit that she had been pretty completely wrong ..." (*P*, 235)

Interesting too, is a sister's reaction towards her sibling's prosperous marriage. Mary Musgrove found gratification in that

> ... her own sister [Anne] must be better than her husband's sisters, it was very agreeable that Captain Wentworth should be a richer man than either Captain Benwick or Charles Hayter. (*P*, 235)

However, there was something that did make Mrs. Mary Musgrove suffer, which diminished her happiness and the reason lay in equally materialistic concerns –

> ... in seeing Anne restored to the rights of seniority, and the mistress of a very pretty landaulette; but she [Mary] had a future to look forward to, of powerful consolation. Anne had no Uppercross-hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family; and if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from being made a baronet, she would not change situations with Anne. (*P*, 235)

Fortune can too often create jealousy between siblings as exhibited in Mary's attitude.

Except Anne most people consider a match from the point of economic viability. Anne loved Wentworth when he had no money, and continued to do so during his seven long years of absence, and even after his return as a young man of fortune. Her feelings did not fluctuate with the economic fluctuations in his life. Had Anne chosen she could have had a landed estate, headship of a family, even take the place of her mother and be the mistress of Kellynch-hall, by marrying Mr. Elliot, the wealthy successor to the title and estate of the Elliots. Mr. Elliot who had been harbouring such a plan, would only have been exceedingly glad about it. For on hearing Anne's engagement we are told that "It deranged his best plans of domestic happiness ..." (*P*, 235) Also had she chosen she could have been in Mary Musgrove's position- it was because she refused to accept Charles Musgrove's proposal that he marries Mary. Both the situations would have given Anne higher status, power and authority than Mary could ever have. But in choosing Wentworth she chooses individual worth not fortune and in continuing her relationship with poor Mrs. Smith "... married [to] a man of fortune ..." (*P*, 144), now a widow, sick and crippled with rheumatic fever, robbed of luck and fortune by Mr. Elliot's cunning and neglect, and her husband's extravagant ways Anne reveals that she does not allow wealth to cloud her judgment of human worth and come in the way of genuine friendship.

Elinor Dashwood is also another important female protagonist who behave more or less in the way Anne and Elizabeth do and possesses this higher sense of intellectual and moral authority. Unlike these characters Lucy Steele marries for money. Instead of Edward she chooses the inferior Robert who had come to inherit the additional wealth that rightfully belonged to Edward. Further Edward's sacrifice matters little to Lucy. Without looks or fortune, this scheming person wins over Robert and Mrs. Ferrars in no time, despite the latter's great displeasure at their marriage.

> Lucy became as necessary to Mrs. Ferrars, as either Robert or Fanny; and while Edward was never cordially forgiven for having once intended to marry her, and Elinor, though superior to her in fortune and birth, was spoken of as an intruder, she was in everything considered, and always openly acknowledged, to be a favourite child. (*SS*, 332)

Lucy is well aware that all the wealth is controlled by her mean mother-in-law and hence is determined to become her favourite.

Lucy and Robert the cunning manipulative pair though devoid of all decency as human beings, nevertheless enjoys a position of power, wealth and privilege. The author sums up their personalities,

> *That* was due to the folly of Robert, and the cunning of his wife ... before many months had passed. The selfish sagacity of the latter, which had at first drawn Robert into the scrape, was the principal instrument of his deliverance from it; for her respectful humility, assiduous attentions, and endless flatteries, as soon as the smallest opening was given for their exercise, reconciled Mrs. Ferrars to his choice, and re-established him completely in her favour. (*SS*, 330-31)

In Lucy, Mrs. Ferrars meets her match who will succeed her and will be instrumental in perpetuating the mishandling of power and authority in the next generation. Austen tells us that,

> The whole of Lucy's behavious in the affair ... may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, ... will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no sacrifice than that of time and conscience. (*SS*, 331)

Just as Lucy discards Edward once his mother disinherits him of his huge wealth, likewise Marianne is abandoned by Willoughby because she is not rich enough. Austen's novels present instances cutting across genders where a worthy loving person is sacrificed at the altar of wealth. *Sense and Sensibility* provides the most powerful example where Marianne is rejected for Miss Grey of 'fifty thousand pounds'. This work more than any of Austen's other novels provides the most numerous implications of the adverse effect of economic power. Just as Marianne is a victim of the lack of wealth, excessive wealth too can make a victim of a young woman. In a way, Miss Grey's unhappy married life with Willoughby ultimately makes her a victim of her wealth, for it is precisely her fortune that had attracted him to her.

But it the heiress Eliza Brandon who undoubtedly remains the worst affected victim of her inheritance. As Colonel Brandon recounts to Elinor,

> At seventeen, she [Eliza] was lost to me for ever. She was married – married against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our family estate encumbered. And this, I fear, is all that can be said for

> the conduct of one, who was at once her uncle and guardian. My brother did not deserve her; he did not even love her. (*SS*, 150)

The difference between Eliza and Mrs. Willoughby is only in degree and not in kind, as wealthy women, heiresses, either titled or from less prestigious background end up as vulnerable catches, since their riches attract like moths to the fire, men who do not love them but their fortune. *Sanditon* too perhaps would have provided us with another such victim in Miss Lambe had the novel been completed.

But not all rich women become such victims, as they too can come to occupy a position of command and authority. *Sense and Sensibility* through the junior Mrs. Dashwood provides instances where wealthy young women can be thoroughly mean to their female counterparts in less fortunate situations. In a society where women are often their worst enemies is it not surprising that the hardship of the Dashwood girls and their recently widowed mother, is primarily due to the meanness of Mrs. Frances Dashwood and her exerting considerable authority over her husband's decisions. Thus,

> Mrs. John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her mother and sister-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors. (*SS*, 4)

As the narrative progresses she convinces her husband in reducing the financial assistance to his step-sisters despite the "... solemn promise ..." (*SS*, 9) made by him to his late father to look after their interest. Since Mrs.

John Dashwood "... did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters ..." (*SS*, 5), she whines,

> To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too, of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Miss Dashwoods, who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no relationship at all, have on his generosity to so large an amount. ... and why was he to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his money to his half sisters? (*SS*, 5).

Finally she succeeds in persuading him not to part with any money, except some assistance in the form of an occasional "... fish and game, and so forth, whenever they are in season ..." (*SS*, 8).

Sense and Sensibility more than any other Austen novel is pre-occupied with financial concerns connected to land. The opening passages center around the past and future of Norland Park – the heart of the Dashwood property which had changed owners several times. In the beginning of the novel we see Mr. John Dashwood had just inherited the estate on his father's demise, whereas his three half-sisters get only the paltry sum of "... a thousand pounds a-piece ..." (*SS*, 2). It is worth mentioning that "The old Gentleman ..." the previous owner from whom late Henry Dashwood had legally inherited the property had ensured that Norland would pass on not to his successor's daughters –

> ... but to his son, and his son's son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as to leave himself [late H. Dashwood] no power of providing for those [three daughters] who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision ... (*SS*, 2),

this despite the son having inherited a handsome amount from his deceased mother and having a wealthy wife in Fanny Ferrars.

Austen elaborately recounts the difficulties of the Dashwood women, who with Elinor's wisdom and the kindness of Colonel Brandon and Mrs. Jennings face it with dignity. Their experiences reveal that the power of wealth is most debilitating for people who do not have it because then the lack affects their lifestyle and everything that is precious including love. A fate similar to the Dashwood women would have befallen the Bennets as well on the demise of their father. However, Austen seems to have chosen to give us a more cheerful story in *Pride and Prejudice*. Nonetheless, till the girls get married there is always the lurking fear that they could be thrown out of their paternal house due to the entail.

Though it was considered important for young women to marry to ensure a secure future, a few rich young ladies did not feel the same way, as Austen says,

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome; clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition ... (*E*, 3)

is not too inclined towards marriage. Instead, her superior socio-economic status fills her head with a false sense of power and authority, whereby she becomes a victim of her own assumptions and not of some fortune-hunting young man.

Austen in delineating Emma had said, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like ..."[6]. This remark alludes to certain negative qualities in Emma induced by her wealth and status which are not normally found in a heroine.

> The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. (*E*, 4)

Her misconceptions were further bolstered because

> Hartfield, in spite of its separate lawn and shrubberies and name, did really belong, [to Highbury] afforded her no equals. The Woodhouses were first in consequence there. All looked up to them. (*E*, 5)

Thus, for simply being 'Miss Emma Woodhouse' she bluntly tells Harriet why marriage is not a lucrative proposition for her,

> 'Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's.' (*E*, 77)

At this even naïve Harriet reacts with shock, "But then, to be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates!" (*E*, 77). Emma points out that their situation can never be the same for,

> '... I am convinced there never can be any likeness, except in being unmarried. ... Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid [like Miss Bates]; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else.' (*E*, 77)

Convinced of her unassailability on account of her wealth and position, Emma has failed to recognize a social reality about the position of women in patriarchal England: that marriage was an inalienable fact of a woman's existence.

Irrespective of what Emma might think of her financial powers, it can never be the same as wielded by the Knightleys and the Darcys of the world. But the Knightleys, Darcys, Wentworths, Edmunds, Edwards and Colonel Brandons do not marry with an eye on wealth. Elinor and Edward's marriage is free of all mercenary concerns notwithstanding that he has been disinherited and has an insufficient income. He suffers as a result of his integrity. Rejected by his dictatorial mother and deprived of the fortune that should have been rightfully his - he being the eldest - he makes his beginning as a clergyman at Colonel Brandon's parsonage, that too, owing to Elinor's recommendations. Just as women can suffer impoverishment, he too undergoes difficulties, but unlike the former lot he is not deprived of the right to earn his own living. The right to earn money and keep what he earns is entailed by the responsibility of providing for his family. Such responsibility is the obvious corollary to power and authority.

In *Sense and Sensibility* we have a male version of Lucy Steele in Willoughby who sacrifices his conscience to further his selfish interests. Willoughby's spendthrift manners land him in deeper debts, rendering him

dependent on his aunt Mrs. Smith, from whom he hopes to receive an inheritance after her death. This remains unfulfilled for his un-gentlemanlike treatment of Marianne and the junior Eliza Brandon does not go well with the elderly lady's sense of ethics. She consequently disowns him thus putting him in the same category with dependent women.

Regarding the importance of wealth in contracting a marriage, a brief conversation that transpires between Elizabeth Bennet and Colonel Fitzwilliam in *Pride and Prejudice* would not be inappropriate. He candidly points out that "A younger son, ... must be inured to self-denial and dependence ..." (*PP*, 163) since title and estate legally go to the eldest. But Elizabeth disagrees, "... in my opinion, the younger son of an Earl can know very little of either ..." (*PP*, 163). The Colonel defends his stand:

> 'But in matters of great weight, I may suffer from the want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like.' (*PP*, 163),

hinting that for being the legally deprived lot, he must look elsewhere to compensate through a rich wife. The Colonel further adds,

> 'Our habits of expence make us too dependant, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money.' (*PP*, 163)

A similar conversation regarding the fate of the younger sons also takes place between Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford. She says,

> 'And you know there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son.' (*MP*, 74),

to which Edmund replies,

> 'A very praiseworthy practice ... but not quite universal. I am one of the exceptions, and *being* one, must do something for myself.' (*MP*, 74)

So he chooses to become a clergyman to which Mary again reacts, "... A clergyman is nothing." (*MP*, 74-75). A clergyman is "nothing" because it is not a financially rewarding profession although it has much influence on the society. There is another issue involved in this instance as Kirkham points out,

> ... Austen, by making her younger son the moral superior of the heir to Mansfield Park, implicitly questions the validity of primogeniture which not only divides brothers and is associated with the disqualification of sisters, but also dissociates government, whether in the family, Church or State, from Reason and Nature, as they appeared to a mind formed in the Age of Enlightenment.[7]

Though not a younger son unfortunately for Sir Edward Denham of *Sanditon*, the heir of late Sir Harry Denham, his weak monetary position renders his knighted status rather powerless. Power can be got from wealth even without rank, but mere rank without fortune commands little respect. Lady Denham repeatedly tells Charlotte that "Sir Edward *must* marry for Money ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 355).

> 'And if we could get a young Heiress to S.! But Heiresses are monstrous scarce! I do not think we have had an Heiress here ... Now, if we could get a young Heiress to be sent here for health ... and as soon as she got well, have her fall in love with Sir Edward!' (*S* in *NA vol.*, 355)

There seems to be some kind of a wish fulfillment when the West Indian, "Miss Lambe a young Lady..." of "... an immense fortune – richer than all the rest – and very delicate health ..." (*S* in *NA vol.*, 364), lands up

at Sanditon. This Miss Lambe "... about seventeen, half Mulatto, chilly and tender ..." was treated -

> ... beyond comparison the most important and precious, as she paid in proportion to her fortune. – had a maid of her own, was to have the best room in the Lodgings, and was always of the first consequence ... (*S* in *NA vol.*, 373),

Even in the very racial Regency England, where Mulatto's and mixed blood were looked down upon, Miss Lambe is spared discrimination because of her fortune. Whether this Miss Lambe, like a real 'lamb' falls a prey to her wealth is destined to remain unknown.

Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* is another Willoughby like character who is motivated by materialistic concerns in marriage. He ends up making a miserable choice in Lydia Bennet. Both Wickham and Willoughby elope with girls whom they believe will fetch them money – Willoughby with Eliza Brandon junior, and Wickham's failed attempt with Georgiana Darcy and a successful one with Lydia Bennet. Darcy informs Elizabeth,

> 'Mr. Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds ...' (*PP*, 180).

Jane Austen through these characters brings about the reversal of roles in their behaviour where they behave like desperate poor powerless women. She mocks the ideals of patriarchy that entrusts power and authority to men, simply because they are men and not to those who truly deserves it.

Sir Thomas of *Mansfield Park* remains sufficiently partial to rank and fortune, so as to let his daughter Maria marry the utterly foolish Rushworth.

> Sir Thomas, however, was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so unquestionably advantageous. (*MP*, 31)

Sadly,

> Edmund was the only one of the family who could see a fault in the business ... he was not pleased that her [Maria's] happiness should centre in a large income ... (*MP*, 31).

Regrettably the figure of patriarchy succumbs to the power of wealth and thus, fails in his paternal responsibility. He overlooks that 'If this man [Rushworth] had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow.' (*MP*, 31) for he is too much blinded by the factor that he is –

> ... a young man who had recently succeeded to one of the largest estates and finest places in the country. (*MP*, 30)

Because of this Sir Thomas fails in his duties as a father to prevent his daughter marrying such a foolish man. Though he could see that Rushworth is "... an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books ..." (*MP*, 161), and also that Maria was "... careless and cold ..." towards him (*MP*, 161) he felt that "It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain; ..." (*MP*, 161). On the contrary he was

> ... happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence, and very happy to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favourable for the purpose. (*MP*, 162)

This study reveals that the pattern found at work in most of Jane Austen's novels regarding wealth and fortune, is often repetitive. Young women are more-or-less seen to behave in a similar manner depending on their moral and intellectual authority and their personal worth. The same can

be said to be true for their elderly counterparts, as also for young men and the elderly father figures. Austen through this repetition had perhaps wanted to highlight the tremendous power of wealth. For wealth after all is the basis of patriarchy. The laws of the land have been fashioned in such a way for centuries that fortune became a major foundation upon which patriarchy exerted itself. This is evident from our discussion in this chapter.

Perhaps, another reason why Austen has repeated the importance of wealth in all her novels is because it is an important factor in determining relationships. Love and marriage are made or broken all for the sake of fortune. This is particularly true for those who are dependent on others, like young women without fortune or a livelihood and even younger sons and men with fortune who wants to further enhance it because of an insatiable greed for it. At times such greed for wealth can reach an extreme as is exhibited in the case of Eliza Brandon's uncle in *Sense and Sensibility*. It is this response to wealth of individuals, and the way they handle or mishandle it that they can also be categorized as angel, monster or human. A monster woman like Lady Denham or Mrs. Ferrars will always misuse their power of wealth, whereas angel women like Anne or Elinor will never succumb to the power of wealth or use it injudiciously. On the other hand, human characters like Emma and Marianne can themselves become the victims arising from their own misconception regarding wealth. This categorization as angel,

monster or human can be as much applicable for the men for wealth can make them behave in similar manners. Such behaviour of men which have lasting consequences on their female counterparts will be discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] W. H. Auden, "Letter to Lord Byron," Letters from Iceland (1937): n. pag., online, Internet, 9 Apr. 2006.

[2] Chapman 62.

[3] Woolf 93.

[4] Jeremy Black and Roy Porter, eds., The Penguin Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century History (London: Basil Blackwell LTD, 1994) 393.

[5] Kirkham 111.

[6] Chapman 203.

[7] Kirkham 114.

Chapter V

An Apology for Patriarchy

> The most transient visitor ... could not fail to be aware ... that England is under the rule of a patriarchy.[1]

Virginia Woolf had declared this as late as 1929. Years later Sylvia Plath in her characteristic way articulated her fear towards her father thus,

> For thirty years, poor and white,
> Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.
>
> Daddy, I have had to kill you.
> You died before I had time - ...
>
> I never could talk to you.
> The tongue stuck in my jaw. ...
>
> I have always been scared of you, ...[2]

The discussions so far have sufficiently revealed Jane Austen's ambivalent attitude towards patriarchs and the patriarchal society with its various ramifications. Her characterization of General Tilney, Sir Walter Elliot, Sir Thomas Bertram along with their successors Captain Tilney, Mr. Elliot and Tom respectively amongst others, further goes on to suggest that she did not have much expectations from patriarchy even in the future. Her last complete novel *Persuasion* liberates the heroine from the land-based patriarchal society for a new world. All her mature novels are highly critical in their evaluation of this system. The behaviour, manners and attitude of many a male guardian along with their heirs, and the effect that their

principles, ideals and beliefs have produced is quite unflattering – suggesting as if the author is being apologetic for patriarchy.

After all, the novelist was well aware that one of the main criteria on which patriarchy has survived throughout the ages is by means of effective domination. Studies by many anthropologists and natural historians have pointed out that even before societies – as we know them today had started forming – both the genders were at par, enjoying equality in a manner that is unthinkable today. Though the roles played by both the genders were different even then, still that did not make one inferior to the other. But then something happened to distort this harmony and men came to occupy a superior position over women and, thus the latter became 'the second gender'. This was achieved by various means, of which suppression perhaps is foremost, which primarily ensured that men continue to enjoy the dominant position of power and control. Austen might not have been aware of the history per se, but surely she perceived the suppression of women around her, which finds reflection in her narratives. A brief discussion of patriarchy at this point is essential, before understanding Austen's view of the system and its perpetrators.

Patriarchy means male domination and the loss of space for women, according to feminist scholars. They further say that history today, as we know it, is a distortion of matriarchal values which have been cleverly

replaced by patriarchy - a culture that is inherently linked to capitalism and the destruction of nature. Patriarchy is a system of domination in which war always becomes the main principle of social organization, the formulation of economic policies and the striving for technology. So successful has patriarchy been in its domination that matriarchy with which the earliest societies had begun is marginalized, almost obliterated. The instances of extant matriarchal societies can literally be counted on the tip of our fingers. But at what point and exactly how did matriarchy become subsumed by patriarchy, is still a matter of controversy. Importantly, the male-dominated society is associated with the culture of violence and economic disparity. Simone de Beauvoir opined that the male's identification with nature is symbolized by his ability to hunt and kill, whereas, for women her identification with nature has been as a symbol of immanence which is connected with the natural life-giving process which perpetuates the species. However, in the history of mankind, superiority or authority belongs not with those that bring life but with those which can kill and has the power to take away life.

Feminist researchers also contend that the social order in matriarchal societies is based on intelligent principles cultivated over thousands of years of human experience. It encourages well-balanced societies that practice reciprocal equality in which every individual irrespective of sex and age is

treated with respect. This theory is supported by the very nature of matriarchy which means 'centred around the mother' and the mother as the life giver and preserver cannot be violent, destructive or non-egalitarian. However, the same cannot be said about patriarchy, or the society centred around the father, which as opposed to matriarchy, cannot claim to be based on the ideals of a non-violent social order in which all living creatures are respected.

Since force, subordination and suppression are the mechanisms by which patriarchy works, the party which has the upper hand is in control. Patriarchy is inextricably connected with the concept of power and authority vested in men, which they exercise over women through subordination and suppression. Such authority also presupposes that women are the property of men. The Western patriarchal society which often displayed misogynistic tendencies was able to bring about the subjugation of women to their will through both physical and psychological tactics. In "A Room of One's Own" Woolf says,

> In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she [women] was locked up, beaten and flung about the room.[3]

Along with these physical means their upbringing instilled in their minds the idea that all men are superior to women. There may have been women like Austen's female protagonists who did not subscribe to the principle of male

superiority but they continued to be docile to men out of fear of the consequences if they went against them.

Female thinkers and writers of the eighteenth century like Wollstonecraft and Austen (the latter in an implicit way) thought of challenging these conventions. Intelligent women – like Austen's heroines - were gradually learning to come out of their cloistered confines because somewhere deep down they had an invincible sense of their own authority and autonomy gained from their experiences but which they were then themselves unable to comprehend fully. Writers like Austen who could 'comprehend' and yet did not try to provoke patriarchy openly, however did speak of these things in her novels through the art of evasion and concealment. For Austen the one language at her disposal which she mastered was the language of double talk. In this she became adept, perhaps more than any other female writer in England or America. It is thus that she presented to the public in an acceptable manner even dangerous visions of women in a way which obscured but could not obliterate their most subversive impulses. This was not an act of challenge against patriarchy but a survival strategy born out of fear.

So carefully has this evasion and concealment been done by Austen and other female writers that some critics believe that men authors are nowhere as elaborate as them. That Austen expressed her thoughts under the

legitimized cover of parodic strategies made her works ambiguous in nature and difficult to understand her exact meaning. Given the very patriarchal literary tradition, no doubt she and her counterparts had important things to hide and had tried to veil their criticism and managed to write within the bounds set by patriarchy. Feminist scholars like Patricia Meyer Spacks, Margaret Kirkham, Elaine Showalter, Carolyn Heilburn and Catherine Stimpson have tried to reach the truth behind the concealment in women writers and find meaning out of the seemingly empty spaces in their narratives.

The relegation of women to the domestic sphere was the most effective tactic of patriarchy to exercise control over women. Following this patriarchal norm Austen limited her literary topics to the domestic confines of three or four families belonging to the countryside. But even then she was able to effectively criticize patriarchy. It was through rebellious escapes from houses and institutions supported by it, from where women propelled by their claustrophobic rage ran away or eloped. They sought an escape from their deadened world into one of activity and freedom. When Maria Bertram seeks to go beyond the locked gates in her would-be husband's grand estate Sotherton, she too perhaps expresses the anxiety of women in such confined environments. But such dangerous and rebellious feelings can never be tolerated within patriarchy and for her defiance she is punished.

All the houses and estates in Austen are conspicuous by their lack of details which symbolize the emptiness in the lives of the women who are destined to live within them. Further Austen portrays most of her protagonists as sub-consciously looking for an escape from their paternal houses which are always uncomfortable because they offer them no private space. This general discontent is voiced by Anne when she says,

> *'We* live at home, quiet, *confined* and our feelings prey upon us. You [men] are forced on exertion. *You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other,* to take you back into the world immediately, ...' (*P*, 219) [Italics mine]

In *Persuasion*, Anne's father's house is defined not by any other feature but Sir Walter's numerous mirrors where she is faced with the monotonous ambience of her father's estate. Although mistress of her father's house Emma suffers from intellectual loneliness enclosed within locked doors and windows and blazing fires. All the heroines consciously or unconsciously want to reach beyond their father's house to the world outside. Maria Bertram is "... prepared for matrimony by a hatred of home, restraint, and tranquility ..." (*MP*, 70). Fanny leaves Mansfield to occupy the smaller parsonage at Thornton Lacey and Emma after her father's demise will eventually move over to Donwell Abbey. Catherine too will occupy Henry's parsonage at Woodston away from the claustrophobic environment of her parental home and the confining Abbey of the monsterish General. Although women from their mothers' lives did perceive how debilitating

marriage can be - as does most of Austen's female protagonists as well as some of her secondary female characters - they still want husbands in order to escape from home. Besides, the subconscious fear of becoming like their mothers, financial dependence adds one more motive to flee the parental house. Therefore, in a patriarchal world women are shown as competing with one another for male protection.

The public image of patriarchy was one of benevolence and protective guardianship of their womenfolk. But by presenting the cases of so many women in her novels whose conscious or sub-conscious impulse is to escape the confines of paternal houses, Austen explodes the myth and exposes the ugly truth about patriarchy. Some of her novels portray more than one instance of elopement which are deliberately shown to be rash and foolish acts because Austen was aware that any endorsement of such acts would not be taken kindly by patriarchal society. Nevertheless, such instances speak for Austen's indictment of patriarchy which is very cleverly couched in subtlety and indirection.

The author had realized that there is no possibility of escape from the patriarchal enclosure, which has betrayed nature through a culture that refuses equality to women. The irony is that women cannot escape these conventions and must adhere to them which ultimately denigrate them. Women were fated to inhabit the male-defined confines, be it in matters of

conduct, speech, thought, way of dressing, etc., as their mothers and before them their mother's mother had been doing for centuries, which inevitably was bound to alter their vision of life and living. Tight-lacing, fasting, vinegar-drinking and other cosmetic or dietary excesses were encouraged. For women to be frail, sickly and ill, as it were became an ideal to be aspired for, an essential objective for their training in femininity. It formed a part of the physical regimen which made women ill and weak, that in turn was admired by the men, for the weaker they were the more complete their suppression will be. If anything firmness within patriarchy can only precipitate downfall as it does literally for Louisa Musgrove and figuratively for Mary Crawford. Women like Lousia are expected not to jump from the stiles (suggestive of masculine activity and energy) but to read love poetry quietly in the parlour with a suitor sensitive to her condition. Louisa's near fatal fall and illness reinforce Anne's belief that female assertion must be fatal and diminishing, just as Marianne Dashwood's is shown to be.

In *Mansfield Park* the distinction between a weak and timid Fanny and a healthy and outspoken Mary is most marked, based on which they are accorded different treatments within patriarchy. Mary's physical fitness is not seen as a sign of good health but as a masculine attribute. "I am very strong. Nothing ever fatigues me ..." (*MP*, 55), Mary frankly admits this supposedly unfeminine quality. Unlike Fanny, this "rather small, strongly

made" lady takes up riding out of sheer "inclination to learn to ride" (*MP*, 53). Mary's passion affects Fanny's already fragile health as she is deprived of the much-needed exercise, since Mary borrows her horse. Even Edmund points out, "She [Mary] rides only for pleasure, you [Fanny] for health ..." (*MP*, 56). As the narrative progresses, Mary is shown to be evil and monstrous, primarily because she is assertive, brutally outspoken and willful in her way of living – qualities abhorred by her society in a woman. Mary and Fanny can be equally selfish, yet the difference between them is that the latter keeps her selfish feelings to herself and does not allow this impulse to determine her outward actions. Thus, outwardly she is an angel for patriarchy. Mary is the reverse. In this story Fanny and Mary are shown as variations of the angel and monster character respectively, since they exhibit some differences from a complete angel or monster character.

The ill-effect of patriarchy can also be seen in Austen's characterization of the angel, monster and human characters among the women, because these characters are shown to behave in the way that they do, in direct proportion to patriarchal approbation that they wish to attain. For example, Fanny is shown to have gained the approval and love of the patriarch as a reward for her submissive and dedicated behaviour. "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he [Sir Thomas] wanted ..." (*MP*, 385) and, "... dearer by all his own importance with her than any one else at

Mansfield, ..." (*MP*, 384). Mary on the other hand has little prospect of love or domestic bliss because she does not behave in the same manner. In another instance in the novel, the punishment on the Bertram sisters is seem to be in direct proportion to their degree of willfulness and selfishness. That,

> Julia escaped better than Maria was owing, in some measure, to a favourable difference of disposition and circumstance ... (*MP*, 380).

Austen's vacillation between the twin images of the angel and monster suggests her own sense of ambivalence as a member and a female writer in the male-dominated society. The anxiety she felt as a female author in such a profession is evident in her handling of the angel and monster characters. The creation of the perfect angel would amount to an unequivocal endorsement of patriarchy which Austen could not have done without perjuring herself. On the other hand, to allow the monster characters to go unpunished would be a direct assault on the power and authority of patriarchy. In several examples we see the author's anxiety at work, like Anne the most perfect angel character in the end breaks away from patriarchy by embracing the naval society. Lady Susan though she is placed in the monster category and Austen's language in describing her is not of approval yet she is portrayed as a charming and attractive woman.

Even writers like Emily Dickinson, Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and also modern writers like Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, are found to be alternately

defining themselves as the angel woman or the monster woman. The continued presence of the angel and monster women in much of women's literature is because few writers have succeeded in breaking away from the deep-seated imprints of patriarchy.

General Tilney of *Northanger Abbey* is presented as the worst patriarchal figure in Austen's novels. Through elaborate double talk and other techniques of concealment Austen nevertheless, transforms this work into perhaps her strongest indictment of patriarchy. On the surface it is an amusing and inoffensive novel. But when this was published posthumously the harsh portrayal of patriarchy disturbed the readers and reviewers. In partial subversion of gothic conventions Austen presents General Tilney as handsome, polite and a polished man of the world, unlike the gothic villain. This façade however, hides his villainous traits like cruelty towards Catherine, his children, his wife and his subordinates. Like all patriarchs his self-assurance is based on the fact that he has the ultimate power and authority because of his being a male and also as the possessor of family wealth. On his first being introduced to Catherine he is shown as being very pleasant to her because he thinks that she is fabulously rich. She was

> ... received by him with such ready, such solicitous politeness ... to such anxious attention was the general's civility carried ... (*NA*, 79)

that it surprised Henry and Eleanor. Also

> The general attended her himself to the street-door, saying everything gallant ... and making her one of the most graceful bows she had ever beheld, when they parted. (*NA*, 79)

But once the truth is known his villainous traits and cruelty come to the fore. Austen remarks about Catherine's unjust treatment,

> The General had had nothing to accuse her of, ... She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be. Under a mistaken persuasion of her possessions and claims, he had courted her acquaintance in Bath, solicited her company at Northanger, and designed her for his daughter in law. On discovering his error, to turn her from the house seemed the best. (*NA*, 198-99)

This remark shows how Austen in spite of her protestations to the contrary, was not always successful in hiding her criticism of patriarchy. She sometimes even tried to disown such a reading of her novel by professing ignorance of her own intentions. In the "Advertisement" to the novel she expresses confusion as to why this work finished in 1803 –

> ... disposed of to a bookseller, it was even advertised, and why the business proceeded no farther, the author has never been able to learn. That any bookseller should think it worth while to purchase what he did not think it worth while to publish seems extraordinary. ("Advertisement", *NA*)

Northanger Abbey remains the most political of all the novels in which her indictment of patriarchy finds the strongest expression.

The position of an unloved woman or an uncared-for wife can be truly pathetic as is evident under the General's patriarchy. This is shown through Eleanor and her mother, the late Mrs. Tilney, about whom the author says very little, but through this little the author simultaneously leaves a lot unsaid about the life of the deceased wife. We can perhaps

surmise that like her late mother-in-law, Catherine Morland too might comprehend the powerlessness of women and the various forms in which they are exploited. It is this kind of treatment or rather mistreatment that leads to their psychological vulnerability in various situations. This is as much the secret of the Abbey as also a part of the secret behind the graceful and elegant surfaces of English society. The gullible Catherine soon realizes from her experience in the Abbey that most women resemble Eleanor Tilney in that they are only "... a nominal mistress of" the house and their "real power is nothing ..." (*NA*, 182). Austen's other heroines too realize this through their various individual experiences.

In *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse the heroine's father is another selfish patriarch who wields his power and authority over the women folk without any compunction. He is also a hypochondriac and uses his imaginary illnesses to ensure the unstinted devotion and obedience of his daughter Emma. He manipulates her to such an extent that she is made to believe that marriage for her is out of the question. At the same time Mr. Woodhouse lavishes his love and attention on Emma with praises like "Dear Emma bears every thing so well" (*E*, 9), "And you have never any odd humours, my dear." (*E*, 6) She is so over-whelmed by his love and appreciation of her that she feels "Marriage ... would be incompatible with what she owed her father." (*E*, 416). While extolling Emma's virtues as a devoted daughter,

Austen is also pointing out the psychological hold that the father has on his daughter and the slavish relationship between them. Such a subjugation of his daughter by Mr. Woodhouse finds an echo in the words of Wollstonecraft:

> ... the early habit of relying almost implicitly on the opinion of a respected parent is not easily shook, even when the matured reason convinces the child that his parent is not the wisest man in the world. This weakness ... of obeying a parent only on account of his being a parent, shackles the mind, and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason. [4]

Emma in being portrayed by Austen as a gullible and willing slave to her father's manipulation can not only be read as a weakness in her character but also as Austen's indirect way of exposing Mr. Woodhouse's extreme selfishness. Also in her excessive devotion to her father, she fails in fulfilling her responsibility outside her home and family, towards the society and towards other women.

In spite of being endowed with power and authority as the first citizen of Highbury, Mr. Woodhouse's emotional dependence on Emma is un-manly and speaks for a deep-seated sense of insecurity. This makes him an unfit father or guardian incapable of sustaining his daughter either intellectually, psychologically or morally. As such, on the whole, he is a bad influence on Emma. Her mistakes can therefore, be said to be the result of her staying at home in an environment which makes it difficult to think for herself. Mr. Woodhouse is another example through whom Austen

questions the moral authority of patriarchy in which such men misuse the power and authority vested in them. He is portrayed as

> ... having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in his ways than in his years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time ... (*E*, 5).

It is not any genuine concern for his daughter's happiness or fatherly responsibilities that precipitates Emma's marriage as it ought to have been. Rather it is his own sense of insecurity, Mr. Woodhouse's anxieties about a local poultry thief that hastens the wedding. For the indictment of Mr. Woodhouse's personality that starts from the very beginning of the novel – in his criticism of Mrs. Weston's marriage – completes a circle with Emma's. It shows his inability to judge anything sensibly and emphasizes his selfishness. It is only proper that the paramount position – the role of a guardian – is taken up by someone able, like Mr. Knightley.

Given the partiality and prejudice with which patriarchy have treated and stifled women down the ages, it is but natural that a woman of Austen's understanding and perception would give us flawed patriarchs in all her novels, who make demands for obedience and respect no matter how fallible, foolish or in the wrong they may be. Sir Thomas Bertram of *Mansfield Park* is another representative of such defective patriarchy. Austen shows how his dictatorial mismanagement of Mansfield results in

terrible consequences. He is portrayed as an authoritarian who cannot brook the slightest sign of opposition and had once said to Fanny:

> ... that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern times, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. (*MP*, 318)

The atmosphere in his household therefore, is the gloomiest among all of Austen's novels. In depicting his solemnity and portentousness, and ultimately proving him to be wrong in almost all his assumptions, principles, and general beliefs, Austen once again highlights the inadequacy of the patriarchs. Even as a father he has a benumbing effect on his children. Only through pain and mortification and through the misfortune that his children bring on him, he learns that he had failed not only as a father, but also as a member of the patriarchy in not being able to impart proper guidance.

Sir Thomas's above quoted utterance reduces Fanny to silence and tears and through this Austen articulates women's suppression. Perhaps, never before was female silence so clearly made to speak as it is in the East Room. Sir Thomas, well-meaning but blind, benevolent but dictatorial, moralizes in a lengthy speech about her "wilfulness of temper" and "ingratitude" (*MP*, 318). In the end he learns how wrong his assumptions have been and from his bitter experiences undergoes some change of heart in the end. Money and materialistic bonding which had once mattered much

to him is now relegated and he learns to value family ties and genuine qualities of head and heart as more important. Thus, earlier where he had insisted on maintaining the distinction between his daughters and his poor niece, in the conclusion this very man is

> Attempting to 'bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity', he comes to give 'joyful consent' to the marriage of 'the two young friends', whom he once believed could never marry, since the distinction between even a second son of a baronet and the unproportioned Miss Price must be too great.[5]

Mansfield Park, in which the domestic government of an English estate is exposed as based on fallacious principles, makes the education of Sir Thomas Bertram, Bart, MP, rather than of Miss Fanny Price, one of its central ironic themes. Here it is not the heroine but the patriarch who learns from his mistakes. Through Sir Thomas's emphasis on submissiveness in women the novel very much questions the moral status of women within Mansfield, and England in general. After all, the English patriarch is the owner of Antiguan plantations and of the slaves who work there. Following his return back home, we are informed that Fanny questioned him about the slave trade which went unanswered. Neither are we told what was his niece's question was nor what answer he provided her with.

It is worth mentioning that *The Abolition of the African Slave Trade* which was published in 1808, Clarkson while delineating the history of the anti-slavery movement mentions a particularly famous legal judgment, which established that slavery was illegal in England. This was the

Mansfield Judgment given by the Lord Chief Justice of England in 1772 whereby Lord Mansfield favoured abolition. The topic of abolition which was hotly debated then was considered as a wicked traffic for it virtually denied men the status of a moral being, by substituting the law of reason by the law of force. It was the Mansfield Judgment that banned the practice and restored the rational creature to his moral rights. Paradoxically Austen by choosing to adopt such a title and by making Sir Thomas a slave-owner abroad, and the unstated question of Fanny, draws an implicit contrast and comparison between her moral status in Mansfield and, women of England in general with that of the Antiguan slaves. This itself reveals Austen's view of patriarchy.

Nonetheless, Sir Thomas despite his defects is benevolent and kind-hearted which is why Maria Bertram does not end up as another Eliza Brandon. Maria is refused a shelter at her paternal home, a move that was strongly supported by her own father, and by all her relatives in Mansfield including her mother, except Mrs. Norris. He ensured that

> As a daughter ... she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right ... but farther than that he would not go ... (*MP*, 379),

on ethical grounds and bound by societal proprieties. Austen in keeping with her own propriety comments detachedly on the role of the father and absolves him partly:

> Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored ... (*MP*, 379).

In *Pride and Prejudice* Mr. Bennet is perceived to be lazy who spends all his time in the library, immersed in a sort of self-indulgence and makes witty comments at the expense of others. Although intelligent enough to see the fault in his wife and his daughters (except Elizabeth) who are constantly the butt of his ridicule, he does not use his intelligence towards positive ends in grooming his wife or his daughters. Though not dominating as Sir Thomas, or foppish like Sir Walter, or greedy and manipulative like General Tilney, he bears some resemblance with Mr. Woodhouse in his love for his favourite daughter Elizabeth. His neglect for his family is unpardonable, especially since he alone is in a position to educate them as his wife clearly fails. This proves his selfishness.

Persuasion is about a foolish, vain patriarch who is neither benevolent nor authoritarian, but too selfish to think of anyone else besides himself. Sir Walter is treated more harshly than any other Austen patriarch. Except Elizabeth, Sir Walter does not have any affection for his other children. His vanity and love of the luxurious life coupled with his foolishness eventually lead to depletion of his considerable wealth.

The novel opens with the *Baronetage* which is "the book of books" (*P*, 13):

> Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he

> found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century-and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed-this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened :
>
> 'ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL.
>
> 'Walter Elliot, born ... (*P*, 9)

The *Baronetage* symbolizes male authority, patriarchal history in general and also of the family history of the Elliots:

> 'Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great grandson of the second Sir Walter.' (*P*, 10)

The first chapters of *Persuasion* relentlessly exposes the unworthiness of Sir Walter Elliot to govern himself, and therefore to govern anyone else.

> ... Sir Walter ... in forgetting her age, [that eldest daughter is twenty-nine] or, at least, be deemed only half a fool, for thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever, amidst the wreck of the good looks of every body else; for he could plainly see how old all the rest of the family and acquaintance were growing. Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighbourhood worsting; and the rapid increase of the crow's foot about Lady Russell's temples had long been a distress to him. (*P*, 12)

He can perceive only these trivial things but fails to see the deteriorating condition of either his estate or his fortune which ought to have been a real cause of concern for him. Incapable of fulfilling his fatherly responsibility, Austen dismisses Sir Walter's claims to filial respect and transfers the same to Lady Russell, who takes up the position of a friend and surrogate mother after the death of Lady Elliot.

Such is the man upon whom the laws and customs of England confer the control and protection of wives and daughters. Through him Austen suggests the dearth of good men, especially among the baronetcy who constitute the upper rung of the patriarchal society. In Sir Walter we see a patriarch who strangely exhibits the traits of a smart society woman of uncertain age – a character much despised in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature.

> Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation. ... Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did ... He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; (*P*, 4)

In *Pride and Prejudice* the imperfect but sympathetic father Mr. Bennet is partly redeemed because of his warm affection for Elizabeth. Sir Thomas is ridiculed in *Mansfield Park* but in the end still retains power and authority as a benevolent patriarch. Despite all his faults, Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* enjoys the affection of all.

In contrast to these patriarchs whose flaws are relieved by such redeeming features, Sir Walter remains vain and selfish all throughout. For example, because of the numerous mirrors installed in his house to reflect his vain image, his daughter Anne looses her own self-image. Anne is the ghost of her own dead self - pale, sickly, thin, quiet, submissive, living not for oneself but for others. Austen demonstrates through Anne that this woman who has not become anybody is haunted by everybody. One reason

as to why she has deteriorated into a ghostly insubstantiality is that she is a dependent female in a world symbolized by her vain and selfish aristocratic father, who inhabits the mirrored dressing room of Kellynch Hall and is fascinated with the *Baronetage*. In the process, Anne also discovers why her mother lived an invisible and unloved life within Sir Walter's house, though she had a better claim to status as his wife. Such is the debilitating effect that a self-centered patriarch like Sir Walter can have on women under his protection.

Jane Austen's exposure of such flawed patriarchy gets reflected even in the younger generation. For example, Henry Tilney is very much his father's son as is revealed in his attitude towards women.

> 'Everybody allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female ... the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars ... A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar.' (*NA*, 13)

Typically he thinks highly of himself for he says,

> 'I have no patience with such of my sex as disdain to let themselves sometimes down to the comprehension of yours [women].' (*NA*, 88)

and continues

> 'Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute-neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius and wit ...' (*NA*, 88).

This goes on to prove that like the older generation of patriarchs Henry Tilney does not believe in the equality of the sexes. Just as the General

controls and watches over his children, Henry too like his father's true son teaches and lectures Catherine with an air of authority and command.

But Catherine being ignorant and gullible accepts Henry's views wholeheartedly and believes in what he says, irrespective of whether they are derogatory towards her gender or not.

It was no effort to Catherine to believe that Henry Tilney could never be wrong. (*NA*, 89)

But by accepting Henry's opinions and judgment for granted she invariably clouds her perception and reconstructs her understanding of things. In the process she is victimized as the process of her depersonalization sets in. Ironically she is awed by the fact that he has read "hundreds and hundreds" of novels (*NA*, 83) and his room at Northanger is littered with books, guns and great coats. Her open admiration of Henry is for his supposed literary knowledge which boosts his ego considerably. Austen criticizes Henry's snobbery in particular and of men in society in general affected by this misplaced adoration by women like Catherine when she says,

> '... I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them [men] too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire any thing more in woman than ignorance.' (*NA*, 86)

Being able to establish his intellectual superiority in this manner, Henry Tilney seems to add another dimension to his power and authority as a future patriarch. As for his relationship with Catherine his "... affection

originated in nothing better than gratitude ... of her partiality for him ..." (*NA*, 198). Henry's charming vivacity notwithstanding, his attitude raises doubts about Catherine's happiness as his wife.

There is yet another type of male protagonist like Frank Churchill who is adept at manipulating the affections of women through his show of respect and consideration for them. Such prevarications help them to maintain control over the women through their emotional vulnerability. Though secretly engaged to Jane, he encourages Emma by flattering her and in the process manages to turn the girls against each other. This shows how Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax fail to understand the devious nature of men when it comes to their exercising control over women. Gradually with experience Emma ultimately realizes that her position is not much different from Jane's – in that both are powerless, be it at the hands of the cunning Frank or the selfishly manipulative Mr. Woodhouse. In concealing his engagement to Jane Fairfax which will jeopardize his inheritance if revealed and in appearing to court Emma; Frank Churchill is merely using both these women to ensure his fortune. Austen also censures him for making Jane an object of pity, bordering on contempt. The effect of Frank's duplicity is such that she exposes herself to criticism through her complicity with him. Both Emma and Jane commit the mistake of abetting Frank Churchill consciously or unconsciously in this speculative love-game but their

complicity is somewhat condoned whereas, Frank's deliberate exploitation of power over them is portrayed as contemptible.

Mansfield Park also points out certain flaws of patriarchy which are not peculiar to it alone, but are present in the other novels too. In this instance patriarchal law which favours the eldest son irrespective of his worth or merits is being questioned. In pursuance of this law Sir Thomas's Mansfield will have to make the scapegrace Tom the heir and not the more deserving and judicious Edmund, who is destined to obscurity in the role of a country clergyman. His parsonage will be at Mansfield thus making him his brother's first servant and dependant. That Tom is unfit for this superior position is amply demonstrated by his drinking and reckless living which result in his almost fatal illness. Also he is partly responsible for Maria's ruin because it was his idea of a play that allows his sister and Henry to develop a dangerous level of intimacy. Though invested with power in his father's absence he is completely oblivious of the effects of his actions.

As he points out to his brother Edmund, Tom is acutely conscious of the greater claim to their father's property. But he lacks any sense of responsibility regarding it that he will eventually inherit. He is to be blamed for Sir Thomas having to leave England for Antigua, as it is his expensive lifestyle that considerably depletes the resources of Mansfield, thus compelling the aging patriarch to do whatever lies within his means to

restore it. The depletion of resources also means the reduction of Edmund's share of inheritance which is anyway much less than his own share which will include the title, estate as well as cash. The younger son Edmund though quite clearly better qualified by natural gifts of prudence, sensitivity towards other people, and would have made a better patriarch is aware of the disadvantages of his birth as a second son.

When Mary Crawford, with whom Edmund was for some time in love, says that he ought to go into Parliament instead of the Church, he replies:

> 'I believe I must wait till there is an especial assembly for the representation of younger sons who have little to live on ...' (*MP*, 214).

On the other hand, despite his deficiencies Tom will also become a Member of Parliament like his father Sir Thomas. Another unworthy young patriarch Rushworth who is immensely rich will also enter into the House if Sir Thomas is able to find him a borough.

Henry Crawford an only son, an heir to wealth, estate and family name is another example of undeserving young patriarchs. He is intelligent, manipulative and of loose morals whose actions lead a family to humiliation and shame and forever ruin the life of a young woman. He is portrayed as more undeserving than Tom or Rushworth to occupy a position of power and authority. In his relationships with women he is deviously unscrupulous. He flirts simultaneously with Maria who is already engaged

along with her sister Julia. This suggests that he has no respect for women and their feelings. He is persuasive, aggressive and totally ruthless when it comes to attaining victory over them. His pursuit of women is motivated only by pleasure without any intention of marriage. Although he elopes with Mrs. Maria Rushworth, he never intended to make an honest woman of her by eventually marrying her. This ruins her life but there is little or no condemnation of his moral depravity.

Henry like his sister possesses the same seductive allure, but he can "... do nothing without a mixture of evil ..." (*MP*, 307). Being brought up under a corrupt and evil uncle (who brings his mistress into the house after his wife's demise) and his unloved but affectionate wife, Henry turns out to be insecure and unhappy. As the author says, he

> ... ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. (*MP*, 381)

Though he is seen as an unsavoury character one cannot overlook the fact that this young patriarch is the product of the flawed patriarchal system which fails to groom the heirs in a proper manner.

Henry is the product of such a system where he grew up without a role model. Therefore, his lifestyle can be viewed as his attempt to create a distinctive life of his own. Self-divided, indulging in passions, alienated from authority by his conscious choice and decision, yet full of ambition and seeking revenge for past injuries, this false young man's character

borders on the Satanic, as it were. He might go on to survive this way, and even find a lover or wife – as his counterparts in the other novels do – yet he can never be the choice of Fanny, just as his counterparts will never be the choice of other Austen heroines. Austen's indictment of such lives as their's, bereft of ethics and virtues rests on the fact that Henry commits acts like running away with a married woman and seducing others.

Interestingly, only Fanny and Mary can see through Henry – that he is outrageously flirtatious with both the Bertram sisters giving rise to terrible jealousy between them. His own sister thinks thus of him,

> 'He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry.' (*MP*, 33)

In a lighter vein Henry comments on marriage as 'Heaven's *last* best gift ...' and holds that 'An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged.' (*MP*, 34-35) This reveals his cynicism. Just as Fanny sees through the actor Henry Crawford to be a role-player and a hypocrite, Edmund finally recognizes Mary's playfulness as her refusal to submit to the expectations of her culture, a revolt that is both attractive and immoral. It might gain her the freedom to become whatever she likes, but simultaneously implies that she will be denied a good husband, and the higher status that only marriage can confer on her.

In stark contrast to other young patriarchs Sir Edward Denham of *Sanditon* is a pathetic caricature. As opposed to Tom Bertram, Henry

Crawford or Frank Churchill he is spiritless. Most of the time he lives in a world of fantasy where he imagines himself to be a character like Lovelace.

> With a perversity of Judgement, which must be attributed to his not having by Nature a very strong head, the Graces, the Spirit, the Sagacity, & the Perseverance, ... (*S* in *NA Vol.*, 358)

and

> ... his fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned & most exceptionable parts of Richardson's & such Authors as have since appeared to tread in Richardson's footsteps, so far as Man's determined pursuit of Woman in defiance of every opposition of feeling and convenience is concerned ... (*S* in *NA Vol.*, 358)

His inherent ineptness is further complicated by his lack of money. He also displays a certain amount of meanness and villainy which are used by Austen to debunk his fantastic ambitions of being a hero like Lovelace. Like the other young patriarchs Sir Edward too is most unsuited to be at the helm of affairs in the role of a patriarch. While critical of works like Richardson, gothic novels and sentimental poets, the author points out that the fault essentially lies with the characters.

But the character who stands apart from all of Austen's male characters for his mindless verbosity is Mr. Collins. A clergyman by profession, with high impressions about himself Mr. Collins's words and actions reveal his lack of intelligence and he is shown as incapable of exercising his power and authority as a man, a husband or a clergyman. When the eloped pair Lydia and Wickham are accepted by the Bennets, Mr. Collins says -

> '... I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement, at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It is an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing.' (*PP*, 323)

Mr. Bennet recognizes the contradiction in the statement, "*That* is his notion of christian forgiveness! ..." (*PP*, 323), which is tantamount to his saying that Mr. Collins cannot think clearly. His character is drawn on similar lines to one of Austen's brothers Henry Austen who too was a clergyman, very talkative and about whom "... Jane herself has warned us ..."[6].

Given such perspectives on patriarchs one tends to agree with Margaret Kirkham's comment on the author, her novels and her characters:

> In her own novels Austen criticizes the belief that women's problems are to be solved by benevolent patriarchs. She does this by showing patriarchal figures as at best defective, like Mr. Bennet, and at worst vicious, like General Tilney. Her heroines, especially the later ones, solve their own problems before making marriages with men who see themselves in a fraternal, rather than a patriarchal relationship as husbands, no doubt she was influenced in this by her understanding of feminist argument, as it was to be found in polemical writing like *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ...[7]

The discussion of the patriarchs both young and old amply exemplifies how they have been the agents for perpetuating a flawed patriarchy consciously or unconsciously. Thus, Sir Thomas affects Tom's behaviour, the Admiral had very negative influences on Henry Crawford, General Tilney inculcates superiority of men in the mind of Henry and Sir Walter will eventually be succeeded by the totally undeserving Mr. Elliot.

However, in delineating characters like Sir Thomas, Mr. Bennet and Mr. Woodhouse, Austen has attempted to maintain a middle stand by endowing them with some redeeming features. She undoubtedly is critical of them, but her criticism is within the limits acceptable to the patriarchal society, as she is constantly aware of her position as a female writer and her sense of propriety. But there are unredeemable characters like General Tilney and Sir Walter who represent the kind of patriarchy most abhorrent to her. It is worth noting that both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published posthumously. Again it is in keeping with her middle stand that Austen ensures that her female protagonist will not spend their lives with men like the General or Sir Walter. Instead they will have as their spouses men like the Darcys, Knightleys and Wentworths and it is with them that they will exercise power, authority and influence, no matter how limited it is. These patriarchs though only a handful in number are intelligent, perceptive and are amenable to change because they become aware of their defects. No doubt they are the few exceptions to the rule but through their portrayal Austen seems to be trying to blunt the edge of her general criticism against patriarchy.

In her treatment of patriarchy Austen has focused on the misuse of immense power and the consequent ill-effects on the family and the society. In order to remove such an acute imbalance of power and authority the

author advocates a kind of power sharing between her male and female protagonists. Too much of power and authority for either sex can have negative consequences. Therefore, it is only to be expected that Austen's heroines like Elizabeth, Anne and Emma are provided with the opportunity to exercise power and authority together with their husbands.

Notes

[1] Woolf 29.

[2] Plath, Sylvia. "Daddy." Selected Poems. 1985. London: Faber and Faber LTD, 2002. 53-54.

[3] Woolf 37.

[4] Wollstonecraft 267-68.

[5] Kirkham 112.

[6] Chapman 94.

[7] Kirkham 32.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Beyond Authority

> Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote, I thought, looking at *Antony and Cleopatra*; and when people compare Shakespeare and Jane Austen, they may mean that the minds of both had consumed all impediments ; and for that reason we do not know Jane Austen and we do not know Shakespeare, and for that reason Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote, and so does Shakespeare.[1]

Virginia Woolf has rightly commented that Jane Austen had successfully "consumed all impediments" of her eighteenth century society to acquire a timelessness that only one "without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching" can attain. Austen was able to circumvent the restrictions imposed upon a women writer of her times and finally overcome her anxiety over authority within the constraints of a patriarchal society. This is suggested in the conclusion of her novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* where she strikes a balance between the power and authority wielded by her male and female protagonists, and thereby tries to resolve the anxiety over authority faced by women. This is amply borne out by the analysis of the various novels. However, it can be seen that it was not an easy task to surmount authority and propose any kind of balance in power sharing in a society like hers. In order to achieve this she had to negotiate between the paradoxes, anxieties,

conflicts and contradictions which have been examined in the preceding chapters.

Since this thesis centres around anxiety over authority in Austen's novels and to an extent in the author herself; it is perhaps only appropriate, that the discussion in **Chapter I** opens with an issue that throws light on both these aspects. Hence the choice of delineating her characters on the basis of the angel, monster and human at the very outset. In doing this Austen's ambivalent attitude towards the different characters has been adequately demonstrated. Such categorization done in proportion to their adherence to patriarchy, is in itself a criticism of patriarchy. But through her human characters Austen strikes her characteristic balance within the limitations of patriarchal society. In the process of doing this one is privileged to have an insight into the author's bent of mind in dealing with the subject.

A natural corollary to this categorization of Austenian characters is an analysis of their outward mode of behaviour which has been examined in **Chapter II**. This has afforded an insight into the hidden motivations of the characters revealing why they behave in either openly selfish manner or try to couch selfishness in apparent selflessness. There are also certain characters who display selfish and selfless traits at the same time. This chapter by taking up the correlated yet distinctive issues of selfishness and

selflessness, attempts to show how deeply rooted is the anxiety of Austen regarding power and authority which is reflected in the psyche of her characters. It also provides a fresh perspective towards the power play between the genders, for often selfishness and selflessness becomes interchangeable as a means for securing authority for women. The tension between the genders over power and authority is highlighted in these two chapters by exposing the personality and behaviour of the weaker female sex.

The two following **Chapters III** and **IV** deal with two very seminal matters without which our understanding of anxiety over authority in the author and her works would remain incomplete. These are the vital issues of education and finance which have a very crucial role to play in the shaping up of any society. Women could acquire power and authority only through male patronage because their inadequate education and lack of financial rights made them dependent on men. The third chapter_dealing with education, reveals the crippling effect that a biased and prejudicial system of education for girls can have on them. Such an education failed to equip them with rational thinking and ultimately created only an angel or a monster character but rarely a human one. It also bred selfishness or selflessness in women in their attempt to gain acceptance in the eyes of the menfolk. This kind of education imparted to women in the eighteenth

century rendered women dependent rather then independent and this is the core of Jane Austen's criticism of such a discriminative education system. However, she projects this criticism mainly through the behaviour of her characters and in a manner that concealed more than it revealed.

The fourth chapter on finance entitled "On the Power of Wealth" deals with the effect of money which very often becomes the determining factor for contracting marriages and breaking up relationships. Though the law did not prevent women from inheriting money and property, she effectively looses control over it the moment she gets married, when the reverse is not true. While for a man, a woman's wealth means an enhancement of his power and authority, but for a woman the wealth of a prospective husband means security for life. Thus we can see that power play surrounding wealth affected both the genders in different ways. This alone was responsible for creating a lot of unpleasantness over authority often leading to gross misuse of it.

In spite of their position of power and authority men on account of money and education often failed to exercise this authority properly. **Chapter V** is about Austen's scathing criticism of patriarchal figures both young and old, and how their inability to wield authority judiciously, affects the well-being of the entire society and is a primary factor creating anxiety over authority among women. The implication of male response to power

and authority is intrinsically connected to the topic of this dissertation and hence this chapter. The author consistently deals with the issue of this unhealthy influence over society at large in all her major works. Though she was aware that such an imbalance in power and authority between the genders can never be completely resolved within patriarchy, she nevertheless condemns certain traits in the fiercely patriarchal figures and contrasts them to the more benevolent protagonists of the novels discussed here. Perhaps, it is from this point onwards that Austen is trying to map the route to that ideal stage where power sharing between the genders would one day become possible.

This idealistic vision can be drawn from some of the conclusions to her novels in which she portrays an ideal power sharing between the sexes and a significant curbing of misuse of power by menfolk. Moreover, such sharing brings out the best in a person and helps nurture a relationship where a woman is treated as a human being and an equal. However, Austen arrived at such a conclusion while being acutely aware that this state of affairs would perhaps be possible only within the world of her fiction. This made her restrict her idealistic endings only to her chosen female and male protagonists. Nonetheless, this handful of protagonists did not achieve this balanced state without a struggle. This is most apparent in *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet are "The child of good fortune!" (*E*, 406), the luckiest human characters who come to wield more power and authority than the angel characters. *Emma* opens with the delusions of the protagonist about her power and authority which is eventually reined in by her husband's influence – a process that is set in motion long before they marry. She herself is aware of Mr. Knightley's role in the shaping of her character:

> '... I had the assistance of all your endeavours to counteract the indulgence of other people. I doubt whether my own sense would have corrected me without it.' (*E*, 419)

Despite all her fallibility and her part in certain "... very bad wrong things ..." (*E*, 434) Austen clearly emphasizes at the end that she will come to wield tremendous power and authority as the lady of Donwell Abbey. In a way the entire story can be perceived as preparing her for that role. Her position and power as 'Mrs. Emma Knightley' would exceed what she had exercised as 'Miss Woodhouse'; though she had earlier been under the mistaken notion that as a rich single beautiful intelligent spinster she could exercise significant power and authority over others – a notion that was encouraged by her father.

The eventual union of Emma and Mr. Knightley is cleverly woven into the progression of the plot and for which adequate mental and psychological justification has been provided. Emma is designed to be "...

faultless in spite of all her faults ..." (*E*, 393) for Austen restricts them to corrigible ones. She remains essentially right in her judgments and feelings on matters of greater import. Neither a picture of perfection, nor foolish, a manipulative shrew or one who is now reformed and submissive, Emma possesses genuine qualities of head and heart that qualifies her to be Mr. Knightley's wife. In keeping with her worth Mr. Knightley accords her respect and recognizes in her an equal - one who is suited to become his partner in life.

> '... Nature gave you an understanding:- ... You must have done well. ...'
> (*E*, 419)

This in itself is an acknowledgement of her fitness to be the mistress of Donwell. He sees her as a human with faults but does not overlook her powers of mind in which he has absolute faith. Emma's essentially sound head and heart make it possible for her to share an equal relationship with Mr. Knightley who emerges as the one responsible for affecting this power sharing.

Emma is a perfect match for Mr. Knightley in his active, intelligent, non-moralistic concern of the poor and needy. But the author clearly distinguishes that Mr. Knightley is superior and Emma herself is aware of it. However, Emma's moral growth remains incomplete till she learns to accord the respect proper to Miss Bates. Although not obviously

disrespectful towards Miss Bates – who comes close to the version of a devoted daughter,

> She [Emma] had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than act; scornful, ungracious. (*E*, 341)

She does not call on the Bateses as often as she ought to, as she finds it "... a waste of time – tiresome women ..." (*E*, 155). But having once realized her mistake, that "... it should be so no more ..." (*E*, 341), she is resolute to develop, "... a regular, equal, kindly intercourse ..." (*E*, 341) with her. This reveals her growing awareness of her social responsibilities as a woman and as Mr. Knightley's wife. Despite such obvious faults Emma influences Mr. Knightley. Thus, his initial opposition against Emma taking Harriet under her care, yet he later admits:

> '... I am now very willing to grant you all Harriet's good qualities ... Much of this, I have no doubt, she may thank you for.' (*E*, 431)

Significantly Emma's marriage is different from others,

> ... must not [be] class[ed] with Isabella and Mrs. Weston, whose marriages taking them from Hartfield, had, indeed, made a melancholy change: but she was not going from Hartfield; ... (*E*, 423) –

instead Mr. Knightley would change house till circumstances permit otherwise. In the end Mr. and Mrs. Knightley are the guardians of their society and shoulders the responsibility of it wellbeing.

Austen's portraiture of Knightley (note the significance of the name) as the ideal English gentlemen is very close to the figure of a knight, not only because he comes to the rescue of women but owing to his superior

qualities. It is a little ironic but he saves ladies in distress, tactfully shower kindness on the Bateses, saves Harriet from embarrassment when she is insulted by Elton at the ball and is lovingly protective towards Emma. Unlike Elton or Frank Churchill he treats women with genuine respect be it a rich spoiled young lady, an orphan, a half-blind old widow of a clergyman, an aging spinster or an illegitimate young woman. They truly are in need of him, especially in a society where the Church is represented by the Eltons and the aristocracy by the Churchills.

Not a believer in false vanity, Mr. Knightley despite being the owner of Donwell wears thick leather gaiters of a working farmer, does not pay much attention to his looks, discusses matters of "... business, shows of cattle, or new drills ..." (*E*, 430) and is Mr. George Knightley not Sir George. In this he is the exact opposite of the character that Austen would develop in the following years - Sir Walter of *Persuasion*. Firmly rooted in reality he prefers for his company his bourgeois neighbours – the Coles, Mr. Perry, Mrs. Goddard, and is capable of appreciating the superiority of John Martin. Through him Austen mocks the romantic notions of chivalry and the aristocrats with their aversion to work and their incurable habits of flattery and deception in sexual relationships. Austen through him makes a subtle mockery of that class of literature that treats Baronets and Dukes as gods. Mr. Knightley emerges as no God, but a picture of perfection - simplistic,

real and admirable. Emma is more fortunate than Elizabeth Bennet for unlike Darcy, Mr. Knightley is the author's most perfect hero.

In *Emma* the irony as well as the redemption lies in that Emma despite all her shortcomings belongs with the guardians of England in so far her powers are concerned. This should ideally be the situation of a woman deserving it. In Donwell not only are vegetable farming, drains and fences, farmers and servants given due attention, but so are the education of daughters and the welfare of poor aging spinsters. In future it promises the continuation of such a tradition as it is looked after by people with sound heads and good hearts.

Emma is not only the co-inheritor of her father's house but also an improver of the society. Critics like Margaret Kirkham consider Emma's relationship with Miss Bates as the central moral issue of the novel, which questions her ability to wield power and authority. But this is opposed by Angus Wilson, who considers such a requirement as a depressing compromise. To attain this higher moral level is particularly challenging for Emma when one perceives that Miss Bates is rather foolish, absurd and at times irritating with her over-talkativeness. Miss Bates proves to be a rather difficult barometer to test the protagonist's ability for correct social response.

Kirkham argues, that Austen's famous use of her 'indirect free style' in *Emma* enables her to reveal Emma's inner consciousness, thoughts and even errors. On the contrary Marilyn Butler says that this style proved to be an embarrassment unsuited to the moral purpose of the story. Kirkham contradicts by saying that Austen uses it to show that:

> ... for all their [female protagonists] mistakes they have the capacity for stringent rational reflection and it is through the exercise of this capacity that they learn to judge aright of their own conduct and that of other people, including those in higher places, carrying greater authority than themselves. ... Austen uses it to show not only the intimate personal feelings of her heroine but their argumentative, hard-headed minds, and she needed such a technique because, in the age in which she lived, a young woman's ability to think rationally, ... was likely to be the most private - because least acceptable - aspect of her mental life.[2]

However, like in Austen's other novels, Emma's post-marital life remains elusive and lacking in concrete details. It is left open-ended with a fairy-tale conclusion where Emma's aim in life "... were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union." (*E*, 440)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy's power and authority are evident from the beginning, as also Elizabeth's powerlessness although she possesses intellectual and moral authority. Given Darcy' wealth and status, his importance with his family, friends and neighbours; his headship of an old family and his intelligent, sensible, rational, ethical nature, his position is formidable. As the master of Pemberley he has control over the lives of many. As opposed to Darcy, Elizabeth (like Emma) suffers from the delusion that she has power because she is more intelligent than most. True

her intelligence gives her an edge over others, but her mistake lies in that she confuses intellectual and moral authority with power. Besides her very limited exposure to the outside world undermine her authority. She remains without economic, societal, customary, legal and other powers till she marries Darcy and becomes the mistress of Pemberley.

Elizabeth's intellectual and moral authority reaches a peak when she turns down Collins's and Darcy's wedding proposals. Significantly her courage and confidence are never affected by her powerlessness. But the flaw that leads to her humiliation arises from pride and arrogance born out of a sense of superiority and over-confidence. Both Darcy and she suffer from them, but interestingly they can see these faults only in each other and not in themselves. Their authority grows in strength only after their pride is hurt during Darcy's failed proposal at Rosings. This is an eye-opener which enables them to improve. From this point they start regaining the authority they had lost due to their pride and prejudice. Darcy admits to Elizabeth:

> '... I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle... such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! ... You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. ...' (*PP*, 328)

His powers, however, even during his ignorance and arrogance were unaffected and remained intact. But not Elizabeth's who attains authority when she learns to see people for what they are.

Acquiring economic, legal and other societal and customary powers after her marriage, Elizabeth plays an active role in complimenting Darcy's abilities in carrying out his responsibility towards the society. His reserved manners are compensated by Elizabeth's witty nature and she even goes on to "... take liberties with her husband ..." (*PP*, 345). Amongst Austen's female protagonists she wields the maximum amount of power and authority, at par with Emma.

Though not cordial at first Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship begins on an equal footing as she refuses to be over-whelmed by his wealth or consider herself as inferior. Darcy through humiliation learns to treat her as an equal and acknowledges her higher intellectual and moral authority. Also she influences him in maintaining a cordial relationship with her inferior relatives and friends; although she herself was happy at the prospect of being

> ... removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley. (*PP*, 342)

Darcy is also a good brother who ensures the happiness of his sister Georgiana, concerned for the well-being of his friends, respectful towards his parents as he keeps his father's favourite room unchanged which even includes a miniature of the traitor Wickham. Although Darcy and Elizabeth

> ... could never receive *him* [Wickham] at Pemberley, yet, for Elizabeth's sake, he assisted him farther in his profession. Lydia was occasionally a visitor [at Pemberley]... (*PP*, 344).

Elizabeth shoulder's her authority equally well as her husband's. She brings about Darcy's reconciliation with his aunt Lady Catherine and ensures that "Pemberley was now Georgiana's home; ..." (*PP*, 344) where her sister-in-law's

> ... mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By Elizabeth's instruction ... (*PP*, 345).

Elizabeth has a positive influence on her younger sister too:

> Kitty, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her time with her two elder sisters. In society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great. (*PP*, 343)

Despite that "Miss Bingley was very deeply mortified by Darcy's marriage; ..." (*PP*, 344) they ensure the preservation of a cordial relation with her. Together Elizabeth and Darcy ably exercise the power and authority vested on them as the guardians of their society.

As opposed to Emma and Elizabeth whose prospect of becoming a perfect lady is set in motion from the start, in *Persuasion* Austen describes a heroine who refuses to become a lady but is shown as most worthy of wielding power and authority. Yet she will never exercise power like Emma or Elizabeth. Anne is the central moral intelligence of the novel and even when Wentworth is wrong, she is steadfastly put in the right. Unlike Emma, Elizabeth, Marianne and Catherine, she can comprehend the problems faced by her gender and shows maturity from the beginning which other heroines acquire only at the end.

From the very beginning Austen makes it obvious that Anne possesses the highest moral and intellectual authority but no power. Even as a young girl of nineteen her sense of judgment was shown to be higher than Wentworth's. Thus, Austen squarely puts the blame on Lady Russell and Wentworth for breaking the engagement. Wentworth acknowledges later,

> 'I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not do you justice.' (*P*, 247)

By putting Anne (also the only protagonist to receive a school education) in the right, Austen reverses the role of the heroine as a pupil and the hero as a teacher, a concept that is found at work in *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma.* Notwithstanding her ability to guide others – usually attributed as masculine qualities – she is so thoroughly feminine that none can accuse her of the slightest degree of masculinity.

Though Darcy comments in *Pride and Prejudice*,

> '... detection, could not be in [women's] power, and suspicion certainly not in [their] inclination ...' (*PP*, 134).

Yet Anne watches, listens and judges. Only Wentworth heeds her words. Ironically

> ... never since the loss of her dear mother, [had she] known the happiness of being listened to ... (*P*, 48).

Anne is the only Austen heroine who makes thoroughly feminist pronouncements and speaks to Captain Harville about her sense of exclusion from the patriarchal society. Though it sounds as if her views on

the bias towards women and literature were directly picked out from Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, none can accuse her of being unsexed. She speaks without bitterness, rancour or contempt (like Austen), but states her views as if they are the most commonly acknowledged fact. Her soft, gentle nature disarms all criticism while revealing the strength of her character and the correctness of her judgment. She speaks in a way as if she were speaking to a brother or a sister or one within her family, but she does so with Wentworth's friend and fellow-officer Captain Harville. In that famous conversation Austen emphasizes that Anne and Harville speak from the same platform, as equals without any gender discriminations. This puts her on a higher level of intellectual and moral authority than her fellow companions.

Austen goes beyond giving Anne an equal status with men - she accords her the role of a guide - an area considered as an exclusive male domain. Significantly it is from her that Captain Wentworth learns the limits of masculine assertiveness and she influences his relationship with Lady Russell. She advices Captain Benwick about literature and life. Yet she is never self-complacent and strongly believes that she was right in obeying Lady Russell as an inexperienced girl of nineteen although the latter was wrong in giving her advice. She was bound to her by loyalty and filial piety as she occupies the place of a mother, friend and confidante. But by not

being duty-bound to her father, Austen underscores that her decisions are as much based on affection as on prudence and rationale. Anne's behaviour is similar to what Wollstonecraft had said regarding the proper duty of a child towards an affectionate though mistaken parent.

Through Anne, Austen reaches a new height regarding the relationship between man and woman, for not only is she treated as a moral equal but as even superior to men. Thus, Wentworth despite all his achievements in his naval career is mistaken in his assessment of women. Austen here reverses the role of the couple in Sir Walter and Lady Elliot from the one in her earliest novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Where Mr. Bennet ends up with a foolish wife, Lady Eliot here is married to a foolish baronet. But where Mr. Bennet resorts to making jokes at his wife's expense, Lady Eliot an "excellent woman, sensible and amiable" (*P*, 10) tries to improve Sir Walter for seventeen long years. Anne, Lady Elliot and Lady Russell are shown as more capable of handling authority than their male counterparts. *Pride and Prejudice* however, provides us with Charlotte and Mr. Collins, where the intelligent wife tries to overlook his faults and encourage his good qualities.

In *Persuasion*, Austen goes a step further than *Emma* – the heroine's status as a moral being is defined more elaborately, and this has been done in terms of her relationship beyond her family, particularly in her

relationship with other members of her sex. Her moral independence and higher ethical and intellectual authority is both thematically and technically crucial. It is worth noting that in *Emma* and *Persuasion*, which follow each other in quick succession, the influence of both the father and the sister are construed as harmful. In such a situation the protagonist reaches outside her family for emotional and moral bonding. For Anne she finds them in Lady Russell, Mrs. Croft, Mrs. Smith and even in Nurse Rooke. Anne's relationship with Lady Russell, Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Smith have been given a lot of attention, whereas, it has been emphasized that she does not own any obligation towards her sisters. Blood relations here are not put above genuine 'sisterhood'. Thus, Anne puts her visit to a former school friend Mrs. Smith above her loyalty towards her uncaring father and later even takes up the responsibility to secure her assets. In this she has Lady Russell's support while her father opposes it. Lady Russell despite all her obvious flaws commands Anne's respect, just as Mrs. Croft is looked up to, her unfemininity notwithstanding.

Unlike her predecessors, the author has preferred the open blue seas and fresh air for Anne. Naval life is meant to provide her with an alternative – an escape – from the corruption of the land and the conservative aristocracy both of which are closely linked to patrilineal affinities. The

navy promises resurgence for Anne although Sir Walter has an aversion for it because it elevates

> '... persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; ...' (*P*, 24).

Anne is fortunate because Captain Wentworth though no member of this rigid class system has by dint of his merits made a fortune that puts him at par with the landed gentry in terms of wealth.

However, navy contributes in the growth of women unlike the landed system. When left behind sailors' wives are bound to fend for themselves; they learn to be practical, efficient and self-reliant women as Mrs. Harville. On the other hand Mrs. Croft exhibits that navy does not entirely exclude women as most landlocked vocations do. She does not fumble with the names of countries like other women and having crossed the Atlantic four times she strongly believes that

> 'Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England.' (*P*, 68)

A companion, an equal and a partner to Admiral Croft, she guides the horse chaise when her husband fails. Anne perceives this as a good representation of what comes close to an ideal marriage. Mrs. Croft points out that the difference between "a fine gentleman" and a navy man lies in that the former treats women as if they were "... all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures ..." (*P*, 69). Among the elderly couples, the Crofts and the

Harvilles present glimpses of an ideal power sharing that is found_only among Austen's protagonists. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* also illustrate this.

In this last novel Austen differentiates between those dowagers who attempts to gain power by exploiting traditional male prerogatives, as opposed to Anne and naval wives where men participate in and value domestic life and women complements by contributing to public events. With this the author steps towards establishing an emerging egalitarian society in her novels. The traditional female_tasks of childbearing, child rearing, managing the household etc. which are both dreary and dangerous (as Austen perceived in her juvenile works) no longer confines the naval wives, as they experience a sense of liberation hitherto un-experienced by women within the land-locked social system. For Anne her marriage will indicate the union of traditional male and female spheres, where her relationship with Wentworth will be more like that of friends. Friendship and not male domination is evident when Wentworth despite having good reasons and a good rationale is willing to be influenced by Anne in reshaping his relationship with Lady Russell.

There is no denying that like Anne, Wentworth too possesses intellectual and moral authority but like her he is not perfect. He can be prejudiced and biased, as when he tells his sister,

> 'I hate to hear of women on board, or to see them on board; and no ship, under my command, shall ever convey a family of ladies anywhere, if I can help it.' (*P*, 68)

Admiral Croft accuses him of lack of gallantry and Mrs. Croft admonishes him for his poor impression about women. Nonetheless, when called for Wentworth had

> ... brought Mrs. Harville, her sister, her cousin, and the three children, round from Portsmouth to Plymouth. (*P*, 69)

Here like Austen's female protagonists Elizabeth, Emma, Marianne and Catherine, it is Wentworth not Anne who undergoes the humiliating experience of revising his views. Unlike Anne, Wentworth is unsure of his feelings and flirts outrageously with Louisa thereby giving rise to misconceptions. Later he is shocked when the meaning of his behaviour is revealed to him. Although for a wife his foremost requirement is a woman with "'A strong mind, with sweetness of manner,'" (*P*, 62), he is himself unaware that he is describing Anne and not Louisa as he had himself understood.

In *Persuasion*, Austen allots a new role to her heroine and gives her a new kind of power and authority, hitherto un-experienced by any of her female protagonists. Though endowed with less power and authority than Elizabeth Darcy, Emma Knightley and Marianne Brandon, Anne is better off than angel characters like Fanny Bertram and Elinor Ferrars. Her powers however will be very different since she would not inherit anything like

Pemberley, Donwell, Delaford, Northanger Abbey or Kellynch-hall, no landed estate or headship of a family.

Yet undeniably Anne is Austen's chosen one for she gets her man who in turn recognizes her worth and treats her with love, equality, respect and friendship in an age when women were treated as inferior to men. Austen through them advocates her faith in restricted authority between a couple. But here it falls a little short of the ideal, for it is only with Wentworth that Anne can have her full power and authority. The conclusion and tenor of this last novel is different; for here Anne's fate is contrasted to Elizabeth's. Perhaps, the greatest difference lies in that Anne departs from Kellynch. Through this Austen projects the future of the landed society as dark, whereas, she is hopeful of the new naval society which treats women with more respect, equality and understanding than the landed patriarchy. For the author this is a big step which enabled her to overcome her anxiety over power and authority.

Mansfield Park too, presents an instance where the deserving and intelligent heroine does not come to acquire the power that she deserves. But unlike in *Persuasion*, here the place of the hero has been substituted by the patriarch Sir Thomas. Though Fanny marries Edmund, yet gaining the approval and love of Sir Thomas matters more to her. His undiminished powers at the end ensures that Mansfield retains its old dignity derived from

its orthodox trappings. When Tom and not Edmund – despite all his higher claims - succeeds Sir Thomas, Mansfield might degenerate, although Austen clearly mentions that,

> Tom, who gradually regained his health, without regaining the thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits. ... He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself. (*MP*, 376-77)

But this appears more as a dismissive comment, forcing a happy ending about which the author herself is unconvinced.

The possible degeneration notwithstanding, Fanny becomes a part and parcel of Mansfield, of the landed aristocracy by marrying Edmund. She endorses the system while being aware of its defects. As Sir Thomas's favourite her power and authority is significantly enhanced. Yet it falls short of her potential as she marries the younger son who will not inherit Sir Thomas's position and title. Despite Gilbert and Gubar's comment that Fanny will be another corpselike wife like Lady Bertram, it does not appear to be so, since she is not mentally, intellectually and morally deficient like the latter.

Fanny is fortunate to marry Edmund for like a true Austen hero he accords her the respect due to the fairer sex. Edmund's respect for women is evident when Mary Crawford questions him as to whether Fanny has 'come out' (*MP*, 49). He responds:

> 'My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me' (*MP*, 49)

His comment echoes Wollstonecraft who says in *Vindication*

> ... what can be more indelicate than a girl's coming out in the fashionable world? Which ... is to bring to market a marriageable miss ...[3]

Edmund's refusal to understand the question is a mark of his ability to respect his cousin, which is in direct contrast to Mary Crawford's conceptions about a woman which do not include recognition of adult human qualities.

Even when Fanny moves to Thornton Lacey for a brief period after her marriage, as Edmund joins the parsonage there, Mansfield continues to influence her actions. In the end Fanny's becomes what she had always wanted to be -

> ... the daughter that he [Sir Thomas] wanted. (*MP*, 385).

Mrs. Norris and Maria's banishment as well as Julia's fall from grace proportionately strengthens her position in Mansfield. In the end she is no longer the poor niece whom nobody gave any importance (except Edmund), the beck-and-call girl of her aunts or the subject of discrimination of her uncle. It is when she becomes *the* favourite with her uncle that her intellectual and moral authority is firmly consolidated. Ultimately so much does she matter to Sir Thomas, that it seems as if he and not Edmund is the husband:

> ... now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong. After settling her at Thornton Lacey with every kind attention

> to her comfort, the object of almost every day was to see her there, or to get her away from it. (*MP*, 385)

Fanny exercises power and authority over her younger sister Susan too, whom she brings from Portsmouth. She takes charge of her upbringing as well as Lady Bertram's comforts. Only in Susan do we see the revival of her former self, when as a young girl of ten she used to take charge of her younger siblings at Portsmouth. This suggests her ability to be a good guardian, better than Sir Thomas. On the other hand, Edmund behaves like an elder brother to Fanny with his loving care and protection, an attitude which is likely to remain unchanged though he marries her. He however, fully appreciates her superiority of person and always values her sense and judgment. This gives her authority and influence over him.

Contrary to what Kirkham says, *Mansfield Park* does not present the ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' in the feminist sense. Although Fanny has been given more than an equal moral status – she can have an equal relationship only with her brother William, not Edmund. The paradigm of equal, affectionate relationships between men and women is always held up as an ideal, having implications beyond the literal meaning of 'brother' and 'sister', but it cannot be so with a cousin who is as senior as Edmund, and certainly not when he is also her husband. Although Kirkham argues that the purpose of their marriage was to establish the right relationships between men and women, which is only possible in a marriage

between cousins. In Austen this equal relationship is more plausible between brothers and sisters than between husbands and wives, yet the marriage between the cousins Fanny and Edmund does not result in an equal relationship as Kirkham would have us believe.

> Her marriage to Edmund allows the reader to hope that she will know felicity in her adult married life.[4]

but this does not happen as equals within their marriage.

Her marriage to Edmund gives her happiness but little power and authority because as the wife of a clergyman, her social, economic, legal and customary powers will be insignificant. Most of her power and authority will be derived through Edmund but as Sir Thomas's favourite they can be quite substantial. Her restricted authority in conjunction with her husband is less satisfactory than between Emma and Knightley, Elizabeth and Darcy and Anne and Wentworth.

Elinor Dashwood like Fanny does not acquire the power and authority that she is capable of wielding. But unlike Fanny who has authority as Sir Thomas's favourite, Elinor only has the love and affection of her extended family. However, there is satisfaction that their higher qualities are appreciated by their spouses. Edward Ferrars "admired" (*SS*, 323) her superior qualities of head and heart. Yet all Elinor has is influence and some amount of authority. Even as an elder daughter her status is not much different from Marianne's. But with marriage Marianne acquires higher

economic, legal, customary, social authority than her's, simply because she is 'Mrs. Brandon':

> ... entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (*SS*, 333)

Marianne as the wife of a country gentleman will have authority, influence and some power.

Yet in the end it is established that on Elinor and Edward rests the well-being and harmony of the society as well as of Marianne. That Elinor and Edward shoulder their responsibility efficiently is evident as her family come to spend half of the time with them, and it is under her roof that the marriage between Brandon and Marianne finds encouragement.

With Edward, Elinor is an equal and a partner in life. It is owing to her sensible advise that he seeks his mother's forgiveness earlier than he had intended to. Between them they fulfill Austen's ideal of restricted authority. Nonetheless, the end is less satisfactory since the monster characters of Mrs. Ferrars, Lucy and Fanny wield and misuse tremendous economic, social, legal, customary and other powers while those with higher intellectual and moral authority like Elinor and Edmund are deprived of them. Because of this the ending of *Sense and Sensibility* is less satisfactory than the conclusions of *Emma, Persuasion, Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Northanger Abbey too presents a conclusion where the good is weaker than the evil, as General Tilney continues to be powerful. Henry is

lucky for he enjoys economic powers from his profession although he is only a younger son. This allows him to marry Catherine despite his father's initial opposition. But unlike Austen's other protagonists Henry and Catherine are not equals. Henry dons the role of a teacher, guardian and guide to his wife. He is patronizing towards her and does not take her opinions seriously. He is a typical man of his times and thus inferior to Mr. Knightley, Edward, Edmund, Darcy and Wentworth who recognize female authority within the English social structure. The only argument in Henry's favour is that Catherine is not as intelligent as the other heroines. She stands out for her gullibility, innocence and ignorance.

Given Henry's condescending attitude Catherine's happiness appears uncertain although she will never be another Mrs. Tilney whose happiness was always in doubt. She as a clergyman's wife will occupy the parsonage of Woodston and not be the mistress of the Abbey. Significantly Henry and Catherine are not entrusted with maintaining the harmony and balance of society, as other Austen favourites. The ideal of restricted authority remains inapplicable in this early novel. It is interesting to note that *Northanger Abbey* was begun in the same year – 1797 – that Austen had completed *Pride and Prejudice*. While the latter presents the most fulfilling version of restricted authority; it is ironic as to why Austen had decided to almost immediately reverse the ideal in *Northanger Abbey*.

Lady Susan which was written in 1795 - just a year before *First Impressions* later rechristened as *Pride and Prejudice* was started - presents the victory of dictatorial power. Except for this earliest novel all her other novels have advocated the need for power sharing. But Lady Susan grossly mishandles her position, doing whatever she wants and causing a lot of unhappiness to her daughter. Also by way of breaking engagement, snatching away lovers, causing separation and grief she brings unhappiness to the lives of many, thereby exercising an unhealthy control over the lives of others. She even dictates her daughter's letters -

> ... they were written under her Mother's inspection, ... (*LS in NA vol.*, 270).

Here it is not this monster heroine but the unattractive Mr. and Mrs. Vernon who shoulder social responsibility, looks after Frederica and encourages her marriage to Reginald De Courcy. In contrast Lady Susan willfully shirks her motherly responsibilities.

Since *Lady Susan*, Austen shows rapid maturity as a novelist and her perception of society and women undergoes major changes. Significantly characters like Lady Susan would figure marginally - overlooked, ignored and despised in her succeeding novels for their deliberate mishandling of power and authority. Lady Susan anticipates widows and aunts - monster characters like Lady Catherine, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Churchill, Mrs. Ferrars and others.

It is worth noting that *Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey, Emma*, all have as their predominant theme the taming of the shrew, while *Mansfield Park* uses it as a sub-plot. Feminist critics like Kirkham and Gilbert and Gubar observe that it provided Austen,

> ... with a blotter or a socially acceptable cover for expressing her own self-division. Her acknowledgement and acquiescence to masculine values in her plots allows her to consider her own anxiety about female assertion and expression as a writer and express her doubts as a woman and as a writer.[5]

The theme where rebellious, stubborn, imaginative women like Elizabeth, Emma and Catherine are tamed undoubtedly flattered patriarchy. Ultimately they are brought under control by the more sensible and mature men they come to love. But Elizabeth, Emma, Elinor, Fanny, Anne or even Lady Susan do not give us the story of complete female submission. Thus, it cannot be asserted – as some critics have claimed – that through her female protagonists Austen advocated the need for female submission for female survival. As opposed to it, the feminist school holds that this story is a camouflage behind which Austen could hide her real intentions within the culture that negates and literally shuts-up women.

> Her contemporary society defined a married woman's status as suspended or "covered" : "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage," wrote Sir William Blackstone, "or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything."[6]

In such a society women will always be subordinated. In all her novels the happy ending includes male protection for the heroine which nonetheless

enabled them to exercise power and authority. Such a privilege denied in their paternal houses is made possible in their husband's house, under their husband's loving care and protection. Pemberley, Donwell Abbey, Delaford, Woodston and Thornton Lacy allow the heroines an escape from their father's house while protecting them from the dangers of society. By doing this Austen held up the advantages of some degree of female submission as in the cases of Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood against rebellious imaginativeness. But by highlighting the moral and intellectual superiority of her female protagonists Austen ultimately holds the view that they too should be allowed to exercise power.

The issue of female imagination vis-à-vis female submission resurfaces over and over again in her mature works. An integral part of female submission entails restraining their imagination as well as their articulation. For example, Catherine learns to do this as she matures and this can be noted in all of Austen's rebellious heroines. Through them Austen shows that authority can be achieved by the females without being too vocal. Marianne's imagination leads her lively affections which involve her in an improper amorous involvement with Willoughby – one that is almost self-destructive. As opposed to such behaviour a mature Marianne learns to remain silent even when,

> ... a thousand inquiries sprung up from her heart ... she dared not urge one ... (*SS*, 305).

With similar awareness Elizabeth Bennet too keeps secrets and indulges in double speak. Thus, she refrains from telling her parents Darcy's role in rescuing Lydia nor does she tell Jane about Mrs. Gardiner's letter. Also the real intention behind Lady Catherine's visit is never disclosed to her mother. Nor does she answer Lady Catherine's repeated questions. Later she wants to make fun of Darcy but controls herself when,

> She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laught at, and it was rather too early to begin. (*PP*, 330)

Emma too undergoes a similar experience. Thus, when her misgivings are removed she learns to remain silent and keep secrets about Harriet. Learning to restrain oneself and maintain silences are a part of acknowledging one's position in patriarchal society.

Austen too had used the art of concealment and double talk on sensitive topics and maintained silence about the reconciliation of heroines and heroes. Thus, details are wanting about the union of Fanny and Edmund, Marianne and Colonel Brandon, Emma and Knightley, Catherine and Henry etc. Between Fanny and Edmund we are only given half a sentence:

> ... exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (*MP*, 383)

This announcement is too brief and ironic since Edmund treats his inferior little cousin as a sister early in Vol. I and does not fall in love with her until the final chapter.

For Emma, her acceptance of Mr. Knightley is equally short,

> What did she say? – Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. – She said enough to show there need not be despair-and to invite him to say more himself. (*E*, 391)

Regarding Catherine and Henry, Austen has been abrupt too –

> ... before they reached Mr. Allen's grounds he had done it [the proposal] so well, that Catherine did not think it could ever be repeated too often. (*NA*, 198)

For Lady Susan the only words allowed are:

> Frederica returned to Churchill with her Uncle and Aunt, and three weeks afterwards Lady Susan announced her being married to Sir James Martin. (*LS in NA vol.*, 271)

The same manner is repeated for Elizabeth and Darcy although we are given details clarifying the circumstances leading to their union. For Elinor and Edward –

> His errand to Barton, in fact, was a simple one. It as only to ask Elinor to marry him ... (*SS*, 316)

with the author's comment that more than this "... need not be particularly told." (*SS*, 316-17) As for Marianne and Colonel Brandon, Austen's theory of reward is openly acknowledged:

> They each felt his [Col. Brandon's] sorrows, and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the *reward* of all. (*SS*, 333) [Italics mine]

Perhaps Austen is reticent about these unions and gives scant details about their married lives because she herself had been skeptical about their marital bliss. Only in her last novel, a gentle romantic narrative, does the author dwell at some length on Anne and Wentworth's union.

Austen's heroines discover that they have little control over the lives of others. They achieve it by learning the art of modesty, discretion, silence, fortitude, serenity, patience and endurance. Emma's words are true for most of Austen's conceited heroines:

> Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken ... (*E*, 391)

Often the heroines and their foils, Elizabeth and Jane, Emma and Jane, Fanny and Mary, Elinor and Marianne face dilemmas before they finally master new strategies for survival. Their maturity brings along happiness and fulfillment though they achieve this through humiliation and loss. Elizabeth, Emma, Catherine and Marianne learn to be sensitive towards the happiness of others because they know that only then they can be ideal wives and mothers. This moral awareness enhances their stature in family and society and distinguishes them from the many self-centred ones that abound in Austen's narratives.

Though Austen underscores the need for some degree of submission in women, yet they bow down to those men only with high moral and

intellectual authority. Unlike George Eliot she did not have faith on the idea of great men. Rather her good men think liberally and believe in equality for women. Her heroines too do not consider their husbands as great or overly good. They love and respect their men not worship or idolize them. In her later novels in particular, as opposed to what Marilyn Butler has held, Austen does not become more conservative but rather more radical in her outlook and more subtle in her criticism. This is particularly true of *Mansfield Park, Emma* and *Persuasion.* Thus, Fanny, Emma and Anne agree to marry only when their prospective husbands recognize their superior intellectual and moral authority. This is perhaps true of all her female protagonists except Catherine Morland. Mr. Bennet despite being a defective father rightly comprehends that Elizabeth's husband must "respect" her as his "partner in life" (*PP*, 335). In an "unequal marriage" (*PP*, 335) she will never be happy. The inequality in question is not of fortune or status, but where the husband would fall short of intellectual and moral authority. He rightly understands his daughter:

> '... I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior...' (*PP*, 335)

But it would be wrong to assume that Austen endowed her female protagonists with extraordinary lives. True, their lives are better than most women and their marriages provide them with fulfillment. Yet the oblique

feminist barb is sharp for despite being at par with the heroes – even more so in the cases of Anne, Elinor and Fanny – they are not allowed by the laws of the age to wield equal power and authority. This constitutes the brilliance of Austen's use of irony presented both explicitly and implicitly. Through Anne, Elinor and Fanny who are relatively devoid of power and authority, she presents a scathing criticism of patriarchy. This is ironical because Fanny and Elinor are the strongest advocates of patriarchy although they are deeply aware of its defects. Yet they never question or contest it. Austen clearly understood that patriarchy could be best attacked not through the monster or human characters but through the angels. The words of criticism uttered against patriarchy by monster characters like Lady Catherine, Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. Bennet, etc. eventually turn out to be the author's ploy to mock the respective speakers.

Her mature works like *Pride and Prejudice* through later novels like *Emma*, to her last complete novel *Persuasion*, show that Austen's progress as a writer clearly demonstrates her growing involvement with the question of power and authority for women in a patriarchal society. All throughout her criticism of patriarchy has been subtle and guarded, except the one instance where she endows absolute power and authority to her protagonist Lady Susan. But this turns out to be an untenable situation because Lady Susan is a monster character and Austen's final stand on power sharing is

achieved through deserving human characters like Elizabeth and Emma. These loving human protagonists, although made the central intelligence of the novels, are made to curb their presumptuousness and develop a toned down personality more suited to their position and are endowed with real authority.

In such a balance and harmony of shared authority and restricted power Jane Austen conceived what could come nearer to an ideal marriage, an ideal relationship between a couple and an ideal state of power sharing. Through this Austen had attempted to find an answer to the abuse of power and authority – for most marriages as she perceived, as also most relationships between the two sexes, were about suppression and dominance. She does this primarily through her human characters who come closest to enjoy the true ideal of restricted authority. Austen through them shows preference for benevolent patriarchy. Austen initially displayed skepticism towards her human characters in wielding authority but eventually restores them to a better position in the structure of power sharing. Because of this her position as a feminist has been subjected to severe criticism but Austen was true to her conscience in her writings and was not afraid to take a stand which she thought was best suited to the society of her times. She is not against women wielding authority per se, but given the inadequate education, lack of financial independence she seems to

indicate that undue power and authority may be withheld from such women. Her awareness of the imbalances between the genders did not make her shut out society or seek an escape into an idealistic world, or become resentful towards it. She was at times optimistic and this is seen in the restricted power play between Elizabeth and Darcy, Emma and Mr. Knightley, as also to an extent between Anne and Wentworth and Elinor and Edward. The Darcys like the Knightleys ensure harmony in society along with Austen's other ideal couples. It is through such power play that the author demonstrates how society can successfully overcome the abuse of power. This in effect becomes a form of literary protest against and resistance to existing social malice. Though only a woman and with no other weapon except her pen, Austen was nevertheless successful in creating a body of works that spoke forcefully on behalf of suppressed womanhood. Through the realistic portrayal of her characters in real life situations of her time she is able to create a vision of an idealistic patriarchy which would allow her to progress beyond her anxiety over authority.

Notes

[1] Woolf 56-57.

[2] Kirkham 173.

[3] Wollstonecraft 289.

[4] Kirkham 119.

[5] G and G 155.

[6] G and G 154-55.

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