CHAPTER I

Jane Austen

“What a pity such a gifted creature died so early.”

In this chapter, I have chosen the novels written by Jane Austen, because they are a very good example of how women took advantage of marriage. Austen's novels are a good source to discern the eighteenth and nineteenth century status of women related to love, marriage, money and family. She demonstrates the many faces of nineteenth century marriage through her fictional characters. The reasons for getting married were many, but economics played a major role and helped to define the culture of the era. Although Jane Austen never married, she had a great deal to say about it.

Jane Austen discusses many aspects of courtship and marriage in many letters. In her letters we are presented with her thoughts and privy to her observations of the institution. She writes, “Marriage is a great improver.” According to Austen’s letters, she was generally in favour of basing a marriage on love. Yet she also recognizes the realities of the nineteenth century where women were often faced with poverty if they did not marry. By taking some of her key statements in her letters and comparing them with marriage in her novels we can perhaps better understand the reality of marriage in her time.
I. Jane Austen and Marriage and Family

Jane Austen is the first English novelist who presents the implications of the institution of marriage. Austen’s novels are domestic novels which center on marriage. A major part of her fiction examines marriage in contemporary England. To Jane Austen marriage is a fact of life and “Single women have a dreadful propensity”. But she believes that women should not marry early, “poor animal”, she wrote, “will be worn out before she is thirty- I am very sorry for her- Mrs. Clement too is that way again.”³ She also did not wish her niece, Fanny, to marry too soon, “by not beginning the business of mothering quite so early in life, you will be young in constitution, spirit, figure and countenance.”⁴

The theme of marriage and women in the nineteenth century was demonstrated through many of her characters. Happy matrimony was the only way of life in which women could hope to find themselves satisfied and secured. Economically, women were therefore a dependent class: if they married, they were supported by their husbands; if they were single, like Jane Austen and her sister, they remained dependent on their family.⁵ Therefore that was untraditional in Austen’s time to see an unmarried woman. But Jane Austen’s herself never married. She believes marriage is for love not money.

In Jane Austen’s time, young women could not be independent or strike out on their own. And unmarried women had to live with their families or protectors that can support her. It is almost unheard of for a never-married female to live by herself.
Therefore, an unmarried woman could generally only look forward to living with her relatives as a ‘dependant’. Marriage was pretty much the only way of ever getting out from under the parental roof. So in nineteenth-century fiction, as Robert B. Heilman points out that marriage was granted as an objective, or way of life, or resolution of uncertainties and tensions.  

In Jane Austen’s days, people had to choose their marriage partners carefully, yet there were often few options to choose from, or else the young people had no say in the matter. In *Northanger Abbey*, the conversation between Catherine and Henry Tilney shows that Henry Tilney, the hero, compares marriage to a dance.

‘And such is your definition of matrimony and dancing... You will allow, that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; and that when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other till the moment of its dissolution; that it is their duty, each to endeavour to give the other no cause for wishing that he or she had bestowed themselves elsewhere,… You will allow all this?’

‘Yes, to be sure…. I cannot look upon them at all in the same light, nor think the same duties belong to them.’

‘In one respect, there certainly is a difference. In marriage, the man is supposed to provide for the support of the woman, the woman to make the home agreeable to the man; he is to purvey, and she is to smile. But in dancing, their duties are exactly changed.’(p.82-3)

Jane Austen described the joys and dangers along the path of courtship and marriage. She viewed courtship and marriage quite seriously. She often pointed out in
humorous, and sometimes even slightly satirical ways the means people would go to for what was considered a good match. But in the end, only one thing was considered a good match in Jane Austen’s eyes, and that was a marriage of love, with affection on both sides. T. Vasuvada Reddy remarks, “There is thus implicit in Jane Austen’s projections of marriage a recognition of marriage as a measure of the worth of human personality, which means that one makes the marriage he or she deserves.”

Marriage was often forced on women as their only way of having a recognized position in society. It is marriage that is on everybody’s mind. Jane Austen’s heroines become complete with marriage. They struggle for self-fulfillment through marriage. But in choosing husband, they do intelligent examination instead of accepting them blindly.

A young girl just entering the world must be in want of a husband is the marriage plot that late-eighteenth-century novels use. Austen’s novels are full of young women conventionally keen to marry. Jane Austen’s \textit{PP} opens with the sentence, “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in position of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (p.2), revealing the most important concept of Jane Austen’s time: marriage. For the majority of the population, marriage was the goal and the center of everything. Marriage was used as a tool in unite powerful families. It was used as a ‘bargaining tool’ by parents in matters of business. Love was rarely mentioned in its literal form. It was rare in practice in Jane Austen’s time.
Marriage gives a place of respect in the society. Douglas Bush remarks that at formal parties the order of precedence for women depends on rank, married, status and age. So respect is given to status, married people, and age. In *PP*, Lydia, after becoming the wife of Wickham feels superior to her elder sisters. Her married status gives her a special place in the society and whatever be her past, she acquires a place of prestige in the social circle. Lydia said to her sister, “Ah, Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman.” (p. 110)

A carful study of the couples enables us to a large extent to arrive at the accepted view of Austen on marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Mansfield Park* the various couples represent various attitudes towards love, money and marriage. Material comfort and personal feelings, realism and romance, matter in the choice of a partner. They reveal Austen’s opinions and thoughts on the subject of marriage.

The marriage of some characters is a balance between head and heart and it is due to love, while the marriage between some characters is due to physical attraction and mercenary. These marriages contribute to the theme that a strong marriage takes time to build and must be based on mutual feeling, understanding, and respect. Hasty marriages based on superficial qualities may lead to inevitable unhappiness. Within a social and cultural context where marriage was assumed to be of great important, Austen used the number of marriages to expose societal values of the age and to explore the nature of the ideal marriage.
The table below shows that there are many kinds of marital relationships in Jane Austen’s novels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal marriage</th>
<th>Romantic marriage</th>
<th>Materialistic marriage</th>
<th>Transgressive marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>represents ideal wedding that involves affection and understanding. Their relationship is a more complex affair: both are critical and strong-minded. They encounter a barrier of ground of misunderstanding.</td>
<td>Is based on love in the traditional senses. Their marriage is the union of two similar and gentle souls.</td>
<td>represents marriage of pure convenience.</td>
<td>represents a kind of degrading and immoral act like elopement and adultery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>romance</th>
<th>Material comforts</th>
<th>Personal feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth &amp; Darcy</td>
<td>Jane &amp; Bingley</td>
<td>Charlotte &amp; Collins</td>
<td>Lydia &amp; Wickham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny &amp; Edmund</td>
<td>Jane Fairfax &amp; Frank Churchill</td>
<td>Maria &amp; Mr. Rushworth</td>
<td>Julia Bertram &amp; John Yates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma &amp; Mr. Knightley</td>
<td>Harriet &amp; Mr Elton</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maria &amp; Henry Crawford</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50
This table shows that these marriages are defined according to the social standing of each character. The marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy, Fanny and Edmund, and Emma and Mr. Knightley reveals the characteristics that constitute a successful marriage. One of these characteristics is that the feeling cannot be brought on by appearances, and must gradually develop between the two people as they get to know one another. The series of events which they both experienced give them the opportunity to understand one another and the time to reconcile their feelings for each other. Thus, their mutual understanding is the foundation of their relationship and will lead them to a peaceful marriage. This relationship between them reveals the importance of getting to know one’s partner before marrying.

The marriage between Jane Bennet and Bingley, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, and Harriet and Mr. Elton is also an example of successful marriage. However, there is a flaw in their relationship. The flaw is that women characters are too good-hearted to ever act strongly against external forces that may attempt to separate them. Lydia and Wickham, Julia Bertram and John Yates, and Maria and Henry Crawford’s marriage is an example of a bad marriage. Their marriage is based on appearance and physical attraction. Through their relationship, Austen shows that hasty marriage based on superficial qualities quickly cools and leads to unhappiness.

The last example of marriage is of a different nature than the ones mentioned above. The marriage between Mr. Collins and Charlotte, Maria and Mr. Rushworth is based on economics rather than on love or appearance. It is a common practice during
Austen’s time for women to marry a man to save herself from spinsterhood or to gain financial security.

These novels examine marriage in its significant aspects. Marriage system is the only means by which heroines can make a respectable and comfortable life for themselves. As Nicholas Marsh points out,

> It is presented to them as an incompatible contradiction between romantic qualities (love, intellectual equality, warmth of mutual feelings) and economic imperatives (equality of class and fortune, sufficient money, equality of education and accomplishment).\(^8\)

Women character’s views on marriage are different. To Charlotte, marriage is “pleasantest preservative from want”, and “however uncertain of giving happiness”. Charlotte’s views on marriage is sensible and different from Elizabeth

> Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before hand, it does not advance their felicity in the leas …; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life. (PP, p.31)

Lydia is like her mother, waiting eagerly for the first opportunity to marry, especially a smart officer in uniform though the man lacking in the materialistic opportunism. Maria wants to marry, but “its heartlessness implies the marriage from which she runs away.”\(^9\) Her mind is obsessed with marriage and she does not take any account of other realities which have a bearing upon it. Mrs. Bennet also obsessed with this idea. Some women like Jane Fairfax must marry or, failing that, go into a life of degrading servitude as a governess.
Elizabeth’s self-discovery and self-actualization lead her to have a true love and marriage. As T. Vasudava remarks that Elizabeth’s marriage “would appeal to moral sensibility aware of its existential and experiential implications- a marriage that the New Woman who come to prominence in modern literature would like to contract since it promises self-actualization.” Emma Woodhouse is the only Jane Austen’s heroine who is financially independent and rejects marriage. These are Emma’s views about marriage,

I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all... I have none of the unusual inducements of women to marry... 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, could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eye’s as I am in my father’s. (E, p.89)

But Harriet finds Emma’s decision not to marry so astonishing. To such a woman like Harriet, marriage and housekeeping are the purpose of a woman’s life, and other purpose for female existence is unimaginable. But Emma speech has a quality of fresh thought. Emma’s argument is that women marry for “fortune”, “employment” or “consequence”, or to be “beloved”, all which she has. So she has no reason to marry. Emma thinks that she has no need to marry when she analyses material values. She finds that she is ‘so always first’ in her father’s eyes, so she has no need of another man’s admiration.
What M. Knightley does not like Emma do is match-making, “my dear, pray do not make any more matches, they are silly things, and break up one’s family circle grievously.” (E, p.21) Joseph Wiesenfarth points out, “Though Emma sees marriage as woman’s best good, she does not see it as her own…. Harriet’s portrait is an image of Emma’s disposition to think a little too well of herself.”\\n\\nEmma is unable to face the issue of marriage herself and has to face it through Harriet, instead.

Therefore, the heroines are rewarded at the end with marriage. Marriage is not just a matter of providing a happy ending, but of rewarding the heroines for reaching the right judgment. In all Jane Austen’s novels, there are only two or three marriages that end unhappily with adverse result. She shows all her skills in bringing the people together.

a. The Role of Elopement and Adultery in Marriage

Propriety which is the basis of social life is seen in the society and it is presented in almost all the central characters in Jane Austen’s novels. Adultery is seen as a quite immoral deed in her novels. And elopements and disgraces usually play a vital role in plot development of Austen novels. Couples who have considered elopement or brought about at least the possibility of disgrace include, Lydia Bennet and George Wickham (PP), Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford (MP), Julia Bertram and John Yates (MP).
Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham

It is very serious when a young woman leaves her family without their approval such as running away to marry a disapproved husband, or entering into an illicit relationship, for example Lydia leaves the home to run away with Wickham. Lydia Bennet’s pleasant pastime is to have a look at and talk with the young military officers. She has no work makes her very much lazy and fills her mind with lustful thoughts. Lydia’s elopement with Wickham gives rise to different attitudes. Mary gives reaction to her sister Lydia downfall, saying,

“Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable- that one false step involves her in endless ruin…. and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behavior towards the undeserving of the other sex.” (p. 60)

Elizabeth revolts against Lydia-Wickham sexual adventure, and when Mrs. Bennet regards it as an objectively desirable outcome, Elizabeth says, “How strange this is! And for THIS we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are forced to rejoice. Oh, Lydia!” (p.374) Lydia’s sisters look at it as an act that brings ignominy to their family, others considers it an unpardonable sin.

Both in middle class and aristocratic families, it is considered as a blemish in society. But the moment these people get married, the social disapprobation of the act of elopement disappears. After their marriage, Lydia and Wickham are received into the society, which treats them with all respect.
The figure of the seducer is not an exclusive mark of the eighteenth century literature, since we can find this figure also in some examples of the nineteenth century literature. Austen’s novels almost all include elopements or seduction, whose role stands as warnings of the consequences of wrong judgment. We find it in the figure of George Wickham in Jane Austen's *PP*, where he tries to seduce Elizabeth Bennet deceiving her by telling her untrue stories about Darcy's life. Then he seduces Elizabeth's sister, Lydia, and marries her.

**Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford**

The act of adultery on the part of the married woman is viewed as a ‘blatant’. In *MP*, Mrs. Maria (Rushworth) commits adultery with Henry Crawford and both runaway. Fanny’s father, Lieutenant Price, wishes he could take the rope’s end to Maria for her adultery. Maria’s brother and father also cannot forgive her. Such things seem to be quite common. Incest is a recurring theme in literature; and it plays a significant role in some of the major novels. The performance of *Lovers’ Vows* disrupts the basic family order. In the play, the lovers, Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram, make their vows and begin their relationship which culminates in their elopement and an act which damages the Rushworths and the Bertrams.

We usually find one characteristic in common with all the seducers, which is that they are in a higher position in society. This is why they act this way, because they think they have the right to use their victims as they want, just because they have the power. Henry Crawford tries to seduce Fanny and then he seduces Maria.
In Jane Austen’s period, a man and woman engagement was expected to observe the moral code of the actually married people. Henry is more inclined to the lady that is engaged. He prefers an engaged woman or even a married woman and he thinks it is safe to have attachment with such a woman. Henry Crawford says,

An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged. She is satisfied with herself. Her cares are over, and she feels that she may exert all her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is safe with a lady engaged; no harm can be done. (p.40)

So Maria is at liberty because “she considered her engagement as only raising her so much more above restraint, and leaving her loss occasion than Julia, to consult either father or mother.”(p.116) Then Henry tries to court Fanny. Neither his flattery nor his wealth succeeds in enticing Fanny. Again he starts to make progress with Maria and wrecks her married life.

Maria never realizes her moral obligations in her new position as the fiancée of Mr. Rushworth. Neither before nor after her marriage, she ever makes an attempt in realizing her duties towards the man with whom she identifies her fate. She, in spite of her married state, runs off with her lover. The result of her adultery is more disastrous to her than it is to her lover. She brings on herself and her family the bitter social disgrace. “Maria’s father Sir Thomas ensured that she is driven out of her class and family circle forever.” The social disgrace is less for man than is for woman. “Lady Bertram was fixed on the event, she could see it only in one light, as comprehending the loss of a daughter, and a disgrace never to be wiped off.” (p.410)
Sir Thomas realizes his mistake in not giving his daughters a proper education, “They had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty, which can alone suffice.”(p.422) He had been content with common place education that imparted a little academic knowledge and no higher principle relating to character-building.

b. The Role of Status and Class-consciousness in Marriage

The England during this period of time was far more class conscious, and class was more to do with breeding than with wealth. In her novels, Jane Austen emphasizes not only the right of women to choose their partners for life but the right of men to reach their choice regardless of socio-economic differences. The romantic indifferences of lovers to the subject of income are a theme in a number of Jane Austen’s novels. As some critics see Austen’s novels as essentially class based, but as Mary Waldron remarks, “class in the Marxist sense that they use did not exist in Austen’s lifetime; her society was only just emerging from a semi-feudal situation.”

The women play a significant role in leveling the disparities of class and their weapon with which they achieve this is marriage. But a higher socio-economic status is not necessary an advantage. Emma is over-indulged in her early years, and has too much to learn from experience; Darcy is spoiled by his parents, who encourage him to be selfish and overbearing; the Crawfords are influenced by the manners of aunt and uncle; and Sir Walter Bertram comes to realize that, despite all their advantages, his
daughters affections and dispositions have not been nurtured in the right way, whereas his nephew and niece had gained from “early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure.”

**Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley**

The status struggle can be clearly seen in *PP* where Darcy with his innate pride goes to the extent of preventing his friend Bingley from having any connection with Jane Bennet. Darcy’s pride in his rank and passions leads to prejudice. But after he falls in love with Elizabeth, he promotes the marriage of Bingley with Jane. In the letter to Elizabeth, Darcy writes, his objections to the marriage of Jane and Bingley were

“The inferiority of your mother’s family, though objectionable, was nothing compared with the total lack of good breeding so frequently shown by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father.” (p.65)

**Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy Fitzwilliam**

In *PP*, Darcy is much concerned with Elizabeth’s inferior social status. But unlike Darcy, Elizabeth is indifferent to social status. Elizabeth shows displeasure with Darcy because she may feel a condition of inferiority towards Darcy. To deserve Elizabeth, Darcy has to reject his personal and social pride. He has to recognize her as an equal in the moral terms which really matter. To achieve an ideal marriage both have to compromise. Karl Kroeber mentions that the marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth implies
“how class stratifications may for individuals be rendered (liberative) and fulfilling, not restrictive.”13 But the disparity of fortune and class between them is not too great.

Darcy’s superiority derives from the wealth of his material passions too. He has every reason to be proud of himself and of his situation. Charlotte Lucas thinks that Darcy “has a right to be proud”- the right of fortune and status. Darcy confesses to Elizabeth,

“Unfortunately,…, I was spoiled by my parents who thought good themselves… allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing-to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world.” (p.357)

Darcy has renounced class snobbishness which is seen at its worst in Lady Catherine and Bingley’s sisters, and judge people on their instinct merits. Bingley sisters exhibit their prejudice towards Jane because of their differences in social status. It is prejudice that causes them to avoid people of different social status. It is their pride that forces them to believe they are better than others solely because of the amount of money they have. But towards the end of the novel, even after all their efforts of separating the two, Jane and Bingley get married. After the lower social class prejudice is removed, the Bingley sisters display their mutual respect towards Jane.

Wealth also prejudices people’s opinions of themselves and others. The conversation between Lady Catherin de Bourgh and Elizabeth shows that Lady Catherin puts forward the unreasoning class prejudice.
‘The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up.’

‘In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal. ‘True. You ARE a gentleman’s daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.’

‘Whatever my connections may be,’ said Elizabeth, ‘if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to YOU.’ (p.437-8)

So connections are so important in Jane Austen’s novels. Elizabeth’s family is socially beneath Darcy’s. Lady de Bourgh uses upstart pretensions, without family, connections, or fortune, and their condition. Lady de Bourgh says that Darcy will lose ‘honour’ and ‘credit’, it will disgrace him in the eyes of everybody, ruin him in the opinions of his friends. So lady Catherins’ idea of society is about relationships between social ranks, not between individual human beings. As Lady Catherine says, “My daughter and my nephew are made for each other. Their birth and their fortunes are noble. And what is to divide them? The ambitions of a young woman without rank and money?”(p.125)

But Elizabeth believes that people with good reasoning powers are superior to others. She thinks that there could be such a disparity of education and manners as to make marriage impossible between two people. She also emphasizes her own and Darcy’s rights, as individuals, to make free decisions for themselves. She points out that Darcy will marry a woman to whom he is ‘attached’, not who Lady Catherin wants him to
marry. So Jane Austen’s novels discuss the relative value of money and rank which make people socially confident.

**Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley**

It is only in *E* we find that the hero and the heroin are of equal status. Emma is much conscious of social status and wealth. All novels end happily because the heroine, except Emma, marries above herself. Emma does not marry above herself, but she is ‘the most snobbish of all the heroines’. She tells Harriet that if she had married Robert Martin, she would have thrown herself out of all good society. She thinks Harriet to be a fit wife for a man belonging to a much higher rank in society like Mr. Elton.

Class division in the novel is clear. Most of Jane Austen’s characters are snobs with regard to class. Emma’s snobbery is seen also in her attitudes towards the Coles. She thinks it beneath her dignity to mix with them. She feels that it will be disgraceful to get an invitation from them. But she attends it. The coles’s party expresses class-consciousness of Emma.

**Harriet and Mr. Martin**

In *E*, Mr. Knightley thinks that Emma’s intimacy with the poor girl will be harmful to her future when he comes to know that it is Emma who spoils the intended marriage of Harriet with his farmer-tenant, Mr. Martin. Mr. Knightley scolds her for wrecking an eligible match and for creating false hopes of higher chances and superiority in the
mind of that poor girl. Emma does not pay attention to this correct view of Mr. Knightley. Emma thinks Harriet is superior to Mr. Robert Martin.

‘Mr Martin is a very respectable young man, but I cannot admit him to be Harriet’s equal.’

‘No, he is not her equal indeed, for he is as much her superior in sense as in situation…. What are Harriet Smith’s claims either of birth, nature of education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin? She is the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision at all, and certainly no respectable relations.’(p.65-6)

Mr. Knightley is very much aware of Harriet’s social inferiority. He fears that she will be made unhappy by feeling socially displaced. But Emma believes “Mr Martin may be the richest of the two, but he is undoubtedly her inferior as to rank in society. The sphere in which she moves is much above this. It would be a degradation.”(p.67) Mr. Knightley may prove right, that Harriet suffers because Emma gives her expectations above her social position. Harriet’s background is quite unknown. But Emma thinks that Harriet is of gentle birth, and she is superior to Robert Martin. Mr Knightley says,

“What are Harriet Smith’s claims, either of birth, name or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin…. She is pretty, and she is good tempered, and that is all…. I felt, that as to fortune, in all probability he might do much better; and that as to a rational companion or useful helpmate, he could not do worse. But I could not reason so to a man in love.” (p.61)

As Mary Waldron points out, “Harriet is the extreme example of the doubt about everybody’s true social position, the collapsing nature of old ideas about rank, which
leads the central characters to fall back.” Emma encourages Harriet to marry above her station but it is jealousy that opens her eyes to the reality of life. Mr. Knightley sees the marriage connection as involving larger issues. Mr. Knightley believes

“Harriet Smith may not find offers of marriage flow in so fast, though she is a very pretty girl... Men of family would not be very fond of connecting themselves with a girl of such obscurity – and most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed. Let her marry Robert Martin …., and teach her to be satisfied with nothing less than a man of consequence and large fortune.” (E, p.69)

Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram

In MP, Fanny feels displayed in the house, and her self-centred cousins judge her according to her possessions. They hold her ‘cheap’ which shows the mercenary nature of their judgment. Fanny’s social inferiority becomes a source of added emotional pressure. She closes her eyes to the socio-economic complexity of life, whereas other people such as Mary Crawford, Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, and so on, give importance to money and rank. Mary is not pleased with her “brother’s marrying a little beneath him.” (p.264) Mrs. Norris points out to Fanny inferior status, “I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful… very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is.” (p.133)

The mercenary and the socially superior are the objects of Jane Austen’s satire. We think of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and the Bertram sisters; and Mrs. Norris, Emma,
etc. Jane Austen’s characters estimate others by their social status—birth, breeding and wealth—rather than by their ‘minds’. Mrs Norris says to Fanny,

“The nonsense and folly people’s stepping out of their rank and trying to appear above themselves, makes me think it right to give you a hint, Fanny, now that you are going into company without any of us; and beseech and entreat you not to be putting yourself forward, and talking and giving your opinion as if you were one of your cousins…. Remember, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last.”(MP, 19)

c. The Role of Parents in Marriage

The heroines may not able to rely on their mother or father. The mothers are silly and irresponsible. Jane Austen writes about her novel, Sense and Sensibility, in a letter to her sister Cassandra, “I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her suckling child”. We encounter heroines and other major characters’ mothers who are deficient in showing affection. In Jane Austen’s novels, the relationship between parents and the children and the way in which parents raise their children generally has a major influence on the marriage choices that the daughters make. Jane Austen’s heroines do not have satisfactory parents. Their mothers are foolish like Mrs. Bennet. Fanny and Elizabeth have no affection towards their mother and no inclination for their company.

In PP, Mr. Bennet seeks refuge from reality in books, and even the shock of Lydia’s behavior does not change him. Mrs. Bennet likes her daughters married to a wealthy man. She dedicates the majority of her time trying place her daughters in what she thinks “good matches”. She sums up her life when she says to her husband, “If I can
but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield, and all others equally married, I shall have nothing to wish for.” (PP, p. 83) It shows how important marriage is to her.

Mrs. Bennet’s business of her life is to get her daughters married. “Since there is an entail, she must marry her daughters off before Mr. Bennet dies or the family will be in major trouble.” (p. 317) Her daughters’ marriage is an important motive. Also, if she can marry her daughters off well, she will be seen as a successful mother. Since Jane is the oldest, the family's hopes are dependent on her marrying well and then "throwing the girls into the paths of other rich men." (p. 95)

Elizabeth has her own independent views on marriage. The most important thing she learns from her parents is a desire not to have a marriage like theirs. Elizabeth knows the value of the moment of choosing the partner and she knows it better from the instance of her own father. Their neglect of their parental duties is harmful to their daughters. “Elizabeth had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable marriage.” (p. 237)

Elizabeth wants to marry someone who loves, respects, and accepts her. But Mrs. Bennet is prompted by material considerations in threatening her daughter to accept Mr. Collins. To her mother, Elizabeth will never have her sister's beauty. Elizabeth retains her own views on marriage and hates marrying for material gains. Her mother says in a bitter tone that she will sever all her connections with the daughter if she disobeys her words. Mr. Bennet tells Elizabeth. “An unhappy alternative is before you,
Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents _ your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.” (p.98)

After refusing Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet refuses to speak to her. She thinks Elizabeth throw away her best chance of marrying and will not find a better match. But Mr. Bennet tells his wife to allow her the free use of her understanding. Mr. Bennet has realized that his cousin is a fool and Elizabeth will never be happy with him. He does not want his daughter to suffer her whole life by marrying such an odious man like Mr. Collins. He also expresses that the final decision lies on Elizabeth’s side as we can conclude from his words when giving his consent to Darcy and Elizabeth:

“Lizzy …I have given him my consent. He is the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything… But let me advise to think better of it.... 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. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life.” (PP, p.254)

Even though all members of Bennet family are aware of bad consequences of Lydia’s secret elopement and marriage to Wickham, Mrs. Bennet is cheerful that she shall has a daughter married. Unmarried Mary and Kitty stay entirely unnoticed by their mother. Her most favourite daughter is always the one who is getting married. Her loving attention that way shifts from Lydia to Jane and from Jane to Elizabeth. She proclaims:
“Lord bless me! Only think! Dear me! Mr Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! My sweetest Lizzy! How rich and how great you will be! What pin money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane’s nothing to it – nothing at all. I am so pleased – so happy. Such a charming man! – so handsome! So tall! – Oh, my dear Lizzy! Pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! … Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What become of me. I shall go distracted.” (PP, p.255)

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do not think deeply about ins and outs of marriage, and they do not give due consideration to the problem. “Mr. Bennet had married a woman whose weak understanding and narrow mind had very soon put an end to real affection for her. Respect and confidence had gone forever, and his hopes of happiness at home were ended.”(p.79)

In E, Mr. Woodhouse cares for Emma, and he is involved in her life without placing limits or controls in her, and Emma loves his father. To Emma, he is “the most affectionate, indulgent father”. The only time Mr. Woodhouse becomes a problem is when Emma realizes that she loves Mr. Knightley and likes to marry him. Mr. Woodhouse thinks that Emma's marriage is going to cause him pain. “Mr. Woodhouse's view of marriage is clear: he thinks it is a calamity.” To him, “matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable; and he was by no means yet reconciled to his own daughter’s marrying.”(p.15)

In MP, Lady Bertram thinks “more of her pug than her children.”(p.17) She is a woman of little energy and feeling. Yet she has done her duty. She marries well and attempts to find equally good husbands for her sisters. She becomes Sir Thomas'
dutiful wife. She gives control of her daughter's education to Mrs. Norris, so she will not be bothered with it. She is generally led by Mrs. Norris in her opinions, and Lady Bertram agrees when Mrs. Norris feels that Mr. Rushworth is a worthy match for Maria. Lady Bertram is indifferent to her children. Sir Thomas likes Maria marry a fine name and a great fortune but he is not able to see that Maria does not like to marry Rushworth.

Fanny’s mother is, “a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end.”(p.57) The Prices, Fanny parents, do not seem to care about Fanny. By the end of *MP*, Fanny is too important to the Bertram family for them to mind that she will become a Bertram in fact by marrying Edmund.

**II. Jane Austen and Love**

Historically, mates have not often been chosen on the basis of love but rather on the basis of convenience; at times mates are selected by the parents or families of the individuals to be married. But in her novels, Jane Austen considers love as an essential basis for marriage, and it is wicked to marry without affection. She belonged to a middle-class family which was above want. Marriage was not a forced choice for her. In her view it is better to remain unmarried than marry a man whom one cannot love. She gives a piece of advice to Fanny, her niece, “Nothing can be compared to the
misery of being bound without love, bound to one and preferring another. That is a punishment which you do not deserve.”\textsuperscript{15}

According to J. E. Austen, there is no tale of love to relate to Jane Austen, but “it is probable that she met with some whom she found attractive; but her taste was not easily satisfied, nor her hear to be lightly won.”\textsuperscript{16} But Jane Austen had several brushes with love and affection. A family friend named Tom Lefroy paid her the closest attention, yet went away without proposing. She accepted an offer of marriage from a wealthy man, Harris Bigg-Wither, she liked, but did not love. But Jane Austen told him she could not marry him. The only man whom she was supposed to have liked, had died suddenly. From then onwards she either abandoned the idea of marrying or had not come across such an eligible man to marry. She also lived the unmarried life not because she was unattractive or disagreeable but because she didn’t want to marry without love.

Jane Austen gives much importance to love in marriage. Her novels are love story with happy ending. Marriage symbolizes reconciliation and harmony. In spite of social and economic implications of marriage it is love that plays a dominant role in the involvements of the central Characters. But her minor characters sacrifice love for lesser causes like money or lust. Her heroines are not carried away by the prospect of wealth. She makes her heroines fall in love with the right man. Through her novels, Austen gives a voice to the women of her time, and gives a voice for the society in which they live. The heroines overcome society’s barrier by marrying for love instead of money.
Therefore the role of love in marriage in the novels of Austen is indisputable and married life minus love is obviously a ‘waste land’. Jane Austen writes to Fanny, her niece, “Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection.” And this theme is echoed by characters in almost all of her novels. Both partners should benefit from each other’s company, not only in physical aspect but in intellectual and social aspects also. Her novels reveal that true love is based on sense, reason and understanding. Jane Austen moral concern is evident in relation to marriage and in everyday domestic situation. All her heroines fall in love that leads them to wedlock. She studies the problem of marriage from a moral point of view.

Scott compares Jane Austen with Maria Edgeworth, but concludes that Austen is less romantic. She pays great attention to humanity. As Lord David Cecil says that love itself did not rouse her enthusiasm unless it was justified by reason, disciplined by self-control. She has little sympathy for romantic imprudence. In her novels, Austen does not romanticize or sensationalize love. It is the conflict of love and reason. Austen’s love stories tell very little about love itself. ‘Rational love’, as John Halperin mentions,

Is eclipsed by sudden or irrational love; the passionate blaze burns itself out; the old reliable flame remains. Love is education through contradiction and sorrow, through the agony and wounding of it by a misguided application of principles;.... Love at first sight is always condemned as delusion.
Jane Austen also does not believe in love at first sight. There is a growing affection between the heroes and heroines over a period of time. Darcy has at first barely admitted Elizabeth to be pretty. He thinks that Elizabeth “is fairly pretty, but not good-looking enough to tempt me.” (*PP*, p.7) Austen laughs at the romantic cliché of “love at first sight”; and points out that in the real world like that of Elizabeth Bennet people fall in love more slowly, and their emotions grow stronger as they begin to know the other person more thoroughly.

There seems to be two attitudes to love: the romantic attitude of ‘love at first sight’; and the more realistic attitude Jane Austen seems to take. She suggests that ‘gratitude and esteem’ are better grounds for love than at first sight. The good first glance is not synonymous with the complete good first impression. But “one thing that epitomizes the total good first impression is the self-confidence of the one who does the impressing.”¹⁹ So self-confidence is so important to the total first impression.

The relation of love and jealousy can be seen in Jane Austen’s novels. In *MP*, Fanny is jealous of Mary Crawford’s influence over Edmund. Fanny “was full of jealousy and agitation.”(p.143) There is the feeling of jealousy of Mary who is superior to her. She cannot be as interesting as Mary Crawford who is sportive. She becomes very much worried over Edmund’s growing friendship with Mary Crawford who with her intelligence gradually draws him towards her. Fanny is very much grieved to see Edmund whom she loves persuades her to accept to marry Henry Crawford.
In *PP*, Miss Bingley is jealous. “Jealousy had not yet made her despairing and she still hoped to win Mr Darcy.” (p.89) In *E*, a deep jealousy which rises almost to the level of consciousness when Emma hears Mr. Knightley and Jane might marry, or when Mr. Knightley and Harriet might marry. Mr. Kightley also is jealous when hears Emma might marry Frank Churchill. It shows Emma’s jealousy of Jane Fairfax and Harriet, and Mr. Knightley’s jealousy of Frank Churchill.

**Elizabeth and Darcy**

The story of love of Elizabeth and Darcy in *PP* falls into two stages. The first ending with her rejection of his proposal at Rosings and her acquaintance with Darcy grows in hostile circumstances, and the second stage developing at her Pemberley visit and ending with their union in wedlock. In the beginning, Elizabeth and Darcy are distant from each other because of their prejudice.

Darcy starts to fall in love with Elizabeth slowly. Darcy’s high social position emphasizes that he is out of her reach. Elizabeth cannot believe that she can marry ‘above her station’. This motivates her determined hatred of Darcy and her flirtation with Wickham. She resents Darcy’s power and rank. Nicholas Marsh points out, ”Marriage is a problem for Elizabeth because she… is under pressure to reconcile the conflicting demands of prudence and romance, money and love.”

Elizabeth’s acceptance of her errors is the first step in the progress of her love for Darcy. Elizabeth’s view of Darcy is overturned when Darcy pays Wickham’s debts,
and so ensures that he will marry Lydia and save her from social disgrace. Therefore
she opens her eyes to the real worth of Darcy.

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in
disposition and talent, would most suit her. His understanding and
temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It
was an union that must have been to the advantage of both. (ch.6)

Elizabeth confesses, “Had I been in love I could not have been more wretchedly
blind.” (p.201) Elizabeth does not give secondary place to love. She makes up her
mind to marry Darcy because she feels that she can be happy with him alone. When all
the differences are completely removed, the misunderstanding which has separated
these two partners dissolves. Darcy’s willingness to accept Elizabeth despite the
inferiority of her connections is a triumph of conventional romantic novel
expectations. So their marriage is seen as a triumph of their “virtue” over “passions”.

Jane Austen's heroines set out to accomplish and succeed at gaining what, in Austen’s
day, was considered the main purpose for young women. They all marry, and for the
most part, they marry for love. Mr. Bennet wants Elizabeth to marry for love and
encourages her to do so even though his wife just wants her married. Mr. Bennet
believes that Elizabeth has hated Darcy from their first meeting. When Darcy asks for
permission to marry Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet fears that she is making a mistake and
marrying for something less than love. Once Elizabeth has been able to convince him
that she loves Darcy, Mr. Bennet is able to consent more easily than before.
True love is based not on wealth or rank but on natural attraction. The barriers which have to be broken down between Elizabeth and Darcy are social as well as personal. The love that could withstand the stresses imposed by pride and prejudices, and make both parties recognize and regret their failings, must have grown strong very early. Couples teach each other, like Darcy educates by implications on Elizabeth’s faults of pride and prejudice and Elizabeth also educates Darcy. First they learn, and then they marry. They know each other’s feelings after a long time.

Emma and Mr. Knightley

In E, Emma thinks Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, and Mr. Knightley to be in love with Harriet and considers herself far from the state of falling in love. Emma avoids the issues of love and marriage.

“I have none of the unusual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fell in love; it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I would be a fool to change such a situation as mine. (p.89)

She realizes that flirting with Frank will be safe, and it will not lead to anything serious. Mr. Knightley is the only one who can tell her, what her faults are. Mr. Knightley thinks that marriage is the only thing that can seduce Emma “I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good.”(p.41) Mr. Knightley’s view on the general tastes of men in their choice of wives is
“Till it appears that men are much more philosophic on the subject of
beauty than they are generally supposed; till they do fall in love with
well-formed minds instead of handsome faces, a girl, with such
loveliness as Harriet, has a certainty of being admired and sought
after…. I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not
think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could
possess.” (p.178)

The marriage of Emma and Knightley “holds the possibility of becoming a balance of
opposing but equal forces, rather than the subjection of one personality to another.”\textsuperscript{21}

Emma realizes her love for Mr. Knightley. She is afraid of losing him to Harriet.
Emma is now reformed and she is ready to hear the truth from Mr. Knightley. It is the
right type of love which does not blind him to the faults of Emma. Like all Jane
Austen’s heroine, Emma is rewarded by marriage to the man she loves. Emma has
learned to recognize her mistakes and achieve self-knowledge and is rewarded
appropriately.

\textbf{Fanny and Edmund}

In \textit{MP}, the marriage of Fanny Price with Edmund Bertram is entirely based on love.
Fanny’s love for Edmund is deep. Edmund’s love for her is genuine though it seems to
be passionless. From the beginning, among all her cousins, it is Edmund shows
sympathy to her. He spends part of his time with her and teaches her on various
aspects. When she succeeds in marrying Edmund, it appears as though virtue is
rewarded with a love.
Austen’s heroines are not carried away by the prospect of wealth. She makes her heroines fall in love with the right man. Fanny’s situation is simpler than Elizabeth’s and Emma’s because she is aware of the feelings she tries to control. She knows she loves Edmund. There is no mystery about her inner conflict. Sir Thomas Bertram reacts when hears that Fanny will reject Henry Crawford’s proposal and says,

‘Refuse Mr. Crawford! Upon what plea? For what reason?’

‘I — I cannot like him, sir, well enough to marry him.’

‘This is very strange!’ said Sir Thomas, in a voice of calm displeasure.’ There is something in this which my comprehension does not reach. Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more that common agreeableness with address and conversation pleasing to everybody.’ (p.285)

Fanny and Henry Crawford

Jane Austen denounces both wealth and rank in marriage and mutual love in choosing one’s partner in life. MP is based on the solid foundation of morality. Fanny Price with all her shyness and weakness is morally potential. Fanny says,

“We (Fanny and Henry) are so totally unlike, we are so very, very different in all or inclinations and ways, that I consider it as quite impossible we should ever be tolerably happy together, even if I could like him. There never were two people more dissimilar, we have not one taste in common. We should be miserable.”(p.316)
Fanny believes that women have as much right to their individuality and feelings as men. She defends her right as a woman to have some say about the man she marries:

“Every woman must have felt the possibility of a man’s not being approved, not being loved by someone of her sex, at least let him be ever so generally agreeable…. I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happened to like himself.” (p.321)

The main motive that Fanny rejects Henry Crawford is her love for Edmund. According to John Halperin, “Mansfield Park suggests that true love may be founded upon esteem but not upon passion.” 22 Fanny thinks, “how hopeless and how wicked it was, to marry without affection.” (p.293) Fanny tells Henry Crawford,

‘She did not love him, could not love him, was sure she never should love him:…. that in her opinion their dispositions were so totally dissimilar, as to make mutual affection incompatible; and that they were unfitted for each other by nature, education, and habit.’ (MP, p.296)

But the elopement of Maria with Henry drives out all the romantic illusions of Fanny and Edmund. Edmund realizes the worth of Fanny. Even Sir Thomas Bertram at last realizes his folly for having tried to persuade her to marry a man who is not a suitable match to her and feels happy over his son’s wedding with Fanny. Having a good Character is the most important factor in choosing a partner for heroines, as Fanny tells Edmund,

“I must say, my cousin, that I cannot approve his (Henry Crawford) character. I have not thought well of him from the time of the play. I then saw him behaving, as it appeared to me, so very improperly and unfeelingly, I may speak of it now because it is all over.” (p.349)
Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley

The marriage between Jane and Bingley is based on love. Elizabeth expresses her opinion of this in the novel,

"... really believed all his (Bingley) expectations of felicity, to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself."(PP, ch,55)

However, unlike Darcy and Elizabeth, there is a flaw in their relationship. The flaw is that both characters are too good-hearted to ever act strongly against external forces that may attempt to separate them, "You (Jane and Bingley) are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income." (PP, ch,55)

Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill

Jane Fairfax’s love story in E is similar to that of Jane Bennet’s in PP. Emma says, “I have no doubt of their being happy together…I believe them to be very mutually and very sincerely attached.” (E,288) The majority of literary critics recognize unequal marriage of Frank and Jane as unconvincing but for Austen it could be a kind of revolt against the order established in society of her time. The primary and proper motive for marriage should be love, not just search for security or wealth.
Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins

Both prudence and love are desirable; one without the other may not be of enduring nature. Charlotte Lucas represents the former while Elizabeth stands for the latter. Charlotte is the strong symbol of material gains through marriage, while Elizabeth is the champion of marriage based on love. Elizabeth rejects Collins because she feels that she can never love that man. Charlotte Lucas says that she “care not” for anything about courtship expect the chance of an “establishment.”

Elizabeth cannot understand how Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins. But Charlotte is twenty seven without any chance of attracting any man and receiving any proposal. “Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object.”(p.155) She gives considerable importance to material considerations. Charlotte explains her position to Elizabeth,

“I am not romantic… 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 of entering the marriage state.”(PP, p.125)

She confesses that she has no romantic illusions regarding the choice of her partner. She does not want to remain a spinster and become an object of contempt and vision in the society.

Austen unlike her Romantic counterparts advocates balances between passion and reason in romance. Elizabeth and Jane’s marriage are seen as the reasonable end.
Charlotte is the antithesis of the conventional romantic heroin, she declares herself that she “never was” a romantic. She rejects passion entirely. She sets forth the more common view and condition for which most people have to settle: “In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better show more affection than she feels. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” \(PP\), ch.22

**Maria Bertram and Mr. Rushworth**

Maria’s “behavior to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him.” \(MP\), p.180

**Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham**

Lydia, Elizabeth youngest sister, is fond of company of men and does not care for the views or sentiments of others. Lydia runs away with Wickham seeking physical pleasures. “Lydia was extremely fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on every occasion. No one was to be compared with him.” \(PP\), p.110  Neither of them thinks seriously about marriage. When Wickham gets the promise of financial assistance from Darcy, he has no objection for marrying. The relationship between Lydia and Wickham is partly based on physical attraction and partly mercenary.
III. The Relation of Love and Money in Jane Austen’s Novels

Marriage should be about partnership, a moral contract between individuals, rather than a financial takeover of ownership and these two opposing ideas of marriage reinforce the basic oppositions between money and love. Jane Austen shows the influence of wealth and status on love and marriage. In Austen’s fiction, love and money are shown to conflict and complement each other. A good marriage meant having love and money.

The definition of love is an important factor to consider in evaluating its relationship to money, for there appear many types in Austen’s fictions. The main distinction is between love for marital purpose as in Charlotte and Mr. Collins case, or love appearing genuine, existing despite social barriers, as with Darcy and Elizabeth. Money and power are the main motives for marriage without real affection. Charlotte marries Collins out of financial necessity; her dislike for him is clear in Elizabeth’s observation.

Should Austen’s young women marry for love or for money? Austen also asks whether marrying for love is wise if it entails to poverty. David Daiches says that Jane Austen is “the only English novelist of stature who was in a sense a Marxist before Marx. She exposes the economic basis of social behaviour with an ironic smile.” He further says that her heroines are basically preoccupied with money and true love is secondary to them. But it is true that money plays an important role in her novels, but the primary important is given to love or affection not money.
Money is important for minor characters not for the main characters. Though they get offers from economically sound people, they refuse their proposals and marry men of their choice. Elizabeth Bennet should have straight away given her consent to marry Collins, if she had cared only for money motives. She rejects a wealthy suitor because she thinks him morally corrupt. She entertains for sometime the idea of marrying Wickham in spite of knowing that he has no money background. But she begins to hate him only after knowing his odious nature, and begins to like Darcy. In MP, Fanny would have accepted the proposal of Henry, if she had been after money. But she is not after money. She is ready to face the practical difficulties of life by marrying Edmund, the man of her choice.

In Jane Austen’s fiction, human’s integrity is superior to wealth. For example, Elizabeth Bennet marries Darcy, a fortunate man, only when she is impressed with his improved disposition. Elizabeth is not tempted by Darcy’s vast wealth. She loves him when he becomes worthy of her respect and affection. Elizabeth insists on a combination of romance and rationality.

Wealth and position in society cannot always give happiness. What Austen’s heroines in general want is a comfortable life with an income that would meet their needs to keep up their position in society. Love alone cannot ensure marital felicity, unless it is joined by a minimum wealth that would be adequate at least to make the both ends meet. The novel has been concerned to judge between material and moral criteria. But at the end the heroine is rewarded with both. Wealth is criticized, only if it is used in the wrong way.
IV. Jane Austen and Money

Money is extremely important in all Jane Austen’s works. In this chapter on Jane Austen’s novels, I am going to discuss the relationships between marriage and money, the two essential elements in the plots of all the novels. In *Persuasion*, Mrs. Smith remarks that marrying solely for money is ‘too common’. “When one lives in the world, a man or woman’s marrying for money is too common to strike one as it ought.”(p.143) Yet Austen, with her keen perceptions, combines love with fortune and promotes a form of prudent marriage.

During her lifetime, Jane Austen received only one known proposal of marriage. Harris Biggs-Wither was a large, plain man who Jane had known since childhood. Theirs would not have been a love match, but more a marriage of convenience. Biggs-Wither was heir to much property near the area where Jane grew up, and a marriage to him could provide security for her family. Jane accepted the proposal, but in the morning changed her mind. Cassandra, Austen’s sister, was engaged for several years without being able to marry due to lack of money on the part of her and her fiancé.

All Jane Austen’s heroines like to marry with a good man with a comfortable income. Given all this, some women are willing to marry just because marriage is the only allowed way to financial security, or to escape a family situation. This is the dilemma discussed in following exchange between the sisters Emma and Elizabeth Watson in Jane Austen’s *The Watsons*. Emma Watson states her reaction for her sister, Penelope’s search for husband.
‘To be so bent on Marriage- to pursue a Man merely for the sake of situation- is a sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot understand it. 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 a Teacher at a (Scholl) and I can think of nothing worse than marry a man I did not like.’

‘I have been at school, Emma, and know what a life they lead; you never have. — I should not like marrying a disagreeable man any more than yourself, — but I do not think there are many disagreeable men; — I think I could like any good-humoured man with a comfortable income. — [you are] rather refined.’ (p.318)

Jane Austen’s preoccupation with money in connection with marriage is very important. Even heroine must have serious thought to this topic, because it is rather hard to marry without having a sufficient income and there is no social security for women. The important of material wealth to human being is evident in her novels. She also does not approve of mere materialism. As Lord David Cecil says that “it was wrong to marry for money, but it was silly to marry without it.” 24 It becomes clear that money matters much in the world of the novels of Austen.

Many of Jane Austen’s work are about woman trying to find suitable husbands for themselves or for others. Jane Austen was born at a time when women did not have careers, and a favorable marriage match was all-important. A good marriage to a member of the landed gentry could secure the future of the entire family, while a poor choice might lead to poverty and ruin.
All of Jane Austen's opening paragraphs, and the best of her first sentences, have money in them. She introduces the crucial theme of marriage in the opening sentences of her novels. The immediate focus of *PP* is on the link between marriage and money.

> “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in position of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings of views of such a man maybe on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters.” (*PP*, p.2)

It seems to convey a simple truth that a young man of considerable wealth ought to marry or it is the duty of a marriageable girl to search for a wealthy partner and marry him. They see marriage as the natural consequences of having a ‘good fortune’. In this way an opposition is established from the very beginning between love and money. The monetary considerations have transformed the state of marriage into ‘market-place’.

In *Emma*, the opening sentence also talks about money, “EMMA WOODHOUSE, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence.” (p.13) In *MP*, like *PP* and *E*, Jane Austen introduces the crucial theme of marriage and money in the opening sentence, 

> “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, ..., and to be thereby raised to the rank of baronet’s lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income.” (p.1)
There are many critics who maintain that Austen’s main preoccupation is with money and in most of the domestic events like marriage, it is money that is ultimately the deciding factor. Domestic happiness depends not only on love but on material comforts also. Hence financial soundness, at least to a moderate degree, is essential for domestic happiness. The industrial revolution and nineteenth century capitalism has not impinged upon Austen’s novels. As Leonard Woolf says,

The economic determination of Jane Austen is of the type which one usually associates with a capitalistic bourgeoisie. The social standards are almost entirely those of money and snobbery…. The axis of the plot in every novel except Emma is money and marriage or rank and marriage. The social standard, ideal, and duty of a woman is assumed to be to marry as high or as possible.25

Throughout this discussion it will be emphasized that marriage is represented for minor characters as an institution detached from love and that it pursues more than anything else economic purposes and an rising the ‘social hierarchy’. The attitude of so many people on marriage is colored by economic considerations. The thoughts of most of the minor characters revolve around money, but the main characters, who generally voice the personal view of the writer, do not easily succumbed to the monetary motives. Their relationship cannot be called mercenary, while the relationship of other pairs can be described as mercenary.

Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Wickham

Elizabeth Bennet discusses the doubtful nature of the prudential marriage with her aunt Mrs. Gardiner. Elizabeth’s aunt, Gardiner, warns her against marrying Wickham,
“We see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other…, I will not be in a hurry to believe myself his first object. When I am in company with him, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best.” (PP, p.144-5)

But later Elizabeth writes her aunt when Wickham was admirer of Miss King with ten thousand pounds, “handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as plain.” She adds,

“Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because he is trying to get a girl with only ten thousand, you want to find out that he is mercenary.” (p.149)

Mrs. Gardiner asserts that to prove that he is prudent and not mercenary, he must show himself to be really in love with the girl. So a man should be wary if he is looking for a rich wife. According to Elizabeth if she is not allowable for him to gain her affection, because she has no money. Mrs. Gardiner is afraid of Wickham’s marrying Elizabeth. Now she calls him mercenary because he is trying to get a girl with a considerable fortune of 10,000 pounds. Elizabeth tells Mrs. Gardiner that a ‘gentleman’ and ‘gentleman’s daughter’ needs money as well, in order to live in comfort.
Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Collins

Elizabeth’s first marriage proposal comes from Mr. Collins, who is a complete fool. If marriage were solely a business transaction, Mr. Collins would be correct, as he lists all the economic and social considerations that lead him to disbelieve Elizabeth rejection his proposal.

Elizabeth and Darcy

Elizabeth and other young women operate under a ruthless imperative: they must marry. In choosing a husband, Elizabeth will remain true to her feelings. She rejects mercenary and crude class considerations. She dislikes Darcy and his manner and class-based pride. Darcy’s and Miss de Bourgh’s fortunes are ‘splendid, while Elizabeth is ‘without … fortune’. Money is as the natural adjust of those with ‘family and connections’. But Darcy has been dismissed by the onlookers for being too proud. Manners can be seen in opposition to money, to the economic criteria by which Darcy is initially judged. Darcy does not marry his cousin, who is the mistress of Rosings estate nor does Elizabeth accept Darcy when he first proposes to her.

Elizabeth’s only chance of a fulfilled life is through marriage. “She is of a romantic disposition….Her parents’ imprudence leaves Elizabeth with a very small dowry, unlikely to bug a man of equivalent upbringing to her own.” (PP, ch.50) Elizabeth meets a handsome and rich person like Darcy but there is the gulf between his level
and hers. But the disparity of fortune and class between them is not too great. The marriage rewards Elizabeth and Darcy for their ability to change and learn.

Elizabeth began the novel with an emphasis on love and mutual understanding. Her initial ideas do not acknowledged the constraint of a social system, the power of money. But she realizes that Darcy occupies an important social position, and this influences her opinion of him. Elizabeth half truthfully remarks that the beauty of Pemberley caused her to fall in love with Darcy. To joke about it, telling Jane that her love for Darcy starts “from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at (Pemberley).” (p.301) She is conscious of Pemberley’s influence on her feelings.

Elizabeth reaches a compromise between romance and economic reality, seeing that “handsome young men must have something to live on as well as the plain” (p.126) As Nicholas Marsh says, Elizabeth’s life “is touched by the traditional system (marriage for material reasons) and a more individual aspiration (marriage for love).” 27

**Emma and Mr. Knightley**

*Emma* is the tale of a wealthy young woman in eighteenth century Britain. Mr. Knightley is the wealthy owner of Downwell Abbey. Though it is a marriage of love on both sides, it is also economically sounds because both of them are rich. More fortunate men like Darcy and Mr. Knightley do not care for money, but they do not want to marry far beneath their position and they want to marry girls who are the
daughters of respectable gentleman. More than romance, marriage is meant to give security. Mr. Knightley describes one of the fundamentals of a good marriage, “A man would always wish to give a woman a better home than the one he takes her from; and he who can do it where there is no doubt of her regard, I think, be the happiest of the mortals.”(p.393)

Emma is financially independent, so she does not need to marry because one of the issues of marriage is a conflict between financial and romantic considerations. But to Emma, Mr. Elton will fall for pretty Harriet, because romance and materialism difficult to reconcile. As Nicholas Marsh says, “The courtship and marriage theme in Jane Austen’s novels explore the incompatibility between human and material values.”

**Fanny price and Henry Crawford**

In *MP*, Henry Crawford tries to interest Fanny in his state in Norfolk and represent her all luxuries. Sir Thomas says, “let me tell you, Fanny, that you may live eighteen years longer in the world, without being addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford’s estate, or a tenth part of his merits.”(p.288) Although Fanny considers the advantages that a socially and economically advantageous marriage to Henry Crawford might bring to her family, she refuses to marry him.

Fanny is dependent upon ease and wealth. She does not respect her parents when she sees their poor conditions. But it is one of the great ironies of *MP* that a home which is
so comfortless produces children of such admirable qualities as William, Fanny, and Susan. Sir Thomas recognizes that his ambition for his daughters has failed despite they are wealthy. Economic can turn a Lady Bertram into a Mrs. Price.

“A situation of similar affluence… would have been much more suited (Mrs. Price’s) capacity, than the exertions and self-denials of the one, which her imprudent marriage had placed her in. She might have made just as good a woman of consequences as Lady Bertram, but Mrs. Price would have been a more respectable mother of nine children, on a small income.” (p.390)

Both Fanny and Elizabeth are conflicted by the issue of marriage, in the form of a conflict between romance and materialism. As Nicholas Marsh says, “The qualities of sensible caution and materialism are identified with masculinity, and those of strong passion and emotional sensitivity sufficient to overthrow caution, are ascribed to the ‘feminine’.”29 So it is a dilemma of romance vs. materialism. Nicholas Marsh adds, “Jane Austen heroines are impressed within a rigid materialism system of courtship and marriage.”30

Fanny, a wealthy family's poor niece, suffers the humiliation of poverty and ‘the hurt of immovable social barrier’. Sir Thomas cannot understand that a woman like Fanny will refuse an offer that he thinks as a ‘good’ offer. He thinks that she already loves somebody else, that is the only reason he can imagine for such a refusal. He cannot conceive of a woman not dependent on a man. This is Sir Thomas view about marriage, “I am an advocate for early marriages, where there are means in proportion,
and would have every young man, with a sufficient income, settle as soon as after four
and twenty as he can.” (p.287)

**Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham**

The relationship between Lydia and Wickham is partly based on physical attraction
and partly mercenary. Wickham’s aim is to gain money. He has planned to run away
with Lydia in order to get her money. The only reason why he agrees to marry Lydia
is because Darcy agrees pay off all his debts.

**Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins**

For a number of young women sentiment is a foolish thing and they answer only to the
call of money. Matrimony is an easy and respectable means for the acquisition of
wealth. In *PP*, we see Charlotte’s and Mr. Collins’s materialism. Charlotte has agreed
to marry Elizabeth’s cousin, Mr. Collins who is the heir of estate. He has also just
proposed to Elizabeth and been refused. But Charlotte is fully conscious of her
motives of accepting Mr. Collins, because she is aware that she is unlikely to get a
better chance or any offer of marriage. Perhaps it is an ideal choice to her where
marriage is the only career for a woman in Charlotte’s social position.

Charlotte might be materialistic, but her self-awareness differentiates her from Mrs.
Bennet with her blind desperation of marriage at all cost. Charlotte may have some
logical reasons behind her marriage with Mr. Collins. In *PP*, Austen dramatizes
gender inequality and shows that women who submit themselves to this type of marriage will have to suffer in tormenting silence as Charlotte does:

"When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, she [Elizabeth] would involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear." (ch.28)

Charlotte Lucas bides goodbye to all her idealistic views of marriage and she gives her willingness to marry Collins, who is no better than a fool. In spite of the fact that life with a senseless man like Mr. Collins will be a waste land. The fact that he is the legal heir to the Langbourn estate after the death of Mr. Bennet and he is entailed to his property however modest it is.

Elizabeth feels “Charlotte’s opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own”, but she cannot have supposed that “Charlotte would sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.”(ch.22) To Elizabeth, it is the act of sacrifice for the sake of material security. She cannot understand how her intelligent friend could accept the odious man. Elizabeth herself also married into money but she accepts Darcy with her rational mind. John Gregory remarks, “I know nothing that renders a woman more despicable, than her thinking it essential to happiness to be married.” 31 He also states that it is better not to marry at all than marry for an establishment. He points out that no daughter of his should ‘marry a fool’.
Maria Bertram and Mr. Rushworth

Even well-to-do people are after money and marriage becomes a sure means to them to acquire money. In *MP*, Maria, the daughter of Sir Thomas Bertram, consents to marry the stupid Mr. Rushworth whose only merit is his wealth. By marrying him she marries his money. She does not love him. In spite of her indifference to the man she accepts him. But this marriage does not hold her very long.

Maria does not love Mr. Rushworth but she expects him to make her mistress of Southerton.

“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 fathers, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could.” (p.34)

Aware of the unworthiness of Mr. Rushworth, Sir Thomas Bertram permits his daughter to marry Mr. Rushworth because for Sir Thomas marriage is a matter of material advantage and it is a sure means to settle oneself well in society. The girl gives consent for the marriage because she can become the mistress of Souderton which will enhance her social position. Until she comes into contact with another man, Henry Crawford, she does not give due consideration to the problem of marriage.
Mary Crawford and Edmund Bertram

Unlike Fanny, Mary Crawford has a fortune of twenty thousand pounds and the self-confidence which results from a position of economic superiority. In *MP*, Miss Crawford “had only learnt to think nothing of consequence but money.” She indulges the hope that Tom will die, and that Edmund will become the heir and abandon the church. Her view on marriage is ‘a maneuvering business’, a transaction in which “people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves.” (p.40) Mary has only learnt to think nothing of consequence but money. “A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of.” (p.192)

So Mansfield parks’ social status is contrasted with the money and modernity of London. Mary stands for spending money to bring about marriage; Fanny, having lived in the country, is in favour of stability and security of things as they are. Mary Crawford remains deep in her materialism. She says to Edmund, “A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of…. I have a much respect for those that are honest and rich.” Edmund replies,

“Your degree of respect for honesty, rich or poor, is precisely what I have no manner of concern with…. Poverty is exactly what I have determined against. Honesty, in the something between, in the middle state of worldly circumstances, is all that I am anxious for your not looking down on.” (p.192-3)
The reasons in that Jane Austen’s women marry for money seem to be as follows:

**a. Financial and Family Pressures**

Austen examined the financial pressures on women to marry. She meant that a single woman, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was in want of a man with a good fortune. In Austen’s world, marriage was the only honorable provision for a young woman of small fortune. For example, when Mr. Collins, a man she neither loves nor respects, proposes to her, Charlotte accepts, saying, “considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situations 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.”(p.165-6) Charlotte marries for purely economic reasons.

Marriage, in Austen’s time, was not about love but ‘social standards’. In addition to the reason why the woman herself might wish to be married, there could also be family pressure on her to be married. The parents used to search for a man that had a title and could advance the family social status. Marriage of daughters was used to secure family business deals, increase wealth and raise status. In Jane Austen’s time, married women legally owned nothing: all their property belonged to their husbands. Yet the only way to financial security for many women of the time was through marriage. So these families seeing the eligible young man is the ‘rightful property’ of one of their daughters.
In Jane Austen’s period, young girls started exercising their freedom in choosing their partners. In higher social circles the parents still influenced their daughters in their choice of husbands, and played a vital role in the marriage market. But in spite of the monetary motive in Austen’s novels, heroines and heroes display their independent attitude in making their choice on which their future happiness depends and they marry for love and parents generally do not stand in their way.

The opening lines of *PP* claim that most of the people of the countryside are money-minded. As soon as a visitor arrives, the parents make money enquiries, especially regarding the wealth and his position whether he is married or not. The arrival of Bingley and Darcy is a matter of interest for all parents having marriageable daughters in. Mrs. Bennet tells her husband, “A single man, of large fortune; four or five thousand a year _ what a good thing for our girls.” (p.3) The character of the man is accorded only secondary importance, while his material background is sound.

Elizabeth cannot change the superficial materialism of her mother; she can only move away from her influence. Mrs. Bennet does not learn anything from marriage. She is fascinated by its material charm because she thinks it gives respect to the woman. With this limited background she wishes that her daughters also follow her advice and puts her plan into practice. Mrs. Bennet wants to see her daughters to be well married. She is familiar with the fact that her daughters are not rich and if they do not get a wealthy husband, their prospects in life will be rather gloomy. She does not want them to stay ‘old maids’ and to be regarded as the shame of a family and society with no possible occupation in their lives.
b. The Restrictions Laws and Customs

In addition to financial pressures, the restrictions laws and customs of eighteenth and nineteenth century England placed on women made look to marriage as a means of stability and made women even more dependent on men. There are attitudes to the entail in *PP*. For instance, inheritance laws entail a family’s inheritance to a male heir. In the situation of Bennet family, Mr. Bennet’s inheritance, his money and his home will have gone to Mr. Collins, his cousin, leaving his wife and five daughters poor and homeless upon his death. Austen shows “Patriarchal control of women depended on women being denied the right to earn or even inherit their own money.”32

An *entail* was a legal device used to prevent a landed property from being broken up, or from descending in a female line. This lefted the bulk of one's wealth (particularly real estate) to one's eldest son or "heir".

Entailed property is usually inherited by the nearest male-line descendant (son of son etc.) of the original owner of the estate or title, whose ancestry in each generation goes through the eldest son who has left living male-line descendants thus the male-line descendants of the second son of an owner will not have a chance to inherit until all the male-line descendants of the eldest son have died out.33

Mary Crawford’s interest in Edmund Bertram increases when Tom, the heir to Mansfield Park, is dangerously ill; and Edmund is distressed to find that she is like her “mercenary and ambitious” friends in London.
Females were caught up in strong pressures to find husbands in order to solve their maintenance problems. A woman could only be an "heiress" if she had no brothers because the eldest son inherited an estate. Most women could not get money except by marrying for it or inheriting it. Only a small number of women earned an income sufficient to make themselves independent.

Women generally inherited only if there was no male-line heirs left. If the family head died without sons, the estate would be inherited equally by all the man's daughters. If there were several daughters, they each would inherit an equal share, and the subdivision problem occurs. But even if the head of the family died leaving only one daughter, the daughter almost surely would marry— and at her death her heirs would be, presumably, the children she had with her husband.

If Mr. Bennet dies, his wife and five daughters will have to leave Longbourn and live on the ‘interest of £5,000, or a little more than £200 a year’. Probably they will be partly dependent on the charity of the Gardiners, or even Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet's threat to Elizabeth that "If you go on refusing every offer of marriage, you will never get a husband - and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead."(PP, p.142) This is the background against which Elizabeth and Jane are not desperate to be married to anyone with a good income unlike Charlotte.

Any property that a woman possessed before her marriage automatically became her husband's, unless it was "settled" on her; this led to the "fortune-hunter" phenomenon: men who married a woman only for the sake of the woman's fortune -
after the marriage, the woman and her money were legally in the husband's power. This is the reason why Wickham tries to elope with Georgiana Darcy, who has £30,000. Single women with even small family inheritances had to protect themselves from dangers of being “caught” by fortune-hunters.

Since women were deprived of liberty to inherit money, marriage was their safety way from a life of poverty and despair; thus, women felt that their only alternative was to compete on the marriage market. Society encouraged women to live through others rather than to find their own fulfillment. Through her portrait of Elizabeth and Darcy, Austen made the reader believe in the possibility of love, the chance for true love.

c. Spinsterhood

At a time when marriage was society’s end-all for women, Austen refused quite a few proposals. In spite of financial need, she not only stayed single but wrote about marriage. Jane Austen and her sister, Cassandra, were free to follow their passions. But Jane Austen also thought, “Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.” In general, becoming an "old maid" was not considered a desirable fate. For example When Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collines, her brothers are "relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte’s dying an old maid". Or Lydia says, “Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty.” (PP, p 274)
The situation of single women differed according to their financial and social position. The future life of well-off single women was safe. Women with lower income had to cope with much worse conditions. Their only hope was a good marriage. Mr. Collins implies that if Elizabeth misses this god-sent opportunity of accepting his proposal, she may not get another such proposal and in all livelihoods will have to lead the life of an old spinster. Mr. Collins also mentions Elizabeth's "portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of (her) loveliness and amiable qualifications", and prevent her from ever receiving another offer of marriage.

As soon as Elizabeth rejects to marry Mr. Collins, he goes to court Charlotte, the older friend of Elizabeth. If Charlotte does not accept Mr. Collins, she may never get any proposal at all, because she is already seven and twenty years, faces the gloomy situation of getting no suitor. Austen describes the reaction of Charlotte’s family,

“The whole family in short were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger girls formed hopes of coming out year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte’s dying an old maid.” (PP, 85)

Mr. Collins is a single man in position of a considerable fortune and that is enough for Charlotte. If Charlotte does not take sudden decision there is every likelihood of her remaining a good old maid. It is a question of ‘now or never’. In Austen’s view, if acquisition of wealth is the only motive to be achieved through marriage, that marriage becomes despicable. But Charlotte Luca’s view on marriage is,
“Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was 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.” (p.155)

But only Emma enjoys being rich; and finds the poor ‘narrow’ in mind and ‘disagreeable’. She regards a ‘poor old maid’ as ‘the proper sport of boys and girls’. Harriet is surprised that Emma does not wish to marry, and she tells Emma, “But then, to be an old maid at last, like miss Bates!... or You will be an old maid ! and that’s so dreadful.” (E, p.89) Emma tells Harriet

‘Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; 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!... but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and maybe as sensible and pleasant as anybody else.... Those who can barely live; and who live perforce in a very small, and generally very inferior, society, may well be illiberal and cross. This does not apply, however, to Miss Bates; ... She is very much to the taste of everybody, though single and poor.’ (E, p.73-4)

V. The role of women and Feminism in Jane Austen’s novels

Maria Edgeworth and Germaine de Stael represent ‘empowered’ women, intelligent, above strong-voiced, who will, for example, explain themselves. These writers were occupied at this time with the constraint enforced by the feminine ideal of submissiveness. As Marilyn Butler says that compared to these novelists, “Austen seems loath to use the figure of the articulate and empowered woman. Pre-feminist
criticism attributes this gap in her cast-list to the all – powerful proprieties, but Austen adopts and naturalizes her extreme decorousness; it is not forced upon her.”  36 Jane Austen is not a feminist but it is not hard to see some feminist tendencies. The most important suffering for women characters is being a single. Austen’s women find themselves suffering under disadvantages in material, family, social and personal categories.

In Austen’s day, men were seen as being far superior to women as they were able to work and thus earn money. There was no organized system of education for women. Some children might be educated at home by their parents, or by governesses or tutors such as Miss Taylor in Emma. There was little need for higher education for women. A large amount of women's time was spent on sewing or needlework but it is not done for money as Lady Bertram occupies herself this way. It could be done sitting down while engaging in conversation or listening to a novel being read.

The goal of education for women was often the acquisition of "accomplishments", such as the ability to draw, sing, play music, or speak modern languages. The purpose of such accomplishments was often only to attract a husband; so that these skills then tended to be neglected after marriage. Mary Bennet is the only one in the family who works for knowledge and accomplishments.

Discussion between the Bingleys, Darcy and Elizabeth at Netherfield develops lists of accomplishments. Bingley believes that all young ladies paint tables, cover screens, net purses and scarcely knows anyone who cannot do all this. Darcy’s comment that
he looks for “something more substantial” in the form of intellectual equality, shows that Elizabeth did more than merely provoke Darcy’s interest.” 37 Darcy says,

“A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved…. and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.” (PP, p.35-6)

Darcy’s character is the most interesting in the relation to gender stereotypes. He accepts the conventional definition of ‘feminine’. But Miss Bingley replies that she never saw such a woman. Darcy makes the remark that besides the accomplishments, a woman must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading. Nicholas Marsh says, “Perhaps Darcy is aware of the shallowness of female education, even in ‘feminine’ subjects. So he is provoked into his idea of ’extensive reading’. 38 Darcy is still a ‘chauvinist’. He speaks as if any woman who aspires to him must be extraordinary perfect, ‘impossibly accomplished’.

Jane Austen was aware of this discrimination. In Persuasion, we have a subtle-sharp kind of feminism. For example Anne argues with Harville about the ‘nature’ of men and women. He claims that men are more constant in love because they are stronger and more enduring in every way, and that all histories, stories and verse prove him right. Captain Harville expresses his views about women,
‘But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse…., I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman’s inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman’s fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.’

‘Perhaps I shall-- 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.167)

Anne’s response revises Harville’s analogy, which sees male and female behavior as rooted in their essential ‘natures’. She says that women do not forget so soon as men, because men have so much else to occupy them. According to Anne, it is no achievement for women to be constant, their fidelity is due to the circumstances in which they are made to live, without the professions or pursuits of privileged men. It is a remarkable statement that ‘our fate rather than our merit’.

Despite these discriminations heroines are generally happy in nature. Their lives have been relatively to very comfortable, and they are not accustomed to hardships. For example, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse have endearing qualities, and all are willing to learn, change their inner strength, and grow in order to move forward in life. The heroines like to take chances and move forward, leaving old ideas behind. Elizabeth has a ‘critical intelligence besides charm, wit, and self-assurance’.

Most of Austen's heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price, and even Emma Woodhouse make their own decisions more or less independently because they do not have anyone whose advice they can rely on, for example, Elizabeth Bennet does not
reveal to Jane her changed feelings about Darcy until he has actually proposed again, and she has accepted. Similarly, in a letter to her niece Fanny Knight, discussing whether Fanny should engage herself to one Mr. Plumtre, Jane Austen writes, "you must not let anything depend on my own opinion. Your own feelings & none but your own, should determine such an important point." 39

Austen's heroines are always independent and strong. Elizabeth tells Darcy, “I do not want to dance with a reel at all-and now despise me if u dare.” (PP, p.63) He replies that indeed he does not dare. As Marvin Mudrick says, “like all of Jane Austen’s heroines except Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price, Elizabeth is as strong and brave in her talk as in her feeling.” 40

Heroines like Emma do not leave leadership to the men, and Knightley is dissatisfied with her. She tries to exercise power and boss everybody. She does not listen to anyone and makes her own mind. That is why Knightley believes her ideas to be snobbish and ill-conceived. Emma tells Harriet,

“If I know myself, Harriet, mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many independent resources; and I do not perceive why I should be more in want of employment at forty and fifty than at one-and-twenty. Woman’s usual occupations of eye, and hand, and mind, will be as open to me then as they are now, or with no important variation. If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work. And as for objects of interest, objects for the affections, which is really the great evil in not marrying, I shall be very well off, with all the children I love so much, to care about.” (E, p.90)
Emma adopts a masculine role, in which she controls and commands others, “The power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.” (p.7) Her independent wealth gives her the opportunity to reject a woman’s dependent role. Emma rules the house like Elizabeth’s mother.

Elizabeth Bennet feels, ‘something more’ than she understands herself. And Emma thinks, ‘herself a better judge’. Emma’s situation stands a close comparison with Elizabeth’s: they have a conscious determination to uphold their opinion. Unlike Elizabeth and Emma whom are energetic, Fanny is shy and solemn. Fanny is totally passive. Liberty would appear to have been represented by the Crawfords energetic and with no responsibility to anyone but themselves.

Elizabeth declares her unconventional opinions about marriage very openly – not only to her father and Darcy but also to Lady Catherine, a member of the upper class. For instance, she maintains her right when speaking with Lady Catherine who comes to persuade her not to marry Darcy. Elizabeth is also not afraid to argue with the man she loves. Emma is a similarly independent person, both in her opinions and behaviour, although being an unmarried woman of a different economic and social position. She openly expresses the idea that a woman can turn down the offer of a marriage when giving advice to Harriet Smith. She even declares that a woman should consider the qualities of her suitor before she accepts his proposal. Emma proclaims that if she does not fall in love, she has no intention to get married. Emma’s views, likewise those of Elizabeth, are rather unconventional. (E, p. 41)
Most of Jane Austen’s heroines are free to choose their partners even Fanny. When Fanny argues the case for a woman’s freedom of choice, nobody hear her, even Edmund. Fanny exercises “the freedom of choice which she feels to be her right, and to survive.” 41 She survives as a free individual. Fanny Price says,

“I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like him…. We think every differently of the nature of women, if they can imagine a woman so very soon capable of returning an affection as this seems to imply.” *(MP, p.292-3)*

Fanny Price is alone and a stranger to her own family. She is as a sort of maid to the family. Mrs. Norris has direct influence on Fanny and causes Fanny to have a sense of inferiority. Women like Mrs. Norris make Fanny’s life misery. As Christopher Gillie says,

Fanny is very much more the starling than Maria Bertram; taken like the bird, as a fledging, rescued from an overcrowded nest, and placed under the gaolership of Aunt Norris. But does she want to escape, and what would freedom mean to her? Certainly her home nest at Portsmouth, when she returns to, proves to be a worse cage than spacious and orderly Mansfield Park. The problems of ‘getting out’, of how not to make a false escape from a psychologically confining space, of how to achieving them to the judgment, nor betraying the judgment by false feelings- these are the deepest themes of Jane Austen’s novels.42

Only Miss Crawford has seen her influence in every speech. She says to Edmund her views about a girl’s being out or not, “Girls should be quiet and modest…. One does not like to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen so immediately up to everything-and
perhaps when one has seen her hardly able to speak the year before.” (MP, p.43) She adds, “It is much worse to have girls not out, give themselves the same airs and take the same liberties as if they were, which I have seen done. That is worse than anything—quite disgusting.” (p.45)

Sir Thomas represents male authority, and his actions speak for the male-dominated system which arranges a woman’s life for her. Fanny represents female resistance and she feels insecure. Her ability to speak is suppressed. Mrs. Grant asserts that Sir Thomas is a fitting head of family. He “keeps everybody in their place, and his position is ‘just and reasonable’.” Edmund says to Tom, “My father wished us, as school–boys, to speak well, but he would never wish his grown up daughters to be acting plays. His sense of decorum is strict.” (MP, p.114)

Sir Thomas believes submissive behavior in women, but he is unaware of his failure. He says to Fanny, “you have now shown me that you can be willful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice.”(p.288) But Fanny does whatever she likes to do. Later Fanny is able to overcome Mrs. Norris' opinions about her. Sir Thomas tries to persuade Fanny to marry Henry Crawford. But Fanny rebels against his wishes.

Austen’s heroes display good manners. They deserve a decent marriage. There is an authority in Darcy’s manner; as Mr. Bennet jokingly comments, “I have given him my consent. He is the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything
which he condescended to ask.”(PP, p.303) Mrs. Elton also senses Mr. Knightley’s manner, “under that peculiar sort of day, blunt manner, I know you have the warmest heart.”(E, p.294) Emma thinks of him as “infinitely the superior.”(p.339) These men share quieter manners which are in contrast to the flattery to talk shown by Wickham, Frank Churchill, and Henry Crawford. In Jane Austen’s novels, it is difficult to judge a man from his outward appearance, and only intimate knowledge of a man’s character will reveal the truth about him.

Gilbert and Gubar take Austen’s habitual disrespect for individual patriarchs to amount to a systemic critique of patriarchy. They draw attention to the number of failed patriarchs in her fiction. For example, Sir Thomas and Mr. Bennet fail in authority. Such autonomy on the part of young women would have been approved of in Austen's day, when Fanny Price is resisting his advice to marry Henry Crawford. Elizabeth Bennet have treated as a "rational creature", rather than as an "elegant female", when she refuses Mr. Collins. The heroines rebel against male authority.
Notes


4. Ibid., p.155.


16. Ibid., p.45.


25. Ibid., p. 51.


28. Ibid., p. 140.


30. Ibid., p. 136.


33. *Pride and Prejudice -- Notes on Education, Marriage, Status of Women, etc.* 

34. Ibid.


38. Ibid., p.134.


41. Ibid., p. 162.
