CHAPTER – I

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This thesis aims at analysing the novels of Jane Austen and Lakshmi in order not only bring the homologies found in their writings but also prove their talent in delineating their women characters surpassing their predicaments. A study of the select novels of Jane Austen and Lakshmi reveals the uniformity in their personalities.

Comparative Literature

Literary studies distinguish among theory, history and criticism. The term comparative literature is troublesome and that is one of the reasons why this important mode of literary study has had less than the expected academic success.

Comparison in literature is made through the technical use of comparison of themes, genre, and movements, and trends of a minimal pair of two literatures going beyond the confines of one country and through translation. Comparative literature transports literary materials from one language to another. The American compartment H.H.Remak says that comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationship. The American scholar George Hart’s translations of Sangam literature, K.Kailasapathy’s Tamil Heroic Poetry and A.K.Ramanujam’s translation of Nammalwar’s songs bear
witness to the fact that there is an intellectual awakening and consequent widening of Tamil – English scholarship along the lines of comparative investigations, which needs to be regularized in deference to the native characteristics of Tamil Literature.

Matthew Arnold, while translating Ampere’s use of ‘Histoire Comparative’, was apparently the first to use the term in English (1848). The French preferred the term used earlier by Villemain, who had spoken of ‘litterature comparee’ (1829), after the analogy of Cuvier’s Anatomic Comparee (1800). The Germans speak of Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte. Yet none of these differently formed adjectives is very illuminating, since comparison is a method used by all criticism and sciences, and does not, in any way, adequately describe the specific procedures of literary study. The forms of comparison between literatures – or even movements, figures, and works – is rarely a central theme in literary history, though such a book as F.C.Green’s Minuet, comparing aspects of eighteenth-century French and English literatures may be illuminating in defining not only parallels and affinities but also divergences between the literary development of one nation and that of another.

In practice, the term ‘comparative’ literature has covered and still covers rather distinct fields of study and groups of problems. It may mean, first, the study of oral literature,
especially of folk-tale themes and their migration; of how and when they have entered the ‘higher’ sphere of ‘artistic’ literature.

Another sense of ‘comparative’ literature confines it to the study of relationships between two or more literatures. This is the use established by the flourishing school of French comparatists headed by the late Fernand Baldensperger and gathered around the Revue de Literature Compare. The influence and fame of Goethe in France and England, of Ossian and Carlyle and Schiller in France has developed a methodology which, going beyond the collection of information concerning reviews, translations, and influences, considers carefully the image, the concept of a particular author as particular time, such diverse factors of transmission as periodicals, translators, and travellers, and the ‘receiving factor’, the special atmosphere and literary situation into which the foreign author is imported. In total, much evidence for the close unity, especially of the Western European literatures, has been accumulated; and our knowledge of the ‘foreign trade’ of literatures has been immeasurably increased.

This conception of ‘comparative literature’ has also its peculiar difficulties. No distinct system can emerge from the accumulation of such studies. There is no methodological distinction between a study of ‘Shakespeare in France’ and a study of “Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England”, or
between a study of Poe’s influence on Baudelaire and one of Dryden’s Influence on Pope. Comparisons between literature, if isolated from concern with the total national literatures, tend to restrict themselves to external problems of sources and influences, reputation and fame. Such studies do not permit us to analyse and judge an individual work of art, or even to consider the complicated whole of its genesis; instead, they are mainly devoted either to such echoes of a masterpiece as translations and imitations, frequently by second-rate authors, or to the prehistory of a masterpiece, the migrations and the spread of its themes and forms. The emphasis of ‘comparative literature’ thus conceived is on externals; and the decline of this type of ‘comparative literature’ in recent decades reflects the general turning away from stress on mere ‘facts’, on sources and influences.

This world of Kosmos of a novelist – this pattern or structure or organism, which includes plot, characters, setting, world-view, ‘tone’ is what we must scrutinize when we attempt to compare a novel with life or to judge, ethically or socially, a novelist’s work. The sound critical appeal applies to the whole fictional world in comparison with our own experienced and imagined world, commonly less integrated than that of the novelist. We are content to call a novelist great when his world, though not patterned or scaled like our own, is comprehensive
of all the elements which we find necessary to catholic scope or, though narrow in scope, selects for inclusion the deep and central, and when the scale or hierarchy of elements seem to us such as a mature man can entertain.

The two chief modes of narrative fiction have, in English been called the ‘romance’ and the ‘novel’. Clara Reeve distinguished the novel from the Romance during the onset of romanticism in England in 1785 or thereabouts: Accuracy to her the novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the time in which it is written. The Romance, in lofty and elevated languages describes what never happened nor is likely to happen.

The novel is realistic; the romance is poetic or epic: we should now call it ‘mythic’. Anne Radcliffe, Sir Walter Scott, Hawthorne are writers of ‘romance’. Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope, George Gissing are novelists. The two types, which are polar, indicate the double descent of the prose narrative; the novel develops from the lineage of non-fictitious narrative forms – the letter, the journal, the memoire or biography, the chronicle or history; it develops, so to speak, out of documents; stylistically it stresses representative detail, ‘mimesis’ in its narrow sense. The romance, on the other hand, the continuator of the epic and the medieval romance, may neglect verisimilitude of detail (the reproduction of individuated
speech in dialogue) for example addressing itself to a higher reality, a deeper psychology. When a writer calls his work a Romance he wishes to claim a certain latitude both for its fashion and its material. If such a romance be laid in past time, it is not in order to picture with minute accuracy that past time, but to secure, in Hawthorne’s words elsewhere, “a sort of poetic…. precinct, where actualities would not be …. insisted upon…. “ (The study of comparative Literature. Theory & Practice Edited by TEESI Publications. Madurai 1997).

Analytical criticism of the novel has customarily distinguished three constituents; plot, characterization, and setting; the last, so readily symbolic, becomes, in some modern theories, ’atmosphere’ or ‘tone’. It is needless to observe that each of these elements is the determinant of the others.

Comparison is a source of knowledge and a method of enquiry used by all sciences and a comparative study of literatures across cultures is only an extension and intensification of healthy critical procedures adopted by sensitive readers of literature in all periods and cultures. **T.S.Eliot** has said that all literature is contemporary. Similarly it can also be said that all literature is universal. **Prof.K.Chellappan’s** method of defining comparative literature as “literature without walls” can be taken as a rejoinder to **Van Tie Ghem’s** opinion that comparative literature is across the
walls while national literature is within the walls and the general literature is above the walls. Robert Frost laughs at the very idea of mending walls. Bharathidasan gives a clarion call to demolish all walls that compartmentalise humanity. Comparative literature has already demonstrated the possibility of bringing all literatures under one umbrella breaking the barriers and bridging the gaps.

Comparative literature as an independent literary discipline was recognized by the European literary scholarship in the nineteenth century. This was made possible by the information of national states as the home of national languages and national literatures. Comparative literature aims to identify universal human experience as they are expressed in literatures.

A sociological criticism of a work of art can be legitimately brought within the fold of comparative literature on two valid grounds. One is the authority of remarks of definition of comparative literature and a branch of another area of knowledge and sociology, without doubt, is a very valuable, utilitarian branch of knowledge. The second reason is that literature is also about society, and in fact Marxists avow that literature is for society. An individual cannot exist in vacuum nor his emotions be totally unrelated to and independent of
individuals around him. An individual creates literature in a social context, thus necessarily linking literature with society.

Tamil culture, literary and religious, has grown from time immemorial and is as old as Sanskrit. American scholars and others are active in mastering the intricacies of Tamil Literary scholarship.

The novels of both Jane Austen and Lakshmi show their deep-rooted social consciousness and individual consciousness respectively and discern the evolution of the society. Jane Austen necessitates a change. Lakshmi concentrates on the upliftment of the female psyche. As a first step they pay their attention to the discriminatory attitude shown towards women. In England, philosophers and writers expressed the need for giving women their rightful place in society. In France Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784) wrote that a woman was, like a man, a human being. In England, John Stuart Mill made a speech in the parliament in favour of women. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) expressing the need for recognizing women and their talents. Anna Grimshaw traces the history of feminism in the following lines:

Its history is one of fission and fusion,

Different phases of the feminist movement have gone under different labels: suffragette,
women’s emancipation, women’s liberation, women’s movement, feminism, social feminism, radical feminism. In the present century, the two great intellectuals namely Simone De Beavoir and Germaine Greer in their books. The Second Sex (1953) and The Female Eunuch (1970) respectively explained the meaning of feminism in its proper perspective. (Page No. 78)

In Tamil, Sangam literature abounds in instances of women having enjoyed a status equal to that of men. There were poets and enlightened women. But by strange quirk of fate, the position of women had been lowered over the centuries and women stood deprived of their legitimate status and rights. But after Independence, the democratic set up opened the floodgates of reforms affording equal opportunity to women. Over the years, the ever increasing welfare measures enabled women to place themselves almost in every layer of the society. This was made possible by the writings and speeches of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. In Tamil Nadu, the thinkers Periyar E.V.Ramasamy (1877-1973), Kaliyanasundaranar (1883-1953) and Bharathiar (1882-1921), underlined the need for recognizing the rights of women. Among the divergent views expressed by these great leaders, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy
declared his revolutionary views on the status of women. **Kaliyanasundaranar** wrote a book *Pennin Perumai (The Pride of Being a Woman - 1957)* on women extolling the virtues of womanhood. But his views suffer from the conventionality which clouded his opinions. In that book he speaks of womanhood in terms of beauty, virtue, sympathy, patience, humility and sacrifice. The same kind of view is expressed by **Maraimalai Adigal** in his essay on *Petraval Katamai (Duties of Mother)*. **Periyar E.V.Ramasamy** who says that the very institution of marriage must be made illegal, since marriage enslaves women. **Kaliyanasundaranar** opines that an effort which is against nature relating to women smacks of ignorance. Besides, he is against women copying the Western Culture in exercising their rights. **Bharathiar** and **Bharathidasan** held revolutionary views on most of the social issues. They hoped that women would become a force so that they would no longer be slaves to men. **Lakshmi** states that **Bharathiar**, being a precursor in the campaign for women’s freedom, could not go too far, in this connection.

In his famous poem “Women’s Freedom”(*Penn Vitutalai*) he sang of the glory of the modern woman who was equal to man. **Bharathiar’s** poems could atleast be considered as presenting a romantic image of the woman. So, it may be said that in the
modern world, women do enjoy their rights, thanks to the
philosophers and writers who consistently fought for them.

The study of comparative literature has acquired
importance over the years as the need for unity among the
peoples of various countries has been stressed. It is in this
context that Goethe talked in terms of world literature. As the
world is in a state of flux, the need for a unifying force is gaining
importance. Comparative literature is one such force which
goes beyond the man-made barriers, establishing the fact that
there are some basic factors which are universal. Further, what
is central to the aspect of universality is human relationship;
Since man is the same everywhere, human nature is universally
one in spite of the various differences. One is even tempted to
believe in Plato's theory of Ideal Man. Wellek and Warren have
said that literature is one, as art and humanity are one.

Comparison as method has been in practice in Tamil
literature right from the days of Tolkappiar. The commentaries
on Tolkappiam refer to different grammatical works in Sanskrit
and point out the merits of Tolkappiam. In the twentieth
century, V.V.S.Iyer wrote a book on Kambarayam (1965)
comparing its literary merits with those of Greek and Latin
poets. Vibulananda Adigal studied the plays of Shakespeare in
the light of Sanskrit poetics called Pratapa Rutiram. Ramakrishnan compared the works of Kamban and Whitman,
Sachidanandan compared the poems of Walt whitman with those of Bharathi. Chellappan took up Shakespeare and Ilango for his comparative study. Dr.Kumarasamy compared Swamy Vivekanandha and Thiru Vi.Kalyana Sundaranor. Dr.Jaganathan took up W.B. Yeats and Bharathi in Tamil verse.

In the two different approaches to comparative literature, the American school relaxes the rigidity of the scope of the French school. The French school lays stress on the certainty of the reputation and penetration, the influence and fame. But the American school holds the view that any two works of any two different literatures offer scope for comparison. Remak’s definition of Comparative Literature can be quoted here as a representative American concept:

*Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief ... on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with other spheres of human expression. Such an attempt cutting across the cultural and national barriers will help grasp the essentials of human expression.*
The French school’s insistence will limit the scope in a world of diverse languages, cultures and ethnic groups. (Page No. 105)

A serious study of comparative literature may throw light on the similarity and dissimilarity in themes and approaches. It also shows new insights into the nature of human responsiveness. Fokkema is of the view that the comparatist who studies contemporary literature in distinct cultures may have a similar excitement of meeting writers, critics and scholars whose world view and value systems rival his own.

It is on the basis of these concepts that the present attempt proposes to make a comparative study of the novels of Jane Austen and Lakshmi. The late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century witnessed the rise of socialism and democracy, which started affecting the conventional attitudes towards life. Great thinkers such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Karl Marx (1816-1883) also contributed greatly to the change in the individual’s outlook of social life. In such a socio-political background, changes became inevitable in the field of literature and the growth of novel branched out into different domains, like science fiction and social novels. Even in social novels there were two predominant, trends. The other trend was set by Henry James, Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957) and James Joyce (1882-1941) who renouncing material
aspects of life, chose to dwell on the myriad thoughts and the inward experiences of the individuals who constitute a society.

**The Study of Influence**

“The notion of influence must be regarded as virtually the key concept in comparative literature studies”, declares Weisstein, “since it posits the presence of two distinct and therefore comparable entities: the work from which the influence proceeds and that at which it is directed”, the Emitter and the Receiver. (Comparative Literature Chapter IV, TEES Publication, Madurai 1997, Page No. 67).

**Study of Themes**

Thematology is an important branch of study in Comparative Literature, and is a recent entrant in the field. However, the study is as old as literature, since theme is related to the subject matter itself “Thematology” or “Thematics” as coined by Harry Levin, the well known American comparatist. The term is yet to gain admission in the Oxford English Dictionary. It involves the study of ‘themes’ and motifs. Though basically different, the modern literary critics make use of them as interchangeable terms. So, it becomes the responsibility of the comparatists to evolve formulations to put an end to terminological problems. A motif is a recurring element in a work of art and it may be an incident or a device or a formula.
The term “Theme” is equated with “Thesis” which is an attitude or an argument forwarded by a literary work. Theme is a more concrete term than thesis and it effects the structure of work; it runs like a thread connecting the unrelated features within the next. A thesis of a literary work can be paraphrased and is internationalist in character. For instance one can speak of the Marxian ideas suggested in the novels of Dickens. A theme can be localised or personalised. For example, a novelist can deliberately pattern a novel on musical theme if he is interested in it. Marcel Proust’s fiction can be referred to as examples.

**Literature and Sociology**

Sociological criticism of a work of art can be legitimately brought within the fold of comparative literature on two valid grounds. One is the authority of Remak’s definition of comparative literature which extends the comparison between literature and a branch of another area of knowledge and sociology, without doubt is a very valuable utilitarian branch of knowledge. The second reason is that literature is also about society, and in fact, marxists avow that literature is for society. An individual cannot exist in vacuum nor his emotions be totally unrelated to and independent of individuals around him. An individual creator’s literature in a social context, thus necessarily links literature with society.
A study of comparative literature will have to focus on this aspect of universality. In this connection Dr. Chellappan writes.... “a comparative approach to literatures can liberate us from the deadliness and the routine of conventional responses” (Shakespeare and Ilango as Tragedians P. 1).

The following categories of novelists emerged after Indian independence

(i) Historical Novelists.
(ii) Novelists who portrayed the freedom struggle.
(iii) Novelists who wrote for some social cause.
(iv) Novelists who spoke on domestic delicacies and
(v) Regional Novelists.

Venkata Ramani is popularly known as “South Indian Tagore”. His novel “Desabhaktan Kandan” insists on the Indian freedom struggle the rehabilitation of Indian villages, the eradication of untouchability and the consumption of liquor. This novel is also called a Gandhian Novel for such themes present. The protagonist “Kandan” dies for the freedom of India which melts the hearts of the readers.

**Novelists who wrote for some social cause**

The Tamil novelists of the time having social welfare in mind created many works. Social awareness has always been a part of Tamil novels at the start of it. Madavayya gave prime importance to social welfare in his novels. In such novels the
rights for women, caste-free society and broad mindedness, are stressed strongly.

The person who raised his hands in support for the rights for women was Va-Ra (V.Ramaswamy). He wrote *Sundari and “Kodhai Theevu”* based on such themes.

P.S.Ramaiyyah in his *Premaharam* has portrayed a character *Kalyani* who faces dowry problem and is rejected by the in laws of the family. Her husband rejects her for a gold chain. When he comes back she refuses to go with him. It portrays the struggles undergone by Kalyani’s father to set right his daughter’s life.

**Novelists who spoke on domestic delicacies**

The basic unit in every human life is family. It is the base on which the life span of man spins. Man comes into contact with the universe only through his family. These novels concentrate on the delicacies that rise between family and the man as an individual.

**Novels on Love**

Love, and Motherhood are considered to be the supreme emotions in the world. Most of the novels talk about love Akilan, Na-Parthasarathy, Mu-vaa., Su.Samuthiram, *Lakshmi*, Siva Sankari and Indhumathithi have portrayed love in its delicate sense.
**Women Novelists**

Women Novelists stand first in writing domestic novels. Their novels have the strong foundation of social awareness and concentrate on family welfare.

**Lakshmi alias Thiripura Sundari** has written novels such as – *Kanchanaiyin Kanavu, Mithila Vilas, Adutha Veedu. Penn Manam* and *Oru Kaviriyai Pola* Anuthama has written novels based on domestic shuffles like, *Ketta varam, Thavam, Manal Veedu* etc., R.Sudamani is an adept in writing novels based on human psychology. The noteworthy among them are his *Manudhuku Iniyyal and Sodhanaiyin Mudivu* etc., Indhumathis *Alaigal and Nizhalgal Suduwathilai* are also noteworthy. The list of prominent novelists include names such as Krithiga, Hepsheeba, Jesudasan, Jothirlatha Girija, Vasanthi, Kuyili, Rajeswari, Kumithini, Komagal, Anuradha Ramanan etc.

The period between the publication of *Humphy Clinker* (1771) and that of *Waverley novels* (1814) was marked by the production of fiction, which, in form, though not always in content, was based on the work of the four great novelists – Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. Till about the year 1790, the novel of letters or the epistolary kind, popularized by Richardson, and that of direct narration were equally in vogue, but after that date the novel of letters slowly declined. There
were many imitators of Fielding who divided the novels in books containing introductory chapters and writing ponderous epics in the name of Fielding.

In spite of all this imitative work, the age of Jane Austen, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was also an age of transition. It was, in fact, the seed-time of the nineteenth century novel. The novel of sentiment expanded and gathered itself from politics and ethics and passed into the novel of purpose which served as a medium for promulgating theories of government, conduct and education. The novel of manners, mostly in the hands of women novelists, was refined into the novel of social satire as exemplified by Pride and Prejudice. As a sort of reaction against the novel of manners, there developed a new kind of romance which had its beginning with Smollett. This culminated in the romantic tales of Scott and Cooper.

Miss Burney was the source of inspiration and model for imitation to many other women novelists. Among them were Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen Miss Edgeworth gave the novel of manners its vogue in Belinda and Fashionable Tales, including, Ennui, The Dun, The Absentee etc. Harumscarum manners is the theme of The Absentee, It portrays women who despise their dissipated and gambling husbands, and flirt with their cousins or chance acquaintances, fight duels and go about in masques or disguised as men.
In the Gothic romance, we have a form of the novel in which the epistolary and dramatic analogies employed by Richardson and Fielding are displaced by the epic narrative, and the analysis and ridicule of contemporary manners displaced by a return to magic mystery and chivalry. Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* gave a new impulse to romance. The events of the romance are assigned to Italy of the twelfth or thirteenth century, though in reality, they have no definite historical background, being all built up in imagination. While Smollett gave romance its method of dealing with superstition, Walpole gave it its machinery.

The Gothic romance popularized by Mrs. Radcliffe was taken up by a long line of writers, chief among whom was Matthew Gregory Lewis who wrote *The Monk*. The Gothic romancers insisted that outside the real world is a world of “fine fabling” and in their attention to plot lost sight of their characters which were mere types or abstractions. They made possible a *Jane Eyre* in which high romance lends its aid to the sternest realism. Mrs. Radcliffe’s passion for deep woods, mountains, storms and seas added a new interest to fiction.

The new historical romance came into being with the publication of Miss Sophia Lee’s *Recess* which tells a tale of the times of Queen Elizabeth, portraying most of the court worthies. After this there is a steady flow of historical romance down to
Scott. Many of them portray the contentions between the houses of York and Lancaster, while some spread out over the whole period of English history. The romances of Jane Porter were a great improvement over any imaginative treatment of history which had yet appeared. The unfinished work of Joseph Strutt, in Queenhoo Hall is the best example of historical fiction which attempts an exact reproduction of the past. It is the kind of work Scott has most successfully carried out in his historical novels.

In Jane Austen we have the critic of romance and of contemporary manners. Her novels mark a reaction from the literature of crime, insanity and the nightmare of romance. Romanticism which had drunk deep of new emotions received sharp castigation from the good sense of the author of Northanger Abbey. It is primarily a comic version of the Gothic romance and can be classed with the burlesques Don Quixote and Joseph Andrews. In Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen ridicules the gentlemen while in all the other novels the follies and defects in contemporary manners are held up to ridicule. In both Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility the novelist gave her view of what a novel should not be. Epic digressions, commonplace moralizings, hysterical sentiments, the lovely weather of romance, are all done away with. In these very
novels and in her others, she takes the same critical attitude towards the manners of her times.

When Jane Austen appeared on the literary scene, there was already a feminist tradition established in English fiction by the works of writers like Mrs. Charlotte Lennox, Miss Fanny Burney, Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Radcliffe, Mrs. Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth, and others. Jane Austen’s prowess lies in turning the inferior work by her predecessors to positive and constructive uses. However much she may satirize Charlotte Smith or Ann Radcliffe, the practitioners of the Gothic mode in English fiction, she is indebted to them in various ways besides finding in their work something to parody. Similarly, her indebtedness to Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and the lesser women novelists can be traced in a hundred little things, though in the practice of her art, Jane Austen rises far superior to all of them, having secured a place among the best English novelists.

Jane Austen showed her usual critical shrewdness in using the conventions of the novel as written by Fanny Burney, as a framework for her own fiction. Miss Burney, by writing *Evelina, Cecilia* and *Camilla* despite their absurdities and limitations, established a tradition for other women novelists to follow. While Fanny Burney writes in the stilted Johnsonian style, Jane Austen, avoiding the mannerisms of Johnson, writes
a style that is deeply influenced by him, and at the same time, is her own. The surly, vulgar and disagreeable Captain Mirvan in Evelina resembles the sailor father of Fanny Price, who embarrasses the heroine while staying in his sordid house at Portsmouth.

**The Eighteenth – Century Novel**

The novel has always been a social form in two special senses: it has concerned itself more closely with social problems, manners, and organization than any other literary form; and (at least in England) it has been the product of one particular class – the middle class. Other narrative forms, of course, have had affinities with one social class rather than another: the medieval high romance belonged to the aristocracy; the ballad, to the folk. But these older forms did not necessarily express the values and the way of life of the classes that favoured them, although they tended to do so. The novel, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was more distinctly the outcome of middle-class values and outlook, not only in its characteristic content but in its characteristics as a composition. It is true that the middle class was so broad as to include widely various categories: Bunyan, who had intimate ties with village folk, perhaps marked its lower extreme, and Fielding, with his aristocratic relations, its upper one. Both contributed with distinction to the development of the novel
form, for though Pilgrim’s Progress (1678) can scarcely be called a novel, it has important novelistic qualities.

Any major literary form is a way of interpreting experience. One might say it is a ‘shape of experience’ which grows up in a particular phase of civilization and survives that phase, if at all, much altered or with diminished vitality. It resembles a kind of plant life, which flourishes in a particular soil and climate, and usually derives nourishment from other forms which find the same environment congenial. Jane Austen’s concern revolves around the settlement of woman, not of higher strata of society, but of the recognizable middle class with their dreams, ideas, ideals, fancies, assertions and certain embodiments of characteristics. How do characters behave during the course of interaction with one another constitutes Jane Austen’s Theatre of the confined society of her times in small towns and countryside. Coming to Lakhsmi, we find that her train women characters and the protagonists who due to the pressure of familial problems embolden themselves psychologically and rise from the fathoms of abysmal sinking to the level of assertion of their self. Sometimes they adjust their psyche, and sometimes they stubbornly stand sticking to their ideals and show unto the world that they are different and significant humans capable of thwarting even villainies within household and thereby stand as distinctive personalities. In
order to demonstrate these different aspects, two novels of Jane Austen -- *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* and two of Lakshmi -- *Penn Manam* (The Female Psyche) and *Oru Kaviriyaipola* (Like One Kaviri) have been chosen.

**Life of Dr. Lakshmi alias Thiripura Sundari**

Dr. Mrs. Lakshmi has been writing hundreds of long narratives and thousands of short stories and books related to medicine for the past forty five years. There is a strong flavour Tamil literature and culture in her novels. She has portrayed the trait of the Tamil in her works of art.

She has not only written about the well to do. She has a vast scope for the poor and their life pattern in the stories. She is not only a kind hearted writer but also an adept physician (doctor). She has the capacity to peep deep into the minds of people from all walks of life and paint such personalities in her stories. She has a strong perception regarding the treatment of women in the Tamil society and is very bold in portraying their emotions under various spells of circumstances.

Writers are of two kinds: the first are the persons who write out of interest; the second out of necessity as in the poets of the olden days who wrote for material rewards. Lakshmi wrote for buying books to pursue her studies. Lakshmi busied herself in writing short stories. They were all published without fail. She also earned a considerable sum of money. The
amount her father sent also helped her a lot. Though Lakshmi was fond of writing. She neither had calm atmosphere nor did she have peace of mind to write properly. She would then determine that atleast in future she would have a separate room for writing her works, pleasantly furnished and with a considerable number of books for reference.

Lakshmi was writing a novel under the title *Penn Manam*. She had almost finished writing the story. As she was in need of material help, she took them to *Anantha Vikatan*, When Lakshmi’s second sister – Savithri’s marriage was taking place, their youngest sister – Usha’s was seriously ill in Bed. Her novel *Penn Manam* received a very grand acclaim among the readers and the Tamil Development Committee awarded her a prize for that. It underwent many editions and Lakshmi gained much popularity. It was also translated in other languages like Hindi and Russian and fetched her world wide praise. It was pictured in Tamil in the name of “Iruvar Ullam” in Hindi as well as the Russian language. Dr.Kalaignar wrote screenplay for that in Tamil. Tamilnadu film viewers Association selected it as the Best story of the year – 1963 and awarded a prize for it. The most noteworthy of it was that the royalty she got from it lit the life of her other sister. She got a Sakithiya Acadamy award for her novel *Oru Kaviriyai Pola* in 1985.
Lakshmi’s women characters are not flat, they are all types. When compared to the social background of the women characters of Jane Austen, Lakshmi’s Characters stand some degrees less, for they all belong to lower and middle – middle class. But they are all characterised by individual traits of obduracy in the forms of resolution, facing challengers, unyielding to pressures and criticism from without and advance their goal, the sense of which ironically develops in them during the course of their trammels. But like Jane Austen, Lakshmi’s canvas is narrow, socially speaking. Each novel of Lakshmi is different and she never repeats her characters which makes her similar to Jane Austen in character delineation.

Jane Austen’s characters are all drawn from the upper middle class or landed gentry in provincial village. There is, no doubt, that she paints on a narrow canvas, but this does not mean that her range of character is also a narrow one. As a matter of fact, her range is very vast. In her six books she never repeats a single character. Fine shades of character are skilfully brought out. No two flirts, no two snobs, no two fools are alike.

The folly of the foolish and the villainy of the wicked is sharply distinguished. The vulgarity of the husband-hunting Mrs. Bennet is similarly differentiated from that of Mrs. Lucas, and Mr. Bennet is similarly differentiated from Mr. Lucas. Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins and Lady de Bourgh are three figures of fun
in the same novel, but are different from each other. On her narrow canvas, she has succeeded in painting infinite variety of the human scene.

Jane Austen draws from her personal experience and knowledge. She had been familiar since childhood with the landed country-gentry. It is a leisured class with nothing serious to do. The time passed in smoking, gossiping, playing cards, or in the passions unknown to her respectable ladies and gentlemen. She draws men in their private capacity – in their relation with their wives and children, neighbours and friends, and not in relation to the government, or to God or even in relation to the higher passions.

She draws on personal experience, she brings out the fundamentals of character as revealed in homely activities of daily life, and this goes far to explain the immense vitality of her creations. It also explains their universality of appeal; human nature in essence is the same everywhere in every age, and it is this ‘essence’ which Jane brings out by depicting her personages in their private relations. Her characters are not national or provincial, they are universal human types. As David Cecil puts it, “Jane Austen’s realistic English drawing-rooms are theatres in which elemental human folly and inconsistency play out their eternal comedy.”
There are other reasons also for the vitality of her characters. Her eye for the surface of personality is unerring. She can visualize the externals of personality as vividly as Dickens himself. With a few brief sentences, she can bring out the habit, the dress, the appearance, the tricks of speech, in short, any oddity and idiosyncrasy of his creatures. But she does not stop at that. Her discriminating vision can penetrate to the organizing principles of a personality that lie beneath the surface. She can discern the motives and causes of conduct, the essentials of action. Her understanding of human nature is complete.

She possesses full knowledge of the head and heart of her characters. She presents her figures so wonderfully, that the same person strikes differently to different persons. To Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine is a perfect specimen of humanity, to Elizabeth she is a stupid woman of bad manners. The result is that her characters are living, breathing human beings, and not mere embodiments of humours like the characters of an inferior kind of drama. Their vitality never runs dry, they are ever revealing new facts of their nature.

Her characters are mainly many-sided; they are mixtures of good and evil, virtue and wickedness in varying proportions like real human beings. Jane Austen is impartial; she does not idealize. She has sympathy with all; identity only rarely as with
Elizabeth. Her most virtuous characters have certain faults. And, what is more striking, she shows how these faults are integral to their natures. They have certain virtues, and these very virtues result in certain faults in their respective characters. Thus Elizabeth is intelligent, witty and discerning, but these very virtues make her vain. She has too high an opinion of her own judgment.

Jane Austen has a keen sense of humour. Her eyes take on a merry twinkle when they fall on any specimen of the ludicrous. Conceits, vanity, silliness and pomposity of men tickle her to laughter. That is why a large majority of her characters are regular figures of fun. But her magic wand transforms even fools and bores of real life into the most amusing and entertaining men and women. Mrs. Bennet is foolish, vulgar and peevish. The best example of her folly is happiness at the elopement of Lydia. In life, nobody can tolerate such a woman but the imagination of Jane Austen transforms her into an inexhaustible source of fun. Mr. Collins might have been a bore in life but in her novel he is an object of fun. Jane’s sense of humour sublimates vulgarity and transforms character.

Jane Austen’s grasp of human psychology enables her to conceive her characters in the round. Her characters are not flat; they change; and grow under the stress of circumstances and become different from what they were in the beginning.
Thus Darcy undergoes a sea-change; and Elizabeth too is much altered. Even Mr. Bennet is shaken out of his complacency. However, this applies only to the principal figures. The minor ones are not modified by circumstance. Mr. Collins is a ‘straight character’; he remains the same from the beginning to the end. In a like manner, Lydia, Kitty and Marry, too do not change and grow.

Jane Austen excels in painting women characters, though her understanding of masculine nature is equally profound. Her women are more complex and more memorable than her men. Men there are, and some of them excellently drawn, but they are invariably drawn from the women’s point of view. Certain aspects of their personality, which a woman is not expected to know, are left out. Thus, we are never told, how they behave and talk when wed in a fragmentary manner, as they appear to a number of women, from time to time. But with women it is an entirely different matter. As Basker points out in each one of her six novels, a young woman, witty, sensible, discerning and charming is the centre of interest and the entire action is presented from her point of view.

These young ladies of her novels are in love, without being great lovers. The peaks and heights of love are not known to them. These witty, charming heroines embody Jane Austen’s value of sense, taste, and virtue and it is through them that the
novelist passes sentence on the other characters of the novel. They are the mouthpieces of the novelist; indeed, some like Elizabeth, are autobiographical sketches.

*Jane Austen’s methods of character presentation are dramatic.* The character is developed through short scenes in dialogue. A character gets revealed in conversation; further light is thrown upon characters by what others say about them. In this way, a character is examined from various angles, and the various facts of personality are revealed. Thus the character of the Bennets is revealed in the very first chapter through a dialogue between husband and wife. We know Mr. Collins even before he makes his appearance, from a discussion about him among the different members of the Bennet family. Soliloquy too, is made use of in moments of stress. Thus the soliloquy of Elizabeth, on receiving Darcy’s letter of explanation, is a remarkable piece of character analysis. The novelist intervenes only rarely with direct description and comment.

Thus we find the novels of Jane Austen assume the characteristic of being called the enclosed societal novel with emphasis, of course unintended, for it flows naturally, on the typical individuality of characters. This individuality is representative of the types. But on being compared with the characters of Lakshmi, the reader finds that Jane Austen’s characters do not have the psychological strength which is the
nucleus of the power of the Tamil writers delineating power. Each woman protagonist is a model for emulation. These characters stand the challenge of attitudes, time and problematic issues. How the human society is webbed with problems of sorts to be dealt with socially and psychologically is what the reader experiences in their novels.