Chapter IV

On the Power of Wealth

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

In the above quoted lines W. H. Auden most aptly points out Jane Austen’s handling of a crucial issue – ‘The economic basis of society’ - that has been done in an implicit style and yet ‘... so frankly and with such sobriety’. One might just mention in passing that Austen had explained in a letter to her favourite niece, “single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor”². This was so because firstly, in her society it was impossible for women to earn money and secondly, had it been possible the law denied them the right to possess what they earned. It must be mentioned that property or money inherited by a woman according to the prevailing laws then came under the control of the husband after marriage, over which a woman had little or no say. Therefore, Austenian characters like the spoilt spendthrifts Willoughby or Wickham marry with an eye on the wealth of their prospective brides. Austen condemns such financial calculations in marriage where dowry becomes the purchasing price of a husband and an establishment. It is against the ideal where marriage is supposed to be a union of hearts. However, morals in Austen are learnt not in flashes of
inspired revelation, but through experiences and realization which require a sound head and heart. Thus, her heroes and heroines who are gifted with a superior consciousness never succumb to economic pressures, which is often the fate of her secondary characters.

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

... after the year 1880 a married woman was allowed by law to possess her own property ...\(^3\)

Moreover,

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

According to eighteenth century economic dynamics, land was the most important source of wealth giving its owners a significant role in politics, government and society. The incomes of the largest landowners were rivaled only by those of a small number of leading merchants and contractors. Land conferred social status, and generally the larger his estate the greater the landlord’s title and influence. In most European counties land supported numerous aristocracy whose political power rivaled or exceeded that of the monarch. Many functions of central and local government were
carried out by the landowners, whose services were rewarded by control of patronage and an extended influence over the population at large. The value of landed estates, which represented the largest accumulations of capital of the time was in general seen only as a means of supporting an elevated lifestyle and of sustaining their owners’ position in society.

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

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

*Mansfield Park* too mentions in its opening page:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although

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

Mrs. Bennet's outburst is a natural human reaction to the perceived cruelty and injustice to her family. However, Jane and Elizabeth's subdued and rational behaviour can be seen as Austen's attempt to maintain decorum in manners of eighteenth century women. D. H. Lawrence for one, criticized Austen for such over-emphasis on propriety which he claimed left the delineating of her characters wanting in some aspects. Foolish as she is, Mrs. Bennet is perhaps unaware of the seriousness and significance of what
she says. It is these circumstances that result in her obsession to get her daughters married— even if it is to someone as stupid as Collins. Thus, she overcomes her dislike for Collins the moment she learns that his intention of visiting them is to marry one of her daughters. Her daughters she considers to be a burden. She threatens Elizabeth to accept Collins's proposal. She assures him,

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

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

Through these two distinctive reactions between the mother and daughter the author tries to show how rational beings with head and heart react to wealth and other materialistic concerns as opposed to those who do not possess these qualities. This is shown in relation to marriage, one's choice of a life partner, treatment towards the rich and not-so-rich, the fate of widows, single aging aunts, poor daughters or nieces, sons and nephews too, independent or dependent. Throughout she has consistently portrayed how those with stronger intellectual and moral authority are less awed by
the power of money. But living within society they too cannot remain untouched by it. The difference lies in that these worthy individuals do not let mercenary interests cloud their judgments or influence their decisions. Yet, given the obligations of the patriarchal society within which they must live, they cannot be free from the scrutinizing or comments of others. We see all of Austen's heroes and heroines subjected to pressures of judgment. But with their superior understanding it does not take them long to ignore monetary considerations and assert what they believe to be true. Such a period is always crucial for the narrative as well as in the development of the character.

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

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

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

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

Given her financial situation she anticipates what Jane Fairfax would go on to be if she too remains single. In this her position is more similar to Jane’s than the wealthy intelligent Emma, despite some critics’ emphasis on the similarity of their positions. But Miss Bates continues to be a popular figure because of her pleasing manners.
... she enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married. (E, 17)

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

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

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

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

Critics have often drawn comparison between Miss Bates and Jane Austen. The author herself might have been conscious of the similarities of social circumstances, financial position, power and authority and background amongst others. Both of them were daughters of clergymen, economically handicapped spinsters, dependent on the kindness of others, aging aunts, devoid of power, limited in authority as females, etc. But that's where the similarity ends for neither was the author poor in intelligence nor
a senseless chatterbox like her fictional character. It was Austen’s intellectual prowess, her sharp wit and an equally sharp tongue that must have made her daily life and interaction with others quite different from Miss Bates’s. However, there is no denying that both were restricted by the same limitations. The difference is that Miss Bates is simple, naïve and foolish enough to be hardly conscious of the limitations imposed by patriarchy, unlike the author who was aware of these at every turn in her life.

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

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

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

Marriage was seen as the best option for women in the absence of a respectable profession, yet it was not considered to be so essential for the wealthy ones. Thus, elderly rich widows following the death of their husbands would have no problem in securing another one (Lady Denham
had been widowed twice), yet they often choose not to. For as Austen tells us in *Persuasion*, woman “... of steady age ... and extremely well provided for ... needs no apology to the public ...”, for giving “... no thought of a second marriage ...” (P, 11). Lady Russell “... did not marry ...” Sir Walter, “... whatever might have been anticipated ...” (P, 11) by others; and even after thirteen years of Lady Elliot’s death,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Ferrars

... drawing herself up more stiffly than ever, pronounced in retort this bitter philippic; 'Miss Morton is Lord Morton’s daughter.’ (SS, 173)
However, at the same dinner she is overly nice towards fortuneless Lucy Steele. Thus, in matters of conflicting interests wealth may occupy a place of secondary interest. This monster woman manipulates her economic powers as she enjoys absolute control over the Ferrars’ wealth by disinheriting her elder son at will for daring to displease her, while being very partial towards the spoilt and corrupt younger Robert.

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

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

*Every Neighbourhood should have a great lady. – The great lady of Sanditon, was Lady Denham ... she was a very rich old Lady, who had buried two Husbands, who knew the value of Money ... (S in NA vol., 331).*
In this world her being ‘great’ is not owing to some great personal qualities, but because of her fortune – an unfortunate measuring barometer that society, too often than not, resorts to – and rightly ridiculed by the author. Lady Denham, formerly “… a rich Miss Brereton, born to Wealth but not to Education …” (S in NA vol., 331,) does raise our eager curiosity even regarding her first marriage. It is worth noting that the words – Husband, Money, Wealth and Education – are in capital letters, as are many other words carrying economic connotation or importance which Austen wished to emphasize.

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

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

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

... of considerable Property in the Country, of which a large share of the Parish of Sanditon, with Manor and Mansion House made a part. (S in NA vol., 331).
This was quite a gain and a substantial addition to her wealth. With now a position of privilege and control over her husband’s property and her own, she chooses to marry again.

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

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

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

Regarding her second marriage, it is openly acknowledged “For the Title, it was to be supposed that she had married ...” (S in NA vol., 332). Having enhanced her fortune substantially the widowed Mrs. Hollis next turns her attention towards improving her status, when opportunity provides itself in the shape of Sir H. Denham. Allegedly Lady Denham had boasted to a friend about this second match,
‘... that though she had got nothing but her Title from the Family, still she had given nothing for it.’ (S in NA vol., 332)

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

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

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

Well aware of her economic power and authority she uses it to her advantage. She exerts her power and authority over others to the fullest extent possible, and it matters nothing to her, if in the process her relatives feel insecure or uncomfortable.
But not all women of fortune are as shrewd as Lady Denham or possess great sense of the value of money. Lady Denham like Lady Susan makes wealthy catches, both of them are widowed and marry twice, but whereas the lady of Sanditon goes for the older ones, the latter chooses younger ones, the kind who are more easily malleable. In short, just as a wealthy husband is highly coveted so too is a rich wife, whether a spinster or a widow.

As opposed to them Austen’s novels capture the predicament of plenty of women who are young, of a marriageable age and no less deserving but are rejected because they are not wealthy enough. Sanditon, perhaps presents a worthy match for the manipulative and greedy Lady Denham among one of her younger relatives. Clara Brereton, brought up in poverty but full of tact and sweetness, is the only one among the hoard of relatives, who in little time makes her way into Lady Denham’s heart, so as not only to secure a shelter in the comfort of her mansion, but it is guessed would soon have made her way into her treasury too. It might be guessed that Clara Brereton would have turned out to be a little sly, as well as having the proper air of a heroine of sensibility, and that she might well have displayed the cunning Rousseau thought proper to her sex, but to Sir Edward’s disadvantage. However, this must all be guessed for the story remains incomplete.
Clara Brereton of *Sanditon* presents a case where “Poverty and Dependance joined to such Beauty and Merit” (S in *NA* vol. 346) is reminiscent of Jane Fairfax in *Emma*. Both of them are handsome and gifted but victims of economic circumstances, and dependent on the kindness of others. Following the footsteps of Jane one is tempted to guess a secret engagement likely between Clara and Sir Edward Denham too – though there is no way of ascertaining it. One might surmise that like Jane and Frank, Clara and Edward’s liberation too might happen only with the demise of Lady Denham, under whose powerful presence they can have no freedom to express their feelings openly. Lady Denham in the way she exercises control over the lives of those dependent on her financially, appears no less frightening than Mrs. Churchill. Lady Denham like Mrs. Churchill is appropriately described by Charlotte as “… thoroughly mean …” (*NA*, 356) and she does not hesitate from making wedding plans for another not wealthy young woman, Miss Esther Denham with the ulterior motive of facilitating certain other wealthy catches.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By turning down Henry’s proposal, Fanny attains greater moral authority, but looses out in economic, customary and social power and status for some time. Yet without a second thought she turns him down. Of course, she loved Edmund which she was unable to express, nor was there much hope that her affections will be returned. Nonetheless, she remains steadfast in her feelings for Edmund even under psychological pressures from Sir Thomas and others to accept Henry. The patriarch goes on to label
her as vocal and ungrateful – two very unfair allegations – besides sending her away to Portsmouth, to make her understand her real situation and status, and of the value of money and comfort that she had become accustomed to. But for holding on to her belief she is ultimately rewarded with enhanced authority in the form of limited powers within Mansfield and the approval of the patriarch.

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

By finally marrying Edmund a clergyman, the younger son of a baronet, without estate, title or much wealth but of higher human worth, Fanny remains loyal to her love and her values. This alliance will give her far less power, luxury or comfort than she would have had as Henry’s wife. Unfortunately for Edmund his expected fortune stands depleted owing to
Tom's extravagant lifestyle. But Fanny realizes that wealth or fortune, and the consequent economic power can never compensate for the genuine qualities of a human being.

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

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

This greed along with the need to escape her dominating father's house leads to her marriage to Rushworth, but by eloping with Henry shortly after her marriage she brings about her catastrophe and downfall.
This same greed for wealth is seen in Mary Crawford too, who herself is the inheritor of twenty thousand pounds. She holds money as an important criterion for marriage. She says,

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

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

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

‘Why should you be surprised, my dear Eliza?’ (PP, 113),

and goes on to explain:

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

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

Marriage is crucial in patriarchy because it is the only accepted form of self-definition for women in that society. Perhaps, the author focuses so much on it as she herself experienced the difficulties of being unmarried and living as the women did within the unequal and inadequate social parameters. Thus, like Charlotte Lucas, many women in her fiction, “Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, …” (PP, 111) still consider marriage as their “object”
... the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want ... (PP, 111).

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

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

Yet Elizabeth not only refuses Mr. Collins but also Darcy of “ten thousand a year.” (PP, 7) and the owner of Pemberley because she did not feel it right. This strength unparalleled by any other character in the novel proves her superior worth. By accepting Collins she could have become the future mistress of Longbourn, but by refusing him she and her siblings face
the prospect of being turned out of the house by Mr. and Mrs. Collins (who ever she might be), in just the same manner Mrs. Fanny Dashwood and her husband turn out Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her daughters from Norland Park in *Sense and Sensibility*. Elizabeth is well aware of such consequences, and on the face of this, it requires a lot of courage to turn down such an offer, even when the future is uncertain.

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

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

She is willing to live without the luxury of Pemberley, risk dying a spinster without power or authority and even bear being thrown out of Longbourn, but not willing to marry one for whom she has scant respect and no love, no matter how wealthy he might be. Possessing only the power of her own convictions and the authority of a sharp intelligence Elizabeth reveals a tremendous sense of authority and a capacity to wield power. Her authority is also felt strongly, when one encounters a changed Darcy later, humbled after being forced to self-introspection by her rejection. For a young girl without other prospects this is indeed a remarkable behaviour.
Interestingly, later when Elizabeth accepts Darcy’s second proposal, Jane asks her playfully, “Will you tell me how long you have loved him?” (PP, 332) Eliza replies, “But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.” (PP, 332) Of course, she is being playful, for Austen soon adds,

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

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

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

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

only to marry him seven years later - a wealthier Captain Wentworth, a potential knight with bright prospects. However, she had turned down his proposal for “his good, even more than her own” (P, 31). One rarely comes across this kind of selfless reason in young marriageable women or women in love, so much so that Wentworth too misunderstood her. But to her father it was “… a very degrading alliance …” because Wentworth possessed “no fortune”. Whereas for Lady Russell a friend and mother-figure:
Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen ... who had nothing but himself to recommend him, ... would be, indeed, a throwing away, ... (P, 30) [Italics mine].

But seven years later

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

because

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fortune can too often create jealousy between siblings as exhibited in Mary’s attitude.
Except Anne most people consider a match from the point of economic viability. Anne loved Wentworth when he had no money, and continued to do so during his seven long years of absence, and even after his return as a young man of fortune. Her feelings did not fluctuate with the economic fluctuations in his life. Had Anne chosen she could have had a landed estate, headship of a family, even take the place of her mother and be the mistress of Kellynch-hall, by marrying Mr. Elliot, the wealthy successor to the title and estate of the Elliots. Mr. Elliot who had been harbouring such a plan, would only have been exceedingly glad about it. For on hearing Anne’s engagement we are told that “It deranged his best plans of domestic happiness …” (P, 235) Also had she chosen she could have been in Mary Musgrove’s position- it was because she refused to accept Charles Musgrove’s proposal that he marries Mary. Both the situations would have given Anne higher status, power and authority than Mary could ever have. But in choosing Wentworth she chooses individual worth not fortune and in continuing her relationship with poor Mrs. Smith “… married [to] a man of fortune …” (P, 144), now a widow, sick and crippled with rheumatic fever, robbed of luck and fortune by Mr. Elliot’s cunning and neglect, and her husband’s extravagant ways Anne reveals that she does not allow wealth to cloud her judgment of human worth and come in the way of genuine friendship.
Elinor Dashwood is also another important female protagonist who behave more or less in the way Anne and Elizabeth do and possesses this higher sense of intellectual and moral authority. Unlike these characters Lucy Steele marries for money. Instead of Edward she chooses the inferior Robert who had come to inherit the additional wealth that rightfully belonged to Edward. Further Edward's sacrifice matters little to Lucy. Without looks or fortune, this scheming person wins over Robert and Mrs. Ferrars in no time, despite the latter's great displeasure at their marriage.

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

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

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

That was due to the folly of Robert, and the cunning of his wife ... before many months had passed. The selfish sagacity of the latter, which had at first drawn Robert into the scrape, was the principal instrument of his deliverance from it; for her respectful humility, assiduous attentions, and endless flatteries, as soon as the smallest opening was given for their exercise, reconciled Mrs. Ferrars to his choice, and re-established him completely in her favour. (SS, 330-31)
In Lucy, Mrs. Ferrars meets her match who will succeed her and will be instrumental in perpetuating the mishandling of power and authority in the next generation. Austen tells us that,

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

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

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

At seventeen, she [Eliza] was lost to me for ever. She was married — married against her inclination to my brother. Her fortune was large, and our family estate encumbered. And this, I fear, is all that can be said for
the conduct of one, who was at once her uncle and guardian. My brother
did not deserve her; he did not even love her. (SS, 150)

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

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

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

As the narrative progresses she convinces her husband in reducing the
financial assistance to his step-sisters despite the “... solemn promise ...”
(SS, 9) made by him to his late father to look after their interest. Since Mrs.
John Dashwood "... did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters ..." (SS, 5), she whines,

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

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

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

... but to his son, and his son’s son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as to leave himself [late H. Dashwood] no power of providing for those [three daughters] who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision ... (SS, 2),
this despite the son having inherited a handsome amount from his deceased mother and having a wealthy wife in Fanny Ferrars.

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

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

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

is not too inclined towards marriage. Instead, her superior socio-economic status fills her head with a false sense of power and authority, whereby she becomes a victim of her own assumptions and not of some fortune-hunting young man.
Austen in delineating Emma had said, “I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like …”6. This remark alludes to certain negative qualities in Emma induced by her wealth and status which are not normally found in a heroine.

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

Her misconceptions were further bolstered because

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

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

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

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

‘... I am convinced there never can be any likeness, except in being unmarried. ... Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid [like Miss Bates]; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else.’ (E, 77)
Convinced of her unassailability on account of her wealth and position, Emma has failed to recognize a social reality about the position of women in patriarchal England: that marriage was an inalienable fact of a woman’s existence.

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

In *Sense and Sensibility* we have a male version of Lucy Steele in Willoughby who sacrifices his conscience to further his selfish interests. Willoughby’s spendthrift manners land him in deeper debts, rendering him
dependent on his aunt Mrs. Smith, from whom he hopes to receive an inheritance after her death. This remains unfulfilled for his ungentlemanlike treatment of Marianne and the junior Eliza Brandon does not go well with the elderly lady’s sense of ethics. She consequently disowns him thus putting him in the same category with dependent women.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There seems to be some kind of a wish fulfillment when the West Indian, "Miss Lambe a young Lady..." of "... an immense fortune - richer than all the rest - and very delicate health ..." (S in NA vol., 364), lands up
at Sanditon. This Miss Lambe "... about seventeen, half Mulatto, chilly and tender ..." was treated -

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

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

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

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

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

Sir Thomas of Mansfield Park remains sufficiently partial to rank and fortune, so as to let his daughter Maria marry the utterly foolish Rushworth.
Sir Thomas, however, was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so unquestionably advantageous. (MP, 31)

Sadly,

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

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

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

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

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

This study reveals that the pattern found at work in most of Jane Austen’s novels regarding wealth and fortune, is often repetitive. Young women are more-or-less seen to behave in a similar manner depending on their moral and intellectual authority and their personal worth. The same can
be said to be true for their elderly counterparts, as also for young men and the elderly father figures. Austen through this repetition had perhaps wanted to highlight the tremendous power of wealth. For wealth after all is the basis of patriarchy. The laws of the land have been fashioned in such a way for centuries that fortune became a major foundation upon which patriarchy exerted itself. This is evident from our discussion in this chapter.

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

2 Chapman 62.

3 Woolf 93.


5 Kirkham 111.

6 Chapman 203.

7 Kirkham 114.