The present thesis is an attempt to study Jane Austen's women characters in depth. B.C. Southam observes in his Introduction to *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*:

"What the twentieth century has failed to provide is an account of Jane Austen which is historically sound and at the same time satisfying in its perception of the experience of life that is rendered in the novels. For this Jane Austen still awaits her critic." -1

The present study is an endeavour to discuss Jane Austen's women in relation to the position of women in her time.

The first chapter of this dissertation sums up some salient features of the society of Jane Austen's age and its attitude towards women. In the second chapter, the feminine point of view, emerging from the women novelists of the time, is discussed. The next chapter is devoted to an examination of Jane Austen's view of women and their problems. In 'Rational and Amiable Creatures', a critical treatment of her heroines is presented. In 'Love and Marriage', her outlook on love and marriage is studied in

some detail. In 'Women and Family' Jane Austen's women are studied in relation to family. Women like Lucy Steele, Mary Crawford, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Elton, Mrs. Bennet and Miss Bates are not heroines. Yet Jane Austen speaks a lot about them. 'Women not so Agreeable' deals with such female bores. The last chapter, indicating the dominant characteristics of Jane's heroines and her ideals as also their abiding values, concludes the discussion. This, it is hoped, will lead to a fuller understanding of Jane Austen's women characters and a better appreciation of her own genius.

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