FEMINISM IN EARLY ENGLISH FICTION: A STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN AND BRONTE SISTERS

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **"FEMINISM IN EARLY ENGLISH FICTION: A STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN AND BRONTE SISTERS"** in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the period from January 2001 to October 2004 under the supervision of Dr. Pashupati Jha, Professor and Head, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

Signature of the Candidate

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

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Abstract

Writing in the nineteenth century posed several challenges for women and they had to overcome several odds in order to express themselves. It was not easy and women had the daunting task of defying the norms, yardsticks, and marginality to which they had been subjected to in society. But excluded from social, political, and economic activities, writing remained perhaps the only way through which they could assert their individuality. Writing provided them with an opportunity to carry out a literary rebellion against the deliberate marginality which they faced both as women and as writers. Be it Jane Austen or the Bronte Sisters, the awareness and criticism of the defects prevalent in the social system pertaining to the women of the age were quite visible in all of their works.

In her novels, Jane Austen presented the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England and spoke with such clarity and truth of the relevant issues of her age concerning women that the universal appeal of those issues make them and the novels important even today. So, too, the novels of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte were regarded among the greatest and most varied in nineteenth century literature. The Bronte Sisters stand unparalleled in English fiction for no three sisters have distinguished themselves so prominently as world-class writers. In creating the heroines that they did, Austen and Brontes presented both the social, intellectual, and passionate aspects of womanhood. But at the same time they allowed their heroines control over the passionate side of her with an aim at their independence.

Austen novels were about the importance and making of a good marriage from the nineteenth century woman's point of view. Her novels were centred on the theme of love and marriage and how the wrong reasons and compulsions to marry could affect a

woman's life for ever. No doubt, her novels were the novels of social manners; but beneath the surface she was in fact talking about her own time, about problems facing women then. One may think as to how marriage could be an ultimate issue for a modern woman, for a feminist; but during Austen's time marriage was the only choice a woman had. There she could have no say unless, of course, she had an inheritance and family to fall back upon and could be independent and secure even without marriage like Emma Woodhouse. But even in such a case, she faced the danger of being labeled as an old maid and be pitied upon for her loneliness. In her novels Austen makes a comic presentation of the integral relation between money, love, and marriage and their relevance to the social scenario of the age, and how everything in turn would go on to affect a woman's life. But underneath the comedy she had certain very honest and specific observations to make, not only about the social scenario pertaining to women but also about human nature and relationships as such. Jane Austen was in fact a forerunner of feminism, but hers was not an overt feminism. She does not force her ideas or preach like many other writers of today, but despite this her influence remains profound. In all her novels, she again and again presents her heroines as strong and thinking individuals, making their own decisions, even though those decisions were within the bounds of the conventions of the time. Austen's writings were not exactly aimed towards a revolutionary social change, yet they showed a marked shift from the conservative social ideology of the day in context with the heroines and their relationships. In allowing them integrity, independence, a right to their own decisions, and the will to stick by what they believed in, Austen showed a marked departure from the social conservatism towards a limited social change.

During the Victorian period, women writers were judged against a social rather than a literary yardstick. It was thought imperative for them to be modest, religious, chaste, and sensitive in their writings just as they themselves were supposed to be. But

many Victorian women-writers such as the Bronte Sisters took exception to the rule and resisted the imposition of non-literary restrictions upon their work. They were tough-minded, candid, and forthright in their writings.

The Bronte texts were feminist to the very core, if one analyses them keeping in mind their social and historical context. The fact that these highly passionate, bold, irreverent, often angry, sometimes normal yet most of the time unpredictable novels, were penned by three unmarried sisters, created quite a furore in the literary circles. The very contradiction posed by the aggressiveness in their writings and their very own retiring lives called for much shock, speculation, and interest towards them and their works. Their works, aimed at reflecting and reshaping the nineteenth century 'cultural positioning' and anxieties related to women, their role in society, their aspiration and fears, and their craving for identity and independence, were revolutionary for the age. The Bronte women stood for and asserted notions of female individuality and self-respect, and underwent a relentless struggle aimed at achieving emotional satisfaction.

The Bronte Sisters were no doubt great creative writers. And though many may say that their novels projected an unattractive vision of the world, then they were interested in and spoke of the longings and passions, cravings and desires of the female heart, and in doing so they presented a true but bleak scenario concerning the position of women in the nineteenth century England.

The revolutionary mid-century Bronte genre did not in any way identify with either the outlook or the subject matter of Austen novels. They were critical of Austen's writings, especially Charlotte who found the atmosphere in her novels as stifling. But despite the obvious coolness and attitude with which the later English novelists looked at and spoke of Jane Austen, one cannot take away the fact that they owed much to Austen as their predecessor. For though the times and issues did vary from the time of Austen to

the Brontes and so also the outlook with which these writers dealt with such issues, what remained unchanged was the fact that they were women related issues and problems. And these problems were addressed both by the Austen and the Brontes in their novels, only difference being the attitude, manner, and intensity with which they treated the issues. Vision may have been different for either but not the commitment towards feminism.

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Contents

Chapter – 1

Feminism: An Introduction

> The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. (Beauvoir 1997:29)

Women are equally valuable as men but the fact that they do not have equal socio-cultural rights as men do have, they, therefore, turn out to be subordinate or oppressed creatures; and it is against this very suppression of women's rights that feminism finds its aim and sustenance. Feminism, basically is "...an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it." (Singh 1990:8) Thus the very basis of feminism is an attempt at reformation in the mindset of the people. It is, in fact, a consciousness and an awareness of being victimized by the male dominated society and also an attempt to come out of this centuries old injustice. Feminism, thus, is a constant struggle for the equality of women and is an effort to establish the value and importance of women for what they are and as they are; in short it aims at the individuality and identity of women. It is very important for women to know who they really are and whether what they are assigned to be, is what they really want to be. She has to have a mind of her own – clear and honest; over the years Literature has proved to be that voice, a medium through which women have striven for dream fulfilment even if they could not do so in their real lives. Women need to shape and project their own image and for this they need to do away with the age old assumptions of woman as either a 'devil' or an 'angel in the house'. For women need to 'destroy in order to create'. "Feminist thinking is really rethinking, an examination of the way certain assumptions about women and the female character enter into the fundamental assumptions that organize all our thinking."

(Jehlen 1991:75) For instance, reason and intuition are generally associated with male and female species respectively, ignoring the fact that women are rational beings as well. It is very necessary for women to first understand and analyse their condition in society before they attempt to subvert it. Like Alice Jardine has said, Feminism is a ' "...movement from the point of view of, by and for women..." ' (Singh 1990:25) Thus, as a philosophy of life, feminism opposes woman's subordination in social as well as in family life. However, feminism should not merely be trapped into attaining for women the right to be men or to highlight the "...feminine identity of an oppressed past as ideal womanhood..."; (Jehlen 1991:83) instead its aim ought to be liberation and equal status for women. It should be used as a tool to restore to women a dignified and respectable place, not only in her family but in wider social life too. Feminism needs to analyse and seek ways which help women attain fulfilment in their lives. It should encourage and enable her to break free from the dependency factor and overcome such circumstances which strangle her liberty. Feminism is true and worthwhile only if it frees a woman from the dependence syndrome and this freedom should not merely be in social, political and economic context but it should most importantly, be emotional and intellectual. For, in order to be free and independent, both external and internal evolution of a personality is a must, for therein lies the beauty of a woman's liberation.

"Feminism is a global and revolutionary ideology....The ideology is political because it is concerned with...the question of power; it is revolutionary because it is against the status quo" (Jaidev 1990:49) Feminism as a forceful movement officially began in 1960s but no way it suddenly sprang during the 1960s from nowhere; it is merely a modern day resurgence of those ideas and values that have been there for ages, forming an age-old tradition, but never viewed in feminist light. However, in proving so one does encounter difficulties, for the values and concerns of today's feminism may not

exactly coincide with those of the past. One way to counter this problem is to view earlier texts in modern context, but this has its own drawback for the essence of the work and its importance may be lost in viewing it in a totally different scenario than the one in which it was conceived. The other way would be to view them with a 'weak or generalized definition' of feminism. But here too there is a drawback, which was put forth by Janet Todd: "But if a feminist is one who is aware of female problems and is angry or mildly irritated at the female predicament, then almost every woman and many men claim the title." (Ruthven 1994:17) However, one should avoid 'strong' as well as 'weak' readings, which do not exactly justify the scenario keeping which in view the various feminisms would have come into being. Feminisms conceived in various ages, under varying conditions and separated by a gap of hundred of years, are bound to be different and hence their relational study should concentrate more on their differences rather than on their similarities. "...feminisms like many other human phenomena come and go, and that each not only differs from the others, but is also discontinuous with them." (Ruthven 1994:18)

The evolution of the modern day concept of feminism and female literary tradition can, however, be traced back to its roots in the works of nineteenth century women writers like Jane Austen and Bronte Sisters. The female self-awareness that is depicted in their novels gave an entirely new meaning and demeanour to the pre-conceived notion of a woman's image and status in society. If the contemporary women today are able to take up pen with confidence and authority, it is because their nineteenth century literary foremothers struggled hard against various odds to get for them the right to be in the position they are in today. They

> ...struggled in isolation that felt like sickness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome, the anxiety of

> authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture. Thus while the recent feminist emphasis on positive role models has undoubtedly helped many women, it should not keep us from realizing the terrible odds against which a creative female sub-culture was established...in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:51)

It is impossible to say when exactly women turned literary in English language, but it was 1750 onwards that women made inroads into the literary arena, mainly as fiction writers. Even in the late seventeenth century, feminism found its expression in the works and religious convictions of Mary Astell, who felt that if woman's soul was as good as man's, her mind was equally good and made for the same reason i.e. to love and worship God. But, there were very few women novelists who could make a mark for themselves through the centuries. There were many reasons for this and the most prominent among them being that neither did they have financial independence, nor were they intellectually free; social constraints always bogged them down and they were denied the fullest worldly experience by placing various restrictions upon their lives. Women were not able to discover as to what they really were and what they were capable of, nor could they grant originality to their works, for most of the time they wrote either in deference to masculine standards or in angry defiance of them. They were either aggressive or conciliatory, but never objective or detached as would be proper for them to be. Thus the woman-writer was corrupted by an unjust standard of art. However, Jane Austen, who began writing in the late eighteenth century, was an exception to the rule; she wrote entirely as a woman and initiated a new trend, which was later followed and raised to new heights by the Brontes.

The stable male-dominated society of England in the middle of the eighteenth century offered little opportunity for women to play active role in political, economic and

social affairs. It also offered little encouragement to the ideas now characterized under the term feminism i.e. the civil and political equality for women and a right to self-determination and autonomy for them. Society assumed that women were subservient to men and their natural destiny was marriage, and hence the concept prevailed that women needed minimal education. But the fact remained that men's main weapon for keeping women subordinate was to deny them proper education. The follies that women were accused of were not due to the absence of good qualities, but due to the education denied which prevented them from highlighting their virtues. Thus, education of women or actually the lack of it, was hardly a matter of discussion or concern in the eighteenth century. Men of the age were more concerned with such subjects as trade, political offices, and building and maintaining family fortunes, and women were little thought of other than as created for their pleasure and to raise their family, to be used, guided, cared for, but not to be taken seriously. The constraints and limitations imposed upon women as well as the social status accorded to them in the eighteenth century age and culture was exposed, revealed, and found its expression in the works of nineteenth century women writers like Austen and Bronte Sisters.

Women's literary achievement in the nineteenth century reveal extraordinary strength keeping in mind the daunting odds against which they were realized and fulfilled. In the nineteenth century women had to struggle hard to overcome the influence of the hostile male literary tradition and to bring into being an original, primary, and independent art. Nineteenth century was the 'Age of the Female Novelist'. With such glaring examples as Jane Austen and the Bronte Sisters, question of women's inclination for fiction, if any, was aptly answered. Women novelists have always been self-conscious but rarely self-defining. Although they were aware of their individual identities and experiences, women writers were very sceptical as to whether these experiences of theirs

will be able to transcend the personal sphere and assume the shape of art, which would 'reveal a history'. But writers like Jane Austen and Bronte Sisters immortalized women's dilemmas, feelings, experiences, and cravings by successfully and authentically projecting them in the form of art and revealing what was till then hidden and personal into something universal, and so very true and real. Thus, Austen and Brontes gave us great classics of female imagination. We, today, are inheritors of a feminist tradition that was shaped out by Austen and the Brontes. "The Victorians expected women's novels to reflect the feminine values they exalted, although obviously the women herself had outgrown the constraining feminine role. "Come what will," Charlotte Bronte wrote to Lewes, "I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms, or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand." " (Showalter 1999:7)

The very fact that women took to writing was an act of rebellion, of subversion, and in this context, Anne Finch, a feminist writer of eighteenth century, has commented:

> Alas! A woman that attempts the pen
> Such an intruder on the rights of men,
> Such a presumptuous Creature is esteem'd
> The fault can by no vertue be redeem'd. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:3)

Such a view was indicative of the general theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that considered creative power as essentially a male gift. Pen was defined as a male tool that was not deemed as appropriate for women to handle and claim as theirs too. Since reading, writing and thinking were acknowledged as male characteristics, female attempt at them was regarded as blasphemy. This idea found its further expression in Robert Southey's letter to Charlotte Bronte where he says: " "Literature is not the business of woman's life, and it cannot be." " (Corbett 1992:61) This response of his to Charlotte's

query as to whether she should pursue a literary career or not, brings forth a typical male attitude. Women are warned from making a male vocation the business of their lives. However, Charlotte went ahead and did just the opposite.

When women in the eighteenth century expressed their literary hopes and desires they were scorned and asked to concentrate on home and domestic affairs, thus engendering in them a rebellious rage. It was this frustration, imprisonment and rebellion that found its expression in much of the literature by nineteenth century women writers, forming quite a unique female literary tradition. Although nineteenth century is characterized as an age of the emergence of feminine literary forces, it did not erase a woman's insecurity about daring into a territory which was never attributed to them.

> ...Jane Austen's mirrored parlors, from Charlotte Bronte's haunted garrets to Emily Bronte's coffin-shaped beds, imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places. Indeed, it reflects her growing suspicion that what the nineteenth century called "woman's place" is itself irrational and strange. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:84)

The women writers of the age were always conscious of that sense of alienation which comes about on venturing into an unknown territory. Female 'anxiety of authorship' is not something which is handed from one female to another, but it is bestowed by the "... stern literary fathers of patriarchy to all their inferiorized female descendents, it is in many ways the germ of a disease...a distrust, that spreads like a strain throughout...much literature by women, especially...before the twentieth century." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:51)

Women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century faced 'anxiety of influence' too because, unlike their male counterparts, women did not have a female

literary tradition of the past to learn from and look forward to while attempting to write themselves. Gilbert and Gubar labelled this hostile male literary tradition, with which female authors struggled hard, as 'anxiety of authorship'. "In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, in particular, the act of writing in itself appeared to lend women a self assertiveness which seemed out of keeping with properly feminine aspirations....the ambivalence which many women writers felt towards the self-revelation and assertion necessary to writing fiction prompted a whole spectrum of defense strategies..." (Newton 1991:769) However, the women writers of the nineteenth century tackled the problem of being a female by publishing their works anonymously or under a male pseudonym, the primary aim being to have their works published and read seriously without any bias. But Jane Austen in this context turned out to be bold enough, for though she wrote anonymously, she had the guts to have her identity known, by publishing her first work *Sense and Sensibility* (SS) as 'By A Lady'. Also, in doing so she wished to reveal that the point of view on the Head/Heart question that she raised in *Sense and Sensibility* was essentially a female one. Jane Austen wished to show that sense or rationality was not essentially a male trait, totally devoid in women, and that women too were capable of cool judgment.

However, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte, unlike Jane Austen, hid their bothersome femaleness behind the mask of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell respectively. "For all these women, the cloak of maleness was obviously a practical – seeming refuge from those claustrophobic double binds of "femininity" which has given so much pain to writers like Bradstreet, Finch and Cavendish." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:65) By doing this, they did not wish to prove that they were as able as men but that, as writers, they were men themselves. This attempt at male disguise, gave the women writers a greater creative freedom in their writings and made them free from various constraints, which had till then

engulfed their literary foremothers. But this did not turn things as rosy as they seem, for in pretending to be another, women writers were faced with an identity crisis, which was very taxing. In the Biographical Notice written by Charlotte Bronte for the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* (WH), which appeared in 1850, she spoke of her, Emily and Anne's decision to publish their works under a male pseudonym and their reasons for doing so:

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery which is not true praise. (C. Bell Biographical Notice)

Despite the boldness, passion and spirit that came across in their works, the Brontes felt the pressure of being a female in a male literary domain. And though they were not able to revolt against the social set up in their very lives, they did so by their highly subversive works. "Subversive writing is itself an action upon one's readers and one's world.... To write subversively is more than a means of exercising influence. It is a form of struggle – and a form of power." (Newton 1991:777)

Thus, the age of Austen and Bronte saw the rapid growth of the female talent that was exceptional and was sure to have an effect on the upcoming female writing. The lady novelists of this period published anonymously, declared their dislike for public life and

ensured the world her lack of ability and talent. But despite their proclaimed dislike of 'masculine women', the fact that they went ahead and published their works, belied their words. Hence, it is for this reason alone that "...it will not do to approach the female authors of this period and divide them into genuine feminist versus the rest, for at this period to become an author was, in itself, a feminist act." (Kirkham 1983:33)

Jane Austen was aware of the fact that the past could only offer her an almost non-existent literary tradition. She was also aware of the true position of women in society and the tight spot they were allotted in patriarchy. But, "...she knows from the beginning of her career that there is no other place for her but a tight one, and her parodic strategy is itself testimony to her struggle with inadequate but inescapable structures." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:112)

Sentimental fiction prior to Jane Austen's which dealt with women as central characters, were basically morality dramas in which heroines reacted to unjust treatment, initially by stamping their feet and weeping rebellious tears; but later on they learnt to compromise and find happiness in submission to authority which, in whatsoever form, was essentially patriarchal. And in acting thus they were rewarded by the standards of our superficial society. According to Claudia Johnson, "...the wasting death of the heroine in sentimental novel, rather than being an act of resistance to authoritative rule, is an accession to it." (Preus 1996:83) The fading and eventual death of the heroine in the sentimental novels was not to be regarded or pitied by the society but it was considered as a fit and proper end to a female life that was tainted in any manner and the dying away of the heroine was a sort of duty she owed to the society and more so to herself. Austen was well aware of this trend and she as a woman refused to encourage and fuel such image of female life and character. Her heroines are shown to be of good health and high spirits and she defies sentimental fiction in refusing to show the wasting death of the ruined

woman. Jane Austen created heroines who were the complete opposite of these sentimental heroines. Her heroines resist the surrender of inner freedom. Their freedom is not for sale, irrespective of temptations. Austen's female characters were different from those before her due to "...heroines' right to find happiness because of the kind of people they are – because of their integrity towards themselves and others." (Hardy 1984:Introduction-xiv) Jane Austen's heroines are never static or inert. They are continuously thinking and exploring and, instead of being mute spectators, they are actively involved in tough situations and dilemmas; they do not expect somebody else to help them out or take decisions for them, instead they make their own decisions and shape their own lives. And all this while they remain true to their feelings and moral values, exhibiting grace under pressure. Jane Austen imbibes in her heroines great self-command and respect and value for the self.

All her novels are concerned with central female characters and depict the trials, tribulations and the problems faced by women at home and in society at large. Jane Austen basically writes of the upper middle class and aristocracy of the English countryside of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Although critics have found her limited sphere of writing as hampering for her creative intelligence, but to write well you have to know what you write and that is exactly what Jane Austen does. She never deals with those topics and emotions with which she is not comfortable. High emotions, fiery passions and unrestrained feelings were something which she does not identify with. Her heroines are generally rational and sensible creatures who never let their emotions get the better of them. Jane Austen is more concerned with the independence and moral equality of her heroines. She speaks of women's problems and social limitations faced by them in her novels, but her viewpoint is not cynical or one without hope. Jane Austen feels that co-operation and adaptability are necessary social

traits for women and there is nothing wrong about them as long as they do not involve compromise with their integrity and ethics. "Jane Austen's concern; her interests were more radical than the liberal imagination of our age is likely to conceive. She wished to discover where the unacknowledged energy of so many educated women, women like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, was finding expression. And she found it to be hidden in life itself." (Brown 1996:39)

The term feminism and feminist are contemporary, still literary critics notice feminist elements in the Austen novels. The essential claim of enlightened feminism of the eighteenth century was that since women have not been denied powers of reason, they should be accorded the moral status proper to rational beings. Jane Austen was also of the view that an improvement in the status of women could be brought about by increasing their powers of rational understanding and reflection and from this arose the demand for an adequate education for women. This claim that women should be taught to think may not seem particularly revolutionary right now, but then it opened the possibility of social change beyond contemplation. The feminist stress on education for women was a sort of rebellion against the patriarchal social system, especially at the core i.e. 'the family'. "In her attention to the anonymous sex, and in her articulation of the feminine ethos, Jane Austen was...revolutionary in her own way...." (Trivedi 1996:30).

In almost all her novels, Jane Austen basically spoke of love, marriage and money but in fact she concentrated more upon marriage and money; for in all reality, social set up of the age was such that a marriage was regarded crucial for it was the only accessible way through which a girl could seek an identity in her society. In Jane Austen's time, a girl's only vocation was marriage unless she happened to be some sort of a genius or fabulously rich and beautiful. The unblushing means and persuasions with which any rich girl was literally pursued, the desperate measures employed to get fortuneless daughters

married, these were the ideas of her times, which Jane Austen exposed and ridiculed in her novels. Marriage market as one would call it was, for women, all about keeping an eye on eligible males, delicate manoeuvrings and hints to acquaint themselves, defeating and outplaying their rivals, mobilizing parental approval on both sides and disguised attention and flirtation; and in doing all this without seeming to hardly do anything, they could finally extract a proposal of marriage for themselves, securing a settlement and security for life. Most importantly, in doing all this a woman had to maintain her self-respect, her moral dignity, her role as a daughter, sister, friend, and she had to accomplish her goals before her youth could fade. Jane Austen raised this issue in her novels with the intention of subverting it through her heroines, and exposing the reality behind the façade concerning women's position in society and all that she had to resort to in order to secure herself. Jane Austen spoke of money as a motivating factor in most marriages and exposed social reality in the matter of financial security, thus making a worthwhile feminist statement which was the result of her deep awareness and concern regarding the quality of a woman's life in marriage. The only choice allowed to the woman of the age was in making a marriage on which much of her future security and social stability was at stake. It was not always love but economics that motivated their choice.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the marriage of convenience culture, more orchestrated than desired, is evident in the interview between Elinor Dashwood and her step brother John Dashwood. John Dashwood on hearing that Colonel Brandon has an income of two thousand a year and on seeing his obvious deference for Elinor, prompts her to encourage and secure his affections, despite Elinor's claims that the Colonel has no romantic inclination towards her. "You are mistaken, Elinor; you are very much mistaken. A very little trouble on your side secures him. Perhaps just at present he may be undecided; the smallness of your fortune may make him hang back...But some of these little attentions

which ladies can so easily give will fix him in spite of himself." (SS 133) But, Elinor is not the sort of lady her brother thought ladies to be, she could never stoop so low to entice a man, leave alone for a marriage of status, she would not do so even for the marriage of love. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen has projected a contrast through Elinor and Marianne between sense and sensibility, and through Elinor's triumph in the decisions of life, she wished to show that women are no less capable of rational judgment than men.

Even in *Pride and Prejudice* (PP), Jane Austen has depicted that Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins is a socially motivated one on her part who, with no fortune in her name and no beauty to flaunt, feels marriage as an only way out through which she could gain independence and respectability. Charlotte was of the view that

> Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (PP 306)

However, Elizabeth is shocked and fails to agree with her friend Charlotte's decision. She feels that no amount of social status and security could compensate for the unhappiness that an attachment with a fool like Mr. Collins would bring in the life of Charlotte.

Despite her lack of fortune, Elizabeth refuses two offers of marriage, first one which would have seen her comfortably placed but which demands from her a life of compromise and suffocation with a vain and foolish person like Mr. Collins; second proposal is one of Mr. Darcy, which, though tempting and flattering, for he is of a rich and noble parentage, is unacceptable to Elizabeth, for she could not stand his conceit,

arrogance, pride and selfish disdain of feelings for others. Spirited and principled as she is, she could not compromise herself and her feelings for socially motivated factors of status and money. "Elizabeth rejects the cynical realpolitik of the marriage market as expounded and practiced by Charlotte Lucas." (Lodge 1996:68)

Elizabeth is guided by self-respect and she stresses her individuality as an autonomous being when she insists that she is not an 'elegant female' but a 'rational creature'; and in her physical activities she defies the code that values frailty and debility in women. More so, Elizabeth is a straightforward person who has no place for duplicity or artifice in her life. She speaks her mind clearly and intelligently and does not resort to socially motivated feminine artifice to have her way, or to get her wishes fulfilled. When Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins' proposal, he takes her refusal as customary and says, "...perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and with the true delicacy of female character." (PP 297) Elizabeth feels highly incensed at this pre-conceived notion of female character and retorts: "I do assure you, sir, that I have no pretensions whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being sincere...Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from the heart." (PP 297)

The brilliance and sparkle of *Pride and Prejudice* is largely due to its indomitable and inimitable heroine Elizabeth Bennet, whose combined archness of manner and intelligence captivates everyone. She is a highly spirited and open-minded heroine, defying accepted authority and showing her contempt for set decorums. She believes in analysing customs and beliefs with an intelligent and critical mind, instead of accepting them blindly and much to the chagrin of the people of the age, she is supported and

encouraged by her father in doing so. Austen endows the socio-economically inferior, Elizabeth Bennet, with a conversational gift equal to, if not superior to, that of rich and classy Mr. Darcy, allowing her to create a subversive atmosphere due to her intellect that questions not only the hierarchical class structure but also the supposed superiority of men over women. And it is Elizabeth's intelligence and discernment, evident in her conversations, that play a major role in influencing Darcy to propose to her. Jane Austen believes and projects an "...image of a fully individualized woman who is physically and mentally unrestricted, more mobile, more aware, more herself than the fainting creature in need to male protection and totally without a mind, an image that the conduct books and popular fiction had combined to idealise." (Mukherjee 1996:55-56)

Money, not love, is the motivating factor in most marriages of the age, but none of the Austen heroines marry for money or position alone, not even the socially suppressed heroine of *Mansfield Park* (MP), Fanny Price. Even when she has no hope of her affections being returned by Edmund, whom she loves, she refuses to marry Crawford, despite the fact that marriage to him would raise her socially and economically. Fanny's fragility of body, combined with her apparent innocence and religiosity, as well as her angelic demeanour, make her sexually exciting for men like Crawford who view themselves as God created protector of weak women and who wish to find in their wives such vulnerable virtue as will excite both sexual passion and manly protectiveness in them. Fanny's devoted service to her stupid aunt and her religious nature is mistaken by Crawford for unthinking docility, but what he fails to realize is that Fanny's powers of mind fit her to be an equal friend of her marriage partner. Crawford completely misinterprets her, for his idea of a woman does not include recognition of adult human qualities. Hence, Henry Crawford is surprised at Fanny's defiance in refusing his marriage proposal. Fanny, who is the only one aware of Crawford's corrupted nature,

stands up for herself against everybody's wishes and also because she would never marry a man she could not love or respect. On refusal of his proposal of marriage, Crawford wonders whether Fanny does not show " ...that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern times, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence." (MP 662) His remark is significant in terms of general opinion that prevailed among men with respect to women. Thus Fanny in whom 'the sparkle of confident intelligence never shines is forced' to stand up for those rights which her moral nature has put upon her.

All of Austen's novels are reflective of the "...female powerlessness that underlies monetary pressure to marry, the injustice of inheritance laws, the ignorance of women denied formal education, the psychological vulnerability of heiress or widow, the exploited dependency of spinster, the boredom of the lady provided with no vocation." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:136). In *Emma* (E), Emma's brilliance of judgment and assertiveness which were admired and highlighted at first, are finally criticized, since they prove to be self-deceiving for her. Emma furthermore suffers for her assertiveness and her misjudgements for she is a woman and any sort of power-play is not expected of her. Right or wrong, any sort of assertiveness be it in her judgment or in her decisions, is not asked or granted to her as a woman. Like her "Austen's heroines are made to view their adolescent eroticism, their imaginative and physical activity, as an outgrown vitality incompatible with womanly restraint and survival." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:161) However, Emma is any thing but docile and submissive. She is a sort of person who, if she feels strongly about something, goes ahead and shows it irrespective of whether her actions are womanly or not. She is highly imaginative and forthright in her favourite pastime of planning other people's love-lives. According to Gilbert and Gubar, "Assertion, imagination and wit are tempting forms of self-definition which encourage

each of her lively heroines to think that she can master or has mastered the world, but this is proven a dangerous illusion for women who must accept the fate of being mastered, and so the heroine learns the benefit of modesty, reticence and patience." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:162) This view is reflective of the fate of such lively heroines like Marianne and Emma, who somewhere along the way are forced to change or subdue their liveliness of mind and character and learn to adopt qualities of patience and restraint, since it is womanly to do so.

Jane Austen's next novel, *Northanger Abbey* (NA) is the most political of her works. The novel mocks and refutes patriarchal politics of her age. Jane Austen reinvents the gothic of her predecessors "...not because she disagrees with her sister novelists about the confinement of women, but because she believes that women have been imprisoned more effectively by miseducation than by walls and more by financial dependency, which is the authentic ancestral curse, than by any verbal oath or warning." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:135) She was well aware of the problem of women's education in her time. In *Northanger Abbey* she vents out her anger at the 'culturally conditioned ignorance' and sarcastically comments: "To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman, especially, if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can." (NA 1124).

In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen criticizes all those who look down upon novel as a degrading piece of literature. She says, "...I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel writers, of degrading, by their contemptuous censure, the very performances the number to which they are themselves adding.... If the heroine of one novel be not patronised by the heroine of another, from whom can she accept protection and regard? ... Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body."

(NA 1078) Novel writing was largely taken up by women in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and aimed largely at women as readers; however, it was not given the due literary importance which it deserved, for novel was regarded as something which did not require much creative effort and a thinking mind. Austen raised the issue of the novel and defended it in *Northanger Abbey* for she felt that "The novel is a status deprived genre...because it is closely associated with a status deprived gender." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:131)

In *Persuasion* (P), for the first time, Jane Austen speaks of the emotional pain of a woman in love. Austen depicts the emotional trials and pain of the heroine, Anne Elliot, who suffers for eight long years for the lost love, love which she feels she has lost for ever, with none to care or understand as to how much she suffered in her isolation. Austen made Anne Elliot too good and too gentle a character whom no one would expect to enter a feministic debate, yet Anne reveals her strength of mind and feminist stand in her conversation with Captain Harville regarding constancy in love, wherein he argues of women's inconstancy and puts forth literary proof to justify his stand: "...all histories are against you – all stories, prose and verse ...I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side of the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy." (P 1353) But Anne refuses to go by what books have to say, for she feels that women are not only restrained from attempting the pen, but male writers draw such portraits of female characters which are not merely baseless and unjust, but also suited to men's images and interest. She proclaims: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything." (P 1353) No other Austen heroine talks of feminism so very plainly and so effectively. Anne's confidence in her own feelings and judgment, as well as her strength

of character and gentleness of manner, combined together, makes her a woman of substance.

In *Persuasion*, in the character of Mrs. Croft, Jane Austen sketches a very different image of a woman, a so-called 'unfeminine' woman. She is judged so because she is a sort of person who travels with her husband on board his ship, she has an excellent health and a reddened weather beaten complexion, nor does she care for lady-like lifestyles. And her energy and intelligence make nonsense of the limitations of the role to which women have been confined to by the society. Thus, Jane Austen has presented a woman who, in asserting her physical sturdiness, defies the social code of conduct that expects women to possess feminine qualities of frailty and dependence, while strength and power are considered as essentially male qualities. Also, she makes a very righteous feministic statement through Mrs. Croft, who while speaking to her brother Wentworth says, ' "I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentlemen, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be on smooth waters all our days." ' (P 1251) *Persuasion* is Jane Austen's novel with perhaps the most natural outlook and her last completed work.

The heroines created by Jane Austen were individuals in their own right, free and independent, but none of them were shown to deliberately defy society, in order to assert their freedom and individuality. Critics have either "...excluded Austen for what is perceived as her intellectual orthodoxy and conservative stance or have reinstituted her as a radical beneath the mask of superficial conservatism." (Bhatt 1996:95) But whatever be the general opinion, the fact remains that Jane Austen was indeed a radical woman writer of her age who spoke of women's problems and women's issues in a most truthful and realistic manner like none had done before her; and the fact that she spoke without being negative and cynical about the social system, speaks volumes of her positive outlook on life.

> Jane Austen's heroines are not self-conscious feminist yet they are all exemplary of the first claim of Enlightenment feminism: that women share the same moral nature as men, ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct. As Austen's understanding of the problems of presenting heroines fit to take the place of central moral intelligence increased, so did their moral stature. (Kirkham 1983: 84)

However, the heroines and their independent streak was so represented as to make it seem something natural and real, that it was perfectly normal for young women to have their independent views and ideas which were the result of observations and conclusions that they draw from life and which help them to learn and grow but it is merely an illusion that the author creates. "The illusion is both visionary and salutary, for it suggests how we might live, and criticizes actually the way we actually live, in a world where women, however, marked their abilities, are not thought of (except by a few mostly heroes) as equals and partners in life." (Kirkham 1983:84) Jane Austen was concerned with the problems of being a woman at the turn of the eighteenth century. She was aware of the snobbery and hypocrisy of the age which she playfully portrayed in her novels and saw them as serious issues without being cynical about them.

From Jane Austen to Bronte Sisters, "...the woman's novel had moved, despite its restrictions, in the direction of an all-inclusive female realism, a broad socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community." (Showalter 1999: 29) The Brontes who represent the 'Stormy Sisterhood' in English fiction, were no commonplace or ordinary writers. They were very original and innovative in their works. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne became great authors despite the fact that they led a strange life–outwardly void and inwardly rich. Their writings provided

them with a psychological release from their dreary lives. What sets their novels apart was the emotional intensity which arose due to particular concentration upon human passions in their novels. They were not interested in the portrayal of social life; instead they chose to study the feminine heart and presented the woman's point of view in their fiction. They depicted a new concept of the heroine as a woman of vital strength and passionate feeling. Brontes wrote obsessively about women's feelings of entrapment in feminine roles and in patriarchal homes, and also about their deep and secret desire to escape such roles and restraints.

Charlotte Bronte reveals to us the emotional mysteries of female life. Through her heroines she has projected the image of a woman's heart.

> Charlotte's women vibrate with passions that the fictional conventions only partly constrict or gloss over – in the centre an almost violent devotedness that has in it at once a fire of independence, a spiritual energy, a vivid sexual responsiveness, and along with this, self-righteousness, a sense of power, sometimes self-pity and envious competitiveness. To an extent the heroines are 'unheroined', unsweetened. Into them there has come a new sense of the dark side of feeling and personality... (Heilman 1968:32)

In *The Professor* (TP), Charlotte Bronte has made use of a male narrator to unfold her story, for initially in her very first novel she wishes to prove that female writers are very much capable of an objective approach and that their vision is not always clouded by a subjective point of view. The novel traces the story of a young, orphan and destitute girl Frances Henri, who struggles to earn her living as a lace mender in a ladies pensionnat, through the sympathetic eyes of a male professor. "Frances is an impoverished orphan... an idealist in a materialistic society, and finally a self-established success." (Gilbert &

Gubar 2000:325) She is intellectual, idealistic, honest and straightforward and, despite her lack of proper education, her talent, hard work and perseverance to acquire knowledge enable her to make a quick progress. Frances, though shy, quiet and unassuming, is not dumb; she is intelligent enough to recognize and be aware of her own capabilities. When Crimsworth appreciates her compositions in the class and tells her that she has a talent for it and hence she should nurture it, she is not surprised or obliged but feels happy and merely smiles, as if saying, "I am glad you have been forced to discover so much of my nature...[but] Do you think I am a stranger to myself? What you tell me in terms so qualified, I have known fully from a child." (TP 107).Frances Henri's guarded pride can be read, and is evident, in the entire soliloquy. She is well aware of what she is capable of.

Frances is different from other women because an ambition to make something of her life fosters within her. When Crimsworth asks her to be his wife, she is very clear over one point that she wishes to earn her own living even after marriage. She says,

" ' I should like, of course, to retain my employment of teaching'" to which he replies,

" ' You are laying plans to be independent of me.' "

" ' Yes monsieur; I must be no encumberance to you – no burden in any way.' " (TP 178)

Frances insists on continuing with her teaching profession, for she does not find it necessary that a woman should give up her independence or ambition just because she is married and has a husband to look after her. She is comfortable with looking after her own life.

The Victorian period saw the early emerging idea of feminism that men and women were equal. This simple 'proto-feminism' came about slowly and mostly through subversive literature of the age. *Jane Eyre* (JE), is undoubtedly Charlotte's greatest work and is considered to be the first major feminist text, which created quite a flutter in the

social and literary circles of the age. The novel was not so much about political, legal or educational equality, as much as it was a cry for the recognition of woman's emotional nature, of her feelings, passions, expectations and the sort of life and love that she desired for herself. Bronte wished to declare that the same heart and same spirit animates both men and women; women need not merely be trapped in household affairs, for the very passion and cravings that men embody, are also to be found in women, though they were never allowed to reveal them. Charlotte Bronte spoke in her novels of the problems faced by professional women in settling into society because of her gender and also due to the bleak career prospects for them. A single woman with no fortune and no family to back her, did not have many opportunities to earn a living other than being a governess and a writer if she had the genius to be so. In the 'Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism', Marianne Adam states that

> "Rereading Jane Eyre, I am led inevitably to feminist issues, by which I mean the status and economics of female dependence in marriage, the limited options available to Jane as an outlet for her education and energies, her need to love and be loved, to be of service and to be needed. These aspirations, the ambivalence expressed by the narrator towards them, and the conflicts among them, are all issues raised by the novel itself." (Culler 1991:510)

A novel based on the mores and customs of the Victorian society would appear to hold no interest today, but *Jane Eyre* still retains the same force and power in the post-modern world as when it was written, for the women's issues, which the novel raised, were universal and are alive and burning even in today's context. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte gave us an insight into the female psyche, an insight into the female heart. According to Gilbert and Gubar, it was not the

> ...coarseness and sexuality of Jane Eyre which shocked Victorian reviewers... but, ...its anti-Christian refusal to accept the forms, customs and standards of society – in sort, its rebellious feminism. They were disturbed not so much by the proud Byronic sexual energy of Rochester as by the Byronic pride and passion of Jane herself, not so much by asocial sexual vibrations between hero and the heroine as by the heroine's refusal to submit to her social destiny. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:338)

Society cannot forgive her the sin of pride and wilful existence. As a woman she is not to demand freedom but should be willing to submit to the demands of society. Society could not accept the fact that Jane is strong enough to revolt against the entrenched conventions. Jane Eyre's refusal to submit to the unreasonable demands of patriarch's like Rochester and St. John is not acknowledged as her right but as her revolt. At the altar, when Jane discovers the presence of Rochester's mad wife Bertha, she feels both shocked and betrayed and refuses to go ahead with the illegal marriage. Rochester reasons and pleads with Jane to soothe him, save him and stay at Thornfield Hall as his mistress, for there is none to care for her, nor is anybody there to be injured by her being his mistress for she is an orphan. Any other woman in Jane's place would have consented but she refuses to sacrifice her womanly honour, integrity and independence for lust, pleasure, and financial security. Her emphatic and indomitable reply to all his entreaties is: "I care for myself, the more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself." (JE 280) Jane feels that more than anyone else she is answerable to her own self, she needs to be true to her conscience and whatever the temptations be, they all fade before this fact. Charlotte's portrayal of Jane is totally revolutionary for the age. Jane is not a regular heroine with regular characteristics and feelings; instead she is so depicted as to evoke totally new feelings.

Passion occupies a prominent position in the works of Charlotte Bronte. According to Margaret Oliphant, "...the only true love worth having was that reverent, knightly, chivalrous true-love which consecrated all womankind, and served one with fervour and enthusiasm. Such was our ideal, and such our system, in the old halcyon days of novel-writing." (Oliphant 1974:311) But, the passionate, tempestuous and the wild romance of *Jane Eyre* changed the entire definition of love, especially so far as it concerned a woman and her say in it. Jane is wild and passionate in her love for Rochester. She is jealous and possessive of him, challenging him to match the strength of her feelings for him in order to find out what he really feels towards her, at the same time having the courage and spirit to withstand his unreasonable demand, and refusing to be sentimental in the name of love. The character of Jane so conceived shocked many who could not conceive of a woman as an initiator in love or as one who could match Rochester's passion and wildness, for a woman is always thought as meek and submissive, and not fiery and wild.

> Nobody perceived that it was the new generation nailing its colour to its mast. No one would understand that this furious love-making was but a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Woman' in a new aspect. The old-fashioned deference and respect – the old-fashioned wooing – what were they but so many proofs of the inferior position of the woman, to whom the man condescended with the gracious courtliness of his loftier elevation! The honours paid to her in society – the pretty fictions of politeness, they were all degrading tokens of her subjection...The man who presumed to treat her with reverence was one, who insulted her pretensions; while the lover who struggled with her, as he would have struggled with another man,...,was the only one who truly recognized her claims of equality... (Oliphant 1974:312)

A woman in her heart of hearts wishes to be and is someone other than she is forced by the society and rigid traditions to pretend to be. She is not always angelic and coy in love as she is made out to be, and also expected to be. Thus in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte has projected a strong and passionate heroine who is very forthright about her feelings and emotions.

Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* (S) deals with the pain of female confinement, of lonely emotional struggle with a historical backdrop of industrial revolution. It is the anatomy of female heart. The novel boasts of the truthful delineation of its two female characters – Caroline and Shirley. In *Shirley*, "...the cause of women is defended throughout the book with a conviction and a skill perfectly characteristic of those who are pleading their own cause. As a picture of society, the novel could have been called *Shirley*, or the condition of women in the English middle-class..." (Forcade 1974:143)

In *Shirley*, Charlotte depicts the character of angelic Mary Cave, who dejected and frustrated, loses herself to death due to a loveless and non-fulfilling marriage with a clergyman, who grows tired of her within a year or two of marriage. Bronte wishes to project her as an "...an emblem, a warning that the fate of women inhabiting a male controlled society involves suicidal self-renunciation." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:376) Caroline who stays with her uncle Mr. Helstone, is haunted by the memory of her dead aunt Mary Cave. She is also unable to find a friend in her uncle, who, though kind to her, dislikes female company of any sort unless the ladies are silly and vain enough to amuse and humour him. Separated from her mother, Caroline feels lonely and vulnerable having nothing worthwhile to do in life and no vocation to look forward to even in future. She silently loves her cousin Robert Moore, who is too immersed in his work and ambition to pay any sort of encouraging attention to her. Moreover, Caroline realizes that Robert would never consider matrimony with her since she has no fortune in her name. Caroline

Helstone's problems and frustrations are indicative that women's trials are largely due to their dependent status in society. She lacks the power and assertion, as well as an absence of vocation to shape her life the way she likes. However, she soon finds a friend and companion in Shirley Keeldar, who is complete opposite of her own personality. Shirley Keeldar is a young heiress with very independent notions and a style of thinking and acting which could be characterized as masculine. "She is like no other heroine of romance ever drawn. Wilful, obstinate, proud, pettish, provoking, she has a soul capable of purest and deepest passion, and all her singularities of manner and expression only serve to set off her genius." (Allott 1974:139) She has a large house and a business to look after and she performs all these duties with ease and alacrity, enjoying very much her station in life. Beneath her soft exterior, Shirley possesses most of the qualities of the sterner sex and asserts intellectual independence as woman's right. Shirley's interests are more male than female. She " '...sees a newspaper everyday, and two of a Sunday; she reads the leading article and the foreign intelligence, and looks over the market prices; in short, she reads just what gentlemen read; she hates needlework, but is tenacious of her book...' " (Allott 1974:150) Thus Shirley has most unladylike tastes and, as a woman, she is all fire and animation. Her financial independence, in a way, frees her from those constraints which plagued the life of Caroline Helstone. But, though Caroline and Shirley are two contrasting individuals, they are similar in a way, for they both suffer from unease and dissatisfaction in love.

Despite Shirley's independence and freedom, her fate is not very different from Caroline's. Due to her being a woman, she is kept out of male society in making important decisions like the one concerning the attack on the mill of which she herself is the owner. Both Caroline and Shirley are confined because of their gender and despite their knowledge of it, they have to stay away and watch the conflict between mill-owners

and workers from a distance and later on feign ignorance of their presence during the eventful night. The next day on discussing the adventure with Caroline, Shirley reflects over the situation and speaks out the prejudice with which women are treated by men when a grave crisis has to be dealt with. She says to Caroline, " '...this is the way men deal with women – still concealing change from them – thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were tonight... Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake.' "(S 263)

She states further that men never judge women in true light, as they really are, because, for them, women are either angles of submission or monsters of assertion and aggression: "The cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend." (S 264) Such false creations and impressions pertaining to a woman's image are largely due to male-authored text aimed at trapping them into submission and suppression.

In the 'Biographical Notice' written by Charlotte Bronte for the second edition of Wuthering *Heights* which appeared in 1850, she says of Emily and Anne that "Neither Emily nor Anne was learned; they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the wellspring of other minds; they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores of observation as their limited experience had enabled them to amass." (C. Bell Biographical Notice) *Wuthering Heights*, is Emily Bronte's only novel, an impassioned, spellbinding tale considered to be one of the greatest literary works of all time. It is an intense examination of the human spirit. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily has given a work of mature and astonishing magnitude. It focuses not on society, but on the minds, hearts, and souls of its characters.

In the novel, Emily conceives the Catherine – Heathcliff relationship as such, that it is always Catherine who has a final say in everything which concerns and affects them both. Fanny Ratchford analyses the relationship as one where " "It was as if Emily was saying to Charlotte, 'You think the man is the dominant factor in romantic love, I'll show you it is the woman.' " " (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:256) Catherine Earnshaw has nothing feminine about her. Even as a child she is headstrong, vibrant and passionate. Imbibed with wild instincts, Catherine Earnshaw has a 'half savage and hardy and free' girlhood, which finds a soulful companion in the youth of Heathcliff. As a young girl, Catherine strikes a strong and strange rapport with the orphan Heathcliff, but their attachment is not a usual boy-girl relationship, instead it is something beyond earthly, more like a compatible existence of similar spirits. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily speaks of how a woman is deliberately deprived of what a man has for his birthright i.e. autonomy, freedom and a power to control and be answerable to one's own life. Once on being asked by her father, Catherine wishes for a gift of whip and though this wish appears a bit strange for a girl, Gilbert and Gubar have interpreted "Catherine's longing for a whip...like a powerless younger daughter's yearning for power." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:264) Catherine desires for a whip because, for her, it signifies male power and in a way her desire is satisfied through the control that she possesses over Heathcliff's person, which helps her transcend her own feminine constraints and gives her a fullness of being. In Heathcliff, Catherine finds an outlet for her unfeminine desires of power and control. It is like Heathcliff's body is his own but his will works on her command "As Catherine's whip he is....an alternative self or double for her, a complementary addition to her being who flashes out all her lacks the way a bandage might staunch a wound." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:265)

Catherine, as the lady of Wuthering Heights, needs to comply with the expectation

of lady-like self-denial and this factor plays a great role in her agreeing to marry Edgar Linton. Under the influence of Lintons and her brother, Catherine is forced to exert control over herself, check her impulses and govern her desires and feelings with reason. She herself realizes that as a lady, she needs to marry a man whose station in life complements her own and, in a way, she becomes happy to marry the culture and social dignity of Edgar Linton. But, in doing so, she traps herself in a marriage that forces her to be someone, she is not. She adopts a calm and genteel lifestyle but her spirit remains as wild and free as ever. Moreover, her marriage with Edgar detaches her from Heathcliff and she finds it hard to survive without her own true self. Heathcliff is "...her rebellious alter ego, her whip, her id..." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:275) Catherine's inner, elemental source of strength is Heathcliff. In identifying with Heathcliff, she feels strong and powerful, like she herself insists, "I am Heathcliff." (WH 59) In his presence and through him she feels tough and masculine, ready to face all odds; but no sooner is she separated from him, she looses the will and the fortitude to bear pain and adversity. Frustrated and constrained thus, unable to control situations and have her own way, her temper goes volatile and she is lost of all self-possession and sense in life. Heathcliff acts as an outlet for all she wants to be but is constrained by her gender and its demands, and in not having him, her self is senseless and fragmentary. According to J.Hillis Miller, for Cathy, "Heathcliff is at once within her and beyond her. He is a part of her that exists outside herself, and that part is her true self, her essence, more herself than she is." (Miller 1968:103) Even when Catherine is about to die she does not care whether her death will make Heathcliff unhappy or not. She fears lest it breaks the bond between them. Strangely, if inconsolable anguish will keep him faithful to her, she is glad of it.

Thus in refusing to forsake her relationship with Heathcliff in life as well as in her death, defying all social meanings and conventions, Catherine stands out as an

unparalleled early prototype of feminism, based not on the rhetoric of politics but on the call of intense, individual passion.

A number of critics have recognized *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (TOWH), as a landmark feminist text, but it has long been compared unfavourably with the works of Anne's more celebrated sisters, Charlotte and Emily. The novel, though conservative in its belief and support of Christian values, is in reality a journey of a woman's liberation. It is the story of a woman's will to escape from her fallen husband's prison house and her subsequent efforts to gain economic independence by taking up her hobby of painting as a career. The protagonist of the novel, Helen Graham, shows great courage when she manages to escape and save herself and her young son from the deteriorating atmosphere and values of her husband's house.

Arlene.M.Jackson understands the novel's uniqueness in the way it asks bold questions about the power structures that define sexual relationships during the Victorian period:

> Anne Bronte also answers a question that other novels of her time do not ask: what happens to a marriage and to the innocent partner when one partner (specifically, the male) leads a solipsistic life, where personal pleasures are seen as deserved, where maleness and the role of wife is linked to providing service and pleasure not necessarily sexual, but including daily praise and ego-boosting and, quite simply, constant attention. (Jackson 1982:203)

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall in its brutal realism exposes the Victorian myths concerning gender roles through the humiliating and suffocating marriage of its protagonist Helen Graham, who though a strong-minded and self-respecting woman, suffers much for her only fault of judgment in marrying a sensual brute, Huntingdon.

Many critics have censured Anne Bronte for the coarseness of the language and

subject of the novel, which concentrated on drunkenness and infidelity and though a strong and powerful book, it was thought unfit for girls to read and still more inappropriate for a woman to write it. Hurt by the criticisms against her novel, Anne Bronte wrote in her famous Preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,

> '...when we have to do with vice and vicious characters, I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear.' She ended her Preface: 'All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming in a man.' These sentiments, now integral to the mores of the late twentieth century, were a significant statement in the evolution of modern fiction and an early manifesto for female emancipation and ensure 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' its legitimate place as a classic work of English Literature. (TOWH Introduction)

Thus in sketching the character of Helen Graham, Anne Bronte depicted the dilemmas, vulnerability and courage of a woman in a degrading marriage and had projected through her a female desire for escape and freedom from the constraints and demands of a socially approved prison-house of unfulfilled and destructive bond. In the nineteenth century almost all women were in some manner imprisoned in their own homes, be that of their father or husband, and this was reflective in women's writing of the age.

Thus, as against the apparently sane novels of Jane Austen we have the extremely rebellious stories of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte. The genuine women based issues raised by these writers of the nineteenth century, later on took the shape of cult in the hands of feminist writers of today. Each of the novels of Jane Austen and Bronte sisters, "...is the story of quest, the story of entry into the world, of education and of growth,

including growth in power..." (Newton 1991:769) Thus the works of nineteenth century women writers reveal a growth in consciousness which, though in its embryonic stage and still linked to the 'dominant ideology' of the time is, nonetheless, contradictory to the then prevailing values and hence socially and materially important to and supportive of women's rights. It is largely the ways shown by Austen and Bronte Sisters that are intensified and extended by the later generation of feminist writers

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Chapter – 2

Life and Time of Jane Austen

> It would be difficult to name a writer of similar eminence who possessed so little knowledge of literature and history, whose experience of life was so narrowly and contentedly confined, whose interests were at once so acute and so small, whose ideals were so irredeemably humdrum...her experiences, her interests, her morality, her education were precisely those of any other woman of her time and place. (Singh 1981:9)

Every literary artist, be it a man or a woman, is basically the product of the age in which he or she grows up and Jane Austen is no exception. Yet what is exceptional in her case is to weave classic after classic despite her narrow world and experience. Her works are reflective of her times, the age and culture, norms and traditions that shaped, moulded, influenced and impressed her psyche.

Jane Austen has always been acknowledged as one of the greatest women novelists of all times. Very few women writers have had the satisfaction of occupying so honoured and distinct a position in literary history and still fewer have inspired and called for such varied opinions as to what they really were all about. "...Austen has appeared to us in a number of contradictory guises – as a cameoist oblivious to her times, or a stern propagandist on behalf of a beleaguered ruling class; as a self-effacing good aunt, or a nasty old maid; as a subtly discriminating stylist or a homely songbird, unconscious of her art." (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xiv)

Such fluctuating opinions concerning Austen were a bit more than what were generally attributed to other authors. Such an attitude largely spoke of a fundamental and saturated indecision regarding Austen's importance as an artist, an indecision, which

according to Claudia L. Johnson could largely be attributed to her being of the other sex. The assessment criteria for Austen's artistic endeavours were markedly and qualitatively different from the ones employed in judging the works of her male counterparts, all because she was a lady novelist. According to Claudia L. Johnson, "...I consider Austen's sex to be a crucially significant factor, not only in the formation of her social opinions, but also in the development of aesthetic strategies for writing about them. This is only fitting since the idea that great literature is genderless was entirely alien to Austen's generation..." (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xxiii) Austen's greatness lies in the fact that she faced, withstood, and overcame such like prejudices and attitudes and to manoeuvre and handle such talk that was aimed by her to expose the position of women in her age, she did it with a maturity and finesse that seem to belittle the hurdles and social pressures. If one is sensitive and conscious enough to notice the problems that the women faced, who lived and wrote in the male dominated social and literary culture of Austen's age, one may be able to assess in proper degree the importance of her works and the odds against which they came into being

"While men were constantly being conditioned by history, influenced and modified by the new ideas of individualism and empirical pragmatism that led to the ideal of self made man and to the spread of the empire, women were confined within strict limits, seen as subject to timeless values. Into this society Jane Austen was born in 1775..." (Mukherjee 1991:4) to Rev. George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen in Hampshire village of Stevenson, England. Her father was a parish clergyman and she was the seventh child in a family of eight children. She never married and her life was quiet, retired and apparently uneventful and it ended in 1817. Her literary career spanned from 1786 and 1817 and though Austen is often thought in context of the Victorian novelists and viewed as one among them in the sense that she was thought of as belonging to and

concerned only with the early nineteenth century England, one had to keep in mind that her novels were influenced by the eighteenth century, its culture and technique.

> Writing in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Jane Austen appears historically, both in her social attitudes and formally in her art, as a kind of connecting link or hinge. Her attitude to society was still an eighteenth cantury one: she assumed permanence in its order and in the values of that order. But in her attitude to the individual she looks forward to the later nineteenth century: not only is the individually ensconced within a distinctive social setting, but he or she is faced with decision that are primarily personal, although they have an unavoidable social bearing. (Gillie 1974:153)

In her novels the society and the individual were equally important and they were explored together. She carried out the psychological exploration of the individual along with the social analysis. Her novels reflected the society of her time, the social scenario, social norms, social groups, and social roles and, most importantly, they depicted the influence of the eighteenth century age of order and reason.

Jane Austen lived in an age that was witness to a number of historically significant events, what with the entire Europe reeling under the effects of French Revolution which led not merely to a socio-political revolutionary switchover, but also caused an upheaval in the ideas and values of life. It was also a significant literary era when 'Age of Reason' gave way to the 'Age of Romanticism' and the romantic spirit was all pervasive in the literature of the age. But, "...Jane Austen's novels are altogether devoid of any reference to the significant changes that were taking place on the different planes of life. The theme that she chooses for her novels had no apparent relevance to the political, spiritual and literary climate of her age. Isolating herself completely from matters that engrossed

people's attention, she was content to portray humdrum life..." (Singh 1981:Preface-vii) Critics have tried to analyse this aspect of her writing which depicted an avoidance of the seminal events of her age by attributing it to the constraints and restraints which were placed on women in the eighteenth century and so also on Austen, that forced them to have a restrictive vision of life and limited knowledge so far as it concerned the affairs and workings of the world at large. Jane Austen was more at ease in handling and writing of the sort of life and sphere of which she had a better knowledge i.e. the domestic affairs. She was concerned with the normalcy of daily life. Her novels were novels of social manners and she concentrated on average men and women as they really were, their concerns and preoccupations and their manners and modes of living; anything fantastic or adventurous did not fascinate her at all. She explored and revealed the deep and hidden meaning in the trivialities of everyday life. "The narrowness and limitation in the novels have attracted a great deal of critical discussion. It seems to be the result of Jane Austen's conscious decision to limit herself to what she intimately knew, and not the result of any abnormally narrow understanding or lack of interest in the outside world." (Marsh 1998:224)

Jane Austen confined herself to writing about landed gentry of English countryside. The gentry were a class

> ...whose upper reaches joined the aristocracy and whose lower ones were among the attorneys, apothecaries and surgeons of the country towns. It was an exceptionally vigorous class, at the height of its vitality if not yet of its influence in George Austen's lifetime. The characteristic vice of its members might be snobbery, since they had the best opportunities of social advancement, their corresponding virtue was a combination of practical force with cultured refinement, an awareness of commonplace tasks of

> daily living and of the hardships of the poor, as well as sensitiveness to the life of the mind. This was the class which was the subject of Jane Austen's novels. (Gillie 1974:9)

Moreover, she projected a harmonious existence of the various classes of her age comprising of aristocrats, landed gentry, traders and farmers. There was a respectable portrayal of every class without an attempt to force social equality. Every class had its proper place in the social set-up with no feelings of ill-will, discontent or conflict between the varied classes. Jane Austen did not give a call for a classless society.

Jane Austen was the first major woman novelist in English. She was a successful and notable writer despite the fact that she was indeed restricted and cramped by the limitations imposed upon a female during her time. Austen was different from the other more obvious 'political' women novelist of her age in that

> ...she routinely employs a lexicon of politically sensitive terms, themes and narrative patterns that she inherited from their fiction, and...often discusses politics all the time without making announcements about it beforehand. By opting in this manner to retain the same preoccupations as her more conspicuously political contemporaries, without however alluding as they did to the topical considerations which had originally animated them, Austen was able not to depoliticize her work – for the political implications of her work is implicit in the subject matter itself – but rather to depolimicize it. (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xxv)

It was through the means of disguise that she could speak more freely. In being non controversial and covert about what she said or rather how she said it, she was not being evasive, ignorant or rather plain feminine instead she was very much aware of the women concerned problems and issues of the day. But, she wrote with an attitude sensible enough

to realize the intricacies of the social system, which prevented her from wishing for and voicing a sudden revolutionary or radical solution to the social problems of her day. According to Claudia L. Johnson "Austen's silence is an enabling rather than inhibiting strategy." (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xxv)

Lady Winchilsea, born in 1661 and noble both by parentage and marriage, revealed her sense of indignation towards the real status and condition of women in her age through her poetry:

> "How are we fallen! Fallen by mistaken rules,
> And Education more than Nature's fools;
> Debarred from all improvements of the mind,
> And to be dull, expected and designed;
> And if someone would soar above the rest,
> With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,
> So strong the opposing faction still appears
> The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears.

Men are the 'opposing faction';men are hated and feared, because they have the power to bar her way to what she wants to do-which is to write." (Woolf 1998:66) Literary conditions in Austen's age were not at all conducive for women to write, since it was a common notion that no woman of sense and modesty could write books. Women who dared into the predominantly male arena of literature had to face various problems, reservations and prejudices for authoring the works. In her time "Proper women were modest, retiring, essentially domestic and private. Authorship of any kind entailed publicity thrusting oneself before the public eye – thus loss of femininity." (Fergus 1991:5).

The last quarter of the eighteenth century was a period, which witnessed an

unprecedented growth in the development of the English novel, both in terms of its popularity and also in the number of works published, especially by women. It was a period when novel as a literary genre hardly evoked any respectability. The moralist and literary authoritarians felt it as a threat to the young impressionable female minds, which comprised major part of the reading public. In 1804 when Matthew Gregory Lewis came to know that his mother intended to publish a novel, he was shocked and forbade her from doing so. He voiced his opinion that " 'I always consider a female as a sort of half-man.' " (Fergus 1991:5) To write was to loose one's respectability and to be alienated from one's own 'caste'. Since novels came to be attempted largely by women and aimed at women as readers, they came to be much decried and taken lightly and were hardly treated as respectable and worthwhile work of art. It is to counter this injustice meant more towards the woman as writer than the medium as such that Austen came out with a spirited defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey* (NA) known as 'Northanger Defence' and criticized all those who looked down upon the novel and its merits.

> Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the history of England, are of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope and Prior with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogised by a thousand pens, there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelists, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them. "I am no novel reader; I seldom look into novels; do not

> imagine that I often read novels; it is really very well for a novel." Such is a common cant. "And what are you reading Miss-?" "Oh! It is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down the book with affected indifference or momentary shame. "It is only Cecilia, or Camilla or Belinda"; or in short; only some work in which greatest powers of mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature; wit and humour, are conveyad to the world in the best chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name! Though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste. (NA 1078)

In her Defence, Austen demands respectability for novel as a genre. She was sarcastic towards those who read in private and disclaim doing so in public. Austen felt strongly against such women novelists who went about badmouthing their own art and made their heroines embarrassed and apologetic if caught with a novel. She was confident of her art and called for some dignity on the part of other women novelist who blindly agreed or submitted to the common notion that novel was a frivolous work of art. Austen came like a breath of fresh air with her unapologetic stand regarding the literary genre in which she wrote or for that matter the female content of her novels and how they were not meant to preach as such.

It was a period when the general opinion prevailed that leave alone writing, women were not even fit readers. Writers were urged to write the correct stuff and present only the good aspect of life and society for if both the good and bad factors were to be shown women would be misled towards wrong since they were not thought capable even

to judge as to what was right or wrong. In such an age, women-writers and their works were hardly looked upon with worth and respect. To read, write or think was not a woman's task. Her sphere of capabilities was well-marked out for her, like Anne Finch passionately states:

> They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;
> Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play
> Are the accomplishments we shou'd desire;
> To write, or read, or think, or to enquire
> Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,
> And interrupt the conquests of our prime;
> Whilst the dull manage, of a servile house.
> Is held by some, our utmost art and use. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:8)

In the age then women-writers, in order to have their works published and read seriously without any prejudice, chose to write anonymously or under a male pseudonym. Like many other women writers of her time, Austen too chose to publish anonymously because "Anonymity addressed a major problem: for a woman in this period, the fame of any kind of authorship could became infamy..." (Fergus 1991:5) But it was commendable on her part that she was bold enough to have her sex known. She published her first novel *Sense and Sensibility* (SS) under the title of 'By A Lady' thereby showing confidence in her own work and to have her views and sentiments voiced in novels, to be understood and taken as a woman's point of view.

Even the ladies of that time were supportive of the domestication of women as against their literary bent. Conservatives like Lady Louisa Stuart supported the late eighteenth-century prejudice that authorship vitiated female modesty and sacrificed gentility. But such attitudes could hardly prevent Austen and other women-writers from claiming their place in the sun.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a woman could be allowed the so thought immodesty and audacity to expose herself by publishing her work if she really was in a genuine need for money to look after her old parents, family or helpless children. Hence in order to have their works favourably reviewed by critics, women often mentioned in their prefaces some such excuses as a justification for writing, but despite all such counter measures critics always found some reason, to find fault in their works. For example here is a review for *The Trinket*, 'A Novel by a Lady in 1774': "As this novel is said to be written by a Lady, and really appears to come from a female hand, we are too polite to point our critical cannon against her. Could we believe it to be the composition of a man, we should not scruple to say that it contains a crude and indigested heap of characters, incidents and adventures, tossed and thrown together without much meaning, and less moral." (Fergus 1991:7) Such a review was both condescending as well as critical of the 'female hand'. Even if a woman overcame such prejudices she had to further deal with legal bindings, for in the early nineteenth century the law forbade married woman to have property in her name or to sign any sort of contracts. They could not enter legal contracts without the permission and approval of their husbands; they themselves did not have any right to property and could not indulge in any sort of monetary transactions. Even in the matters concerning children, everything was in the legal control of the husband.

Apart from such prejudices women, most importantly, were further kept from writing due to improper and insufficient education and also because domesticity and its daily chores hardly left them time for anything else.

> Women's lives usually made authorship difficult...most were debarred by lack of education from doing so. Women of the 'middling' classes-wives and daughters of artisans, tradesman, farmers and the like – were apt to

> find themselves engaged in sewing, cooking, shopkeeping, housekeeping and above all child raising, all the forms of women's work that have proved so tenacious over time and sometimes so hostile to writing. (Fergus 1991:8)

According to Virginia Woolf, "...a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." (Woolf 1998:13) Here, she discussed the importance and necessity of having a room of one's own, which was regarded by feminist as essential for the freedom and creative space for all women. But privacy and economic security was a matter of luxury for the middle-class woman of early nineteenth century. Women hardly had a room to themselves in those days. Jane Austen who stayed with her relatives after the death of her father, wrote in the common sitting-room or family parlor and she saw to it that the squeaky hinge on the room's swinging door should not be oiled so that the privacy of her work be ensured since such a door would give her a pre-warning and she could gather time to cover up her manuscripts as soon as she heard somebody walking in.

Hence to write in such an age, to overcome all obstacles and prejudices, was no mean feat and so too the importance of Jane Austen, as the first major woman novelist of the era. It was a time when women could hardly be acknowledged a genius even if she showed the makings of one, and any sort of attention was paid grudgingly. Henry Austen wrote in his 'Memoir' for the 1833 edition of her novels: "When 'Pride and Prejudice' made its appearance, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments, advised a friend of the authoress to read it, adding with more point than gallantry, 'I should like to know who is the author, for it is much too clever to have been written by a woman.' " (Fergus 1991:26-27)

There was one another significant factor for the absence of an original female literary tradition prior to Jane Austen and for the failure that women-writers often faced in

their writings. Whenever women wrote, it was either by "...way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation, she was admitting that she was 'only a woman' or protesting that she was 'as good as a man'. She met that criticism as her temperament dictated, with docility and diffidence, or with anger and emphasis. It does not matter which it was; she was thinking of something other than the thing itself...She had altered her values in deference to the opinion of others." (Woolf 1998:80) As a result of such an attitude and approach towards writing they could hardly create a niche for themselves, nor could they come up with originality and difference in their writings, which would make their works stand apart. But in this respect, Jane Austen was an exception. She "...wrote as women write, not as men write...entirely ignored the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue – write this, think that...deaf to that persistent voice which cannot let women alone, but must be at them, like too conscientious governess, adjuring them..." (Woolf 1998:81)

At the turn of the nineteenth century though women could well publish their works, to earn a sufficient living out of writing was very difficult and hardly possible. Although writing still did not provide women with a stable and sufficient source of income, yet

> Hundreds of women began as eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded...the extreme activity of mind which showed itself in the later eighteenth century among women – the talking and the meeting, the writing of essays on Shakespeare, the translating of the classics – was founded on the solid fact that women could make money by writing. Thus towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about...the middle-class woman began to write. (Woolf 1998:71-72)

All these women entering into the literary arena took to novel writing in a big way. Virginia Woolf analysed this common penchant for writing novels as whether it was due to their all belonging to the middle-class. In the early nineteenth century middle-class families afforded a single sitting room common to all, and if a woman had to write she had to do so in that very sitting room with no privacy of her own and frequent interruptions and under such circumstances "Still it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play. Less concentration is required." (Woolf 1998:73) Jane Austen continued to write so and under such conditions throughout her life. In writing like she did in the common parlour, she was often interrupted in her work but she took care to hide her manuscripts whenever some acquaintance or a servant walked in, in order to avoid her interest for writing from being known beyond her own family circle.

> Then again all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion. Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting room. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore when the middle-class woman took to writing, she naturally wrote novels... (Woolf 1998:73-74)

Women's education was hardly a matter of thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The need was never felt to inform their minds or to improve their manners and capabilities through education. In a way by keeping women uneducated, men could very well keep them subordinate and submissive by pointing out to all their follies and lack of abilities, largely a result of the lack of proper education. Women were thought of as inane and their minds capable only of fashion, music, singing, dancing,

cards and social entertainment; in short they were thought fit only to absorb, understand and reflect the superficial aspects of life. A topic of much discussion and concentration in the eighteenth century issue of woman's education was as to what exactly was proper for women to read. Recommended reading was one which prevented women from being 'scholastic ladies or female dialecticians' and which would ensure them from turning into writers.

> Novel-reading was strictly forbidden for presenting precisely this danger. Since the novel lacked an established tradition as a literary genre, and could be written without the advantage of classical learning or intellectual rigour, it was considered to be an easy form of writing at which anyone could have a go...women readers of fiction were indeed tempted to try their hands at this malleable new kind of writing. But the image of a woman writer challenged the traditional feminine ideal of passivity. (Mukherjee 1991:20)

It was a general notion, that even if women were educated, they would hardly engage themselves in anything worthwhile or fruitful than reading novels, which then were thought of as corrupting their moral values and degrading their very thoughts. In *Pride and Prejudice* (PP), when Mr. Collins was asked to read to the young ladies, he "...readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library) he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels...Other, books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce's sermons." (PP 272) And when Lydia, unable to show interest in the reading of the book, rudely interrupted with some local news of her own, he was highly offended and remarked, "I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit, it amazes

me, I confess; for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin." ' (PP 272) The sermons were first published in 1766 and their popularity sustained throughout the remaining century, enjoying the peak period between 1790 and 1810. According to Claudia L. Johnson, the fact that Mr. Collins approved of such serious books for women in itself spoke of discontent and disapproval of the rules advocated for women in them, for Austen could hardly urge such a conduct and that too at the hands of the morally stunted Mr. Collins.

'Rationality' and 'Individualism' were the dominant reflectives of the age but none carried any meaning in context of women who were hardly taught or brought up as individuals in their own right, but merely as socially approved figures to take their rightful place in social and family life. The only quality desired in them was to be able to secure themselves with name and status through a proper marriage. They had to be endowed with qualities sufficient to attract a good husband and seek a proper marriage. The desirable education for a young woman was a much discussed topic of the eighteenth century and the conduct books published for the purpose "...blended moral and social advice so skillfully that the approved double standard acquired almost a scriptural and timeless sanction." (Mukherjee 1991:5)

The manuals and literary works of the eighteenth century addressed to and aimed at educating young women turned them from rational, thinking individuals into objects of desire, their primary aim being pleasing and trapping a man of good income into matrimony. The conduct books came into being with an attempt to educate young ladies as to how they should go about in polite society and the manner in which they should handle difficult or embarrassing situations and, most importantly, how to manoeuvre love relationship and deal with men. Sentimental fictions, prior to Jane Austen, which were often their only education, gave the young women a romantic bend of mind and made

them irrational creatures and corrupted their very thinking. Conduct books of the age declared woman's fragility as her most enticing feature that would help her to tempt and secure a husband. Janet Todd felt that physical fragility in women in time came to be considered not merely as a virtue in her but rather something seductive, as well which evoked protective and manly feelings in the other sex. "The feebleness to which the tender frame of woman is subject is perhaps more seducing than her bloom...in nursing that which droops (sweetly dejected) and is ready to fall upon its bed, or care becomes more dear...objects are beloved in proportion...as they are gentle, unresisting and pathetic." (Mukherjee 1991:6-7)

By creating such sturdy and candid heroines like Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, Jane Austen intended to usurp idealistic assumptions concerning women as to how she should present herself or the way she should act or behave in society. Austen ridiculed the feebleness society so desired in women through negative characterization of women such as Isabella Thorpe, Louisa Musgrove and Miss Bingley who were affected in their manners and employ feminine artifice and weakness to entice and draw men towards themselves. In *Sense and Sensibility*, she stressed and dignified sense, strength, control and patience over sentimental helplessness and excessive sensibility highlighted through the character of Elinor and Marianne. Thus Jane Austen added her own viewpoint to the much expected, current and debatable topic of how debility and artifice were the most essential feminine traits and a woman's 'legitimate armoury'. Rousseau had been of the opinion that there was a basic difference between men and women which he mentioned in his book Emilius: " 'One must be active and strong, the other passive and feeble; one must necessarily have power and will; it is sufficient that the other makes but a faint resistance...' " (Mukherjee 1991:7) He further argued that God made up for the lack of physical strength in women by endowing them

with beauty, artfulness, and craft to entice men. Artifice or slyness was taken as woman's essential characteristics, which she did exploit to the hilt. Most of the writers of these conduct books believed in this and suggested ways in which "...a woman might render herself more alluring in the eyes of men..." (Mukherjee 1991:7)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, once in the middle of the eighteenth century wrote in a letter of hers in context with the lack of a woman's education in the age and expressed her sense of astonishment and disbelief "...that the same studies which raise the character of a man should hurt that of a woman. We are educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle our natural reason. If some few get above their nurse's instructions, our knowledge must rest concealed and be as useless to the world as gold in a mine." (Gillie 1974:99) Here she alludes to the 'male prejudice', which forced and kept the woman from acquiring proper education and sharpening their mental capabilities and enhancing their knowledge. And if by mistake they happen to acquire knowledge and learn more than what was thought proper for them, every effort should be made to conceal the fact and feign ignorance. Such was the age and conditions to which women then were born into. In the eighteenth century "...a girl was not encouraged...to push herself, to use her knowledge to attempt to exercise power. She must be able to join in conversation when required, but to leave leadership to men." (Waldron 1999:119)

Jane Austen once wrote to her niece Fanny Knight, "'Single women have a dreadful propensity of being poor – which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.' " (Gillie 1974:98). This sentence signifies the fate to which women were subjected to in Austen's time. Devoid of job opportunities and a vocation in life, woman had to look, scheme and plan for matrimony in order to gain financial security. Other than marriage, only teaching was a probable option towards independence but it was "...arduous, penurious and little respected. There were also, of course, literature and

journalism, but they seldom offered a stable livelihood. Unless, like Emma Woodhouse, a woman had a private income, happy matrimony was the only way of life in which middle-and-upper women could normally hope to find themselves satisfied, esteemed and secure." (Gillie 1974:98).Jane Austen believed in education by which one learns self-control and becomes independent enough to handle one's own life. But soon enough she realized that education was not the answer of all the problems in a woman's case, for during her time the rewards education promised was a 'limited affair'. The times in which she lived depicted that for women, independence was conditional on inheriting or marrying money and this is a topic, which is dealt with in most of her novels. For women who had little or no fortune of their own, marriage was the only way out to gain independence or social status. In the absence of which, she could "...either become a governess, earn a meager livelihood with har needle, or she might rely on her pen." (Bhatt 1996:98) But even if the woman attempted a living by being a governess or a writer she was not kindly looked upon nor was she granted proper respect as an equal and righteous human being. In this context eighteenth century governess Ellen Weeton has said: "A governess is almost shut out of society; not choosing to associate with servants and not being treated as an equal by the head of the house or their visitors, she must possess some fortitude and strength of mind to render herself tranquil or happy." (Bhatt 1996:99) This was a fact raised up by Austen in her novels especially in the character of Jane Fairfax in *Emma* (E) who in the absence of a probable marriage is faced with a glaring and not so flattering prospect of becoming a governess. There is a marked awkwardness when Emma talks to Frank Churchill of Miss Fairfax's proposed future profession in lieu of her circumstance in life.

' "You know Miss Fairfax's situation in life, I conclude? What she is destined to be?"

"Yes" – (rather hesitatingly) – "I believe I do."

"You get upon delicate subjects, Emma", said Mrs. Weston smiling; "remember that I am here. Mr. Frank Churchill hardly knows what to say when you speak of Miss Fairfax's situation in life. I will move a little further off.' " (E 885)

Jane Fairfax is to take up the job of the governess and this makes her an object of pity and compassion among others. As a lone woman looking for a means of livelihood, without any inheritance whatsoever and no family to back her, Jane feels that she needs to offer herself for sale in the slave trade, but is quick to suggest that she is not hinting towards flesh trade but rather the sale of her intellect and mental capabilities in the governess trade. Jane clarifies what she meant because as Mary Ann Radcliffe states in her *The Female Advocate* (1799), "...woman making any sort of livelihood are typically treated like prostitutes, because prostitution is the only sale which they are recognized as capable of transacting, the only thing they have ever really been taught to do." (Johnson 1990:137) In a suspicion if not similar then atleast insulting in its hint was one, which Emma imagines when she suspects Jane of having a private and illicit affair with the married Mr. Dixon. But, later on, she feels guilty of acting in a most inconsiderate and irresponsible manner towards Jane by violating 'the duty of woman by woman'.

In Austen's age it was normal practice that sons went to school for education whereas the daughters stayed at home and were instructed either by a governess or one of the parents. Like in *Emma* when Mrs. Weston gave birth to a baby-girl, Emma felt that a daughter was just what Mr. And Mrs. Weston needed. "It would be a great comfort to Mr. Weston, as he grew older...to have his fireside enlivened by the sports and the nonsense, the freaks and the fancies of a child never banished from home; and Mrs. Weston – no one could doubt that a daughter would be most to her; and it would be quite a pity that anyone who so well knew how to teach, should not have their powers in exercise again." (E 1045) A girl's education was generally confined to home and it was such as to make

her accomplished enough to attain a respectable establishment through marriage by attaching herself to a man of consequence and property and have a happy family life.

Austen was well aware of the problem of improper and inadequate education that was imparted to young women of her age. "The entire debate about women's education in the eighteenth century hinged upon the question of whether that education should make the woman a better individual or merely a pleasing companion for man in his moments of leisure." (Mukherjee 1991:18) Conduct books stressed and talked of the importance of the necessity of the drawing room arts in a girl's life. None of them were encouraged to read and advised to fake ignorance in case they happened to possess some knowledge or anything literary. A conversation such as this in *Pride and Prejudice* points out to the social finish deemed proper for women. In Miss Bingley's words a woman could be called accomplished only if she had a ' "...thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing and dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved." ' (PP 253) Such an education that characterized a woman as really accomplished was so superficial and could hardly be of any help to a woman who wished to make her way in the world or choose a vocation. Such an education was more as a means of securing an establishment through marriage and to be recognized by society as a woman of taste and class. To such a list of accomplishments Mr. Darcy had one to add his own when he remarked: " 'all this she must possess', added Darcy, 'and to all this she must add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.' " (PP 253)

Darcy in fact had a valid point to make here. He expected intellectual companionship with a woman whereas the times hardly encouraged or motivated a woman to read or to be academically inclined and did not expect her to give an

intellectual aspect to her personality. Other superficial attributes predominated the need to sharpen the intellect. In listening to Miss Bingley's and Mr. Darcy's individual remarks as to what an accomplished woman ought to be, comes Elizabeth's cynical remark,

" 'I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder at your knowing any.' "

" 'I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe united.' " (PP 253)

Elizabeth felt that in expecting all this out of a woman, she was being extremely pressurized. This idea of a really accomplished woman was more a demand of perfection out of her, which was not always humanely possible. One always expected a woman to be pleasing on all grounds and at all occasions, thus treating her as an object or a doll, all perfection and faultless beauty. "The conversation treats women as objects with marketable qualities, and therefore contributes to the theme of commerce between the sexes that is so prominent in Jane Austen's tales of courtship and marriage." (Marsh 1998:136)

In *Mansfield Park* (MP), Austen further criticized the contemporary guideline for female education. Her cousins Maria and Julia considered Fanny as cheap because she had no knowledge of French, nor could she show any great interest in the music, which they were good enough to play to her.

> Fanny could read, work, or write but she had been taught nothing more; and her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid... "Dear mamma, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together – or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia - or she never heard of Asia Minor – or she does not know the difference between water-colours

> and crayons! How strange! Did you ever hear anything so stupid?" (MP 478)

They regarded Fanny as dumb because she could not repeat the chronological order of the kings of England and their dates of accession, and also the principal events during their reign. She hardly knew of the Roman Emperors even as low as Severus and also hardly anything of heathen mythology, all metals, semi-metals, planets and renowned philosophers. Fanny's elegance of mind and well-grounded principles and moral values were all negated and hardly given a thought due to her lack of such a superficial education that was hardly of any practical use nor could it help to polish or better one's character. Austen felt that one of the chief reasons for the ill upbringing of Sir Bertram's children, Tom, Maria and Julia, was their inadequate education and superficial values.

> Self-denial has very little place in the real education of the young Bertrams, which has concentrated on social manners and the superficial and random acquisition of disconnected facts. Tom, Maria and Julia all consider their education to be irrelevant to real life, which consists in horseracing and debt for the young heir, balls and the marriage market for heir daughters. Austen exposes the shortcomings of the girl's education in great detail, dwelling on the shreds and patches of knowledge thought sufficient for young ladies... (Waldron 1999:90)

She was of the view that reason for Julia's and Maria's downfall & subsequent ruin was their faulty education, which ignored the virtues of kindliness and good manners and concentrated their attention on social pleasures and status marriage prospects. "Jane Austen therefore believed that any education which did not develop commonsense and right thinking fell short of its purpose and was no good." (Singh 1981:73) All her heroines were shown to be of good sense and good taste and were mentally superior to their counterparts. Refinement of mind was a common factor among all her heroines.

In *Northanger Abbey*, at Beechan Cliff while the Tilney's, Eleanor and Henry talked of history, drawing and landscapes, Catherine felt ashamed of her ignorance, which prevented her from joining their conversation. But Jane Austen critically commented when she said that Catherine knew not her own advantages for the common notion obvious of the age was that "...a good-looking girl with an affectionate heart, and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward." (NA 1124). For "...imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms."(NA 1124) Men were only too happy to have their vanity satisfied by dealing with pretty but ignorant women. Ignorance in females is all the more welcome since it convinced and assured men of their superior intelligence and right to authority. Such were the conditions and fate of the women in Jane Austen's time and she criticized the situation in her own calm and quiet manner that was characteristic of her. Hannah More here has a significant point to make when she insists that "...a young women should be well informed and should not as Gregory had advised in A Father's Legacy to His Daughters in 1774, conceal any knowledge she might have in the interests of flattering a man." (Waldron 1999:119) When Henry Tilney points out to Catherine that "...man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal." (NA 1103) He echoes a very significant fact regarding the status of women in society where choices are made out for them and she had only to choose between them. She was not allowed her own say as to what she wanted or the way she wanted.

> In some respects the social predicament of women was worse in the eighteenth century than it had ever been, not because their opportunities of employment were fewer than in previous periods but because they were becoming steadily more informed and more inclined to think for themselves. Their education was typically unsystematic, but more and

> more current literature...was addressed as much to a female readership as to a male one; thus – women and some men – increasingly questioned the assumption that they were intellectually inferior. Before the century opened, Daniel Defoe wrote: 'I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, that we deny the knowledge of learning to women'. But what exasperated women who did acquire such advantages was the dislike men were inclined towards the acquisition. (Gillie 1974:98-99)

Jane Austen stressed on literary education for women and advocated education as the only means by which the characters could find solutions to their moral problems.

Most importantly, Austen novels dealt with the social preoccupations of eighteenth century England like marriage, money, class, status and courtship. Institution of marriage was commercialized and love and feelings were motivated by money and social status and both men and women became commodities in the marriage market. It was an age of great materialism and conservatism and it was highly critical and imperative for young women of the gentry to marry well and marry status, as this was the only worthy and respectable alternative to attain and secure financial independence.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen exposed the hollowness and superficiality of the marital relation and the relationship as shared by the Palmers. Ignoring her son-in-law Mr. Palmer's rude remarks, Mrs. Jennings is as hearty as ever when she says:

' "Aye, you may abuse me as you please," said the good natured old lady. You have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again. So there I have the whip hand of you."

Charlotte laughed heartily to think that her husband could not get rid of her, and exultingly said, she did not care how cross he was to her, as they must live together." ' (SS 67)

Mrs. Palmer, good natured and without sense could hardly be pained by the indifference or occasional rudeness of her husband and neither his rebukes nor his discontent could prevent her determination to be as happy as ever and her husband's behaviour was always a source of amusement and diversion for her blissfully ignorant nature. Here, Austen epitomized her talk on marriages of matter and worldliness rather than of substance in describing the strange marital relationship of Mr. Palmer and his wife. Mr. Palmer with his attitude of arrogance and still greater indifference for the silly ways of his senseless yet good humored wife is bound in a marriage of worth and respectability and yet so imperfect and meaningless. "What with her inane cheerfulness and 'his Epicurism, his selfishness and his conceit', the Palmers live without affection, talent, or moral culture, and they complement Austen's relentlessly harsh satire on contemporary marriage."(Johnson 1990:55)

In her novels, amidst the social obligations, pretensions, reservations, visits, balls and gatherings, JaneAusten had often been criticized for concentrating a bit too much upon the question of money in marriage and as to how one had an effect on the other. Marriage undoubtedly was the central preoccupation of almost all of Austen's novels. It was not only Austen's but also a major issue and theme appearing in the works of many other major novelists of the eighteenth century.

> The particularly British concern with class divisions and the limited opportunities of social mobility, the rich narrative potential of property inheritance, issues of social conformity, parental authority and individual rebellion, economic survival and moral choice, sexual attraction and moral drama – all these could be subsumed under one central trope marriage, which became the ritual ending of most novels... (Mukherjee 1991:29)

Matrimony carried a significant meaning where a woman was concerned. Men, on the other hand, had several options in order to mould and give direction to their lives to enhance and consolidate their position in society and that too on individual endeavour, but for a woman marriage was a sole claim o status and respectability in society. It was one area in which she could to some extent exert her so called choice and it was her "...only means – however illusory – of determining their own identity in a society that denied them any effective autonomy." (Mukherjee 1991:29) Hence when a woman came of age, she had to look out for a suitable husband, a husband who would be her future support and satisfy both her financial and social needs. But this was no mean a feat, at least not for those who had no fortune in their name. Eligible bachelors were always on the look out for a woman of fortune and status. A woman devoid of money in her name was likely to remain unmarried, an old maid, despite the fact that she was most in need of an establishment. The early nineteenth century women all realized the sort of power money could play to make or break their lives. A woman who had 10,000 in her name had a good prospect in marriage and one who could boast of 30,000 was well sought by one and all since her fortune elevated her to the rank of an heiress. Thus, prior to marriage, the subject much scrutinized and discussed was a woman's wealth prospects or the lack of it.

With a girl probability of marriage depended upon the worth of her personal fortune. And if she could well manage to marry above her own fortune or income, it was to be taken as an achievement of sort. Like the opening lines of *Mansfield Park* suggest that for Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, it was her achievement and good fortune to be able to marry a man of Sir Thomas's stature and fortune and to be called a baronet's lady despite having only seven thousand pounds in her name. But such calculations and achievements were not for public discussion but carried out in a subtle manner and

though pervasive in the social fabric, any revelation of it was labeled as mercenary by the very conventions that brought them into being. Opening paragraph of *Mansfield Park* further states: "But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them." (MP 469) These lines pinpoint the need and pressure created for employing strategic moves due to the economic motivations dominating the marriage market. "The equation of money in men and beauty in women is obviously an axiom Jane Austen is exposing to criticism by her literal acceptance of it." (Mukherjee 1991:37) It is with an outlook laden with money motivated practicality and yardstick such as this which makes John Dashwood grudgingly regret Marianne's sickness and her subsequent loss of bloom and felt that this would hamper her marriage prospects and not let her marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a year. Once betrayed, a woman was looked on as an object of pity and someone who had outlived her worth. She may hold on to her virtue, but a loss of health and bloom was considered as equally hazardous. Loss of beauty was considered as a loss of all bright marital prospects. "Dashwood, of course, is coyly circling the only issue he really cares about: if a woman can no longer serve herself and her family as an object of exchange in marriage, who knows she burden her brother or half brother – for subsistence...For a dependent stepsister of only seventeen, wasting away is almost a matter of good grace...a heroine's death serves many of the interests of respectably entrenched power." (Johnson 1990:65)

But the economic factor was so dominating that beauty could well be compensated by fortune. Just as a portionless woman seeks marriage for financial security so too a man in need of independence went for a woman of fortune irrespective of her beauty. But though for a woman financial pursuit in marriage was accepted or expected so to say but with men monetary considerations were not taken kindly at and they were chastised as imprudent and mercenary. Like Elizabeth playfully reminds her aunt of her

previous advice to her concerning Wickham as to how it would be imprudent on her part to marry him and in so speaking of him now was not it like practicing 'double standard of morality': "Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end and avarice began? Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me, because it should be imprudent, and now because he is trying to get a girl with one thousand pounds. You want to find out that he is mercenary." (PP 323)

Opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* proclaims, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (PP 242) Whether or not he felt the need for a wife, the fact remained that the neighbouring families of the area in which he resided considered him as the 'rightful property of someone or other of their daughters'. Good fortune indeed was an underlying factor, which surpassed every other consideration as far as husband-hunt was concerned or even a wife-hunt for that matter. Love and marriage and the role money played to bring them near was a recurring theme in almost all Austen novels, for it reflected the age and culture and times in which she lived, as far as matrimonial market and personal relations were concerned. She exposed the monetary persuasions underlying marriages with the intention of subverting it through her heroines, who showed great elegance of mind and character in choosing their life partner and no amount of money or social status considerations would ever motivate their choices. Speaking of Jane, Elizabeth declared to Charlotte that she entertained a romantic preference for Bingley which was almost love and it was a good thing that ' "Jane united with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner..." ' (PP 242) which would guard her from having her feelings publicly exposed and scrutinised. But Charlotte felt that " 'If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the

opportunity of fixing him...In nine cases out of ten a woman had better show more affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on." ' (PP 242) She felt that ' "Jane should therefore make the best of every half-hour in which she can command his attention. When she is secure of him, there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chooses." ' (PP 242) Charlotte, despite being a sensible woman with right principles, voiced the practicality of such a conduct, so much socially prevalent and practiced though hardly right and honourable. In Austen's time marriage and its attainment was all about being persuasive, tackling social pressures, subtle maneuvers and looking for and grabbing the opportunity without seeming overt or desperate in such efforts though, in reality, it was desperation for security and stability that forced them to act so. However, neither Elizabeth nor Jane were of the sort to follow such a code of conduct but the fact remained that deprived of education and vocation and also hostile working conditions, a woman's only claim to social security, stability and independence was by means of a good marriage, and hence they were forced to submit to the politics and economics behind matrimony.

Charlotte Lucas, in a way, was one of the victims of society, of customs and traditions of the age. Despite being a sensible woman with principles, her practical or mercenary decision to marry Mr. Collins was an 'economic and pragmatic consideration' on her part and defended justly if viewed from her perspective. Charlotte entered a marriage which she well knew would afford her little pleasure, but as far as security and an establishment went it was a safe and good bet and she made her choice. It was a choice which not merely Charlotte but several women of the age were forced to make, going by the demand of time and the priorities of an age. " '...To be so bent on marriage – to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation – is a sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot

understand it. Poverty is a great evil, but to a woman of education & feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest. _ I would rather be a Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like.' " (Gillie 1974:109) These lines are from *The Watsons*, which was an incomplete sketch of a novel, given up by Austen at the death of her father. These lines reflect the truth of the age of how desperation for marriage and stability turned women into go-getters and made them oblivious to all sense and feeling. It also spoke of Austen's indignation of what marriage compelled a woman to become and her acknowledgment of the negatives of a profession such as teaching; but despite all this she adhered to her dislike for a mercenary marriage, come what compulsions.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon's childhood sweetheart, Eliza, a rich orphan, is under the care and patronage of his father and is used ill by his father to better his own selfish interests. He uses his influence and authority over her to force her to marry his eldest son in order to secure and strengthen his estate, already in debt, with the help of her wealth. He completely overrules or discards her right, her wish and her love for Brandon and, after her attempt at elopement with him, she is isolated, locked up and pressurized till she crumbles and gives in to her uncle's wish and command. And like Brandon later explained: ' "She was allowed no liberty, no society, no amusement, till my father's point was gained." ' (SS 122) Her married life proves no better and the character and behaviour of her husband are such that she is heartbroken, pained and not a soul to advice or befriend her, she soon fall to temptation and adultery and subsequent ruin. After her divorce she sinks deeper into the life of sin and by the time Colonel Brandon finds her she is near death and beyond all hope. Eliza's ill-fated existence is brought upon her by her very guardian, who is in the place of her protector.

> Eliza's fate testifies to the behaviour of conservative ideology. As an orphan and an heiress, Eliza is a creature so vulnerable...But Eliza's uncle

> is not in the least susceptible to the melting sensation of solicitude and protectiveness. Rather than feel for the helplessness of his dependent, he looks only to keep up his country estate, while her dissolute husband no sooner possesses a wife's fortune than he abuses the wife herself. Far from being the cautionary tale about the duty of fidelity, Eliza's story, like so much of the central matter in Sense and sensibility, indicts the license to coercion, corruption and avarice available to grasping patriarchs and their eldest sons. (Johnson 1990:56)

In the same novel Willoughby is another reflection of the priorities of the age and its morals, which treats women as playthings, to be used, discarded and sought at convenience. He has no scruples in ruining the life of second Eliza or toying with the affections of Marianne; but when it came to commitment and marriage, he goes for a woman of fortune in order to lead a life of wealth and comfort.

In her writings Jane Austen ridicules conventional notions for women. She is critical of the contemporary belief as to what a woman should be and also how she must act. Her heroines do not bow down to set decorums, instead they question conventions and spurn conventional behaviour. On seeing Marianne talk spiritedly and unreservedly with Willoughby on a mere second meeting and fresh acquaintance, Elinor playfully teases Marianne, after he has left, that for one morning she has done pretty well for herself as she has gathered his opinion on every topic of importance and very little is left to be inquired when they would meet next. But Marianne feels that Elinor is not being just in hinting her to be too open and frank. ' "I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every commonplace notion of decorum! I have been open and sincere when I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull and deceitful. Had I talked only of weather and roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes this reproach

would have been spared." ' (SS 28) And though Elinor merely wishes to check her and not reproach her, the fact remains that what Marianne says makes sense. Women are indeed expected and forced to remain in their shell and in being open, unreserved and spirited, a woman does defy the social norms of behaviour marked out for her.

Jane Austen's sketch of Mrs. Croft in *Persuasion* (P) is quite different and forward and rather in total defiance of the characteristics marked out for the woman of the age. She does "...repudiate the system of sexually differentiated manners ladies and gentlemen depend upon. Her views on the subject are actually quite remarkable, given the renewed importance ascribed to female manners during the period in question. Conservatives and radical alike agreed that amiable weakness and loveliness in women guarantee the continuance of patriarchy itself." (Johnson 1990:152) It is not like she is manly, improper or unfeminine in her conduct or behaviour; she is very pleasing and proper as such but then her features are not marked out as pretty or feminine so to say, in that they are not soft, sweet and delicate as such. She is square, upright with 'vigour of form' and a 'weather-beaten complexion' for being much at sea with her husband. "Her manners were open, easy and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach of coarseness, however, or any want of good humour." (P 1238) She does not see her self-assurance and sturdiness as a hindrance to her feminine nature. She does not doubt herself, she is confident, intelligent, and a steady and constant companion to her husband even on his rough sea life, in short everything that the woman of the age is not expected to be or act so.

In Jane Austen's time girls were officially introduced into society at the age of seventeen. It was a sign that they had come of age, a marriageable age to be exact, and this was described as 'coming out' i.e. they could attempt balls, social gatherings etc. A girl could come out a year or two earlier or later depending upon her situation and

circumstances and whether or not she had unmarried elder sisters before her. In *Mansfield Park* Jane Austen spoke of the wide difference in the attitude and mannerism of the girl who was 'out' from the time when she was 'not out', and criticized the system which formed this tradition that compelled a woman to have split personality and act according to the norms specified for her. Inquisitive about the 18 year old Fanny Price, who always seemed shy, quiet and introvert, Mary Crawford, inquired of the two Mr. Bertrams, Tom and Edmund, whether she was 'out' or 'not out'. For she was confused about it and stated, ' "She dined at the parsonage with the rest of you which seemed like being out; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she is." ' (MP 497) Edmund who was chiefly addressed here stated his total indifference and ignorance of such a meaningless system and says, '"I believe I know what you mean, but I will not undertake to answer the question. My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me." ' (MP 497) However, the difference very much existed as Mary Crawford explained:

> "...and yet, in general, nothing can be more easily ascertained. The distinction is so broad. Manners as well as appearances are, generally speaking, so totally different. Till now I could not have supposed it possible to be mistaken as to a girl's being out or not. A girl not out has always the same sort of dress: a close bonnet, for instance; looks very demure and never says a word...and except that it is sometimes carried a bit too far, it is all very proper. Girls should be quiet and modest. The most objectionable part is, that the alteration of manners on being introduced into company is frequently too sudden. They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to quite the opposite – to confidence! That is the faulty part of the system. One does not like to see a girl of eighteen or

nineteen so very immediately up to everything – and perhaps when one has seen her hardly able to speak the year before." (MP 497)

This system which forced and pressurized a woman to turn from an introvert, shy, demure and quiet girl into suddenly an extrovert and uninhibited person did not show very well on her character and good sense and such a practice was humiliating and degrading to a woman's lot who had to act so out of her character and dignity in the name of system. Edmund felt that girls who agreed to act this way must be ' "...ill brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. They are always acting upon motives of vanity, and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour before they appear in public than afterwards." ' (MP 498) Here, the discussion shows that Austen was highly critical of such a practice for it did not show a woman's character and sense in a very good light and prevented her from being genuine. In context of what Miss Crawford had said, Tom narrated a similar incident of his own. When he was first introduced to his friend Charles Anderson's family, he tried to enter into a conversation with his sister, who was then 'not out', but could hardly get her to speak a civil word to him or get even a pleasant look. Later on when he met her a twelve month later, she was then out and a totally different creature as far as her manners and attitude were concerned. She came up to him, claimed him as an acquaintance and talked and laughed with him till he did not know which way to look or what to make of her. Such conduct was naturally a result of wrong upbringing and misplaced values and showed the lady in poor light. The social system that categorised woman as 'out' or 'not out' and forced her to behave in a certain manner degraded her individuality and her right as an independent or rational being. In this context, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman: " 'What can be more indelicate than a girl's coming out in the fashionable world? Which in other words, is to bring to market a marriageable miss, whose person is taken from one place to

another richly caparisoned.' " (Mukherjee 1991:18) It was like debasing women's integrity by treating her as a commodity.

Another topic of much discussion in the nineteenth century was the propriety behind the public and private display of emotions. Silence was considered as proper and appropriate for women, especially when it concerned deep and private feelings and thought right to be revealed only to a sister or a close confidante. Austen heroines always confined their thoughts and emotions within themselves and pondered them over only in private away from public scrutiny. It was thought improper for women to voice and reveal their deep and innermost feelings in public. They could suffer in private but appear nonchalant about it in public. If they had feelings for someone they could never reveal them or speak of them to the person concerned unless they were approached first. Such a propriety prevented women from having and revealing what they desired or wanted most and left them to the wish and will of others.

Austen in her novels explores the fact as to how patriarchy gains control of women by denying them the right to earn, and it fosters such laws which prevent them from inheriting their own money. From *Sense and Sensibility*, where a male heir deprives his step sisters of their right to their father's home and money, forcing them to leave home and look after themselves in a new environment with limited resources and income, to *Pride and Prejudice*, where the Bennet property with the provision only to be left to the male heir deprives the Bennet sisters from their right to economic independence, threatening them with compromising marriages. From *Emma*, where Jane Fairfax needs to attain social security through a respectable and wealthy marriage if she has to free herself from the horror of being a governess, to *Persuasion*, where widowed Mrs. Smith faces monetary constraint and has to struggle from poverty, Jane Austen exposes those laws and traditions which are not conducive to female independence and security.

Thus, in her novels, Jane Austen wrote when there were many restrictions imposed upon women and they were told to follow the appearances, roles and functions attributed to them by society. It is yet to her credit that by subversive narrative, she could largely counter those constraints. According, to LeRoy W.Smith: "Austen very probably did experience constraints in developing her vision and her art...but the effect of such constraints seem not to have been acquiescence, alienation or a resort to duplicity but commitment, explorations and a positive resolution in the tradition of great art. Her novels portray the possibility of an authentic existence for a woman." (Marsh 1998:254)

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Chapter – 3

Heroines of Jane Austen: A Prototype of Early Feminist

> Jane Austen takes the woman as an individual and places her in a social setting, faced with a choice that is private and personal. A recurrent theme of her novels is the heroine's resistance to the efforts of the patriarchal community to force her into a social role at the cost of her own identity. (Mukherjee 1991:27)

Jane Austen was aware of woman's predicament and exposed and ridiculed issues concerning her subordination and helplessness in society, and so she conceived heroines who would not comply with unjust social norms, decorums and expectations. She accepted the limitations with which a woman had to live in her age, but in her own subtle and quiet manner she revealed and talked of the problems, exposed the compulsions and pressures that a woman had to deal with and were expected to submit to and presented through her heroines role models who, though living within social limits, took care not to compromise where their integrity, feelings and dignity were at stake.

Jane Austen gives us an insight into the many facets of female character. Although some women writers may shrink from exposing a female mind and leave the mysteries of womanhood under wraps, not Jane Austen. Through the various female characters that she depicts in her novels, she lays bare both their strength and weaknesses, as they really are i.e. more human than ideal. "Her heroines are what one knows women to be, though one never can get to acknowledge it. As liable to 'fall in love first', as anxious to attract the attention of agreeable men, as much taken with a striking manner, or a handsome face, as unequally gifted with constancy and firmness, as liable to have their affections biased by convenience or fashion, as we...will admit men to be." (Whately 1976:207) Despite

showing her women to be strong individuals in their own right, Austen does not hesitate to reveal their faults and depict them with all their shortcomings for it is necessary that women be taken for the individuals that they are and not merely as the idealised characters society wishes them to be. She does not idealise her women characters contrary to the norm of her age. A woman is not merely an 'angel' or a 'fiend'; instead she is a rational, autonomous being as liable to faults and failings as she is to virtues.

Another aspect of Jane Austen's realism is that she recognizes the importance of society in its right proportion. She does not isolate the individual from the society, for she believes that they need to co-exist. Going by that age, her female characters are highly individualistic but they are not shown to deliberately defy their society, in order to assert their freedom and individuality.

> Austen inverts traditional notions of women. She allows them a frequently outrageous assertiveness and power that they are conventionally denied, but she also permits to their marginality within society. In Mansfield Park, Emma and to a lesser extent Persuasion, – however Austen is interested in exploring more profoundly the complex power relationships between women and a social world that reduces their options and makes them marginal. (Fergus 1991:145-146)

For Jane Austen freedom and individuality are authentic when given a proper social context. Although the heroines are unconventional, they always operate within the limits that the world has imposed upon them. However, despite the limitations they find the means to assert their independence, their will, their right to be happy and fulfilled; and despite the limited sphere of life in which they find themselves, they find ample opportunities for feminine expression and freedom of self for they have the will, courage and motivation to do so and make the best of what life has to offer them. Austen is more interested

> ...in rendering the way that women are enmeshed in circumstances. Enmeshed not trapped, for Austen's women to some extent shape their circumstances to accommodate their desires. Growth, assertion and achievement remain possible. But these possibilities have to be seized within a more fully realized social world, one that is less ready to permit individuals to evade its laws. Mansfield Park and Emma show women not escaping and evading but working within or re-forming their worlds. (Fergus 1991:145-146)

In all her novels, Austen stressed on the importance of proper social behaviour. But proper behaviour as practiced by her heroines or as advocated by Austen was not always the one as demanded by society or bound to its hypocrisies, for such a social propriety was exactly what Austen censured: "The working out of correct behaviour is extremely complex, and fine points of equilibrium are established between countless antithesis – propriety and snobbery, liberality and excess, decorum and expressiveness, prudence and feeling." (Eagleton & Pierce 1979:26-27) And Austen's approach and outlook towards proper behaviour corroborates the above point. Elinor, Elizabeth, Fanny and Anne were remarkably sensible women who achieved social recognition and also domestic happiness because they had the good sense to mould their life and values just the way it was proper and right to be and did not give in to materialistic and foolish temptations.

Female modesty or female delicacy is a topic so integral to her age that it finds its way in almost all of Austen's novels. Society's ideal woman is one who is delicate, shy, retiring, weak and submissive, more so because she helps men ensure his hold and authority over her. Female modesty, and how self-destroying it can prove to be, is analysed closely in *Mansfield Park* (MP). Austen can often be accused of being socially

defiant when she makes her heroines respond with a 'no' to marriage proposals, be it Elizabeth, Emma or Fanny. They are all thought of as acting out of female character in refusing to be part of any marriage that is revolting to their very self. Even the weak and submissive Fanny Price is ready to risk her modesty to preserve her self, where marriage is concerned. But even when the heroines respond positively to marriage and men their avowal of love and sentiment is often checked by Austen and treated in as modest a manner as possible. In Emma's proposal scene it is asked as to "What did she say?" and the reply is "Just what she ought of course. A lady always does." (E 1027) But what a lady does say exactly is hardly elaborated by Austen and this restraint could be observed in all her novels. Many have opined this as a sign of her personal discomfort in dealing with strong emotions and sentiments and though the opinions may vary, Claudia L. Johnson has a very logical explanation for this. She is of the view that if there is any "...authorial inability, it is only an ability to crack the ironclad logic of female delicacy, according to which a proper woman openly and ardently avowing intense personal desire can scarcely be imagined, much less represented." (Johnson 1990:22) Austen at times, like many other authors of her age, does feel restricted and cramped or even abiding to conventions.

All of Jane Austen's works, though in different degrees, are concerned with the conventionalities of female modesty and the dos and don'ts of it. "...if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her." (NA 1073) In *Northanger Abbey* (NA) one is obvious of the fact that Catherine acts outside the directives of female modesty in the liking and even openly displaying her pleasure and interest in the company of Henry Tilney and that, too, in so brief an

acquaintance. She is not hesitant to draw his attention and seek his company, though it is all done in innocence and naiveté and not due to any vested interest as such. Her obvious attraction towards him without any shown first from his side, may draw censure from the conduct books marked out for modest females but her behaviour since unaffected, genuine and uncorrupted makes her seem so adorable, naive and vulnerable all at the same time that Henry Tilney cannot help but be flattered and in turn be drawn towards her and reciprocate her preference for him. "Austen's heroines are often...heterodox. Blissfully ignorant of the exigencies of female propriety, Catherine both dreams and loves first without harming and certainly without disgracing herself. Austen's other novels, however, burden their heroines without acquired notions about propriety that restrains the spontaneous or unequivocal expression of feelings." (Johnson 1990:59) In *Pride and Prejudice* (PP) Jane Bennet is almost estranged from Bingley because her inherent modesty prevents her from revealing her true feelings to him and is not encouraging enough to assure him of her love before his own avowal of it comes through, and this in turn confuses Bingley, who becomes unsure of her love for him and hesitates in declaring his own. Similarly, Fanny is too modest a woman to have her deep regard and long standing love for Edmund to be known to anyone, least of all to him and neither can she openly display her jealousy or voice her dislike for the ways, morals and manners of Mary Crawford, more so because Fanny senses Edmund's preference for her. Even in *Persuasion* (P) though Anne Elliot is constant in her love for Wentworth and even has an inkling of a renewal of his love for her, but grace bounds her from speaking of her own feelings till his own were revealed to her, failing which she has to bottle up her emotions.

Modesty, in a way, could well provide women with an outward protective shield and prevent them from exposing themselves and their feelings in a relationship with a man before being assured of his own commitment.

> But as Austen's redefinition in Northanger Abbey suggests, strict modesty bars women not simply from avowing their love first but also from dreaming of love first. Women must, then, guard both their outward behaviour and, more enerously, their inward wishes...In Austen's novels...women simply do not have the "advantage of choice"... They can only wait for proposals. They can scrutinize their suitors' gestures, review their every word, differentiate acts of civility from acts of particular affection, and form all manner of conjecture about the likelihood of receiving proposals. But finally they can only wait. As bold as they are in every other respect, even Emma and Elizabeth Bennet can only wait. And of course waiting is all that Fanny Price and Anne Elliot ever do. Because their passivity makes them more vulnerable to the anxieties of hope and disappointment, women must be careful not to dream too much too soon. (Johnson 1990:59)

As mirrors or reflections of life, Austen's novels could hardly do without discussing marriage; for in the England of her age where a large number of women remained unmarried, marriage was still seen as a motivation and catch of a woman's life. "...her central characters are all marriageable young women poised at the transition between the freedom of childhood and the subservience of wifehood. By focusing on this brief time-span in the female life cycle, she corroborates the contemporary view that a wedding is the most climatic event in a woman's life. At the same time...exposing the economic anxiety that underlies the romantic veneer of the courtship ritual..." (Mukherjee 1991:138) In the absence of a vocation and a means to earn a respectable and sufficient living, for women with no economic independence and security, marriage was but the only way to attain social and financial security. The paradox of the situation was

that though the one devoid of inheritance and income was the one most in need of an establishment, yet it was the one with fortune that was secured of being pursued most. Among Austen heroines, Emma Woodhouse with her inheritance of 30,000$ was the only one who could afford to or even hint at a single status for herself and could think of shaping and managing other people's love lives or marital future as her business in life and get away with it.

> For most other women, underlying the elegant ritual of love and courtship, and the pleasant routine of balls and walks, there lurked an unspoken anxiety about the future. The enactment of the ritual was complicated further by the fact that, while a woman's need to get married was much greater than a man's, the pretence had to be kept up that he was the pursuer and she the passive object of pursuit. All the strategies of art and artifice had to be deployed to sustain this myth. (Mukherjee 1991:30)

Women like Jane Fairfax and Charlotte Lucas are caught in the whirlpool of money, marriage, and courtship and are a glaring example of a woman's dilemma threatened with an unmarried state of life.

Jane Austen has often been talked of as conservative and traditional since marriage is highlighted in her novels and every novel closes with a marriage as a conventional end; yet one has to keep in mind that she does not merely talk about marriage as such but the social importance and compulsion that is attributed to it in her time. She talks of the deep link between money and marriage and how love became such a forced emotion in an age when marriage of convenience, status, and money became an all important criteria. But the one ideal marriage that Jane Austen talks at the close of the novel is one in which she "...insists on degrading (without denying) the conventions that make wives submissive to husbands. Instead, the endings celebrate an equality as

complete as the differences between the characters themselves allow...and the marriages that Austen arranges for her heroes and heroines represent society as it ought to become: more unconventional, more equal." (Fergus 1991:87-88) Her ideal of marriage is contrary to the social scenario. She feels that love and marriage should always be mutual and agreeable to both, and a woman need not give consent for marriage merely because the man wants it or society demands it, but if and only if she herself desires the commitment. Every novel of hers has atleast one ideal marriage, which stands out and involves the hero and the heroine, depicting the marriage of true and equal minds based on mutual love and friendship and most importantly on esteem for one another. Mrs. Dashwood once said to Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* (SS), ' "I have never yet known what it was to separate esteem and love." ' (SS 9) But according to Jane Austen difference is very much there and necessary for marital bliss, for love based on esteem is solid in its foundation and outlives all trials than the one based on infatuation and material comforts. For women of such fine characters as Jane Austen's heroines are, marriage without love is impossible and moreover they tend to be unaffected by worldly considerations of money and status and instead crave for achieving a harmonious and co-operative relationship with their life-partner.

"Beatrice Kean Seymour says that Jane Austen's heroines 'had to fall in love and find their happiness not alone in marriage but in the best kind of marriage.' " (Singh 1981:36) Love, marriage and money are the basic theme of all her novels. She does not merely talk of love and marriage as idealized in her heroines but also of the commercialisation of marriage that was characteristic of her age. Money and stature played an important and decisive factor in initiating love and marriage. She exposed and ridiculed the compulsions of the matrimonial market, which forced women to plot, scheme or succumb. Refusing to do so her heroines revolt against the economics of

marriage. Marriage without feeling is unthinkable for them; neither is money a good enough reason to fake love and everlasting happiness. Although Austen talks of love, she does not intensify the emotion, she speaks of it sensibly and rationally. Feelings governed by reason are capable of stability and lasting happiness. Her rational attitude towards life prevents Austen from describing passionate and unrestrained feelings in love. Although she creates a truly passionate creature like Marianne Dashwood, at the same time she reveals the pain and impropriety that is to be in such behaviour. Marianne suffers much for her excessive feelings and is finally made to see the importance of sense and reason in governing one's emotions.

Jane Austen is wary of emotional love and all her novels highlight the view that love ungoverned by sense and reason would only lead to unhappiness, and hence she advocates prudence in love. She is being realistic when she discusses love that is not beyond practical considerations. She talks of love as it is considered and viewed by young unmarried women i.e. love which is more faked than felt for the sake of securing a proper establishment through marriage. Sentimental fiction prior to Austen's, treats love either as an idealistic notion or sentiment or as a violent physical passion, but Jane Austen presents a sober view of love as to what it ought to be and also the manner in which it is used and affected for worldly gain. For Elizabeth, Elinor, Fanny and Emma love is not a passing or passionate fancy that would wither away with time. They all realize "...that enduring love needs a securer base than a sharp but fleeting sympathy roused by the beauty of a face, the notes of a voice and the charm of a smile." (Singh 1981:43) They are never led astray by their emotions. Superiority of head and heart is what they crave for in their life partner. Love and marriage based on such factors wherein one is united by mutual warm feelings, good sense and good tastes on both sides, is likely to outlive all trials and bring a good deal of happiness in their lives. To let passion overrule every other sensible consideration

is not what Austen preaches. Love that would defy all social obligations is not worthy of having.

Though Jane Austen speaks uninhibitedly of the importance of money in life and concentrates on the economics of social behaviour, love and marriage, yet it does not mean that she undermines the value of love. Love is the very basis of all human happiness and she acknowledges it. Her heroines do not marry without love nor do they scheme and plot for status and money. They do act wise and sensibly, but it is in the interest of all or to preserve their self-respect and righteousness of feeling, yet never with an ulterior or mercenary motive. And though marrying well and all that goes around in bringing it about remains the essential and ultimate factor analysed, discussed and criticized in her novels, her heroines are not always guided by such persuasions and all of them marry for love and seek fulfilment through genuine feeling and emotion, and not materialism. In making her heroines marry for love, Austen is quite radical for her age. She is subtly subversive in depicting the situation and position of women in her society, though everything is not apparent on the surface.

> Jane Austen's novels are all about marriage and the struggles for self knowledge and liberation from sexual stereotyping that are the stories of her novels are crowned by the creation of a marriage between two characters who have discovered themselves, and who come together with mutual respect and deep affection. Jane Austen's ideal of such a marriage shows the way forward, and her belief that individual men and women can overcome the destructive force of a patriarchal system she so trenchantly criticizes. She does not show radical change in society, but in individuals concerned, and the liberated marriage relationships they achieve, she shows the possibility of a true society. In assessing her place in 'feminist'

> fiction, Smith argues that Austen faced a major social problem openly, honestly and realistically. She placed herself thereby in the forefront of the unformed movement for its solution. (Marsh 1998: 256)

In the eighteenth century England, especially in the gentry, it was mainly married women who enjoyed any sort of independence i.e. social security of wealth and status, otherwise they were relegated to the category of unfortunate old maids, if they were not clever or cunning enough to secure themselves through a marriage at the first suitable opportunity. For young women of the age to marry well and to marry young was a duty that they owed to themselves and their families. If they could love and still make a prudent match it was well enough for them; but even if they could not love in return, they had no right to refuse a person who could offer them both status and economic security in a marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte's cynicism and practical attitude towards marriage was evident in these lines which she spoke to Elizabeth: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life." (PP 243) But Elizabeth could never agree with her views and when Charlotte agreed to marry a vain and stupid person like Mr. Collins, she felt that Charlotte had turned herself to a most 'humiliating picture', one which she could never esteem. But without being handsome and with no fortune to back her, at the so considered late age of twenty-seven, Charlotte felt all the good luck of such a proposal. Like Jane justified Charlotte to Elizabeth: "...she is one of a large family, that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match." (PP 312) However, despite her lack of fortune Elizabeth could never think on the same lines as Charlotte. In refusing the marriage

proposal of Mr. Collins she was not merely refusing a stupid and senseless man but it was according to worldly and material standards, a refusal of an offer of respectability which despite all his foolishness, Mr. Collins represented. Due to his station in life, it was the refusal of an alliance, an opportunity, possibly her only one which she ought to have grabbed in order to establish herself socially. Like Mr. Collins himself boasts to Elizabeth: ' "It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy of your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable...in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications." ' (PP 297) But Elizabeth had that elegance of mind, dignity and righteousness of feeling that prevented her from acting as an opportunist in the marriage market, and ignoring every better and proper feeling in favour of social and economic security.

Similarly, when the comparatively poor and suppressed Fanny Price refuses the rich though flirtatious Henry Crawford, she raises quite a few eyebrows and without knowing the real reason behind her decision, Sir Thomas questions and criticizes her for her thoughtlessness and for her error in refusing to recognise her good luck and fortune in being addressed by so respectable and wealthy a man as Henry Crawford. He warns her that she is refusing the only worthy proposal that would hardly ever come her way again.

> 'You think only of yourself; and because you do not feel for Mr. Crawford exactly what a young heated fancy imagines to be necessary for happiness you resolve to refuse him at once, without wishing for even a little time to consider of it – a little more time for cool consideration, and for really examining your own inclinations – and are in a wild fit of folly, throwing away from you such an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly,

> honourably, nobly settled, as will probably never occur to you again...and let me tell you, Fanny, that you may live eighteen years longer in the world, without being addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford's estate, or a tenth of his merits.' (MP 35)

But all this hardly mattered to Fanny Price and she who could be persuaded everywhere refuses to budge on this one decision of marriage. In keeping with her good breeding and good principles, she could not ignore his weakness of character and self-gratifying moral values for the sake of an eligible, wealthy match, and most importantly she could not marry without love.

Despite reservations of the age towards unmarried women, Jane Austen depicts through Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot that whatever be the temptations and insecurities, they should first be true to their own selves. A girl who deliberately decides to marry a man, who is unworthy, incompatible and inferior in comparison with herself, merely for the sake of security and luxury, is bound to repent and be unhappy in her life. Companionship is so important in a marriage and one can hardly seek it in a man who would have no taste, talent or maturity of mind and manners and no amount of money can fill the void in such a marriage. On visiting Charlotte, Elizabeth realizes that despite the brave and dignified front that Charlotte put up for everyone, she could hardly ever be happy with such a man as Mr. Collins, but since she has made the decision she does not ask for compassion and Elizabeth leaves her at that. For Jane Austen marriage is not something that is only personal. It is also a social affair, a social institution, and many factors are involved in a marital decision and that is exactly how she deals with the topic i.e. in the wider social context.

"The feminism is in the laughter, sometimes rather harsh laughter, but it is also in the visionary ideal, for Austen manages to create a few brief oases where men and women

experience equal relationships with one another, and where it would appear that the idea of their being otherwise, atleast for those of such superior mind as her heroes and heroines, has never been heard of." (Kirkham 1983:83) This does not mean that the heroines of Jane Austen lead extraordinary lives or are endowed with extraordinary powers of mind. The difficulties that they face are quite different to those faced by men but what matters is the way they handle and solve them. Mary Wollstonecraft says: " 'Women, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil; but they are human duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same.' "(Kirkham 1983:83) That is the central 'moral principle' developed in the Austen novels. Austen heroines act as independent, thinking individuals because that is the way a person with powers of reason and mind are expected by the creator to act. Jane Austen presents such heroines who are capable of learning through experience and their powers of judgment and are not dependent upon the judgment, of others especially a male.

Solitude and solitary reflection is also something, which all Austen heroines crave for themselves, and the solace of being left alone at times with only their thoughts to be pondered over is a sort of luxury, which they could not afford everytime they desired. Elizabeth during her visit to Hunsford goes through a whole gamut of emotions but is unable to find the luxury of solitude to give way to her feelings; instead she has to put in an effort to prevent her experience from being known to others: "Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever she was alone, she gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections." (PP 354) Even Emma Woodhouse, who is an open spirited social person, always out to have an almost probing interest in other people's lives, even manipulating them at times, is sometimes faced with the need to have her privacy. " 'She wanted to be alone. Her mind was in a state of flutter and wonder which

made it impossible for her to be collected.' " (E 1054) But, worse than Emma's need is that of Jane Fairfax who, all the time surrounded by overbearing, sympathetic, unrefined and rather intrusive well-wishers, is almost desperate for solitude and reflection: " 'Oh! Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone.' " (E 984-985) Even the sensitive and submissive Fanny Price looks to the solace of her little white attic and the East Room more often in order to indulge her feelings. Whenever she has something unpleasant or her own private feelings for that matter to sort out or reflect upon, she looks for the solitariness of these rooms to give vent to her feelings. "The symbolic use of a room as a woman's private space is a recurrent device in the nineteenth century fiction...Retiring to one's room becomes analogous to recovering one's wholeness, which is constantly whitted away by the inquisitive glances and queries of society." (Mukherjee 1991:78)

Austen held the view, which stated and advocated the triumph of reason and sense over excessive and unrestrained display of powerful emotions and this was what constituted the main theme of her first published novel *Sense and Sensibility*."...Jane Austen followed the tradition of eighteenth century writers. She was stoutly opposed to an uninhibitedly display of emotions advocated by her great contemporaries. She held the view that strong impulses and feelings must be subjected to the rigorous control of good sense and good taste, not only for the individual concerned but also in the interest of the larger society." (Singh 1981:24) Sensible attitude and caution were always associated with masculinity whereas strong passion and emotional intensity were attributed as feminine characteristics. It was against this characterization of reason and feeling as essentially male and female attributes, that Jane Austen intended to make a point in *Sense and Sensibility* by conceiving the character of Elinor as a person of sense and strong but controlled feelings.

Elinor "...possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgment which

qualified her though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her, frequently, to counteract, to the advantages of them all, to that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong but she knew how to govern them." (SS 4) Elinor reflects all that Austen stands for i.e. sense and rationality. Elinor possesses great self-command and belief in her self, but at the same time she is responsive to the needs and feelings of others and her social responsibilities. Whatever she feels or faced, she refuses to be pitied by others for she thinks that she is stronger alone and deals with her feelings and disappointments all on her own. But her sister Marianne is a total contrast of her. Neither in her joys nor in her sorrows, and still much more in love, Marianne knows no moderation of feelings. She is open, excessive and overboard in all her emotions and feels it a shame to hide one's feelings if they are genuine and truthful. But what she fails to gather is that the world and society are too harsh to respect and understand her sentiments. Her strong and passionate nature makes her look at Elinor's self-command with incredulity. But, Elinor's "...self-command is more positive than stoical, more courageous than negative, because it leads to a response in which the self is engaged." (Hardy 1984:23) Elinor's reserve is not merely a calmness of manner that makes her dull and spiritless, but it is only a means to avoid her privacy from being invaded and to keep her self-respect intact. She is not a senseless reserve but a thoughtful one.

Marianne on the other hand, strongly believes in the unequivocal expression of her self and her feelings since she believed what she says or feels and is not ashamed of her self. For her social forms are equated with falseness and duplicity and she refuses to be the part of the social masquerade that demands her to betray her own true feelings. Elinor's efforts to check her brings forth her disgust for the cramped and socially

approved conduct for women. Her unconventional behaviour and her aversion to social conservatism is for her a matter of values independent of contemporary expectations. "Marianne abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserved; and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subject of reason to common-place and mistaken notions" (SS 31) Marianne is not being headstrong, rash and unjustified in her views; it is not a matter of senseless prestige for her to be in defiance. Instead she makes sense in arguing that if one's views and feelings are not accompanied by any sense of wrong, shame or disgrace and are not deliberately and unnecessary defiant, then too, to ask for their concealment and restraint would be so very unreasonable and beyond rational thinking. And it is due to this that though Marianne has often been criticized for her excessive sensibility, she being at the same time sensible, open, unaffected, and loving, her character as a woman is never really scorned, her disillusionment rather calls for compassion. And to be fair to Elinor, she does not want Marianne to be a social hypocrite nor does she want her to give in to the opinions and views of others, she merely wishes her to practice restraint in her behaviour and emotions, which often leads her to act unreasonably. According to Ian Watt, Jane Austen felt that "...in life sensibility would flounder if it were not directed by sense." (Southam 1976:145) It is not as if Jane Austen values society over individual existence, on the contrary none before her has ever shown how painstakingly difficult it is to adjust oneself to the demands of a necessary social existence.

Colonel Brandon could not quite agree with Elinor when she voiced her view that Marianne needs to be proper and prudent in her behaviour and feelings, proper as adjudged by worldly standards for it would save her a lot of inconveniences and censure. Elinor feels that it would be in Marianne's best interest to be aware of the ways of the

society and to be cautious and responsible in dealing with others, but all this hardly matters to Marianne who always indulges herself wholeheartedly into everything her heart desires. Attracted to the open, endearing and vulnerable personality of Marianne, Colonel Brandon, who has been more knowledgeable of the ways of the world feels that there is something "...so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions." (SS 33) In the world of plastic smiles and fake emotions there is something genuine, unaffected and warm in her behaviour and feelings that one could not be but charmed by her person.

> Sense and Sensibility is not, as it is often assumed to be, a dramatized conduct book, partly favoring female prudence over female impetuosity, as if these qualities could be discovered apart from the larger world of politics. Indeed, it is only because of that larger world around them is so menacing in the first place that the manners of young ladies are of such consequence. Provided she appear proper and play the sycophant to wealth and power, a cold hearted heroine like Lucy Steele finds a place in the world. But for romantic heroines like Elinor and Marianne, who in their own ways challenge the commonplace, the scenario reads quite differently. Whereas conduct books teach young women the social codes they must adopt if they are to live acceptably as wives and daughters, fully integrated into their communities that dictate them the subject of its interrogation, and what is at stake finally is not propriety, but survival. (Johnson 1990:50)

It has been mostly supposed that the openness, freedom and the defiant attitude of Marianne's towards the worldly standards and set conventionalities is the chief object of Austen's criticism, but the fact is that her satire is not directed towards Marianne as such

but towards the system, towards the society which has no value for the independent, straightforward and heartfelt attitude and outlook of Marianne and the fate of heroines like her, romantic and nonchalant is one of heartbreak and betrayal. Marianne on one hand is different, defiant and courageous enough to spurn conventional behaviour and social hypocrisy and is not ready to give in to the unjust demands which ask her to be a social hypocrite. But then on the other hand she is duped and betrayed at the hands of her own excessiveness of emotion, emotions though genuine but rarely valued and reciprocated. If she escapes from the society that not only operates on but also in fact rewards cold hearted and cunning ways, she also in a way confirms to the social mode by almost losing herself to death. "Sense and Sensibility, then, criticizes not the unseemliness or the rebelliousness of Marianne's emotionality, but rather its horrifying conformity to the social context she lives within. Her anticonventionality turns out to be all too conventional after all, and instead of defying dangerously common expectations, she comes close to capitulating to them." (Johnson 1990:69) And though Marianne does not wither away to death but is almost nearly saved from it and good life awaits her in the end, somewhere down the line she learns to keep her feelings and emotions in check and her spirit is self-willingly reigned and one could not help but feel that here the society wins a point over her.

Elinor, too, like Marianne, is sensitive with very strong feelings, the only difference being that she is sensible enough to guard the privacy of her emotions. But, her sense is not guided or motivated by calculation or cunning or materialism. She refuses to take, abide or listen to John Dashwood's hintful advice of trapping the well off Colonel Brandon into matrimony by employing feminine charm and artifice. The detestable and selfish John Dashwood who views his sisters as a liability for himself and values a man for what he is worth in fortune, is inquisitive as to what is the exact fortune of Colonel

Brandon and suggests Elinor as to how very little effort on her part would secure her of a man of good fortune such as Colonel Brandon. But Elinor being a woman of integrity and right principles refuses to share or encourage his thoughts. "The elusiveness of her [Austen's] ideological stand on marriage, as on the other issues, is a perpetual challenge to critics, who have never finally resolved the problem of determining her alignments. The distinction she makes between those who take for granted the manipulative aspect of marriage and those who attempt to resist it seems at first to provide a clear moral divide." (Mukherjee 1991:36) Charlotte Lucas and John Dashwood are similar in the sense that they share a similar attitude and logic towards securing a man for matrimony. But whereas John Dashwood is despicable for his purely mercenary motives, Charlotte is rather to be sympathized. For her attitude speaks of the helplessness and submissiveness in going with the demands of the system.

Marianne is amazed at Elinor's composure despite quitting Norland and leaving Edward behind and is surprised that Elinor does not shun society or appears indifferent or uncomfortable in it. But Elinor, though in love with Edward, guards her heart from hoping too much for she is open and aware of the realities of the situation that exists between them and does not wish to be captivated by unattainable dreams and desires. She is sensitive but she does not believe in giving herself totally, passionately and senselessly to either love or grief. Unlike Marianne, Elinor does not "...augment and fix her sorrow by seeking, silence, solitude and idleness." (SS 62) Elinor, despite her heartbreak, does not lead her life to self-pity or "self-destruction" as Marianne almost does.

> The outright suicide or gradual, often penitent decline of ardent but betrayed women was an ubiquitous and politically sensitive subject...Suicide, of course, is a common theme in the fiction of 1790s...Austen's treatment of the subject is distinctive because it refuses

> to attribute the romantic heroine's near destruction to an (either foolishly or heroically) indulged passion that defies sensible, commonly accepted scriptures about conduct, but suggests instead that established codes themselves insist upon and anxiously collude in it. If Marianne's near death is almost suicide, it is almost murder as well. (Johnson 1990:64)

For a woman ditched and rejected in love, eventual death is a given thing, a sort of respectable, pitiable and a socially approved end to a dejected and wasted life. Such is the conventional ending in the sentimental novels of the age. And such a fate is what is expected of Marianne, which is toppled over by Austen

"Without ruffling the smooth surface of her novels she managed to introduce into them some of the ideological debates of her time which questions the implied assumptions behind the gender-based codes of conduct." (Mukherjee 1991:2-3) Mr. Collins avowal of love and marriage to Elizabeth and his reaction to her staunch refusal is a "...comic rendering of an essentially serious confrontation between two ideologies of marriage and two opposing images of women." (Mukherjee 1991:3) One view can be attributed to Rousseau who believed that women were conceived for the pleasure and fulfilment of men. And in a way, femininity was all about coquetry and subtle manoeuvres to entice and trap men in marriage. The other and less accepted view was one by Mary Woolstonecraft, so also by few others, that women too were rational and autonomous beings just like men. Mr. Collins refusal to see Elizabeth's refusal of his proposal as a serious, reflective and rational decision on her part, rather he views it as her "...wish of increasing love by suspense according to the usual practice of elegant females." (PP 297) And it took all of Elizabeth's patience, will and a rigid stance to get through to him and make him believe that what she said was what she meant and her speech did not carry a diabolical motive as such. And her wish to be taken as a rational

creature rather than an elegant female bespeaks "...crucial dilemma of the intelligent woman in the late-eighteenth-century England, both in fiction and real life." (Mukherjee 1991:3)

In *Pride and Prejudice,* Jane Austen flaunts the most unorthodox and unconventional heroine in Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth does not exactly confirm to conventional behaviour and values sketched out for women and "...many social and political issues cluster around her characterization...we tend to overlook or underestimate Elizabeth's outrageous unconventionality which, judged by the standards set in the conduct books and in conservative fiction, constantly verges not merely on impertinence but on impropriety." (Johnson 1990:75) Elizabeth speaks honestly and boldly and acts and judges independently. Her behaviour and views are hardly of the kind that would comply with what is conventional and proper for women of the age. And despite her notoriety as according to the strict social code of conduct, Elizabeth triumphs in life and in holding on to those values and beliefs in life, egged out of her love for self-respect and righteousness of feeling, she is rewarded by both social recognition and domestic happiness. Elizabeth is lively and independent but a sense of responsibility accompanied her freedom which gives her person a solidity of character and hence dignity and righteousness. Elizabeth defends her spiritedness and the fact that she loves to have a good laugh from being treated as cynical or satirical when she says: ' "I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good.' " (PP 265) It is in this sense of restraint in her character, her responsible independence that separates her 'laughter from Lydia's animal glee'. She is a person of intellect, a girl who knows her mind, sure of herself and even of her opinion of others. Her problems or rather her prejudices are largely due to her being too sure of herself and in believing to know a bit too much about others than was actually true. Her problems are in fact intellectual problems.

Austen makes a realistic portrayal of her heroines. Elizabeth is a rational creature who speaks the truth from her heart and even in matters concerning herself, she does not fear to speak or face the truth both with respect to herself and others. But Elizabeth, despite all her intelligence and sense, is attracted to and flattered by such a man as Wickham; but she is honest enough to admit that in despising Darcy and in being partial to Wickham she has been guided by her pride and vanity. " 'Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity not love has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned till this moment I never knew myself.' " (PP 365) Austen does not idealize her heroines. They are not without faults but to err is human and a woman need to be accepted, respected and acknowledged for the way she really is and not what society expects and projects of her, too ideal to seem real. When Elizabeth first views Pemberly, she is awed by its magnificence and she is honest enough to admit to herself that "...to be mistress of Pemberly might be something." (PP 376) But a sudden recollection that had she been its mistress, she would have to renounce her entire family including her beloved uncle and aunt, saved her from feeling a sort of regret at having refused Darcy's offer of marriage. " 'And of this place', thought she, 'I had been mistress! With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger...welcomed to them – as visitors my uncle and aunt – But no' – recollecting herself – 'that could never be: I should not have been allowed to invite them.' This was a lucky recollection – it saved her from something like regret." (PP 246) Elizabeth is quick and clever but she too has failings, yet she has sense enough to realize where she does err and this helps her to be a better and mature person. Elizabeth's change of opinion with respect to Darcy is not a compromise of her values and principles but her

decision is the result of reasoning and sound judgment reached through long experience and proper analysis of probabilities.

Though her judgment and attitude does let her down at times and make her falter, her principles remains sound and intact, and that is why she could never perhaps agree with Charlotte's views on matrimony. In discussing the Jane-Bingley relationship with Elizabeth, Charlotte feels that Jane should first concentrate on securing him for a husband and once she has done so she would have ample time to fall in love with him or get to know him later on. But Elizabeth disagrees with her friend and feels that a romantic relationship must be a combination of romance and rationality and instead of rushing things up, Jane should take enough time to get to know Bingley better, and also to truly merit her own regard for him irrespective of wealth and status standards. For the intelligent and right-minded Elizabeth Bennet such an advice as Charlotte gives is against her very character and personality and she says to Charlotte: ' "Your plan is a good one...where nothing is in question but a desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I would adopt it...but it is not sound. You know that it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself." '(PP 243) But here Elizabeth mistakes in judging Charlotte, who, inspite of being intelligent and sensible, shocks Elizabeth by agreeing to and bringing about marriage with a fool like Mr. Collins, just for the sake of security and establishment, knowing fully well that there are hardly any chances of happiness for her in such a marriage. "Marriage is an unquestioned necessity in Austen's novels but it is never the first and only necessity..." (Johnson 1990:92) Elizabeth's situation is no less precarious than Charlotte's where financial security is concerned, still she withstands such undesirable proposals which are either an insult to her intellect or else to her self-respect. She holds on to her just opinions and that too in the face of such men like Collins who

mouthed such lines as these, concerning their greatness in offering to marry her. "...it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you." (PP 297)

In proposing to Elizabeth, Collins feels that he is gratifying her but the fact remains that he is merely serving his own interests, cared only of his own happiness without bothering about hers. He thinks of marriage and how it would better his own life and when Elizabeth staunchly refuses his offer, he is bitter about it and instead of respecting her wishes, tries to pursue her till her adamance forces him to back off. Even then he refuses to see any fault in himself and is so confident of his own merits and eligibility that he attributes Elizabeth's refusal to her wilfulness of temper. Initially, so overtly confident is he of himself and what he can offer in marriage that he refuses to take Elizabeth's proposal as anything but customary and says to her: ' "...it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said..." ' (PP 296) And here Elizabeth has to be blunt and precise with him to get her refusal and point loud and clear, and says, ' "I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young women there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal." ' (PP 296)

Darcy, though totally in contrast with Mr. Collins as a person, is similar to him in also being indifferent to Elizabeth's happiness, initially. So blinded is he by his own consequence that he does not restrain himself in informing Elizabeth that in proposing marriage to her, he is acting below his station and against his judgment which warned him of the inferiority of her relations and how that would affect his status. But Elizabeth, the person that she is, is not humbled or quietly grateful at being thought worthy enough to be addressed by a man of Mr. Darcy's stature; instead she is quick to point out to him that

his attitude and behaviour towards herself whom he confessed to admire, is so unlike what a gentleman's should be. She feels insulted and offended since he proclaims of having liked her against his will, his reason and even against his character; and she does not mince words in telling him exactly how or what she felt about him and his conduct or his officious manner in dealing with the affairs concerning her sister and Wickham. She feels and voices that he would be the last man on earth whom she could ever be prevailed on to marry and says: ' "You could not have made me the offer of your hand, in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it." ' (PP 347)

Worldly pleasures, considerations and interests hardly motivate her; she could only be impressed by genuine behaviour and good qualities. Darcy and Collins, two dissimilar men, yet similar in the sense that they both are on their own ego trip, irrespective and oblivious of the fact that Elizabeth could have one of her own. Like after her initial and mild altercation with Darcy, she is still very much receptive of Charlotte's view that Darcy had the "right to be proud" but on one condition: ' "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine." ' (PP 241) Elizabeth is a woman of integrity who feels that she has a right to her pride, and of whatever consequence none has the right to insult hers. According to Claudia L. Johnson those

> ...who contend that Pride and Prejudice is a didactic novel consistent with the orthodox morality expounded in sermons and conduct books typically observe here that Elizabeth is guilty of the "sin" of pride, either in her all-too-fallible private judgments or in her personal attractions...Yet Pride and Prejudice invite us not to chide Elizabeth with threadbare morality about original sin, but on the contrary, of not actually to flatter people's pride as Wickham and Collins do, then atleast to honor it. (Johnson 1990:83)

Austen grants Elizabeth an independence and a capability of judging what is right

for herself or as to what she actually wants for herself that enables her to rise above the pressures and demands of 'filial obedience', an obedience that could end her in unhappiness, and do what she feels is right for herself and her life. She refuses to even consider Mr. Collins despite being bullied, pressurized and threatened by her mother and in withstanding parental pressure, though in the interest of right; she defies and dares all norms of proper female behaviour. Austen's novels "...devote a lot of attention to coercion, bullying and advice among friends, and all of these are problematic to an ethic championing personal choice and self-responsibility." (Johnson 1990:85)

In her novels Austen describes an age where women feel restricted as to what is or is not proper for their reading. Once when Mr. Collins is asked to read for the Bennet sisters, he is taken aback on being handed with a book for "...everything announced it to be from a circulating library), he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels." (PP 272) Instead he selects *Fordyce Sermon* for he thinks it as a correct sort of reading for young impressionable female minds. Although some may say that *Fordyce Sermons* can be a recommendation well enough for Lydia Bennet as it would teach her to tone down her shameful behaviour at times. But if sermons are granted the guideline status for as to what is proper conduct for modest females, one finds that if they very aptly questiones Lydia's behaviour, they do not spare Elizabeth's either. Her lively playful temperament can never go well with the preached code of conduct and her sense of confidence devoid of unaffected modesty when she tells Jane, "Compliments always take you by surprise and me never" (PP 238), reflects a confidence of character in her that is totally in contrast to what was recommended for the proper females of the age i.e. humility and modesty. Furthermore, Fordyce believes that in attire so too in all aspects women should restrain themselves well within the limits pertaining to their rank in life and never desire beyond the class and position that they are born into. But such a

view held no meaning for Elizabeth and unlike Mr. Collins she is hardly bothered as the way she ought or ought not to be dressed at Lady Catherine's dinner party or to the fact that even in matters of dress, Lady Catherine well preferred "distinction of rank". None could awe her down by mere distinction of status or money. "Fordyce's commendation of the "amiable reserve" of "elegant females", together with his underlying assumption that women's primary desire and duty is to please men, especially through the affectation of modesty, may show us where Collins derives his notion of female conduct, but they do not provide us with standards flexible and intelligent enough to evaluate Elizabeth." (Johnson 1990:76)

It is her very intelligence and liveliness of manner that slowly attracts Darcy to her. The interesting conversations that he now and then has with her are an entirely new experience for him as there is always a sense of challenge and defiance that Elizabeth seem to aim at him. At Rosings, while Elizabeth plays the piano, Darcy stations himself so as to get a full view of her and noticing his move as one made to intimidate her, she turns to him and says boldly, " 'You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by becoming in all this state to hear me? But I will not be alarmed though your sister does play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others.' " (PP 336) And though Darcy has no such intention, what is apparent here is that Elizabeth refuses to be dictated by anyone, and superiority of wealth and status scarcely ruffle her up. She refuses to take up the submissive role traditionally ascribed to women. She does not flatter him for his money or position and to be pleasing to him in any way seems totally out of the question. Her very indifference to him and his position catches his fancy and though many may find her behaviour unwomanly, for Darcy it is all charm and a feeling of freshness. After they are engaged, Elizabeth playfully asks him as to what is that that really attracted him to her first:

> "Now, be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?" '
>
> "For the liveliness of your mind, I did" '
>
> "The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking and thinking your approbation alone. I roused and interested you, because I was so unlike them." (PP 460)

Elizabeth is not affected in what she says or means. She is frank and devoid of an artifice, and this indeed is a rare quality in an age when women have to be all tact and socially proper.

Even in Lady Catherine's case, Elizabeth is open to and aware of her own merits and is not ready to disclaim them the way she does, and refuses to be affectedly modest and does not hesitate to censure Lady Catherine's pretentious superiority and her pompous and insulting behaviour. She finds in her no superiority that could be attributed to good sense, good manners or even good nature, and any other superiority pertaining to class or money could hardly humble or intimidate Elizabeth. Hearing her talk, she finds her views to be highly illogical, snobbish and insulting towards others who are not of her rank and this brought forth her intellectual inferiority, since reason and knowledge are a far cry from her conversations. She looks down upon Elizabeth due to her inferior class and in the name and awe of her own class and position, she wishes to extract a promise out of her that she will not marry Darcy. But, here Elizabeth stands her ground and refuses to give any promise, for despite her ignorance of what Darcy still felt for her, she makes it clear that if he proposes, she would accept him. Elizabeth feels that in marrying Darcy she is not moving out of her circle, since Darcy is a gentleman and she herself is a gentleman's daughter, and hence they are equal, with their being no such thing as moving in and out of any particular sphere. She is not ready to claim herself as or agree with Lady

Catherine of her being an inferior one in her suggested relationship with Darcy. She to conveys that if she has a relationship with Darcy and has to marry him, it would be a marriage of equals. "To the extent that this assertion of equality demystifies the great gentry, it serves reformist ends, for it deprives men like Darcy for any rational for their pride." (Johnson 1990:68) Elizabeth's stand infuriates Lady Catherine but Elizabeth remains adamant for she feels that every individual, be it a man or a woman, one has a right to make ones own choice and it is a democratic right of one and all irrespective of their class, status or money. Elizabeth feels that she and Darcy have a right to act in the manner they themselves think suitable for their own happiness and lives. If they can well love and respect one another without any reservations, pretensions or ulterior motives, they owe it to themselves to be together and happy. Thus Elizabeth's views such as they are:

> ...are radically modern for her time. First, she broadens and softens Lady Catherine's rigid ideas of social distinction. Elizabeth implicitly acknowledges that there could be such a disparity of education and manners as to make marriage impossible between two people. So, she erects a benchmark expressed by the word 'gentleman'. Her arguments seem to be that belonging to a 'gentleman's' family provides her with a sufficient background and education. In this way, she regards all of a broad sector of society to be 'equal'...
>
> Second, and more challengingly, Elizabeth repeatedly emphasises her own and Darcy's rights, as individuals, to make free decisions for themselves. (Marsh 1998:103)

There is an inherent spiritedness, certain happiness about the character of Elizabeth. Her never-say-die spirit could never completely be bogged down by dejection and

disappointments in life. She enjoys life and her optimism combined with her desire to be happy and content, gives her life and character certain uniqueness and freshness unseen in contemporary literature of the age. Elizabeth has a different attitude towards life, one that she voices to Darcy when they are united. ' "Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure." ' (PP 453) But Darcy dwells on his past mistakes and talks of his errors, not because he believes in what Elizabeth says but because he wishes her to know that her advice has been analysed and practiced and that he has been changed for the better.

> In making the wish for and experience of pleasure and happiness central to her novel, Austen is no less than redeeming a tradition of liberal, moral and political philosophy which antidates the postrevolutionary controversies that called it into question. Her acceptance of happiness as a morally acceptable goal proves not that she was a closet radical but rather that she and progressives were drawing on a shared tradition. (Johnson 1990:78)

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price is a "...heroine who, though a model of female virtue and filial gratitude, is betrayed by the same ethos she dutifully embraces." (Johnson 1990:96) She is forced and pained by the very people she is willing to look up as protective and righteous authority. Fanny is hardly a traditional heroine in the sense that she is timid, silent, unassertive, shrinking, and excessively vulnerable. But inspite of her nature, she always thinks, feels, speaks, and behaves exactly as she ought. Some critics have accused Fanny of being too still a character. But her stillness should not be treated as a mark of her passivity, for behind the still exterior she is often holding strongly, though silently, to those standards and values in which she believes and which she knows are right.

> ...her resolute immobility, frail and beset though it is, is a last gesture of resistance against the corrosions of unfettered impulse and change. She stands for the difficulty of delicate, right thinking in a world of inadequate perception and subtly corrupt instincts. Her toils and triumphs are all mental and moral...Her immobility, her refusal to be 'moved' are not symptoms of mule like stubbornness or paralysed fear, but a measure of her integrity, her adherence to her own clear evaluations of how things stand. (Tanner 1968:149)

Fanny is a true heroine because in a disturbed world it is harder to refrain from action than to let energy and impulse run out of control. *Mansfield Park* is an attempt on Jane Austen's part to put forth the importance of peace, moral values, tranquillity and order in life in a changing world of fierce passions and destructive energy and, at the same time, she is also aware of the incredible moral strength that is required if something like this is to be achieved and she realizes all this in the character of Fanny Price. She is often humiliated, pushed and forced into decisions and choices, which are certainly not hers, and though she is quiet and submissive by nature, she stands up for her principles and refuses to bow down to circumstances and social pressures. Once she tells Edmund that we all have within ourselves a better guide than any other person can be but only if we would listen to it. And she does exactly what she says. She believes in herself when nobody else does and, finally, she is recognized as the true preserver and inheritor of the values represented by *Mansfield Park*.

> In the debilitated but undeviated figure of Fanny Price we should perceive the pain and labour involved in maintaining true values in a corrosive world of dangerous energies and selfish power play...For righteousness sake, Jane Austen always accepted the fact that life has to be defined and

> lived within limits: she never canvassed the idea of flight from society into non social freedom. But she seems to have become increasingly aware of the pain and misery involved in what D. W. Harding calls 'the impossibility of being cut off from objectionable people.' (Tanner 1968:157-158)

In *Mansfield Park* Sir Thomas is not a tyrannical man, rather he is a man of principles but he represents a patriarchal belief system and views everything in context with his own beliefs and closed mindset. He is honest and just but his "...system of thought is a closed system. He only considers those things he already expects to consider, and he is therefore unable to deal with the variety or unpredictability of life." (Marsh 1998:145) Anything new or outside his own way of thinking is not exactly welcome to him. He takes decisions for others and expects everybody to abide by them. When submissive Fanny contradicts his way of feeling and refuses to take Henry in the name of holy matrimony, he is highly displeased and has his displeasure shown and accuses her of being ungrateful and foolish. In refusing to listen to Fanny and have his own fixed notions regarding the match and his approval of Henry's conduct and character (the reality of whom is not known to him), shows his attitude to be all male and suppressive towards a woman who is under his care and dependent upon him, making her feel all the guilt of her self-willed decision. He feels that if nothing else, Henry's merits should recommend him to her. He states: "Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to everybody." (MP 660) Sir Thomas, like a true patriarch, has a certain image of what a woman should be, compliant, submissive and obedient, and that is what he wishes Fanny to be. Fanny is not allowed to be her own self. Unable to pin-point the reason of Fanny's rigid stance and

her refusal of such a good offer, Sir Thomas tries to probe whether her heart is taken, for he can only think of such a reason for such a stance. And though Fanny loves Edmumd, her reasons to dislike Crawford as a person are valid and genuine enough. She is the only person who has judged him for what he is. Even if she has not been in love with another man, she would never agree to marry Crawford. Firstly, because she would not have been able to love him and secondly, no amount of wealth or status could tempt her to overlook his faults of character. But Sir Thomas merely attributes her decision to the love of another man for "...he cannot conceive of a woman not dependent on a man." (Marsh 1998:150)

Sir Thomas feels that in refusing Crawford, Fanny is being self-willed, selfish, and ungrateful and refusing to be sensible about her own good fortune while, at the same time, insisting that he would never pressurize her against her wishes and all the time his opinions as well as his hints and efforts refute what he claims. He pressurizes and she withstands both barely masked from each other by that almost faint line of decency, decorum, and propriety of behaviour and privacy.

Sir Thomas is kind to Fanny Price but at times his kindness has artifice in store. At the night of the ball, Sir Thomas in advising Fanny to retire on account of her health and spirits has a purpose at hand. " "Advise" is his word but it was the advice of absolute power" (MP 640) Knowing fully well the power his word holds or rather his authority commands, he chooses to advice Fanny, aware that he would be promptly complied with. Fanny's submissive nature is just what the patriarchal attitude of Sir Thomas expects and approves of in women. It is a kind advice surely to be taken and dispatched as a command and his purpose in doing so is to show his niece's persuadableness and obedience to authority, qualities so very desirable in a wife and meant for the eyes and notice of Mr. Crawford. "In thus sending her away Sir Thomas, perhaps might not be thinking merely

of her health. It might occur to him that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by showing her persuadableness." (MP 640) Sir Thomas notices with pleasure Crawford's attention to Fanny and in order to engineer the match, he in a way tries to highlight Fanny's ready submission and obedience to even an authoritative advice.

"Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Austen exposes the limits of socially constructed 'power' allegedly held by women in courtship. Sir Thomas's attempt to manipulate Fanny into marrying Henry underline his power and her comparative powerlessness..." (Fergus 1991:148) In courtship a woman is said to capture a man's affections and has power over his heart. But in reality it is the man who bestows this power upon her and glories in it and in turn gets a power over her person and mind. The initiation of romance, the avowal of it, the perseverance, the pressure for acceptance is all from Henry's side. He only thinks of his love and passion for Fanny without really caring to know what she thinks of him, for it never seem to strike him that a poor girl like Fanny would have reservations about a marital alliance with him and the social respectability that comes with his name. It is only of his will to love and marry her that he cares for when he tells so to his sister, ' "I am quite determined, Mary. My mind is entirely made up...you must be aware that I am quite determined to marry Fanny Price." ' (MP 646)

Fanny is accused of being self-willed and irresponsible in refusing his proposal and overlooking the seriousness of his honourable intentions. Henry is only too happy to have it universally known that she rules his heart and captures his feelings and that she has a strange power over him. But in being excessively pressurized by Sir Thomas on grounds of thankfulness and gratitude not only that she owes to him but also towards Henry, one wonders at the sort of power she is thought capable of. In Sir Thomas's cold disapproval of her decision and Henry Crawford's determined but unwanted preference of

her, she finds it hard even to hold on to her power of refusal or right to say no in a marriage offer. Fanny, like any other Austen heroine, would never marry without love and in being pursued by one whom she detests and ignored or overlooked by one for whose love she cares, she suffers much pain while at the same time being unjustly accused of giving pain to so devoted a man as Henry appeared. Hence one wonders for Fanny when Mary flatters her by saying:

> "Oh! That I could transport you for a short time into our circle in town that you might understand how your power over Henry is thought of there! Oh! The envyings and heart burnings of dozens and dozens; the wonder, the incredulity that will be felt at hearing what you have done! For as to secrecy, Henry is quite the hero of an old romance, and glories in his chains. You should come to London to know how to estimate your conquest." (MP 688)

It is a conquest indeed, for instead of giving her a feeling of high it threatens to imprison her very self. "...Austen's representation of Henry's courtship makes clear that all real power is on his side. His chains are only figurative; a woman's are not...Henry might well glory in his chains that afford him such freedom." (Fergus 1991:149) Jane Austen subjects the socially approved institutions of marriage and courtship to intense scrutiny and the effect it has pertaining to a woman's lot.

In *Mansfield Park* Fanny's cousin Maria Bertram is in a way a victim of the patriarchal attitude and environment of her father's home. Sir Thomas on his return from Antigua is quick to discern that Maria does not have very many cordial feelings for Mr. Rushworth, the man she is engaged to be married. His own assessment of Mr. Rushworth, as a man of little or no sense at all, does not raise his hopes for the future happiness of Maria's life. And though he questions Maria as to what she really desires and whether the

alliance would bring her happiness, he is satisfied with her reply if not entirely convinced and does not probe any further. The fact remains that despite Mr. Rushworth's foolishness, his large estate and huge income make him a welcome and respectable addition to his own status and prestige in society. But had he convinced Maria of his love, care and unflinching support and full approbation in giving up a man like Rushworth, she would have been saved from a mistake and essential ruin. "Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied, perhaps, to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others. It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain." (MP 590) In her desperation to break free, Maria falters in choosing a life of superficial pleasures and her misplaced notions motivated by social considerations see the end of her.

> The system of female manners is supposed to eliminate the need for the nakedness of coercion, and the embarrassment this entails, by rendering women so quiescent and tractable that they sweetly serve in the designs of fathers or guardians without wishing to resist and without noting that they have no choice...the women of Mansfield Park are held to a code of female propriety. The subject of femininity is a matter of great concern to virtually all the male characters. (Johnson 1990:103)

Sir Thomas is a bit uneasy in letting Maria go ahead with her marriage, but he does not have the heart to force her enough to let go of an alliance that is so advantageous to his family on worldly accounts. Hence he talks himself into believing a falsehood that Maria's feelings and disposition are just as ought to be a wife's and this would see her through in her marriage even with a man like Rushworth, thus turning himself blind to reality that shows Maria far from the confines and demands of female modesty: "...nor is her disposition so placid as he wishfully fancies. Studious to conceal rather than sublimate the rebelliousness of her temper, Maria suffers petulantly but desperately from

restraint...her marriage to Rushworth is not voluntary service to a new man, but "independence" from Mansfield and "escape" from Sir Thomas." (Johnson 1990:103) But where Maria defies decorum and all for the wrong reasons, Fanny is one who is an epitome of female modesty. She is only too ready to give in to the demands and expectations of her guardians, especially Sir Thomas. She looks up to him and is sincere in her efforts to please him and tries hard not to offend him but it is her extreme respect for Sir Thomas, combined with her submissiveness of temper and modest nature, that makes her suffer a lot more than one would otherwise have. The people she submits to with respect for authority are so pre-occupied with their own opinions and attitudes that concern and consideration for what she feels and thinks is hardly the issue for them. She suffers all the more due to her refusal to be self-assertive at times. "Fanny's efforts to be modest, then, are every bit as frustrating and corrosive as Maria's efforts simply to appear so. Between the two of them the confounding bind in which the code of propriety places women is laid bare." (Johnson 1990:104) At least Maria's status gives her an opportunity of choice regarding what she wished to have; Mr. Rushworth afterall has been her choice, but Fanny is not even allowed to have that choice and is almost forced into accepting Crawford on account of her desired humbleness and good fortune in evoking the feelings of a man of position like him. Sir Thomas is only too shocked at the audacity of modest Fanny when he learns of her decision to turn Crawford down. He feels that even Fanny, despite all her submissiveness and modest nature, is not really uninfluenced by the 'pernicious doctrines' of the times:

> "I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now

> shown me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you – without even asking their advice." (MP 662)

He expects something totally different from Fanny. He feels that her nature is such a combination of meekness and warmth that she would easily be persuaded into any decision of his without having to use any sort of obvious force or authority over her. "Her resistance implies an assumption of self-responsibility and challenges his authority, and he is alarmed." (Johnson 1990:104)

Fanny, who never even gives an opinion to anybody, has to defy just almost everybody to resist from marrying Crawford. She overrules almost everything, right from Sir Thomas's authority and displeasure to social compulsions and social conventions. She feels that for a right and honourable man like her uncle, her obvious dislike for Crawford would rest the matter of marriage from being pursued any further but, here she is wrong in estimating him and his ethics. And Fanny would only console herself with the thought that "He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth, romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him." (MP 670) Her dislike could carry weight if his opinions coincided with it, but since that is not the case, it would mean nothing but offence to his wishes.

> Sir Thomas's interviews with Fanny and Maria on the subject of feminine choice mirror each other, for just as he attributes Maria's wish to marry a man she does not love to a commendable, because easily governed, serenity of temper, so he attributes Fanny's refusal to marry a man she does not love to a "young, heated fancy" and a "wild fit of folly", to headstrong passions unbecoming in themselves and inconvenient to

> parents or guardians, whose "advantage or disadvantage" depends on her. (Johnson 1990:105)

Even Edmund makes an appeal to Fanny's modest nature and loving heart to let Crawford succeed at last. He knows that she is too kind and good-natured to reject an appeal to her heart and in the name of love and trust. Her modesty ends up raising unreasonable hopes from her and she has to bear the cross of her own goodness. She is appealed by all and asked by none. Even Edmund tries to influence her: ' "You have proved yourself upright and disinterested, prove yourself grateful and tender hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman, which I have always believed you born for." (MP 680) Fanny indeed has been upright in her conduct and behaviour with no attachments to embarrass, for no one has any clue as to her love for Edmund, but in order to prove herself as an ideal woman she has to do much more and that is to show her concern, gratefulness and approval for Crawford since he has honoured her by his affection and proposal of marriage. Her consent could not be doubted for a moment in such a case. But, like Fanny says to Edmund concerning her stand:

> ' I should have thought...that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man not being approved, not being loved by someone of her sex, at least, let him ever so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself...How then was I to be – to be in love with him the moment he said he was with me? How was I to have an attachment at his service, as soon as it was asked for? His sister should consider me as well as him...And, and – we think very differently of the nature of women, if they can imagine a woman so very soon capable of returning an affection as this seems to apply.' (MP 684)

Fanny feels that modesty forbids women from feeling, expressing and wanting in love but the minute they are approached, the very modesty expects a woman to be all ready to desire and to approve and give her ready consent to whosoever honours her with a marital proposal, her wishes and feelings becoming a matter of little or no concern at all.

Henry Crawford has the sense and consciousness well enough to value and admire the principles and modesty that the character of Fanny epitomizes. He has never been a man of decorum or ever led a life of principle and integrity himself but he has taste enough to cherish and value qualities like these in a wife for it would maintain faith and domestic bliss in marriage and remove every fear of betrayal on the wife's account. "The paradox of female modesty is not simply that the same purity which is supposed to place them above the suspicion of sexual desire actually inflames male desire. It is also that female purity itself is simultaneously demanded as natural and disbelieved as affected." (Johnson 1990:106)Fanny's refusal does not deject Crawford instead it is viewed by him like, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Collins considered Elizabeth's as more for propriety sake. And though Fanny is staunch in her refusal, her mild and gentle nature prevents her from making her point in strongest possible manner and this end up giving hope to both Crawford and Sir Thomas to her eventual yes. On her brother's account she feels a gratitude towards Crawford which stops her from being rude to him and more so because it is not in her nature to be so with anybody. "Her manner was incurably gentle, and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude and softness, made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial; seem at least, to be giving as much pain to herself as to him." (MP 667) Her apparent softness of manner in refusing the proposal is taken as her coyness and "Modesty, then dispossesses Fanny of her meaning by reversing her own assertions. As such, it legitimises and guarantees domination by providing it with a "decent" rationale." (Johnson 1990:106)

In *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford is chastised for that very frankness which epitomizes Elizabeth and Emma, maybe because, despite the crucial reality behind her opinions, the fact that these opinions govern or motivate her decisions and her behaviour, she needs to be censured by Austen in order to prevent the corruption of social values and behaviour and not to undermine tradition as such. But, whatever be her personal life, her opinions do indeed rightly pinpoint social restrictions and conventions pertaining to matrimony:

> '...there is not one in hundred of either sex who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so; and I feel that it must be so, when I consider that it must be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect more from others, and are least honest themselves.'
>
> 'Ah! You have been in bad school of matrimony, in hill street.'
>
> 'My poor aunt had certainly little cause to love the state; but, however, speaking from my own observation, it is a manoeuvring business. I know so many who have married in the full expectation and confidence of some one particular advantage in the connection, or accomplishment, or good quality in the person, and who have found themselves entirely deceived and been obliged to put up with exactly the reverse. What is this but a take in?' (MP 495-496)

Having heard Mary speak lightly of her uncle, the Admiral, Fanny feels that it is morally and ethically wrong for Mary to criticize her uncle in front of others and whatever his faults, he is her patron who has taken care of her and her brother over the years and he needs to be respected for that if for nothing else. Edmund too feels her behaviour to be wrong but since he is interested in her as his future wife; he overlooks it as a flaw of her

character and thinking, and sees her action questionable merely on superficial grounds. He does not criticize her principles like to which Fanny objected rather he feels that there is nothing wrong in the view she holds for her Uncle. But what is wrong is the thoughtlessness, which makes her voice that view in public. He tries to convince Fanny that on every other point she is all feminine except in the case, which they were discussing. Here Claudia L. Johnson has a valid point to bring forth "...Edmund is uneasy about a prospective wife's propensity to talk without inhibition about so formidable a figure. A man's character should stay behind closed doors, and a woman's character as a woman is subject to review whenever she fails to respect his character in public." (Johnson 1990:111)

In analysing the women of *Mansfield Park*, one finds them to be in desperate need of a voice. "Mansfield Park adumbrates a phenomenon which has preoccupied modern feminists: the dependence of certain kind of masculine discourse on feminine silence. Mansfield Park runs smoothly only so long as female dissent can be presumed not to exist." (Johnson 1990:112) Lady Bertram is too mild and blissfully ignorant to have anything to say ever to displease anyone. Even her daughters, though simmering with rebellion, hardly voice it in front of the domineering authority of Sir Thomas and end up looking for desperate means of freedom. Fanny could well feel their desperation and frustration but she is unable to voice her opinions and even when she hints or says it in subtle words, she is not paid attention to. Even Mary Crawford's obvious and political attacks at patriarchal figures are unheeded and unnoticed for long. But women in *Mansfield Park* all rebel against the system at some point of time and though they may or may not be justified in what they do, the fact remains that somehow their actions were the outcome of their frustration against the authority. When Fanny refuses to accept Crawford, her wish, or rather her right to do so, is taken as her defiance and so shocked is

Sir Thomas at her decision, more so because he has made his will perfectly clear to her, that her action is beyond comprehension for him. He is not used to have his command overruled and Fanny has dared to do just that. And later on he is benumbed and his authority shaken and humbled by Maria's eventual betrayal of his hopes, trust and values. The faults in the upbringing of his children glare him in the face and he acknowledges it all. "As the case of Mary Crawford attests, however, chastity alone is not enough to assure and ensure the interests of patriarchy. Silence too atleast on some subjects, is also required to place that chastity beyond suspicion, even though paradoxically, that silence like modesty itself, will also and always be liable to doubt." (Johnson 1990:112) Edmund is shocked out of his admiration for Mary on hearing her blatant remarks about the illicit relationship that Maria and Crawford end up being into. He is stupefied by her brazen and cool response to the situation and people involved in it. And though Mary is wrong in her views and attitude towards such an issue, the bottomline remains that it is her audacity and openness in speaking freely of the topic, considered as taboo for a woman that finally puts Edmund off. Had she been silent on what she really feels and just agree with what Edmund has to say she would not have been criticized so. Mary is in a way similar to Sir Thomas in the sense that she too feels that Fanny has been honoured in receiving the proposal from Crawford and she ought to accept him with gratefulness. But, whatever her opinions or values, she is different from Sir Thomas in not putting on pretensions. She never acts as a moral approver or censure but is frank in voicing her point of view. "...Mary makes no such pretensions, and that is what damns her. She covets the trappings of social prestige and respects the dictates of worldly wisdom – including that portion of it which requires female chastity – but she does not recognize the mystique of social institutions and the people who embody them, and thus does not appreciate the enormity of Maria's crime." (Johnson 1990:113) Here, it Fanny's well-balanced sense and

righteousness of judgment and morals to judge as to the immensity of the fate Maria has brought on herself.

Thus Fanny shows a delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling. In total contrast to Mary is Fanny's sensitivity to people and values and this is characteristic of the woman she becomes. Fanny is a sensitive soul and she has a fine sense of discrimination and judgment. In various situations, the principles Fanny chooses to live by are thoroughly tested but they remain unimpaired and help Fanny emerge victorious in the end.

> Fanny's rejection of Henry represents, then, her censure of his presumptuous attempt to author his own life, his past history, and his present fictional identities. Self-divided, indulging his passions, alienated from authority, full of ambition...the false young man verges on the satanic...his way cannot be the Austen heroine's. Although his crime are real actions while hers are purely rhetorical, she is more completely censured because her liberties more seriously defy her social role. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:167)

Mansfield Park portrays a world of traditional values being infiltrated and undermined by modern ones which are unprincipled, unscrupulous, ambitious, selfish, and false and how the heroine Fanny Price holds out on her own for the values she believes to be right against all adversity.

"In its willingness to explore positive versions of female power, Emma itself, is an experimental production of authorial independence unlike any of Austen's other novels." (Johnson 1990:126) One cannot help but be attracted and charmed by the forceful personality of Emma Woodhouse due to her brilliance, wit, energy, independence, fallibility and also because of her ability to realize and acknowledge where she did err, righteousness enough to correct her self. *Emma* has everything to begin with money,

class, and status – and still perfected by looks, intelligence, wit and indomitable spirit. Emma's unconventional notions and opinions gives her an independence of spirit unthought for the females of the age but her freedom does not bother on callousness or rashness of behaviour and she handles her freedom and independence with responsibility and except on rare occasions when her moods get the better of her, her behaviour is well bound within the social codes of propriety and conduct and she remains well aware of the social obligations and duties attached to her status and standing in society and is always too keen to fulfil them to her ability. "...she displays power of delicacy and forbearance which are the more impressive given the vivacity of her own temper and the incisiveness of her wit." (Johnson 1990:130)

Emma is a highly individualistic, ebullient, enthusiastic but erroneous woman. But her faults are not mere faults; they are rather amiable and interesting in themselves. Austen places Emma in affluent circumstances and shows that there are real dangers in the situation of a highly intelligent and energetic young woman, wholly protected from the need to make her way alone in this world and with nothing better to do than to look after her ailing and dependent father and interfere with the lives of one she thinks she is assisting. Emma's mistakes are the result of her environment at home, which pampers her and does not help her to grow up; her errors of judgment about social relationships are the direct outcome of the 'infantile' role she plays as a perfect daughter. Hers is an amazing journey of self-discovery and self-realisation to being a more responsible and considerate person; but though she accepts and learns from her mistakes and rectifies them, it does not mean that she could stop being the wilful person that she is. Austen does not moralise or burden her heroine into being someone she is not for to change her would be to destroy the essence that makes Emma the person that she really is. Despite the perfections Emma is endowed, she is not some picture of perfection. In her Austen has depicted a heroine

who is good, yet not too good and who, though capable of rational judgment and righteousness, falters in every decision of hers and through a series of self-revealing experiences finally sets her priorities right. Her story is that of twist and turns of her mind, as she advances towards self-knowledge and then seeks a way to resist its impact, but despite the setbacks which she faces in interpreting people and situations, it is counter-balanced by the positive energy and the happy spirit that she possesses. Emma has an arrogant independence inherent in her nature, undiluted, untempered and most importantly unapologetic. She has often been criticised for the want of feminine softness and submissiveness to the dictates of social authority. Her independent control of her household, an all important responsibility of her father, her total indifference to marriage as a woman's only important alternative in life and her wish to control and handle or rather manoeuvre other people love-lives, give her character an independence, spirit and an attitude of defiance towards what was or was not a woman's domain. Emma once says to Mr. Knightley with easy confidence: ' "I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other." ' (E 1053)

Her self-assured stance is not easy to digest; since it is not merely a personal opinion but rather it is strengthened and supported by her social position which basically commands for her respect and authority that can only be bestowed to a man of Sir Thomas stature but difficult to grant to a woman, not even to someone like Lady Catherine, leave alone Emma. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne is almost made to pay for her impulsiveness and Elizabeth for her prejudiced notions and with Emma "...power is generally presented as the problem she must overcome..." (Johnson 1990:127) Although Emma's status commands a respect and awe similar to Sir Thomas, the difference lies in the fact that when it comes to authoritating that "power" specially when it involves some other person, Emma reacts in a more considerate and just manner. When

Fanny refuses to abide by Sir Thomas's opinion of Henry Crawford, he turns against her and refuses to even attempt to look into her wishes and reasons since it is difficult for him to digest the fact that someone whom he has groomed under his patronage, refuses to bend to his wishes. Emma shares a similar sort of relationship with Harriet whom she grooms and guides under her care; but when Harriet reveals her attraction for Mr. Knightley and Emma feels threatened by her, she does not loose her sense of justness in dealing with her since, in a way, she herself had been responsible for raising her hopes. Although she does not agree with Harriet, she is responsible and ethical enough to avoid force, confrontation, interference or plain opposition. When it comes to exercising influence she is more graceful and condescending than the patriarchal attitude and authority of Sir Thomas in being righteous, considerate and acknowledgement of her own mistakes.

> ...Emma is a world apart from conservative fiction in accepting a hierarchical social structure not because it is a sacred dictate of patriarchy...but rather because within its parameters class can actually supersede sex. Thus Emma recuperates a world Austen savages in novels such as Mansfield Park and Northanger Abbey, in order to explore what was precluded in those novels, the place such a world can afford to women with authority. Though it may favour male rule, the social system sustained in Emma recognizes the propriety of female rule as well, and it to this system that Emma, in the absence of any social superiors, owes her preeminence. (Johnson 1990:127)

But this does not mean that all of Emma's views, opinions and ideas arising out of her consciousness of her own social superiority and of the liberties attached to her status in life are always righteous in themselves or non-variant in actually putting them into action

but rather to mean that the privileges and responsibilities associated with her status in society are legitimate.

Emma is different from any other Austen heroine, be it in her independence, self-consequence, aggressiveness or wishful fancies for that matter. Even in the one conservative bond that she shares with her father, in her love and devotion for him, it is her strength, spirit, activeness and sense that her father relies on and here too she is the one in total control.

> This unconventional, almost androgynous, choice of heroine permits Austen a much sharper look at women's option within society than she can in any other novel. Because her heroine is so secure, nearly so secure as a rich man, Austen is free to explore issues of women's power and marginality more profoundly than she had in earlier novels...As usual, courtship offers a means to approach these issues, and in this novel, courtships are not merely enacted but obsessively discussed...Much more than any other Austen heroine...Emma herself likes to consider and discuss questions of 'female right'. (Fergus 1991:153-154)

Emma does not need a marriage to fulfil her life or to gain consequence, status and independence. Emma Woodhouse, heiress of a considerable fortune and comfortable house, is not bothered by fears of economic security for herself and feels free of monetary compulsions that generally surround other women. During Jane Austen's time spinsterhood could only be tolerated in a woman of fortune just like Emma Woodhouse had. Like Emma says to Harriet, pertaining to matrimony: ' "I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing...And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine, Fortune I do not want; judgment I do not want; consequence I do not want..." (E 814)

In her age such were the motives behind most marriages and Emma could well afford or wished to ignore all of them. In Mrs Elton's words, she does not need a 'lord and master', a husband to give her life a meaning and importance. She enjoys total freedom, importance and authority at Hartfield and is in no hurry to give up her independence for marriage. She has been used to having her own way ever since she has been a child and like Mr. Knightley jokingly mentions to Mrs. Weston as to how Emma despite being her own student, ended up giving her an education on "...the very material matrimonial of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid." (E 783) Emma's analysis of marriage as a business proposition for those involved in it and as to how fortune and status motivates such decisions and choices and has a bearing on one's happiness, holds true for many other characters in *Emma* (E), be it Mrs. Elton, Harriet, Frank Churchill or Jane Fairfax or even Mr. Weston for that matter. Everybody considers Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston as a stroke of good fortune for her, since it would bring her status and importance in life. And Mr. Weston is not bothered by his wife's lack of fortune, instead it gives him a position of consequence in their marriage. His first wife had been of a rich family and when she leaves all that to marry him, he has been overpowered with a sense of gratefulness towards her and feels all her goodness in accepting him. He always feels a sense of gratitude towards her for being good enough to love him and agree to be his wife. But with Miss Taylor, he is the one"...to choose than to be chosen, to excite gratitude rather than to feel it." (E 770). In this case he is the one who evokes gratefulness, for he is good and disinterested enough to marry well below his station in life. He is now the provider of status and happiness to his wife. And in feeling so he does not lose his amiableness or his goodness of person. According to Claudia L. Johnson,

> Unlike us, Austen is not embarrassed by power, and she depicts it with a quiet pervasiveness and nonchalance that suggest how effortlessly she took

> it and the sentiment relative to it for granted. What makes Emma unusual, then, is not that she as Trilling would have it, is a woman freakishly endowed with self-love but rather that she is a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it...
>
> Emma assumes her own entitlement to independence and power – power not only over her own destiny, but what is harder to tolerate, power over the destinies of others – and in doing so she poaches on what is felt to be a male turf. (Johnson 1990:125)

Emma's dilemma in life is that she moves about in the restrictive group of social circle, meet the same sort of people and out of them very few to match her calibre, and for a women of her intellect she is faced with a dearth of intellectual conversation and stimulation. In order to indulge her mental capabilities and to bring interest to her otherwise monotonous existence, she tries to formulate and imagine situations and manoeuvre other people love lives and all this because there is "...very little scope for channelling her energy and wit. The problem that confronts most of Jane Austen's women, focused most sharply in the case of Emma Woodhouse, is that of leisure management. How can they fill up their time when according to very definition of bourgeois femininity they cannot participate in the productive process and work structure of society?" (Mukherjee 1991:84) Women, however, could utilise their time and energy by being superficially well accomplished to marry well and find an aim, occupation and motive in life. Marriage is the only and most obvious sphere marked out for all possible capabilities that a woman has or means to demonstrate and it is due to this socially approved and marked destiny for a woman's lot that makes Harriet exclaim at Emma's view and disinterest relating to marriage. It is hard for her to understand how Emma would employ her time and life if she shuns marriage as an alternative. Harriet voices the

general prejudice of the age when she says, ' "...you will be an old maid – and that's so dreadful!" ' (E 814) But Emma explains to her that her position is not so dreadful as it seems for she is a well-provided woman. Emma is the only Austen heroine who has wealth and status to begin with. She has social and economic security to back her and she does not need a marriage to achieve such stability in life. Her affluence is a major motivation or supports her decision to remain unmarried for the sake of her father. She is one person who could afford maidenhood without being looked down upon for it, for in any case she would be a rich and respectable spinster and none would question the wealth and status of Emma Woodhouse.

> "Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman with a very narrow income must be ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and maybe as sensible and respectable as anybody else! And the distinction is not quite so much against the candour and the common-sense of the world as appears at first; for a very narrow income has a tendency to contract the mind and sour the temper." (E 814)

Maidenhood is an undesirable status for women in Jane Austen's time and Emma's decision to remain so, speaks of defiance against conventions. Emma rejects and defies the concept and expectation that the society has from women in rejecting marriage or rather in being indifferent to it. From the very beginning she enjoys a position of power and privilege and regales in the influence that she could well form upon others. The way she handles and looks after her father, runs household affairs, commands and controls everything around and about her, she almost acts and takes up the manly role of authority and control. The way she manipulates and guides Harriet's life according to her fancy and

wishes, she acts out the role of "...a patriarchal father, manipulating and bending Harriet to her will, 'for her own good, and Emma assumes and manages the task a father would normally carry out of finding a suitable husband for this surrogate daughter.' " (Marsh 1998:257)

For Emma, match-making is a sort of diversion, something to occupy her leisure and intellect with, for except Mr. Knightley and the much married Mrs. Weston, Highbury affords her no intellectual equals, and even they can not fill all her time-gaps and the void she feels in her life which her unspent energy and enthusiastic spirit causes. She finds it as self-satisfying in her otherwise dull and boring life with nothing worthwhile to employ her faculties in. Emma is an exception among Austen heroines in that she is rich enough to ignore, avoid or even reject marriage as an alternative to give meaning to her life and attain social status and settlement. She has security and status to begun with and "Marriage was a game she could play with other people. Her apparent freedom based on financial independence is thus not only deeply ambiguous but carries with it a latent double danger: she can delude her self and she can toy and tamper with other people's relationships she of course does both." (Tanner 1968:180) Harriet proves to be that distraction for Emma, an outlet for her desire to influence and shape people's lives, the power to shape and bring about what she feels confident of although it may not always be just. She is headstrong, wilful and strong. "The emotional energy which lurks unrecognised within Emma, is channelled into plans, hopes and fears on Harriet's behalf." (Marsh 1998:47) Harriet Smith is an illegitimate child and Emma romanticises her situation by declaring her belief in the fact that she may be the child of an aristocratic father. Although Emma's aspirations concerning Harriet are a bit exaggerated but what is worth admiring is her 'sound moral judgment' in refusing to accept that the child should be punished for the sins of the parents. Emma objects to the general injustice done

according to the laws and manners of the age towards 'natural children' and Austen who believes in the fact that 'unnatural distinctions in society could not be morally justified', does not criticise her heroine's 'moral principle' in this. However, in the end when it becomes clear that Harriet is not of noble parentage as she had hoped for but only the daughter of a tradesman, she reflects ironically that in a society such as ours, " '...the stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility and wealth, would have been a stain indeed.' " (E 1058)

Harriet's unaffected charm, innocence, modesty and openness warms Emma towards her and she takes her under her care and patronage with a wish to see her comfortably settled through a marriage of consequence with someone like Mr. Elton or Frank Churchill. Hence she feels depressed at having Harriet being courted and sought by a gentleman farmer Robert Martin. Mr. Knightley thinks that he would be giving Emma a pleasant surprise in disclosing to her Robert Martin's intended proposal to Harriet Smith but Emma already knows of the proposal being made and having made her reject it outright, says to Mr. Knightley: ' "He is very obliging...but is he sure Harriet means to marry him?" ' (E 797) Although Emma misjudges in estimating Robert Martin's true worth, the fact remains that her question is a perfectly justifiable one unlike Mr. Knightley's statement when he announces: "...he is in love with her and means to marry her." (E 797). Just like Fanny is expected to have Crawford the minute he decides that he wants her, Harriet too is supposed to agree at once just because Robert Martin means to love and marry her. In fact, she is expected to feel obliged for the kind proposal above all. Emma further knows that Harriet herself would be only too ready and more than happy to say yes for she never feels otherwise than what is expected from her. Even Mr. Knightley feels confident of Harriet saying yes and feels that Harriet's initial refusal would merely be as "...fashionable, feminine ritual gesture – something which an up-to-

date female has to say, but can't really mean seriously." (Waldron 1999:122) Mr. Knightley, despite being a man of integrity and righteousness in this case, is not different than Darcy and both being similar to the uncouth Mr. Collins when it comes to viewing female dissent to marital proposals. Emma makes a very rational argument when she says, '"A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her." ' (Waldron 1999:798) And though Emma is wrong in estimating Robert Martin and his worth, the opinions she voices bespeak a truth that dares convention and prejudiced notions.

"Emma finally terms her fiasco with Harriet "the worst of all her womanly follies" not because women are prone to follies in general and therefore will always need the guidance of Mr. Knightley, but rather because the conditions of isolation and restriction that exposed Emma to danger with are those to which women are uniquely exposed." (Johnson 1990:140) Emma having lived in the company and society of elegant and intellectual Miss Taylor, is frustrated and suffers from intellectual loneliness after her marriage removes her from the post of Emma's governess and house to one of her own. It is to fill this vacuum created by her absence, with none to talk to or share her feelings with, with no vocation at hand, none to match her mental capabilities, that Emma is diverted and interested when Harriet, with all her naiveté and sweetness, appears before her as a new avenue and companion, one whom she could spend her time with and groom and improve by exercising her own superior intellectual capabilities and relish her power and capability in transforming an individual for the better.

Beauty, wit, employment, money – qualities which Emma feels would prevent her from being categorised in the same category and fate as Miss Bates, but this is Emma's view of her life, not the society's. Despite all her confidence in her own judgment and penetration, she is humbled enough in the end to acknowledge that she has been wrong in

her attitude and analysis and despite all her intelligence has been taken for a ride and fooled by the falsehood and the double-dealing, suave and worldly ways of a duplicitous man. And here one cannot help but feel that "...Emma's "reign" has always been subject to the restrictions common to her sex." (Johnson 1990:139) Emma is deeply hurt and humiliated by Frank Churchill's engaging behaviour towards herself. She feels that he has misused the faith, love and respect that his circle in Highbury has bestowed upon him. In order to keep his secret and his love-life closeted, he has presented himself a disengaged man, free and careless and even flirting with and engaging Emma's attention, though it is a different matter that despite an initial interest in him and what he is all about Emma is never emotionally involved or in love with him. She, however, does think of him as a marital prospect for Harriet. Emma feels that " 'What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged...How could he tell what mischief he might be doing?' " (E 1005) Though she herself manipulates people and situations, controls and commands as she likes, tries to shape people's love-lives and basically has her own way in whatever she does, she could never compete with a male in being so callous and insincere, she could hardly believe or approve the way Frank has cheated on everybody's feelings and affection and made Jane miserable and insecure just to keep his secret and further his own interest, all in the name of love and then be magnanimously forgiven by all, thanks to his charm and engaging manners.

> Far from succeeding in a man's role, Emma has been the dupe of a favoured clever son of the patriarchy; and she learns from this lesson that society still weighs the advantages in favour of the man, who is able to prosecute and get away with his manipulations and deceptions with an ease and freedom from accountability, that would never be accorded to her. Her independent wealth gave her the opportunity to reject a woman's

> dependent role; but society is so thoroughly set in its patriarchal pattern that she cannot successfully compete with men, despite her comparative freedom. (Marsh 1998:258-259)

Lionel Trilling feels that the character of Emma Woodhouse is striking and significant in having ' "... a moral life as a man has a moral life." ' (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xxiii) But according to Claudia L. Johnson like many others before him, Trilling too could not attribute to Austen or think her capable of a clever idea and is quick to assure that she is not out to prove a point in presenting Emma as a new age woman. Or to be more precise Austen does not on purpose or motive create a character like Emma, one who is independent, intellectual, imaginative, faulty but not irresponsible and unapologetic, everything which society forbids a woman to be. But Austen does not create Emma with an aim at hand and a statement to make, for she is well aware that in authoring Emma she is creating a heroine which would be criticised by many but appreciated only by herself.

> ...the extent to which women have or ought to have moral lives in the same way men have moral lives was very hotly and accessibly debated in Austen's time, as were other issues pertaining to female sexuality in particular and sexual difference in general. In endowing attractive female characters like Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet with rich and unapologetic senses of self-consequence, Austen defies every dictum about female propriety and deference propounded in the sermons and conduct books which have been thought to shape her opinions on all important matters. (Johnson 1990:Introduction-xxiii)

Northanger Abbey is the story of a young, normal, good-natured though a naïve and straightforward girl, Catherine Morland, with head full of romantic notions, vulnerable to and unaware of the games and treacheries people play in real life, with conceptions of

life, people and situations somewhat blurred due to the world of romantic fiction which she reads and is influenced with. She is gullible as to how the actual world runs and the way people use others to fulfil their motives, be it her friend Isabella Thorpe or General Tilney. First, Isabella uses her to court her brother and later on Isabella's decision or motive in dumping James Morland in favour of Frederick Tilney is not a result of sudden change in sentiments or a call of heart but it is purely and essentially a matter of wealth and greed, as to who would prove a better catch. His future inheritance of a considerable amount of landed property is incentive enough for her and in a way she is one day going to inherit the large estate of Mr Allen only to be rudely shocked later on. Catherine is at once courted and duped for his self-interest.

In Austen's age any display of deep emotions is considered as unwomanly and going by it, Catherine is quite radical of her age in her naïve, sincere and unpretentious pursuit of Henry Tilney. "Catherine Morland is unique among Austen's heroines in her naïve, unaffected pursuit of the hero, who learns to care for her only because he cannot help perceiving that she prefers him. In this respect Catherine violates conventional norms for female behaviour..." (Fergus 1991:95) Catherine indeed is not led by design in her wish to amiable and friendly with Henry Tilney. She genuinely likes him and like others of her sex and in accordance with social norms, she is not smart or cunning enough to have her feelings conveyed in a less obvious, subtle or disguised manner. She is honest and straightforward and not one to adopt trickery to influence or capture a man's feelings. She is genuine in her feelings for him and hardly thinks of the fact that to be so open about her feelings and preference for him would be considered as unladylike and also against as to how a woman should behave in the company of a man, especially one for whom she has any sort of feelings.

In *Northanger Abbey,* according to Henry Tilney, matrimony and dancing are two

dissimilar topics, but similar in the sense that in both ' "...man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal" ' (NA 1103) Such a power is constructed and well marked out for women keeping it well within the bounds of traditionally cultivated female decorum and modesty so well advocated and approved of by patriarchal authority in the 1790s. Such a rule prevents women from having or naming their own choice, instead they could be receivers of men's. Such a power for women proves to be more frustrating than fulfilling but on second thoughts even the power of refusal is better than having none at all. At least they could have the assurance of refusing what they definitely do not desire. But Austen frequently exposes the reality behind the so allowed power of refusal and the way it is manoeuvred and forced to yield and compromise at the will of others. Be it Collins, Crawford or even Wentworth, none of Austen men would take refusal in a positive manner and are deluded of their own worth and too self-assured to take kindly to rejection. Collins and Crawford though poles apart are identical in the fact that they consider their proposals of marriage as a honour that they choose to bestow upon the woman they fancy irrespective of how the woman chose to respond. Her wish and interest are totally lost in theirs. In *Northanger Abbey*, despite Catherine's obvious wish to keep her prior engagement with the Tilneys, she is forced and bullied by the Thorpes to give in to their demand of going out on an excursion. Unperturbed by her refusal, wish, or engagement, John Thorpe blatantly lies about the Tilneys as to how he has seen them elsewhere engaged. Later on in spotting the Tilneys, Catherine is eager to stop and step out to meet them but her demand and her refusal to go ahead with them is simply overruled and laughed at by Thorpe who ' "...smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises and drove on; and Catherine angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit." ' (NA 1109) Having succeeded with her on one occasion, she is again attacked for her compliance, and

this time her brother too joins the Thorpes and persuades her to leave or drop her engagement with Miss Tilney and go out with them. On maintaining her stance, she is accused of being stubborn and unkind and is spoken too by her brother with annoyance. ' "I did not think you had been so obstinate, Catherine" said James; "you were not used to be so hard to persuade;" ' (NA 1117) And if this is not enough her engagement too is changed for another day without either her knowledge or approval, and when she refuses to give in and wishes to go after Miss Tilney, she is physically stopped by them all. "Isabella however, caught hold of one hand, Thorpe of the other; and remonstrances poured in from all three." (NA 1117) Catherine's refusal and the way it is approached, makes one think twice about Henry's statement regarding woman's power of refusal and what its fate generally is if a woman is not strong enough to boldly thrust her opinions in other people's face. "The moral and physical coercion of powerless females which figures so predominantly in gothic fiction is here transposed to the daytime world of drawing room manners, where it can be shown for the everyday occurrence it is, but no less "strange" for all that." (Johnson 1990:37)

Catherine fails to agree with Henry Tilney regarding any sort of similarity between an engagement to dance and the one to marry. The former can hold people together for not more than say half an hour whereas there is no way out in a marriage. Once married they are bound forever. According to Claudia L. Johnson, Catherine's thought on the subject, which fails to see Henry's jest, are deep and acute, and is another example of the knowledge that she on various occasions unknowingly utters throughout the novel. For

> After all, the deceased Mrs. Tilney and her gothic avatar, the "injured and ill-fated nun"... whose memorials Catherine expects to find at Northanger, both epitomize the lot females immured in remote abbeys who would not

> have the power to leave even if the were not bound by indissolvable vows. To be sure, Austen is emphatically not recommending the passage of divorce laws, as had novelists such as Inlay, Godwin and Holcraft. But neither does she here or anywhere else in her fiction overlook the desolation experienced by those who have more than enough "cause for wishing that [they] had bestowed themselves elsewhere." (Johnson 1990:44)

Persuasion paints the picture of the "...silent torture of an unloved woman, condemned to suffer thus because she is a woman and must not speak." (Kavanagh 1970:11) It is the story of a sensitive woman, Anne Elliot who is caught between such conflicting people as Sir Walter Elliot and Mr. Elliot, Mary and Charles, and Lady Russell and Wentworth, and how she is able to rise above and transcend the conflict. The story depicts the plight of a sensitive woman in a society, which values and cares for everything except sensitivity. But, at the same time, it is also about the growth and maturity of the heroine who, though cannot escape the social system altogether, learns to rise above its concerns and pressures. During long painful years of separation from Wentworth, Anne gains personal insight, understanding and maturity which help her analyse and worth her own feelings for Wentworth and nurtures within her a love that could hardly be persuaded out of her.

Persuasion opens with and estrangement between Wentworth and Anne Elliot with him refusing to forgive her ever in giving up their engagement and refusing to stand up for him despite having loved him. He feels that she lacked strength of character in giving him up under the persuasion of others.

> Wentworth's anger deserves particular attention, because it is anything but customary to fault women for diffidence. In another kind of novel by

> another kind of novelist, Anne initial hesitation would strike Wentworth and us alike as exemplary and he, like the enthusiastic Henry Crawford glorying in his chains, would, rather than take umbrage at her maidenly doubt, manfully seize an occasion to prove his worth. But Wentworth does not appear to believe that the inconvenient modest of the maiden will be redeemed by the submission of the wife, or to value the "feebleness" so often held to be a part of woman's duty as well as well as her charm. (Johnson 1990:149)

Wentworth feels that a woman is unpardonable if she exhibits feebleness and irresolution, in listening and giving in to the demands and wishes of others and doubting her own love and decision rather than have the strength and guts to stick by it. "Wentworth's contempt for what he perceives as Anne's failure to be decide, forward and strong thus implicates and dissents from and already firmly established and widely available tradition of debate about women's manners." (Johnson 1990:150) Wentworth is a man of strong personality and he appreciates the same from his woman. In describing the woman, who would charm him he states: one who has a strong mind, with sweetness of manner and this in all sums up his idea of an ideal woman. His view is straight and clear enough as to what he wants from his woman but "...as his subsequent remarks attest, he is in fact caught within highly charged tensions about women's manners and his description of the ideal woman is oxymoronic, because however much he may desire "strength" in women, he considers it essentially inconsistent with the sweetness he also exacts." (Johnson 1990:150) In describing an ideal woman, he has Anne at the back of his mind for he could never forgive her for calling off their engagement and feels that it is the lack of will and firmness on her part that made her bury his as well as her happiness. What Wentworth fails to realize here is that how could one maintain her feminine sweetness if she goes

ahead and defies and revolts against her family and friends. He refuses to understand Anne's precarious position and behaves like a typical male who "...loves Anne partly for her traditional womanly virtues (her gentleness, modesty, taste and feeling...) but expects her to revolt against those traditions, when, and probably when, it suits him." (Waldron 1999:141)

Wentworth with his own fixed set of notions concerning women, it is a matter of principle for him not to allow women on board his ship on account of 'female delicacy' and it is not out of some sense or attitude of hatred or dislike towards women but rather a matter of being chivalrous to him: "There can be no want of gallantry, admiral, in rating the claims of women to every personal comfort high – and that is what I do. I hate hear of women on board, or to see them on board..." (P 1251) But his sister, Mrs. Croft who has spent the best years of her life with her husband on board his ships, feels that her brother is being unreasonable in his attitude and talks of idle refinement. She feels that women are not mere fine ladies but rather rational creatures who would be comfortable even on board the ships. But then he has his own notions about feminine delicacy and is of the view that it is not at all proper for women to be so reasonable as not to feel uncomfortable on board and if they really feel so they were no fine ladies, so to say. Even the idea that women would not consider such travels as against their very comfort and agreeable nature is unthinkable and almost revolting to him: "I might not like them the better for that, perhaps. Such a number of women and children have right to be comfortable on board." (P 1251) He objects to sturdiness in women and so also against their right to it and it is this outlook of his that prevents him from acknowledging strength of mind and sweetness of manner in Anne Elliot and it is not until the Cobb incident when Fanny with her presence of mind, confidence and officious manner takes charge of the people and situation, that he finally gives in his views concerning female delicacy. "Like female

modesty, which is suspected to the same degree as it is commanded, female strength is disapproved to the same as it is desired." (Johnson 1990:151)

Though Anne, initially, gives in to the persuasion of her elders in breaking off her engagement, her subsequent maturity after this young uncertain phase in looking differently at life and its situations, in being mature and constant in her emotions, in acknowledging her weaknesses but not regretting her decisions which brings them forth, and through hardly of any importance to her own family, who rarely consulted her anything, she shines forth and exhibits an elegance of mind and firmness of character and despite all her softness of manner and temper. Anne, like Emma, is her own person, having a mind and clarity of her own. "By centering her novel on a maturer heroine, of course, Austen is free to explore female independence without being obliged to explore the concomitant impertinence which always seems to accompany the self-assurance of younger heroines." (Johnson 1990:146)

If one may analyse Anne Elliot by her initial decision and accuse her of having no firm mind of her own or rather in failing to assert it then one is not doing justice to her reasons in doing so. She gives up Wentworth, not because she crumbles under her father, Sir Walter Elliot's pressure, to him she never owes her decision. She loves Lady Russell and respects her a lot. And it is to her friendly advice and wish that she submits to as she is not able to bring herself to hurt the feelings and expectations she has of her, though she never once doubts her own sentiment and love for Frederick Wentworth. She does not mindlessly submit to parental authority like she confesses to Wentworth later on:

> "...I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you would love better than you do now. To me she was in the place of a parent... I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in

continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience." (P 1361)

When she is a mature woman of twenty-eight, she never gives in to her father's unreasonable opinions and outlook, just for the sake of obedience and propriety. While her father mingles in the social circle, which compliments his standing Anne oblivious to his consent and later on his displeasure, pursues and maintains her friendship with Mrs. Smith and prefers to be with those she likes rather than with those she is compelled to be with. To defy where she does not agree or believe in is easy and natural for her like in keeping her engagement with Mrs. Smith. "Anne kept her appointment; the others kept theirs." (P 1305)

After her initial break-up with Wentworth, all the pain and the disappointment that the relationship in its failure causes, took its toll on Anne. She suffers all alone with nobody to speak to or understand the intensity of her pain in loosing her love. Almost seven years had passed since then "... and time has softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him, but she had been too dependent on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place... or in any novelty or enlargement of society." (P 1226) His memory, the love, pain and disappointment continues to linger for several years, long after everyone else ceased to even remember that such an episode ever took place in Anne's life. An absence of vocation with hardly any change of site and scenario makes Anne all the more vulnerable to feelings of dejection and disappointment and all this makes her suffer and remember everything with an acuteness much longer. Jane Austen links "...women's confinement within their changeless neighbourhoods to the strength and longevity of their feelings..." (P 159) and by this means to highlight women's problems. When Anne tells Harville that women tend to love and remember much longer than men do, it is not some point of contention for her that she is out to prove, or to glorify women's virtue and love in comparison to men. Rather she speaks of

woman's loyalty and love in a relationship more as a "burden". ' "Yes. We certainly do not forget you so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions." ' (P 1352)

Anne Elliot is Jane Austen's most mature and intelligent heroine. Her calm demeanour and patient view of circumstances beyond her control, indeed sets her apart. After she has crossed over her impressionable age when she could be easily influenced, she exhibits great maturity of mind, patience and objectiveness when she encounters Wentworth after several years. She is pained on being a total stranger to man who had been her love once and still is for her and unable to convey her own feelings for him and having no clue of his own, she analyses the state her relationship with thus: "Surely, if there be constant attachment on each side, our hearts must understand each other ere long. We are not boy and girl, to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence and wantonly playing with our own happiness." (P 1345) Here Anne reveals a sense and maturity that makes her much superior to any other Austen heroine.

Persuasion is about 'reanimation of love' and so too of Anne Elliot. For several years she is bogged down and suffers due to social dictates and matters of heart but Anne fights the constrictions of her social circle and grows "...out of her timidity, out of the defiant need for wit and self-assertion... Persuasion has a new impulse feeling; and a new climax, self-fulfilment..." (Mudrick 1970:71)

In Jane Austen's novels, the heroines lives are led into trouble and uncertainty due to misunderstandings, error in judgement, lack of knowledge of others as well as their own hearts, forcing them on to a path of self-discovery, and on assessment of their lives and wants. In her novels,

...the conflict between the heroine and her environment is reflected in her mental state, so that she has to resolve inwardly a tangle in which egoistic revolt is confused with false motives for conformity, sometimes the one, sometimes the other being uppermost. It follows that heroines have and interior life which relates closely to the exterior one, so that they closer to normal beings living in normal circumstances than earlier heroes and heroines had been. But Jane Austen differs from many later novelists in her insistence that the heroines never step apart from her society in her adventure of discovery; any attempt to pursue the 'passions' as entities somehow unrelated to social living is open to suspicion – not of individualism but of egoism – of ulterior motives or plain exhibitionistic folly or a mixture of these. (Gillie 1974:154)

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Chapter – 4

Background of the Bronte Sisters

> ...the nineteenth–century world in which Charlotte Bronte lived is the world which we have ourselves inherited, I discovered that to diagram the process of Bronte's growth was also to explore explicitly formations of modern female psyche. It was to indicate the nature of the feminist struggle through which men and women today define themselves – both in support and opposition. In our families, in our society, in our political and sexual lives, we are still the victims of patriarchal forces... (Moglen 1984:14)

Victorian ethics that defined the Bronte era believed in feminine selflessness. Ideology of domestic femininity persistently shaped the written lives of Victorian women. Their social identity lacked individuality since they were always defined in terms of their relation with men. Women had always been dependent on fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers and sons, and without them their situation seemed helpless as well as hopeless. Marriage and motherhood was made to seem the fitting destiny of every normal woman irrespective of whether she felt so or not. And a woman in giving and submitting herself to justify the roles assigned to her by society, lost her own identity.

> Lonely as I am – how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career – perseverance to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me. How should I be with youth past – sisters lost – a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family...As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters – I wish every woman in

> England had also a hope and motive: Alas, there are many old maids who have neither. (Moglen 1984:19)

These words of Charlotte at thirty-three speak not merely of her struggles and despair but also of hope. At the same time, it also talks of the prejudice that the women of the age faced and how devoid of a vocation, goal or motive in life, many of them led a hopeless existence. Victorian girls were brought up reconciled to a fate of subjection and suppression. They were taught not only to conceal what they really felt or desired but also to be self-critical and doubtful of what they were really capable of. All these factors proved to be cramping, forbidding and inhibiting, especially for those who showed a will to write. Like men, women too were found to carry out their role and perform their duty in the 'work of life' but unlike women, for men principles of work satisfied both their personal and public aspirations. In going for their goals they were spontaneously able to do justice to and fulfil social demands and expectations. But for women, work could only be defined as slogging out for others. Any effort made to seek self-sufficiency or self-fulfilment clashed with the subservient, dependent, and repressive image associated with being an ideal female. "The self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing made this career an especially threatening one; it required an engagement with feeling and the cultivation of the ego rather than its negation." (Showalter 1999:22) The vocabulary factor further inhibited such women, for only a specific sort of language was deemed proper for the upbringing of a lady. Elegance of language was a must and any sort of harsh and loud expletives were considered as unwomanly. Coarseness was how any sort of unconventional language in woman's literature was lectured as. Be it *Jane Eyre* (JE), *Wuthering Heights* (WH) or *Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* (TOWH), the boldness of the theme and language was referred to as coarse, harsh and unwomanly.

The Brontes belonged to the first generation of feminine novelists born during the

period 1800 and 1820 and comprised the 'Golden Age of the Victorian authoresses'. Passion and self-assertion were dominant themes in the Bronte novels. When the Bronte novels came on the literary scene, they created a furore out of which sprang several questions as to what was proper for a woman to write on the issue and much they did thus igniting a controversial debate. The feminist phase of today finds its roots in the feminine phase of the nineteenth century. In the Victorian culture, middle-class concept of the proper sphere of womanhood describes woman as a perfect lady or an 'Angel in the House' who is contentedly submissive to a man's authority yet strong in her inner purity, extremely religious, and ultimate authority in the realm of her domestic chores. The professional lives of Victorian women were limited to such roles as a social reformer, nurse, governess, teacher or a novelist. It is in this limited sphere that women were forced to exercise and fulfil their capabilities. Such a scenario was hardly congenial to the evolution of her personality, and this social suppression of her needs and rights led her to frustration and disenchantment. These very frustrations and longings found a release and expression in the novels of Bronte Sisters.

Prejudice and compulsions of the age intimidated and made women conscious of entering into the male dominated literary domain, making them seek for counter and protective measures. Hence, women writers of the age, faced with the 'anxiety of authorship', chose to conceal their identity by resorting to anonymous or pseudonymous publication, thus keeping their works at a distance from themselves and their private lives. The anxiety among women writers going public was natural, for this can be attributed to their cultural and social positioning at the centre of the domestic circle. Any other social sphere or arena in which women would wish to prove or establish themselves, immediately gave rise to scepticism and disapproval. By restricting women to domestic sphere, men wished to fulfil their vested interests because while they may make

themselves through their work in the public sphere, they also depend on the stability and emotional support of the private life for sustenance. Even though the private sphere was a woman's domain, men also experience it as the domain of personal life in which they were moulded and cared for in childhood and nurtured in adulthood. Just like women depend on men for economic and social security, so too men rely and depend upon women for stability and fulfilment in their private lives. But when women work for money, they threaten this mutual dependence by asserting their claim to independence and autonomy; and this makes the patriarchal system insecure. So women who work injure men's interest by competing with them in the public sphere and reveal the fact that their dependent condition is not natural and biological but a social compulsion. This rigid ideological division which separated masculine and feminine realms was part of the Victorian culture; and this culture threatened women writers from being part of the public life, since it would affect the integrity of the private sphere. But women did write, and in doing so, they undid the ideological divisions of spheres in their own person.

The Brontes, thus, comprised of an era in the nineteenth century when a large number of women were entering the literary arena; but despite the increasing numbers women were still in minority in a profession, which was essentially and particularly male-dominated. And this very domination led the male writers and critics alike in having a biased opinion against female capability and work. Another factor that proved inhibiting to Brontes and to many other female novelists of the era was that unless masked by a male pseudonym, they faced the prejudice of being assessed more for their gender than for their work. Furthermore, a work by one woman writer was immediately bracketed or ranked with others of her age, no matter how varied be their theme, outlook or capability. George Eliot objected to being considered in the same league as and compared to Dinah Mulock, and Charlotte tried to defer the timing of *Villette's* publication, so as to avoid it

from being bracketed and reviewed with Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth.* Charlotte in particular wished to check the male dominated literary set-up from turning women-writers hostile towards one another and creating unhealthy competition in vying for the same limited space for them.

At the turn of the century, women published anonymously to avoid gender disclosure and to evade or disclaim having a professional life. The new breed of women writers born after 1800, who published their works round about 1840's, were a lot who felt intellectually liberated and free of all bias and prejudice in the guise of male pseudonym. "... the male pseudonym signals the loss of innocence. In its radical understanding of the role-playing required by women's efforts to participate in the mainstream of literary culture, the pseudonym is a strong marker of the historical shift." (Showalter 1999:19) Emily Bronte cloaked herself under the male sounding pseudonym of 'Ellis Bell', denying her contemporaries her true identity.

> The earliest reviews of *Wuthering Heights* do not concentrate on the sex of the author, whose originality baffled all conception of gender-distinction in its challenge to the boundaries of what is human and non-human. To make such a breakthrough implied, according to the culture prevailing amongst 'Ellis Bell's readers feels that one's gender must be male. (Davies 1988:3)

Brontes decision to write with a male pseudonym was primarily made with the intention of overcoming the prejudice that surrounded the women-writers of that age. But then, it only led to further intensified negative criticism when the issue of their real identity cropped up. In order to counter adverse publicity, Charlotte came up with a strategy.

> In social situations, she had been accustomed to project a timid, ultra-feminine persona to hide her inner life. The way she presented her sisters

> to the world was an extension of this strategy. She decided to make their identities public, but to use the fact that they were female as a plea in mitigation rather than a stick to beat them with. If readers were to know that her sisters were in fact a pair of 'unobtrusive women' they might forgive where they had once condemned especially if they were told about the quiet and blameless lives these retiring virgins had led, and were given a harrowing account of their tragic early deaths. Charlotte would concede that her sisters' novels had dubious elements, but the picture she painted of their lives would, she hoped, exonerate them. (Miller 2001:23-24)

In a way Brontes' decision to write under a male pseudonym did not exactly work out the way they had wished for; instead of having their works be the topic of discussion and critical reviews sans prejudice, they themselves became a topic of speculation and assessment with respect to their true identity. In short, the gender issue predominated. It was not until after Emily and Anne's death that Charlotte finally agreed to be recognized and known in the literary world as the author of *Jane Eyre.*

Despite the image one may gather from Charlotte's own "Biographical Notice" regarding her sisters, as them being 'unobtrusive women' eluding fame, the fact remained that Charlotte had always wished not merely to be just another writer but to be known for ever. But she soon understood that for a woman to attempt to write in the age where any work by a woman was sure to be treated and considered with prejudice, it was appropriate to cloak herself with a male pseudonym if she wished to have her work published and read.

> In her novels that pseudonym would give her the freedom to use her own emotional life as the basis of her art, alluring her to revolutionise the imaginative presentation of women's inner lives. She was so uninhibited in

> her portrayal of the female psyche that her heroine shocked many of her contemporaries and was accused of unwomanly assertion, morbid passion and anti-Christian individualism. (Miller 2001:1)

But as the issue and speculation over her gender identity warmed up in literary circles after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, the mask of disguise began to slip and hence Charlotte had to look for a new way to shield herself from unwanted attention and counter such allegations and remarks that questioned her personal integrity and morality; and she found this in her social identity as being a country parson's daughter unmarried, modest, and quiet. Also she tried hard to convey her point to those she met on the literary circle that other than a passing outward resemblance to the daring and defiant Jane Eyre, she had nothing in common with her. Charlotte, hence, was not the kind to have her respectability at stake and she knew well "... That she lived in a society where 'publicity... for a woman'... is degrading, if it is not glorious and where the line between celebrity and notoriety was perilously thin." (Miller 2001:2)

As the shy, retiring, unassuming, propriety – bound, and dutiful daughter of a clergyman, Charlotte upheld and projected a conventional feminine image. The image was certainly not a façade on her part. As the daughter of a strict country parson she had been groomed so, and all these qualities were imbibed within her. But at the same time, Charlotte was also aware of the fact that she was carrying a part, donning an image. "As her novels – especially Villette – show, she believed that being a woman in her society, often involved putting on a social mask to guard the deeper self."(Miller 2001:27) Despite whatever she wrote as Currer Bell, Charlotte still craved for social approval along with artistic fulfilment and acknowledgment, especially when it came to her relationship with her female literary counterparts; for their encouragement, approval, and faith would prove to be indispensable as well as necessary in her search for social esteem and respectability.

But the coming of *Jane Eyre* posed a dilemma for the women writers of the age. On one side, they realized the imperativeness of the situation that called for their collective stand in fighting prejudiced opinions of various critics who felt that women's limited scope, experience, and capabilities made them incapable and incompetent to attempt writing and to enter into the male literary domain. Yet, they felt simultaneously that a work of the intensity, passion and subject as *Jane Eyre* would bring discredit and criticism to women's writing. And though Charlotte's genius was for all to see, for one could not ignore the effect and success *Jane Eyre* had for itself, but her sister writers felt wary of being associated with her or speak in her support, being apprehensive that Charlotte's passionate stance would instigate negative criticism towards women writers in general.

In a way similar to *Jane Eyre*, the publication of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* made people sit up and take notice. It had an instant effect and had an imprint on the critics, but at the same time the coarseness, violence, and an all pervading passion that devours all, shocked people into somewhat negative criticism. The novel once again brought forth odd criticism for *Jane Eyre* too.

> Charlotte had written a preface for the second edition in which, in the strident voice of Currer Bell, she had defended herself with the cry that 'Conventionality is not morality'. She thanked those among the press and public who had responded positively but fingered the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as Jane Eyre: in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong; whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry – that parent of crime – an insult to piety, that regent of God on Earth. (Miller 2001:17)

Negative approach in considering and discussing *Jane Eyre* intensified as the deliberation on the gender question of the author increased. And slowly as it became clear that the

writer was indeed a woman, the novel became less and less acceptable and its faults multiplied. The issue of her gender identity lends base and reason to the debate as to what was or was not considered agreeable concerning feminine writing. The criticism further increased with the publication of Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that depicted the tale of a woman who dared and planned to free herself from the clutches of a cruel, alcoholic, and abusive husband by fleeing away from him out into an unknown world with only her spirit and courage to fall back upon, resurrecting her life with a new name and identity. Here, too, the so called coarseness and harshness of the subject and the language appalled critics and readers alike. "The critics went on to vilify the sisters' entire ouvre: 'There is a coarseness of tone through out the writing of all these Bells that puts an offensive subject in its worst point of view.' " (Miller 2001:17)

Cramped and disheartened by the negative reaction and social prejudices of the age, biographies of women writers revealed how many of them made honest and agonising attempts to curb their will and inclination to write. Charlotte, too, was one of them, who faced the dilemma when she revealed her inclination to pursue a literary career and sought advice from Robert Southey as how to go about it. He proved most discouraging when he said to her: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be." (Showalter 1999:55) Southey's response to Charlotte seeking advice regarding her literary ambitions and aspirations, confirmed her apprehensions that for a woman to attempt writing, to seek it as a career, would call for criticism and disapproval. To dare into an essentially a male dominated and governed literary arena would be not only described as indecorous but also unwomanly. Southey's discouragement that spoke of social disapproval, thwarted her hopes and ambitions and forced her to reconsider her decision. And hence she made an effort to subdue her will, curb her creativeness and suppress her literary inclinations. But despite Southey's advice

and her own efforts to deny herself, she could not remain bogged down; instead she continued to write in the hope of having her ambitions fulfilled one day. Writing also provided her with a release from the monotony and dreariness of teaching, be it in a school or as a governess in some family, the only respectable profession open to the women seeking work in that age. One major effect that Southey's letter ends up creating, was that in future Charlotte took care not to have her identity known in her dealings with the literary world, and hence she went by a male pseudonym in pursuing her works.

That was an era where women writers, were devoid of education, not because they belonged to a particular class but generally due to their sex. For a Victorian girl belonging to the middle–class, the fact that her brother went to school ahead of her raised in her an unpleasant awareness of how society considered her inferior and less privileged for being a female. Despite being denied a proper formal education, "Women writers, who were almost all self-taught, were expected to meet male standards of scholarship if they ventured to use their knowledge. Nothing was felt to be so shameful and humiliating or was so gleefully rebuked by critics, as intellectual pretension." (Showalter 1999:42)

However, the scenario of the growing dominance, demand and market for literature by, for, and concerning women in a way indicate that the Victorians were reacting to what appeared to be a radical and, at the same time, very intimidating phenomenon. Since a number of significant works written by women novelists were on the rise, male critics had to own up the fact that women indeed were making worthwhile contribution and excelling in the field of fiction. In a way male writers resisted this female dominance by looking upon women novelists as scheming conspirators out to steal their ideas, capture their markets, and rob them off their female leadership and were seen as dominating not because of their excellent qualities but due to their strength in numbers. Even till the year 1851, there still remained a few rigid minds who refused to give women

their due and could never agree that they were able enough to pen a novel. Coventry Patmore was of the view that ' "... there certainly have been cases of women possessed of the properly masculine power of writing books, but there cases are all so truly and obviously exceptional, and must and ought always to remain so, that we may overlook them without the least prejudice to the soundness of our doctrine" '.(Showalter 1999:75) By 1855 even before George Eliot had appeared on the literary scene, the rise of the woman's novel was so impressive that most readers and critics would have gone with Margaret Oliphant's view in relating the phenomenon as one of the aspects of the progressing social scenario.

> To critics who sentimentalized and trivialized women's interest in psychological motivation, the novel was the inevitable crystallization of femininity...if we consider the novel to be the picture of human life in a pathetic, or...in a sympathetic form... addressed to human feeling, rather than to human taste, judgment or reason, there seems nothing paradoxical in the view, that women are called to the mastery of this peculiar field of literature. ...if men are the head of the humanity, woman is its heart; and as soon as education has rendered her ordinarily capable of expressing feeling in written words, why should we be surprised to find that her words come more home to us than those of men, where feeling is chiefly concerned? (Showalter 1999:82-83)

This was the way in which J. M. Ludlow both acknowledged and accepted women's success pertaining to novel without exactly giving them their due or attributing it just to their talent, intellect and efforts. The yardsticks by which he defined novel or novel writing helped him to overlook qualities and such capabilities in women which placed them on par with men, without being rude or uncourteous in so describing their

contribution to literature. Women writers, however, refrained from objecting to such criticism; they rather quietly went along with the view by under playing the efforts which marked their writings and letting it appear only as the natural overflow of their womanly emotions. "This strategy was partly a way of minimizing the professional and intellectual aspects of the work, and partly a way of describing the powerful drives for self-expression..." (Showalter 1999:83) It was in such a scenario, tackling and evading such and similar prejudiced notions that the Brontes made their way in the literary circuit.

One of the most common and frequently voiced opinions concerning women novelists, made in order to depreciate their very creed was that only such women who were sad, frustrated and dejected in life attempted at writing books in order to find an outlet to their thwarted desires and emotions. "If the accidents of her position make her solitary and inactive or if her thwarted affections shut her somewhat from that sweat domestic and maternal sphere to which her whole being spontaneously moves, she returns to literature as to another sphere..." (Showalter 1999:84-85) It was an opinionated view that women, who were happy and content in life, were little in need of an outlet. All they needed was a blissful existence among those daily household chores to which they felt that they rightly belonged.

"...novelists responded to these innuendos of inferiority as to others, not by protest but by vigorous demonstration of their domestic felicity. They worked hard to prevent their writing as an extension of their feminine role, an activity that did not detract them from their womanhood, but in some sense augmented it." (Showalter 1999:85) Women of the age were neither provided privacy nor did they expect one for their work, a space of their own where they could find solitude and pen their thoughts uninterrupted. Writing was just one among the various household duties as liable to interruptions as any other. Mrs. Gaskell carried out her work in her dinning room with all its four doors

opening into other parts of her house; and so too was Mrs. Oliphant's case who did her writing all day long. Mrs. Craik sketches the situation of the 'feminine' novelists in a most self-effacing manner: "We may write shelvesful of books – the errant children of our brain may be familiar half over the known world, and yet we ourselves sit as quiet by our chimney-corner, live a life as simple and peaceful, as any happy common woman of them all." (Showalter 1999:86)

Much of the negative criticism surrounding women's writing in the Brontes era was largely to give authenticity to the prejudiced notion that there was no way that women could attempt better novels than men. Their limited scope of experience was taken as one of the reasons for their so viewed sub-standard literature. Be it educational institutions, government or business houses, generally everything excluded women as such. A man's wider range of experience and formal education were considered as an advantage he had over a woman and which gave a maturity of thought and characterization to this writings and a polish to his language which were almost always found or taken as lacking in a woman's work. Furthermore,

> As a form of social realism and a medium for moral and ethical thought, the novel obviously required maturity and mobility in its creators. Further it required a complex set of emotions. Since the Victorians had defined women as angelic beings who could not feel passion, anger, ambition or honour, they did not believe that women could express more than half of life. (Showalter 1999:79)

G. H. Lewes also was of the view that " 'the position of women in society has never yet been – perhaps never can be – such as to give fair play to their capabilities.' " (Boumelha 1990:4) And such was the case not merely due to the social structure and scenario, the social pressures and persuasions, but because since eternity a woman is expected to be

resigned to her lot and fulfil that one only important role that she has been destined for, i.e. Maternity. Despite this, women did venture and make a mark for themselves in the field of literature. But though they dared into what was essentially a male dominated area, many failed short of establishing an original identity for themselves. Those who failed in their efforts were largely due to the fact that instead of writing as and for what they were capable of and believed in, they tried to copy and follow the prominent male literary figures of the day. And in doing so they gave up their individuality and point of view. It was only when they had spoken as individuals, did they achieve success and created a genuine place for themselves. But though on one hand a woman was expected to go for sincere writing, original and independent and not as being influenced by male-writings or from a male point of view but then that was exactly what male-writers have done for ages, speaking and writing about women, as women and from a female point of view to be exact. " In any case, writing is, for a woman, a denial of purpose and design, a denial of the 'grand function of the reproductive organs to which even 'virgins and childless widows' should sacrifice their capabilities. Small wonder, then, that Bronte's response to Lewes's comment on her work was, 'God deliver me from my friends!' " (Boumelha 1990:5-6)

Charlotte was sensitive to the problems and issues pertaining to the woman of the age.

> Charlotte goes on to express the view concerning the condition of women that there are 'evils-deep rooted in the foundation of the social system – which no effort of ours can touch - of which we cannot explain – of which it is advisable not too often to think.' Yet though she recommends turning a blind eye to these unsolvable problems in life, in her art she was prepared to think the unthinkable about such issues. Currer Bell may have

> described the female mind as a place of rebellion in *Jane Eyre*, but as Miss Bronte she was keen to present a moderate, conciliating face... (Miller 2001:45)

Female modesty was one such issue deep rooted and implicit to the age. Writers of conduct books and critics insisted on the necessity and relevance of female modesty, each had their own viewpoint and outlook, and each of their opinions opposed one another as to the 'nature of the virtue'.

> It is a commonplace of the advice literature that women's modesty is instinctive, but the very existence of the literature testifies to the belief that the "instinct" must be strenuously cultivated..."Innocent Modesty"... has an "unsuspicious look", for "it is the glory of a delicate female to be unconscious" of all "unbecoming knowledge". The modest woman can be recognized by her downcast eyes, her head turned aside, and above all by the blush that suffuses her check...and mysterious proof that she has neither done nor thought anything for which she genuinely need blush. Such a woman never puts herself forward, and female modesty restrains and controls the violence of masculine love; but a modesty clothed body is more seductive than a merely naked one, and modesty creates love in the very act of restraining it. (Yeazell 1991:5-6)

The modest woman was taken as marriage material. A man may flirt with a coquette all he liked, but when it came to marriage he always opted for a different woman. In Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* (V), Paulina, despite the wealth, beauty and station that she holds in life rather fears to reveal her fond liking for Dr. Bretton lest she may, like she confesses to Lucy, be looked down upon for being open about some fickle, weak, one-sided attachment on her part. Hence her pride, integrity, and modesty keep her from

revealing her true sentiments and pose a cool and calm exterior. Lucy, in nurturing feelings for Dr. John herself, suffers silently under the realisation that he would never cherish romantic sentiments for her. She has neither beauty nor rank to attract someone like Dr. John. "Lucy who had neither charm nor beauty and who must labor her bread at a menial task, is an asexual being to him." (Blom 1997:147)

Victorian women were almost barred from sharing and revealing their feelings and experiences publicly and openly, especially with men. They could well express themselves, their feelings and emotions in private through letters or diaries or with an intimate female confidante but never in the open. In a way she had to feel, bear, hope or suffer alone. In *Shirley* (S), Caroline silently loved her cousin Robert Moore. But oblivious to the rules of the courtship, her emotions and feelings were open enough to guilelessly convey her regard to him. Moore, though kind and gentle to her and even drawn by her charm and innocence at times, was too practical and too caught in the affairs concerning his mill that he kept himself from returning her ardour. But despite the dejection and depression she went through due to Robert's rejection, she knew that he was not to be blamed, for her misery had been her own calling. It was she who had bestowed her affections first and most importantly unasked for defying all modesty. "Robert had done her no wrong; he had told her no lie; it was she that was to blame, if anyone was...She had loved without being asked to love – a natural, sometimes an inevitable chance, but big with misery." (S 80) Caroline religiously craved for every look, every gesture, and every loving word that Robert uttered to her. One day after having spent a quality evening with Robert, Caroline was too happy and content for words. It was an evening when Robert warmed up to her and though what they talked was far from being called a lover's talk yet everything he said, whatever he meant or the way he looked at her, all spoke of his love for her. But the very next day Robert checked himself from

giving into any sort of romantic temptation, withdrew and returned to being his cold, reserve self, much to Caroline's disappointment. She could not understand his change of heart nor the reason behind it, but she bore his cold attitude silently; and though she suffered severely, she could not bring herself to question his behaviour and seek an explanation.

> "A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation, a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts...Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions, utter no remonstrances; it is your best wisdom. You expected bread and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrised...You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no concentration; close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it string through your palm. ...in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a job. For the whole remnant of your life, if your survive the test – some, it is said, die under it – you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. (S 79)

Here Charlotte Bronte speaks of a woman's lot in the strongest and most sarcastic of words. A woman has to learn to bear the fate assigned to her and suffer silently under it. If at all she has grievances and questions to put forth, it is in her best interest to keep them to herself, leave them unasked and unanswered, for a woman is expected to do so, accept her lot and be content in that. Wisdom for a woman is silence irrespective of whatever she goes through.

In *Professor* (P), Charlotte presents another image of a woman, one who represents and signifies social duplicity, tact and manoeuvring. Speaking of the girl students of the Pensionnat where he teaches, Crimsworth explains that he as a master views a pretty, giddy, innocent, light-headed girl in a totally different context than would her admirer or her partner at a ball. As a master Crimsworth is "...really master of the mystery of feminine identity. He "knows" as other woman do not...what a female really is." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:322) As a professor he does not see her as a person dressed in fine clothes but rather as his plainly dressed student with books in front of her. He sees her and analyses her as one would do with an object of mystery. He sees her preparing herself not merely for the course of the pensionnat but for the wider feminine social roles. She learns and imbibes the duplicitous strategies of femininity and is not always as angelic and innocent as she appears from the surface. As to what a female is Gilbert and Gubar have said that

> ...though Bronte may not have successfully mentioned this to herself, through the medium of Crimsworth she suggests that a female is a servile and a "mentally depraved" creature, more slave than angel, more animal than flower. And – the book implies, even it Crimsworth / Bronte does not – she is like this because it is her task in a patriarchal society to be such a creature. Lying, "...speaking fair when a point [is] to be gained," tale bearing, back-biting, flirting, learning – all these are, after all, slave traits, ways of not submitting while seeming to submit, ways of circumventing male power. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:322-323)

This image of a monster woman, a duplicitous female, is projected by Charlotte in the character of Zoraide Reuter – the director of the girls pensionnat in which Crimsworth is a professor. At first, Crimsworth is extremely impressed by her dignified and elegant

persona, but slowly he realizes that behind the modest, tranquil and principled exterior their lies a devious, scheming and harsh lady who could go to any lengths to have her motives and desires fulfilled. Crimsworth's faith in Zoraide is shaken when by chance he overhears a conversation between her and Pelet in the Pensionnat garden, regarding their impending marriage, when all this while she has adopted a seductive and flirtatious attitude towards him, in order to have him under her spell. Here, Bronte writes to show the tendency of women like Zoraide Reuter, typical society products, who for security and comfort go for "... a cynical marriage of convenience...rather than one of love and honesty." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:324) Knowing herself for what she really is and realizing her true colours, Crimsworth begins to distance himself from her, adopting a very professional, precise, and hardy approach in dealing with her. But instead of being put off by such behaviour, she shamelessly and relentlessly continues to woo him and refuses to let go of him. The harsher and ruder he is, more she is turned on by him for "...it was...her tendency to consider pride, hardness, selfishness, as proofs of strength...to violence, injustice, tyranny she succumbed – they were her natural masters." (P 101)

In *Shirley*, Rose and Jessy – though as gay, spirited, creative and tough as their brothers were, were not quite liable to a future as certain as the boys would have. Raised as equals by their father, the girls could still feel the differentiation. "'There are plenty of people...who take notice of the boys. All my uncles and aunts seem to think their nephews better than their nieces; and when gentlemen came here to dine, it is always Matthew, and Mark, and Martin that are talked to and never Rose and me.' " (S 118) Seeing the girls speak freely and boldly in front of their father and Mr. Moore, Mrs. Yorke checked them in her usual 'kill-joy fashion', asking them to keep their chatter in check by saying:

> 'It becomes all children, especially girls, to be silent in the presence of their elders.'
>
> 'Why have we tongues, then?' asked Jessy pertly; and Rose after two minutes of thoughtful consideration asked '...why especially girls, mother?' And to their queries Mrs Yorke declared her reasons so:
>
> 'Firstly, because I say so; and secondly, because discretion and reserve are a girl's best wisdom.' (S 118)

It was not thought proper for a girl to speak her mind or utter her thoughts and ideas freely and openly to one and all. "Although they share their brothers' aspirations and attitudes, their prospects are inferior. Their mother acts, ironically, as society's representative: interpreting for them its sexist will: urging upon them suspicion and repression...attempting to restrain-their spirits, limit their sense of possibility, reduce them as se has been reduced." (Moglen 1984:166) Retiring, quiet and modest was how a girl was supposed to be and this fact was grilled into her right from her childhood.

Unmarried woman was a much discussed topic in the 1850s that saw an excess in female population over male "What, it was asked, should society do with these spare women? In her correspondence with William Smith Williams Charlotte had answered that question by proposing the expansion of employment opportunities, wondering whether their might be room 'for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, for more female artists, more authoresses.' " (Miller 2001:33) Going by the age, for girls of education or need, teaching or being a governess were the only respectable career to opt for. But being a governess was a precarious situation to be in since she was well above the position allotted to a servant, but still continued to be inferior to the members of the household. During the period in which she served as a governess, Charlotte went through all the hurt and humiliation associated with her station in life and though she bore it all,

the hurt and resentment with her lot comes across in her letter to Ellen in which she wrote:

> But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess's work is to me – for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are to the employment. Do you think that I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity. I find it so hard to ask either servant or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it. It is less pain to me to endure the greatest inconvenience than to request its removal. (Moglen 1984:60)

But for a woman seeking self-sufficiency, being a governess was one of the very few respectable options available in the age. The other most obvious one was marriage.

In *Shirley*, Charlotte "...elaborates fully upon the fact, the causes, and the consequences of male domination of the female. It is in the economic sphere that the discrimination against women is most apparent; for the society, of which they are members, although it places material values above all others, provides them with no means of earning money." (Blom 1997:113) A young man could easily turn to business or any other profession for that matter, and make a living easily whereas a woman was limited to either being a house help or a governess. Out of these, for educated girls of respectable families being a governess was the only given respectable option available, but it was like being a slave with hardly a sufficient income. Thus marriage remained the only possible alternative for a respectable and comfortable life, or rather it was forced as the only choice. But where marriage remained of supreme importance to women than for men, it continued to remain rather elusive for them to achieve in fact. Reduced and forced

to being commodities as well as manipulators to the marriage market made them the target of men's ridicule. They exulted in the power they could wield over women. "The gentlemen turn them into ridicule; they don't want them; they hold them very cheap. They say – I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time – the matrimonial market is overstocked." (S 293) In speaking of his disgust of marriage to Robert Moore, Malone ends up summing the existing social scenario of the age. " 'If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage – I mean marriage in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment – two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling. Humbug! But an advantageous connection, such as can be formed in consonance, with dignity of views and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad – eh?' " (S 17-18) Malone hated a marriage based merely on matters of feeling, sentiment or emotions, but a match that could boast of advantageous connection and interests, of course that of money and social standing, could not be so bad to make. Marriage, despite being the most basic, special, and important social bond still remained a subject of economic security and personal gains. Robert who felt the pressure of his strained financial condition confides in Yorke as to how marriage was not for him, but he gets a very practical answer in return from him. Yorke was of the view that if he was in a situation such as Robert was, it was quite likely that he would easily find for himself a wife with a few thousands who would suit both him and his affairs. And Robert heeded the worldly advice when he turned a blind eye to Caroline's charm and affection, and instead made a proposal of marriage to Shirley Keeldar for her money and status and not out of love for her. She however, refused him in the strongest possible words saying she could not marry, for she never cherished any feelings of love or him. Similarly Shirley's uncle, a worldly man by all standards, felt that Samuel Wynne's was a good match for her, especially so since he stood for " 'A fine unencumbered estate, real substance and

good connections.' " (S 349) He felt him to be worthy of her not because he estimated him to be a man of character, but because he had twice the money that Shirley had, and could boast of equality of stature, connections and respectability. He felt that for Shirley to refuse such a match would be shocking. But Shirley stood for the view that she could never marry unless she came to love, admire, and respect the man. But for Mr. Sympson, love was a " 'Preposterous stuff! undecorus, unwomanly.' " (S 350)

"The combination of willed, self-conscious sympathy and indistinctive debate evident in Bronte's letter on the subject of single women..." (Pauline 1985:121) could be found in her novel *Shirley*. In knowing old maids like Miss Mann and Miss Ainley and their isolated existence through Caroline's efforts to form an acquaintance with them, one becomes aware of the graveness and importance of Bronte's point which conveys the unfairness of the trials, neglect, ridicule, mockery, and banter which these women have to go through just because devoid of either money or beauty, marriage eludes them and reduces them to being old maids. And such women are nothing more but a source of sarcasm and ridicule for more to begin with, a matter of amusement. "... he had amused himself with comparing fair youth, delicate and attractive, with shrivelled old, livid and loveless, and in jestingly to a smiling girl the vinegar discourse of a cankered old maid." (S 135) His attitude in speaking thus of Miss Mann makes Caroline ask of him, " '...Ah! Robert, you do no like old maids. I, too, should come under the lash of your sarcasm if I were an old maid.' " (S 135) Her reaction to his viewpoint sets forth the seriousness of a woman's precarious situation in an unsympathetic society and the complexity and self-doubt to which Caroline is subjected to, going by the compulsions of the age.

Caroline had never imagined a future without Robert. But since Robert did not love her, she knew she would never be married, never have a husband and kids to love and live for. She never even thought of considering for herself any other avenue in life

than of growing up to the natural destiny of a woman as a wife and mother. But now she saw herself growing up to be an old maid. She knew Robert would marry one day, but not to a penniless girl like her, but to a woman with wealth and status. And she ends up wondering as to what was her place in the world, for what was she created for, and subsequently muses over her thoughts and felt,

> '...that is the question which old maids are puzzled to solve. Other people solve it for them by saying, "Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted"...Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it; Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness.' (S 133)

In order to try and give meaning to her life, to look for occupation and interests to keep herself busy and occupied, Caroline made an effort to befriend and get to know two respectable ladies of the parish, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, who were given little or no importance, hardly paid attention by many others, since they were unmarried and with neither looks, nor wealth, nor status to boast of. They were referred to as old maids and even laughed at at times. In getting to know them Caroline realized that they had goodness and good deeds to their credit. They had qualities of heart that were hid or forgotten before their plain exteriors. Miss Ainley made her life happy and meaningful by devoting herself to charity and services to the poor of the parish. But somehow, Caroline

> ...felt with pain that the life which made Miss Ainley happy could not make her happy. Pure and active as it was, in her heart she deemed it deeply dreary, because it was so loveless – to her ideas, so forlorn. Yet

> doubtless, she reflected, it needed only habit to make it predictable and agreeable to anyone. It was despicable, she felt to pine sentimentally, to cherish secret griefs, vain memories, to be inert, to waste youth in aching languor, to grow old doing nothing. (S 140)

Caroline, from her own experience, of her own frustration having nothing worthwhile to do and also from what she saw in looking into the lives of Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, feels that something ought to be done for women who are single, women who would never have the security of marriage, and who had no money and status to fall back upon. Such women need to do more with their time and life, better occupations, prospects and interests than what has till now been assigned to them as their lot. But society shuts its ears against such grievances, on such issues for which it has neither sympathy nor the urge for reform or remedy. People hate to be pulled into and confronted with those problems and issues for which they are uninterested in finding a solution.

> Such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world; the demand disturbs the happy and rich – it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood...The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do. Their sisters have no earthly employment but household work and sewing, no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting, and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health. They are never well, and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The

> great wish, the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry; they will die as they now live. (S 293-294)

Men could never think of such an existence for themselves, but they expected women to live such lives uncomplainingly. Fathers were embarrassed and angry if they saw their daughters scheme and manoeuvre to entrap husbands without caring as to what drove them to act so. They were confined at home, restricted and preached but never listened to. But then double standards were made for the very purpose of suppressing women. Keeping them confined and restricted within the home premises helped men rule over their existence. Women were brought up with their minds being focussed on a one point agenda and aim of marriage as their only goal and alternative in life, failing which they would be destined for a life of loneliness and vacuum. They would be without a home to involve themselves in and no motive in life to look for, and with hardly any other alternative or profession to give a positive meaning to their life. It is almost a cry for compassion when Charlotte Bronte speaks through Caroline:

> 'Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! Look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you...degenerating to sour old maids – envious, backbiting, wretched because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! Cannot you alter these things...You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seeking for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvre, the mischief making tale-bearer. ...Cultivate them – give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most painful prop in age.' (S 294-295)

Should not a woman be encouraged to attain happiness, independence and self-worth beyond and outside marriage? And it can only be done if society and families provide their daughters with an alternative, a occupation, a profession, a aim that looks beyond marriage, that gives them a chance to work and prove their worth and individuality and, most importantly, a sort of work for which they are not looked down upon, and which brings to them both respect and happiness.

"When a man demands that women submit to...social and mental bondage, he also forces them into total psychological dependency while he remains independent." (Blom 1997:115) Caroline, who is hopelessly in love with Robert Moore, is pushed into the depths of misery and despair since her love remains unanswered and unwanted. Moore, led by work compulsions and economic motivations, fails to respond to her love. But though Caroline withdraws and suffers in dignified silence, her situation in life makes it extremely hard for her to get over her passion and love for Moore. With no possible profession to look forward to, nothing of importance to do with so much of her spare time, her thoughts keep on returning to Robert, pushing her to further distress and heartache, so much so that her cherished feelings become a torture for her. She longs for something interesting and absorbing to engage her head and hands, and to occupy her thoughts. But that is exactly what she could not have; none is sensitive to a woman's need for occupation, release, and self-fulfilment in a society which expects only patience, submission, and understanding from a woman. Circumstanced as she is, she has nothing of importance to do or occupy herself than to think only of Robert all the while. She longs to be near him, with him; craves for his look and attention, and when deprived she would feel wretched, heartbroken and worthless. She has Robert in her thoughts when she says to Shirley, "'Shirley, men and women are so different, they are in such a different position. Women have so few things to think about, men so many. You may have

friendship for a man, while he is almost indifferent to you. Much of what cheers your life may be dependent on him, while not a feeling or interest of moment in his eyes may have reference to you.' " (S 171)

To find themselves in a marriage with someone with love, as the only possible, promising, happy, and enviable destiny for a woman, was a notion that was taught and well grilled into the psyche of the woman of that age. Thus blinded, women became victims at the hand of their own emotions, giving their husbands something that they neither desired nor cared for i.e. love. But if success in the marriage market ensured a woman from a life of loneliness, ridicule and boredom, for this was exactly what the old maids were reduced to in the society, but it certainly did not always promise her freedom and individuality. A marriage saw her loss of freedom and self and taught her to be patient and submissive. "...Society assumes that women should function only as slaves and servants or, at best, as the mindless dependents of their husbands. Indeed, the belief in the innate superiority of man is so strong that it abrogates even the belief in class hierarchy." (Blom 1997:114) Even Joe Scott, an employee of Robert Moore with hardly an education to boast of and certainly no position, considered himself fit to lecture both Shirley and Caroline as to the proper sphere and place of a woman in society. When Shirley questioned Joe Scott that " '...do you sincerely think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?' "(S 246) he replied, " '...I have a great respect for the doctrines delivered in the second chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy...Let the women learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed than Eve.' " (S 246-247) Here, Caroline interposes by saying that if everyone had a right to private opinion, a woman had every right to make it as well as men. But Joe proclaims, " 'Nay, women is to take her husband's opinion, both in politics and religion. It's wholesomest for them.' " (S 247)

In *Shirley*, the curates Malone and Sweeting, had stayed the night to dinner at another curate Donne's place when Malone spoke arrogantly to Donne's landlady, ordering her to cut the loaf. " 'Cut it woman... and the woman cut it accordingly. Had she followed her inclinations, she would have cut the parson also; her Yorkshire soul revolted absolutely from his manner of command." (S 5) The three curates Donne, Malone and Sweeting had neither friendship nor religion in common, yet they were bound to one another in their common interests and enjoyment of such habits as wining and dining together. No season or weather could ever keep them from passing a chance of tea, dinner or an occasion to sup at each other's abode, and their respective landladies bore the burnt of their eccentric ways. Their concern with females was only "...as so many sexual objects with so much dowry value. Significantly, the curates do not number their landladies, upon whom their comforts depend, among the rest of "the fair sex." Because these females have no "human" qualities, they share the same name, always spoken in tones of cruel command. The name is "woman." It designates function: to clean, to cook, in short – to serve." (Moglen 1984:159)

According to Margaret Howard Blom, in *Shirley* Charlotte suggests that though men may stress that it is in keeping with the Bible doctrine, to follow which they are bound to keep women confined and in check, but the fact remains that they are led to do so since they themselves feel wary and intimidated by the female sex. For someone like Caroline's uncle, Mr. Helstone, women were silly, light-headed and vain creatures, to be treated lightly and certainly not with serious respect and consideration. "Helstone's insecurity, his desire for power, his fear of feeling, all express themselves in his cruel, sexual sadism." (Blom 1997:164) He could be gallant and cheerful with them but never serious and respectful, for they remained to him mere playthings, to be used and discarded. Such an outlook spoke how men found it amusing and self-boosting to see

women wriggle under rules and roles marked out for them by a traditional and prejudiced society. Shirley described well when she spoke of the biased way men rate and view women. " 'If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women. They do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil. Their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.' " (S 264)

What men found most threatening and impious about a woman's sexuality was that it excited their feelings and desires, attracting them away from their personally created, desired, and set worldly standards and aims, to the attainment of which had been their goal in life. Like Robert turns his back to Caroline's love and attraction and though drawn to her sometimes and caught by her charm, he treats his inclination and feelings for her something of a frenzy and weakness that may overpower him at times, but was only temporary, and would go away in time leaving him free to pursue his set ambitions, free from the trappings of undesired emotions. . At other times so bent was Moore to withdraw from female society that he stayed alone at his mill at night with his foreman Joe Scott and cooked his own meals rather than going back to his house and be with his sister.

> It is because of the woman's allure that the man attempts to assign her non threatening roles which allow him to ignore or possibly to eliminate her sexual appeal. As long as she can be thought of as a doll – a toy – her sexual attractiveness poses no danger but simply adds to her owner's pleasure in amusing himself with her. Thought of as an angel, she is equally unthreatening because the term, by definition, implies a lack of interest in, and a superiority to, all physical desire. (Blom 1997:117)

In this novel, the lot of Mary Cave epitomizes a woman's fate in an uncaring and unsympathetic male governed and influenced social scenario.

> In *Shirley*, Charlotte examines in some detail the male attempt not only to deny the existence of female sexual response but also to equate purity in women with physical weakness and ultimately with death. Because any self-motivated action implies the existence of independent will and because such independence in the woman is thought to be unnatural and sinful, the ideal feminine response is conceived of as that which is totally passive. And because the ultimate passivity is that of death, dying makes a woman wholly attractive...(Blom 1997:117)

The relation between purity and death is signified in the story of Mary Cave. Mary Cave had been a young and beautiful woman, an angelic creature, a perfect woman, and though she was admired generally and had several suitors, Yorke and Helstone were the chief rivals in love. And though Helstone did not have Yorke's all 'absorbing passion' and love for her, still he did fancy her and sought her for marriage. A clergyman by profession, Helstone was favoured by Mary over all others for the respectable post that he held. And for Helstone to be able to win the much admired Mary for his wife, satisfied and pleased him. But as fate would have it, he was not to be a good husband, especially not to a silent wife. He who treated women as dumb and inferior beings "...fails to notice that Mary's innate unresponsiveness has become the lassitude induced by fatal illness; and her subsequent death meant little to him since it only intensifies and confirms those qualities which originally attracted him to her." (Blom 1997:117) He had been attracted to her for he saw in her an angelic face. But after a year or two of marriage she hardly meant anything to him; oblivious to her sufferings he continued with his own affairs to the extent that he could not see her approaching near death. Her decline, born out of dejection, unhappiness and neglect, finally saw her rest in peace and in silence, which had always marked her existence. For Mr. Yorke who had loved and lost Mary to Helstone,

her death further enhanced her angelic image. But once Robert Moore instigated Yorke and said that he did not find anything special in Mary from the picture that he had seen of her and prodded him further as to what if Mary had been something more than just a beautiful face.

> 'Supposing, Yorke she had been educated (no women were educated in those days; supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips...supposing her conversation, when she sat at your side, was fertile, varied...supposing that whenever her face was under your gaze, or her idea filled your thoughts, you gradually ceased to be hard and anxious, and pure affliction, love of home, thirst for sweet discourse, unselfish longing to protect and cherish, replaced the solid cankering calculations of your trade...supposing in short, your Mary had not been cold, but modest; not vacant, but reflective; not obtrusive but sensitive; not inane but innocent; not prudish but pure – would you have left her to court another woman for her wealth.' (S 401-402)

At first Yorke would not reply but when Robert persisted, he replied that they lived in a strange world and men in fact were strange beings. And though he may swear for now that nothing but death could have separated him from Mary in such a case, chances were that he would have acted completely opposite to what he now said. He felt that had he been secure of Mary's love and affection, sure of her care and constancy, not at the receiving end of her scorn and rebuffs, free of all doubts – chances were that he would have left her.

"Far from conferring purity on women, the restriction placed on them by society may drive them to a perverse aggressiveness which is masked by the appearance of

conformity to the role of subservient obedience. Mrs. Yorke, an ardent supporter of the doctrine that the best wife is the best servant to her husband, is a monster." (Blom 1997:118) Physically stout and strong, accomplished and efficient Mrs.Yorke is capable of many things but limited to fulfilling herself in performing her duty only as a wife and mother. At home, despite being strict and commanding in dealing with her children, she could hardly gain control over them or keep them in check whereas their father would have more of an effect over them with a mere gaze than any of her scolding or preaching could ever achieve. She tries to imbibe in her girls a traditional mindset and tries hard to mould them into becoming a woman she herself has been all her life – a woman of dull and monotonous duties, to an extent that she almost forces them to rebel at times. Limited and restricted to the domestic sphere in exercising her capabilities and powers, she desperately holds on to her domain to the extent of being bossy and overbearing. She is extremely possessive of her husband and children and of their time, love and attention. She is an extremely good wife and a loving mother who takes good care of her house and family. But, though sincere in her love and devotion for her husband, if left to her she would not have allowed him to have any friends of his own just as she kept all his relations at a distance with the view of keeping all his time and attention for her own self.

> Desiring power but having only one area in which to seek it, she aggressively aggrandizes the little authority she gains and savagely turns on any who dare to oppose her. The irony that is implicit in the character of this dictatorial matriarch...is plain; to have power in this society, the woman must confirm to the limited role of the house-keeper and bearer of children; and the society which requires such conformity not only creates but ultimately applauds as virtuous the man-eating, child devouring female monster of myth. (Blom 1997:119)

Thus the novels of Bronte Sisters, spoke of a woman's lot in the age that saw them into existence. The highly independent, revolutionary and forthright heroines of Bronte Sisters contributed much to the growth of such a who stood for a woman's need and right for freedom and to be able to voice their passions, emotions and desires – something that was shocking and radical for their age. "They did much to alter the way in which women were viewed, demonstrating new social, psychological and emotional possibilities for women." (Carter&Rae 1997:289)

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Chapter – 5

Major Heroines of the Bronte Sisters: Creation of Power and Passion

> I once had a conversation with a charming but unliterary accountant who was trying to take a polite interest in my book. 'The Bronte sisters – weren't they fictional characters?' was his response when I told him what I was working on. The Brontes only existed on the vaguest fringes of his consciousness, but the space they occupied there – hovering between reality and fantasy – said a lot about their role in the cultural imagination. (Miller 2001: 140)

The Bronte Sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne operating under the male sounding pseudonym of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, were a force to reckon with in their unique writings, defying and debating the norms that defined the woman of the age. Passion and self-assertion were dominant themes in Bronte novels and they, in a way, sketched out a new concept of the Victorian heroine as a woman of enduring will, intense emotions, and passionate desires, capable of revolting against the prejudices and compulsions of the age. For a woman to be in love was nothing unusual as such; what was unusual was that till the Bronte Sisters came on the literary scene with their revolutionary creations, a woman had been taught to hold her feelings to herself, keep them in check, and prevent them from being known to others. However, the Brontes came out with spirited and impassioned heroines who no longer hid their feelings and were, in fact, honest and forthright about their emotions and desires. The Bronte Sisters dealt with female realities like confinement, destitution, starvation, rage, and even madness. In their works the exploration of the female psyche became an all important issue.

> Charlotte's life and art is 'both an eloquent protest over the cruel and frustrating limitations imposed upon women and a triumph over them.' An understanding of the social expectations and everyday lives of Victorian women was essential for understanding Currer Bell... the conflicts within Charlotte that gave such electricity to her work were not generated ... by mental pathology, but by the tensions commonly experienced by talented and intelligent middle-class women of her time, for whom 'life could not be other than a battle between conformity and rebellion. (Miller: 2001: 162)

Feminist of today identify with Charlotte, since her stand and belief belonging to a woman's right to tap and exploit her potential seems so contemporary. Behind the quiet and unassuming exterior, Charlotte had a strong, intense and uncompromising aspect to her personality that came across in her novels in depicting her heroines. Charlotte's novels portrayed a world centred on a woman's passion in love, and so too in life. She reveals to us the deeper mysteries of female life. Bronte heroines like Jane Eyre, Caroline Hesltone and Lucy Snowe seek recognition of the self and their struggle and conflict is neither for something they are not, nor for what they wish to be, but to be recognized for who they are, as an individual and an acknowledgement and right to form and have their own point of view.

> In a world, where some medical men defined both intellectual work and active sensuality as masculine, she was keen to show that literary labour could be perfectly pure and feminine. Charlotte, on the other hand, put passion at the heart of her vision in a way that was particularly worrying for women writers. Not only did she acknowledge erotic feelings in her heroines but she made an implicit connection between sexuality and artistic creativity. (Miller 2001:52).

Like the protagonist of her works Charlotte, too, was always in search of an identity, of accomplishment and recognition. All of Charlotte's novels are focussed on the individuality of the heroine and her needs rather than on the social scenario.

Charlotte centred her first work, *The Professor* (TP), on a male subject William Crimsworth, tracing his life's journey and carrying the story through him: "William Crimsworth is her transitional hero: a bridge between her identification with a male persona and her commitment to a female "voice". He is, at times, feminized: almost androgynous... of more importance is his initial position of powerlessness which makes him seem most feminine"..." (Moglen 1984:88). In *TheProfessor,* Frances Henri is a shy, quiet, unassuming young woman who, though an orphan and oppressed by her circumstances and poverty, stands apart in being mature, intelligent and sensible. She is aware and conscious of her own capabilities and does not believe in self-denial nor does she underrate herself just because as a woman it is coercive for her to do so. Her compositions provide her with an outlet and release for her innermost feelings and thoughts. Frances differs from other women in that an ambition to make something of her life, fosters within her. It is, for this, that she works hard as a lacemender and simultaneously improves her academics so that she can work as a teacher and earn a living for herself. As his pupil the relationship that comes to develop between her and Crimsworth is one based on understanding and respect for one another and their subsequent marriage is worthy in being intellectually mature. But Frances "... relationship with her "maitre" does force upon her a condition of fragmentation which is potentially valid: the fragmentation of a woman who seeks for independence in life and feels dependent in love." (Moglen 1984:97) Frances loves and respects Crimsworth well enough to respond very warmly to his proposal of marriage with love and enthusiasm and is happy to be his wife. But at the same time deep within her, an inherent independent

streak instils in her a need to be her own person and not to be dependent on anyone even in marriage. She wants a marriage that would allow her to be self-reliant and grant her, her freedom. "Think of my marrying you to be kept by you, Monsieur! I could not do it; and how dull my days would be! You would be away teaching in close, noisy school rooms from morning till evening, and I should be lingering at home, unemployed and solitary; I should get depressed and sullen, and you would soon tire of me." (TP 179) Alone and friendless, Frances has always been independent and self-reliant and it is difficult for her now to imagine being anything other than being so. Crimsworth recognises and understands her need for an independent self and is mature and sensible enough not to be in her way, instead he encourages and supports her in her endeavours. "I put no obstacle in her way: raised no objection; I know she was not one who could live quietcent and inactive, or even comparatively inactive." (TP 198) He realizes her need for work, for duties to perform; something which would absorb and interest her and nourish her talent and intellect. And not one to curb her spirit and freedom, Crimsworth is only too happy to support her and provide her with a field to perform.

Crimsworth understands Frances, the state and position in which she has been, her integrity, her vulnerability, her sense of loneliness, her constraints, for his own life and position has been, in a way, responsive to hers. An orphan devoid of status and inheritance, solitary and friendless, his lot is no different from Frances in that, according to Gilbert and Gubar he, too, is 'powerless like a woman.' Hence, he could identify with her helplessness and helps her in dealing with her problems and boosting her confidence and morale.

> In *The Professor*, Charlotte Bronte asks the question, "What is female?" her answer is, "powerlessness." Probing further, she discovers that the male alone may rid himself of "effeminacy" by achieving social status.

> The woman is caught in a double bind. Her femininity and therefore her powerlessness are largely inescapable. She can, in the manner of Frances Henri, develop her intellectual and personal capacities. Still, her potential "as a woman" will be realized only within the strictures of a conventional marriage which maintains her in a position of infantile dependence and subordination. (Moglen 1984:105)

Charlotte was committed to the idea of projecting unconventional heroine, one whom she could well describe as plain as she herself was. Like, she mentioned to her sisters that they were, in fact, ethically wrong in always talking of their heroines as beautiful. And on being asked, as to what other way possible there was to make their heroines fascinating and engrossing, she replied, ' "I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours." ' (Moglen 1984:106)

Although she could not exactly pull off the feat with *The Professor* she, nevertheless, managed to do so in *Jane Eyre* (JE), setting up an entirely new tradition in women oriented fiction which talked of women as independent, thinking, decision making individuals. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte explored a woman's psyche, presenting the suffering experiences and voice of a woman's heart with almost blatant honesty. "... In freeing Jane Eyre from the conventional trappings of femininity and granting her liberty to feel and express her feelings to think an express her thoughts...Charlotte Bronte created the first "anti-heroine": one who defied the conventions of both fiction and society." (Moglen 1984:106-107).

Jane Eyre is the story of the trials and tribulations in the life of Jane, depicting in her a positive growth despite the circumstances, and a maturity and understanding that helps her to be independent and self-reliant and gives her a confidence to take important

decisions based on her sense of right, no matter how tough and taxing they prove out for her. The novel traces the growth of Jane Eyre as a person, from being weak and fragile to a strong willed, righteous individual. As a young child caught in the hostile environment of Mrs. Reed's household, bullied and humiliated by her cousins, John, Eliza and Georgiana, Jane goes through various emotions of depression, dejection and resentment. Not being what one would describe as a pretty looking girl and being told and made to realize this, does not help her confidence either. Furthermore, John Reed's intimidating and threatening behaviour towards Jane, meant always to insult her and show her, her inferior position both in the house and society, turns Jane's life to one of misery and hell. "It is from John that she learns the meaning of powerlessness, the meaning of being a female in a patriarchal society." (Moglen 1984:109) As the young master of the Reed's household, John Reed in using his position of power and authority over the weak and timid Jane, pushing and bullying her incessantly, means to satisfy and feed his ego. Her weakness proves his weapon. However, Jane could not bear the humiliation and injustice for long and one day on being physically assaulted by John something snaps within her and she overcomes all her timidity and weakness to stand up for herself and put forth a strong verbal defence and outburst against John Reed. " 'Wicked and cruel boy! ... You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman Emperors!' " (JE 6). Her sense of self and outrage at injustice helps her withstand the pressures of tyranny even as a child. Neglected, maltreated, chastised and abused, her revolt marks her spirit and passion, evident even as a young child. Though she suffers unjust behaviour, suppression and isolation, yet she seems to be able to gather the courage to retaliate and resist attack made on her self–respect and hold her own ground. "Jane awakens to the knowledge that she must test the strength of her private self against the constraints of the social world. Her ordeal had aroused in her a burning sense of injustice and the realization

that although she is badly treated, she is not necessarily guilty: to be a victim is not necessarily to be unworthy." (Moglen 1984:111)

However, as usual no one blames John for his cruelty rather Jane is chastised for being so fiercely passionate in her behaviour towards him, and is locked in the red room as a punishment. Her heart and soul revolts at the unjust treatment meted out to her just because she is neither important for anyone nor beautiful and adorable enough to draw love and attention on that account. Jane knows she is in the right but nobody feels so for her, and all this leads to further hurt and suffering. Locked in the red room Jane goes through varied emotions of helplessness, hurt, fear, anger, humiliation and rebellion. Later on, accusations false and destructive levelled against her by Mrs. Reed in the presence of Mr. Brocklehurst, while speaking of her admission to Lowood, forces her to rebel once again. After Mr. Brocklehurst left Mrs. Reed's house Jane, left alone in the room with Mrs. Reed, humiliated, tormented, hurt and in anger at the conversation that passed between Mrs. Reed and Brocklehurst concerning herself, contemplates for a while whether or not she needs to speak for herself. But finally she gathers the strength to speak and she does so in the strongest possible but very true words at the injustice Mrs. Reed has always treated her with and how her cruelty has pushed her to hatred and revolt. She further says that she could dare bring herself to say all this because she knows that she is in the right and merely defending her self-respect.

> 'Speak I must: I had been trodden on severly, and must turn: but how? What strength had I to dare retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence- 'I am not deceitful: if I were I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies,

and not I.' She further added:

> 'I am glad you are no relative of mine: I will never call you aunt again as l long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you, makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.' (JE 29)

Unable to cope with her loneliness and alienation, she turns and speaks her mind out bluntly to Mrs. Reed, giving her in no uncertain terms what exactly she thinks of her and her ways. And when Mrs. Reed asks as to how dare she speak thus of her, Jane replies: " 'How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I have no feelings and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity....People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hardhearted. You are deceitful!' " (JE 29) Having had her passionate and spirited outburst Jane feels a strange sense of liberation at having finally broken the chains that has bogged her down for long. After the initial feeling of having pulled a righteous victory of sort over Mrs Reed subsided, Jane is caught in self doubt and conflicting emotions of whether or not she should have spoken so boldly with her aunt. At first, she feels the high of a conqueror but guilt soon follows and she feels it has been wrong on her part to act the way she did in loosing control over herself. She is a child quarrelling with an elder and knows this to be wrong. She considers that "Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after flavour, metallic and corroding gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned." (JE 30)

Lowood, the school, to which Jane is moved from Mrs Reed's house, is no better for her and she is faced with greater physical discomfort and humiliation there. If Jane suffers, despises, resists and finally revolts at the patriarchal attitude and behaviour of

young Reed then in Brocklehurst, she faces the most dominating and ruthless figure representing patriarchal authority. "Because Brocklehurst is a more threatening expression of male authority than John Reed, because he is sophisticated in the wielding of power, he cannot – like the boy – employ that sadism in its own guise. Instead, he cloaks his greed, selfishness and vanity in the hypocritical vestments of religious principles, disguising fear and guilt with love of God." (Moglen 1984:113).

In being able to muster enough guts to stand up for herself against the bullying John Reed and finally in her outburst against the heartless Mrs. Reed, speaking of the injustice and humiliation she has been put through every hour of the day in her house, Jane discovers for herself a will and courage inherent, which despite being faced by a man like Mr. Brocklehurst, she would not give up so easily and would never yield to his unjust authority. But in a way, it is easier for her to face and embattle the hostile Mr Brocklehurst unlike when she faces her aunt or cousin, for there she has been an isolated sufferer and even though Mr. Brocklehurst represents 'social, sexual and religious' suppression, Jane has other fellow students as her co-bearers, her partners in grief and strength. And "Because she has achieved power over herself, she has earned the supplement power she needs to triumph over a more sophisticated threat to her ego." (Moglen 1984:113). Whether in submission or in revolt, in feeling, what she does or what she does not, Jane Eyre even as a young child embodies a spirit, a personality strikingly different, one which rather defies or goes against the proprieties defining what exactly an ideal female of the age ought to be.

"When Jane arrives at Lowood she is emotionally starved; spiritually and intellectually hungry. Her life has been one of extreme deprivation." (Moglen 1984:113). Coming to Lowood is in a way, a liberty for her from the tyrannical atmosphere of Mrs Reed's home but then Lowood curbs that liberty by its still more suppressing and

humiliating environment. Mr. Broclehurst tries to run her down by declaring her to be a liar in front of the whole class reducing her to tears and humiliation. But in the counselling of fellow classmate Helen Burns and sympathetic Miss Temple, Jane learns to overcome her miseries, gets a hold over herself, toughens her spirits and makes an effort to adjust herself to the ways of Lowood with her self-respect intact. She finds an anchor and moral support in Miss Temple and Helen and draws will and strength to face and bear odds in the face and not to be angered or depressed by them. But though the loving kindness of Miss Temple and religiosity of Helen Burns do act as a soothing balm to the pained soul of Jane and help her to attain a calmness of manner and submission to duty in life. But her nature though subdued, is not fulfilled or satisfied. Jane is both passionate and intense in her feelings, desires and views and though she loves and admires Helen and all that she stands for – patience, humility, self-denial – and to be content with whatever she has or her situation, Jane could not bring herself to be like her or view world and people the way she does. Like she says to Helen: "No I know I should think well of myself; but that is no enough: if others don't love me, I would rather die than live- I cannot bear to be solitary and hated..." (JE 59). Jane can not live without love or being loved. She has this urgent need within her to be loved and she is not ready to subdue or compromise with her feelings. "She cannot perceive the world in moral terms as Helen does. She feels it, knows it, through her emotions. Sensitivity, vulnerability and disappointment have tinged that knowledge with masochism and dependence." (Moglen 1984:115)

At Lowood, the influence, company and guidance of Miss Temple and Helen Burns, sees Jane imbibing from them qualities such as duty, self-control, patience and courage. So by the time she is ready to step out of Lowood she has changed much from the passionate, impulsive, young girl she once was at Mrs. Reed's and, if not totally, then

atleast she appeared so. The life at Lowood has toned down and subdued anything passionate, difficult or resentment in her self.

> The childhood trauma of Gateshead had plunged Jane into the awesome depths of passionate response. The fear of irrational experience remains, although it is tempered by the ordered life at Lowood. Jane has confronted her commanding need for love and respect and she accepts with some trepidation her consequent condition of dependence: the potential power of passion. She can only attempt to guide herself against extremes of behaviour which must result in the loss of selfhood. (Moglen 1984:117)

Having spent eight long years in the dreary, depressing and monotonous environment of Lowood, Jane finds in herself a daily growing urge to escape the monotony and boredom that life at Lowood has offered her for so many years. With no relative to visit her, having no contact and ties with Mrs. Reed for long and no friends to care, Jane literally has lost touch with the outside world. The day which brought her to Lowood has also shut the door for the outside world to her ever since. Jane yearns for change, for freedom and life beyond Lowood. She feels that for eight years she has served at Lowood and it is time that she moves along and serves elsewhere. She sought for a new life and vocation for herself which finally take her as a governess to Thornfield Hall. "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer...' Then, I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!' " (JE 73)

Thornfield is a welcome change for Jane after years of dreariness that life at Lowood has given her. But despite the peace and tranquillity of Thornfield, there is a certain restlessness in Jane which creates in her an urge at times to seek action and meaning in life. She feels,

> It is in vain to say human being ought to be satisfied with tanquility: they must have action...Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine

> and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions, ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts...it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to make puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (JE 95).

Jane talks of conventionalities that defined, limited and constricted women's roles, alternatives and aspirations. Jane is revolutionary in her admittal of feelings of passion and this avowal of desire, in a way, both signifies, and asserts a woman's desire and necessity for accomplishment and satisfaction.

Rochester's economic stature, independence, status and standing in society and so also his gender enable him a lifestyle beyond social considerations. He intends to live through actions that revolted against the conventions. Jane, too, like Rochester, can lead a life beyond social scrutiny but for the simple reason that she is too socially inferior to be given any importance or be answerable to social dictates. Since Jane does not carry a name, wealth and status to match, she can hardly be treated as a bid in the marriage market and hence training at Lowood has her trained for a life to be earned by earning a living rather than one which would groom her as a lady. Jane, like other charity students at Lowood, is a liability rather than an asset. "Her aspirations and her perspective are therefore more human, less sex-typed, than those conventionally held." (Moglen 1984:119).

Thornfield is a beginning of a new phase in Jane's life which sees her develop a

special relationship with her employer Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester and Jane get together after the initial awkwardness between them is overcome. They enjoy pleasant conversations and company of each another. Rochester is impressed by her intelligence and spirit and in his disillusionment from his past life and present loneliness, he finds her refreshing and different with all her integrity, innocence and independence. Oblivious to society's scrutiny, care or concern and judged by none, Jane can well afford to be natural, uninhibited and open to what she thinks or wants:

> In her interaction with Rochester, both are liberated from the superficial gestures and restraining, repressive behaviour associated with traditional sex roles. Jane feels herself to be freed by Rochester's rude openness: his disregard for "civilities'. They communicate on a new level, revealing themselves emotionally and intellectually. They share a profound sympathy of mind and spirit. It is in part from this that their sexual passion derives and passion it is – portrayed with a vividness not found before in the English novel....It is his will, his superb self-confidence, his power and authority and the mysterious promise of emotional intensity by which she is compelled. It is his "masculinity" which arouses her "femininity". (Moglen 1984:119).

Jane is everything which a traditional heroine should not be. She prefers rudeness to flattery from Rochester and is equally passionate, honest, and blunt in her relationship with him.

Jane is attracted towards Rochester not because of his wealth or status or magnificent persona but because he talks and treats her with an ease, a blunt directness and an open attitude. Thus treated as an equal, leaves no scope for argument on gender inequality. If there is any inequality it is in their social status or in their respective ages.

He treats her as an equal being with frankness and honesty that none had granted or acknowledged her ever before. Jane, having understood that in trying to either domineer or guide her on their conversations or in asking her to obey him, he does not do so with the intention or thought that she is his paid employee, inferior to his stature or that she is bound by duty and job to listen to him, she begins to trust and respect him and do what he asks of her. She has courage, will, and dignity enough not to be bogged down by financial and class status, be even of the man who is her employer.

> 'What you are my paid subordinate, are you? Oh, yes I had forgotten the salary! Well then, on that mercenary ground, will you let me hector a little?'
>
> 'No Sir, not on that ground: but on the ground that you did forget it, and that you care whether or not a dependent is comfortable in his dependency, I agree heartily.'
>
> 'And will you consent to dispense with a great many conventional forms, and phrases, without thinking that the omission arrives from insolence.'
>
> 'I am sure Sir, I should never mistake informality for insolence: one I rather like, the other nothing free-born would submit to, even for a salary'. (JE 117-118).

Through the force of her character and strength of her principles, Jane is able to carry herself with dignity and grace and face and respond to every challenge. She is well aware of the fact that social barriers and strata stand between her and Rochester. And though she addresses him as her 'master' and obeys him to an extent giving him power to guide and command her, Jane believes and, in fact, shares a relationship with Rochester as an equal.

Though Jane is fully aware of the fact that there is great disparity between her and

Rochester's social status and position in life, yet on seeing him with Blanche and company, she honestly feels with all her heart that he can never be for them what he is to her, for he is certainly not their type. " 'I believe he is of mine – I am sure he is – I feel akin to him...though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him.' " (JE 153).

Jane shared a very unique relationship with Rochester but at the same time she is unnerved and wary of the influence and power Rochester has come to have over her. She is drawn not only to him but also led by his wishes and command so much so that she is loosing herself completely to him; and though she longs to be by his side and with him always, she fears his power and influence. "Rochester's ruthless will, coupled with her own uncontrollable passion, makes him a figure of danger; and while she needs him and seeks to win him, she fears to be won by him." (Blom 1997:96). But if she could well resist the bullying John Reed as a child, she could well do so with Rochester and withstand his authority in keeping her autonomy. Later on, when Rochester influenced by his station and position and in superiority of wielding male authority, tries to play about with Jane's feelings and test her emotions, he is in for a passionate resistance from her. Jane defends her individuality, her position, and her right as an autonomous being, speaking with passion of her needs and desire:

> 'Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart! And if God has gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave

> me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh – it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave and we stood at God's feet, equal, - as we are!' (JE 223).

The strength of her feelings makes her both vulnerable as well as volatile. However, Rochester is not indifferent to her feelings; he is merely testing the intensity of her attachment before declaring his own love and commitment to her. He says to her: "My bride is here, because my equal is here, and my likeness." (JE 224). The words thus uttered by Jane and Rochester do not merely speak of their love and passion but are about being equals, equality of mind and sentiments, irrespective of gender and age difference.

Though Rochester treats Jane with respect and equality and not as someone inferior to him, but the fact remains that patriarchal attitude pre-exists in his thinking. Despite their declared love and faith in one another, he does not find it necessary to reveal to Jane the presence of his first wife, Bertha Mason, who is mad and resides under strict vigilance in the attic of his own house. And when the truth is finally revealed to Jane and that too at the altar, her decision not to stay along with Rochester as his mistress despite his repeated pressure and coaxing, is not merely a morally motivated decision for her. It is not as if suddenly she has begun to hate him or love him any less, rather on seeing him repent and regret and plead for her forgiveness, she feels pity and almost sorry for him, for the situation and circumstances that engulfed and threatened his happiness. She is of the stand that if she too agrees and accepts to live with him outside marriage, weakened by her love for him, what difference would then be between her and those women with whom he had those brief, immoral and self-destructive relationships and affairs. For would not then he think of her just the way he thought of them as now. "It was a grovelling fashion of existence: I should never wish to return to it. Hiring a mistress is the

next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Celine, Giacintia and Clara." (JE 275). To be one among such women is what probably the only obvious choice that Jane is put to. But Jane refuses to even consider such an alternative; she does not wish to become a mere source of pleasure, an object for Rochester, to be toyed around for a while and then discarded. Jane loves Rochester but she can not agree to his unethical demand of living with him outside wedlock. She is certainly shocked and in despair when her wedding with him is disrupted but when Rochester, who had till now dominated and directed their relationship, tries to coax and pressure her in the name of love, her dormant will which had till now lost its ground to feeling revived. "She has always sought not just respect, but praise; not just equality, but superiority." (Blom 1997:98). Even earlier it had been her pride and a sense of self that made her declare to her aunt that she is in no way inferior to her cousins, rather they were the ones not 'fit' to be in her company. It is this very pride and self-confidence of hers that makes her reject and disregard the wealthy and beautiful Blanch Ingram as nothing extra ordinary. In fact she described her as rather 'too inferior to excite feeling'. And once again her sense of worth makes her reject Rochester's proposal of compromise. She owes her decision to herself. She feels that she has a right to remain true to herself and her interests, and her decision to uphold her integrity and self-respect.

Locked in the red room by her aunt as a punishment, a passionate rage builds within her and simmers but when it cools, Jane learns and imbibes from Helen Burns and Miss Temple, qualities such as patience and self-control, realizing it as a necessity if she wish to be accepted in the given social scenario of the age. It was an attempt on her part to confirm to the conventions but once at Thornfield, her love and passion for Rochester reignites her old spirit and she gradually begins to loose herself to him and his hold over

her. Passion and impulse lead her on but when it comes to guard her integrity and self-respect, she stands and talks firm. Then neither his love nor his emotional entreaties could stop her from quitting Thronfield. She would not let love or passion blind her from doing right. For her to leave Thornfield was not an act of 'self-denial but as an act of empowering self-assertions'. "Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty – "Depart!" (JE 279).

Jane idolises Rochester to the very core but she realises that in doing so she had been loosing her self to him, and to 'depart' from Thornfield by breaking all barriers of passionate love was something that despite her emotions, she owes to herself. In her firm resolve to leave Rochester, Jane takes her first major independent decision concerning her life. Despite Rochester's deep love for her and so also hers for him, Jane realises that she ought to prevent herself from being entrapped by such feelings and emotions that are destructive to the sanctity of her very being, her happiness and peace within her. Despite the pain and dilemma she faces in giving up her love and life, she has the satisfaction of holding up her honour and integrity against all odds and temptations. In her dilemma, her disturbed self returns to a scene from her childhood:

> "That night I never thought to sleep but a slumber fell on me...I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision...I lifted up my head to look the roof resolved to clouds...I watched her come – watched with the strangest anticipation...She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable

> folds and waved them away...a white human form shone in the azure...It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart –
>
> 'My daughter, flee temptation.'
>
> 'Mother, I will.' " (JE 282).

And sure she does. She leaves Thornfield lonely, penniless, dejected, knowing not where her fate would land her, but with dignity intact and heart warmed with righteousness of her action. She has to seek her own path and vocation. According to Helen Moglen, 'God the Father' gave Jane the life she had but the 'mother' she finally turns to in her hour of agony and desperation, she discovers to be within her own self, the strength a mother embodies comes from within and to which she becomes aware in the evening she decides to leave Thornfield. And it is this strength that is to be tested and relied on her in the most critical phase of her life.

When in the middle of night, Jane leaves Rochester's house, she has no clue as to where her life would take her. Her journey is not only nameless and placeless but also solitary. However, her inner strength helps her to survive and as destiny would have it, broken, hungry and helpless, she lends up at the door of her cousins, St. John, Diana and Mary with none aware of others' existence. Eventually, their love and care help her to get her life back on track. In the peaceful and soothing company of her cousins, Jane regains her last spirit and makes an introspection of her life. St. John helps her find a job in the village school and an honest and peaceful life, away from the temptations of Thornfield, makes her at peace with herself. In Diana and Mary, Jane discovers a stable and dependent support system, the only other known to her since her days at Lowood with Miss Temple and Helen Burns. Through them she grows in strength, confidence, and perspective in life. She comes to respect and be close to them.

> She responds to the authority in Diana – with her it is natural to be passive, "feminine" "to bend where my conscience and self-respect permitted to an active will"... but there is still equality among them. No longer functioning within the authoritarian context of the master – student relationship she had with Rochester, she finds instead that there can be intellectual reciprocity : a sharing of knowledge and gifts, delight in the interaction of personalities. (Moglen 1984:134).

It is this security, spirit, positiveness and self-reliance that she acquires through their friendship that enables her to take up the job of a teacher, offered by St. John in the village school. With this new opening she begins to overcome her complex of being socially inferior. (JE 137). Slowly, she gains confidence and satisfaction in what she has taken up. She feels proud of the way she handles her students, talks and teaches them, became friends with them, someone they trust and rely on. Her efforts soon draw for her a respect in that limited social circle much to her delight and fulfilment. It warms her to live amongst genuine regard, though it may only be the regard of working class people.

"Feminist it might well be, but it is not a feminism which can preach or envision radical social change. Jane, in leaving Rochester, must, it is true, discover her own capacities and strength. She must learn the pleasures of independence and self-sufficiency. But only economic independence and social position will give her the status essential to the recognition which is the better part of equality." (Moglen 1984:134). When St. John discloses to Jane the considerable fortune that she has come to inherit and that St. John and his sisters were her cousins, she could not gather at first but slowly as the news sinks in her, she is overwhelmed with various feelings and sensations, overjoyed not merely because she sees monetary independence for herself but more because for the first time in her life she can boast of having family ties, blood relations she would love

and who would love her back. No doubt, the inheritance gives her security and independence but then it also invests in her the power to free her cousins Diana and Mary too from the dreariness of work away from home in alien conditions and hostile environment. And as the money gives her a chance to live in the permanence of a home with those dear to her, she tells St. John that "Now the wealth did not weigh on me: now it was a mere bequest of coin, - it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment." (JE 341). Seeing her so enthusiastic and adamant with the idea of sharing her fortune with her three cousins, overjoyed at the thought of domestic felicity, St. John says to her that family ties and domestic happiness which gave money its attraction for her, could well be gained even through marriage. But Jane did not desire marriage, not if it is to be done for a purpose. She will go for either a marriage of love or none at all. " 'I know what I feel and how averse are my inclinations to the bare thought of marriage. No one would take me for love; and I will not be regarded in the light of mere money speculation. And I do not want a stranger – unsympathising, alien, different from me; I want my kindred: those with whom I have full fellow-feeling.' " (JE 343).

Believing that without Rochester her life has no meaning, Jane loses her desire to exist ever. In such a spiritless state, St. John is able to have maximum influence over her, guiding and moulding her to his wishes and aims so much so that at one point of time she is almost ready to submit to his demand of a loveless marriage, a marriage of compromise and interests despite the fact that she does not comprehend or agree with what he asks her for. She firmly stresses: " 'If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now.' " (JE 365). Discovering in Jane certain qualities and viewing her as a person who could well turn out to be a useful tool for himself and what he wished to achieve, he tries to exert his influence and authority over her in order to get her to agree to and commit to his own plans irrespective of what she feels and wants for her own life. Jane's efforts and

struggle to resist St. John's will from being imposed upon her is similar to the one that she had to put up with Rochester in order to assert her independence and individuality. "The two men represent the antithetical forces of passion and reason which exist within Jane; therefore, part of her nature spontaneously responds to each. Jane fully realizes that Rochester and St. John see her differently and wish to wed her for different reasons but that, despite these differences, they both seek to destroy her selfhood." (Blom 1997:940) It may appear at first that Rochester offers Jane a life of pleasure, a life of love, and a marriage of passion; but under the given circumstances it is basically the life of sin and guilt. Despite their mutual love, Rochester acts like a patriarch, emotionally pressuring Jane to live with him, oblivious of her dignity and desire. Contrary to his offer, is St. John's who offers Jane a life of labour, a life of principle, and a marriage of spirituality. But the fact remains that though both claim her, none keeps her views and interests in mind. One way or the other, both wish to master her. Jane, who resists her love for Rochester from falling into temptation and sin, once again resists her sense of duty and obligation from giving into a marriage with St. John, which is against her very nature, character and sense of right. To be "...his wife...always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital – this would be unendurable." (JE 361). Jane feels that in order to please St. John, she would have to go against her very nature.

"The extent to which St. John purchases his religious calling at the cost of sexual passion is illustrated in his abortive relationship with Rosamond Oliver, the charming girl whom he rejects precisely because he is attracted to her. And the extent to which his religious fervor is the result of sexual fear and repression in his more subtle complex relationship with Jane." (Moglen 1984:136-137). Initially, St. John is attracted to Jane for

the sort of person that she is, for the strength that she displays in difficult times and adverse situations. In knowledge with her past, St. John is aware of the moral strength that defines her very character. In dealing with the students she teaches she not only displays her intelligence but also her commitment, forbearance, industry, hard-work, patience, and positive will and nature. "He recognizes in her desire to share her inheritance, a gift for sacrifice, and he feels in her response to him an appropriate recognition of his power." (Moglen 1984:137) And all these reasons make him view her as a valuable helpmate in his own spiritual pursuit. He does not wish to see her as a woman with feelings and desires but merely as someone essential and useful for his purpose in life. Jane tries hard to please and follow St. John in his demands and wishes but in doing so she feels that she is loosing a part of herself, of who she is, each passing day to a power she would not bring herself to submit to completely. Although St. John comes to exert a certain power and influence over Jane, manages to guide and mould her life and actions to an extent which suits his own ideology and way of thinking, yet in doing all this, he ends up suppressing her spirit and true self. She feels restricted and restrained, checked and controlled but never once does she feel free and liberated.

> "I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master: he expected me to do a great deal; and when I fulfilled his expectations, he, in his own way, fully testified his approbation. By degrees he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk, or laugh freely when he was by,... when he said, 'go', I went; 'come', I came; 'do this', I did it. But I did not love my servitude..." (JE 352).

However, she bears it all but the strife arises when St. John asks Jane to join him in his missionary endeavours not as his friend or sister, but rather as his wife. He feels that "A

sister might any day be taken from me. I want a wife: a soul helpmate I can influence efficiently in life and retain absolutely till death." (JE 359). His problem is that he wishes to possess Jane, to exert complete influence and hold over her person, life and feelings. Although Jane disagrees with his point, the temptation to comply is strong for her, since estranged from Rochester with nothing particular to look forward to in life, a life of labour, involvement and mission is an attraction enough. It would help her to gain focus in life, get over her feelings of love for Rochester, and put to worthwhile use her 'physical and intellectual energies.' "Jane recognizes that St. John would buy her body with the coin to spirituality, hypocritically posing as God's agent... St. John must make a religious duty of sexual need. He explicitly denies his own and therefore her sexuality, fearing the passion which would make him mortal and vulnerable." (Moglen 1984:138) As Jane comes to comprehend St. John, she is so upset and troubled by his appalling distortion of his own feelings and complete misapprehension of hers that she angrily and candidly opposes him. St. John asks her to be his wife in the name of God and duty but she scorns his idea of love and duty defined. She refuses to be bound to him by marriage which is orchestrated and manipulative in keeping with his needs. She is ready to devote her life to his mission, agree to be his companion and helpmate, but certainly not as a wife but as a free creature.

> 'He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon, and that is all. Unmarried to him this would never grieve me; but can I let him complete his calculations...go through the wedding ceremony? Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will

> never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him – not as his wife.' (JE 358).

St. John has devoted his life in the service and attendance of God and despite his sisters' entreaties, he makes up his mind to go as a missionary to India. He foresees a certain fire and passion in Jane's spirit which he feels would imperil her very soul and hence he offers her a chance to embark on a holy and noble mission, as his partner and wife, thus providing her with a chance to flee temptation on a holy and noble mission, for this is how he sees his selfish proposal. In Jane's patience and perseverance in work he finds a sturdy and useful partner for his mission. Averse to an idea of marriage without love and knowing fully well that such a journey would see the end of her identity, she still considers saying yes to him. Having lost Rochester and his love, her disillusionment and loneliness makes her vulnerable to St. John's power and pressure. But before she could agree, she is led back to Rochester by means of what one may describe as a supernatural call with Rochester calling out to her for help. *Jane Eyre* thus traces the development of Jane Eyre as a person, her growth in strength, maturity, understanding, and self-confidence and the dominance of the will to struggle and survive inspite of all odds.

> In rejecting St. John, Jane comes to term with her need for an external authority. She completes the move towards independence begun in the red-room and continued in her departure from Thornfield. In rejecting St. John's repressive sexuality she rejects the perverse sadomasochism it implies and she attempts to distinguish the sexuality of love from the sexuality of power: the love born of equality from the love subject to idolatry. (Moglen 1984:140).

Jane almost struggles, fights, and triumphs over all, be it Rochester, St. John or society. She opposes all to stand for what she believes is right and upholds her integrity.

Finally, having heard Rochester's voice calling out to her one might in a semi-reverie, Jane drawn by the intensity of the cry leaves for Thornfield the very next morning. Her decision to go and seek Rochester is as little influenced, guided and motivated by social considerations or morality as when she had decided to leave Thornfield. For her, it had been an individual decision then, a call of self –respect, dignity and preservation of self; and similarly going back too was an independent decision. Only this time passion and love guided her solely rather than ethics or judgment or social decisions. Drawn by love and the intensity of his voice, she does return to him only to find Thornfield in ruins; the very night she left the place Bertha Mason, his wife had set fire to the house and also lost her life in it. The same fire left Rochester, maimed, crippled and blind, lost of hope, dejected and heartbroken in Jane's love and pinning each day for her return. Their roles reversed now, Jane becomes his support and anchor, marries him, guides him out of his loneliness and dejection and becomes his life's entire existence. "Reader, I MARRIED HIM." (JE 397) This statement made by Jane in summing up her relationship with Rochester epitomizes the self that finally becomes ultimate in Jane Eyre.

> Jane Eyre was the first fiction Charlotte had written in the authentic voice of a female narrator. It offered access, unheard of in the novel at the time, to the depths of the individual psyche: the 'I' of it was revolutionary....Instead of trying to emulate male writers in her quest for literary identity, she had carved out a path of her own... Disbarred by her gender from the public posturing of the man of genius, she poured her egoism into a new and specifically female form of self expression. (Miller 2001:13)

Thus, through the character of Jane, Charlotte put forth and gave expression to the pent up emotions, passions, and cravings of a woman who stood solitary and friendless in the world she inhabited. And in doing so she took pointers at her very society that expected her to suppress her own desires and ambitions in the name of womanly decorum and duty.

Charlotte's another novel *Shirley* (S) is about the love and lives of two heroines Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar, set against the backdrop of growing resentment and rebellion of mill workers against the cloth mill-owners. Caroline and Shirley, though in complete contrast to each other in terms of their nature and personalities, still manage to find friendship and company and feel comfortable together. Caroline given up by her mother as a young child, raised in her uncle's household, friendless and lonely, is shy and introvert by nature. She is caught and dejected in her feelings and love for her cousin Robert Moore, who a mill owner entangled in his own work pressures, has neither time nor inclination to indulge himself in romantic feelings and return her affections warmly. Shirley, on the other hand, is bold and spirited person, a distinguished and privileged lady of the parish with a name and inheritance to boast of. And, despite the riches and suitors seeking her, she is in silent love with her tutor and Robert Moore's brother Louis. "In the process of conducting her heroines through their romantic trials, Bronte introduces her readers to various aspects of life in this transitional society. She examines the state of church, England's political struggles, the position of women, attitude of owners and workers." (Moglen 1984:156).

In comparing *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* one finds that in talking of feministic issues *Shirley* is definitively much more explicit and pointed. The character of Caroline Helstone, her situation and circumstances, are conceived with the motive of highlighting a thought-provoking issue that women ought to be looked at with compassion and consideration. They should be provided with a vocation, a means, an outlet, an aim in life

to give their existence a meaning to fulfil their desires and search for and nurture their talents. They should not merely be reduced and limited to the household duties and chores; they are exploited and ignored in the name of decorum and conventionality and it is imperative that the outlook be changed and broadened. "In its exploration of the central relationship between Shirley and Caroline and of the tension between male and female spheres, and in its preoccupation with the problems confronting single women – this work represents Bronte's closest approach to an explicitly feminist novel." (Pauline 1985:112).

Dissatisfied and discontent, Caroline does disdain her femininity at times for it has chained her to a dreary existence and servitude. "I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one." (S 53). Caroline is a simple and loving person and her sole desire had been to be loved back. She loves her cousin Robert Moore which she is unable to reveal openly to him, for she is a woman. Robert, on the other hand, is in the know of the attachment and is himself drawn to her, but worldly persuasions and economic compulsions prevent him from returning her love. Dejected and heartbroken, Caroline has no option but to bear her pain in silence and try to appear unaffected. Being a woman, convention prevents her from speaking out first. She can neither bestow affections unasked for nor can she choose before being chosen herself. Caught thus in the whirlpool of her emotions and desires and to keep them from being known despite believing in them strongly, she feels suppressed and restricted in her sex. " 'Now, I love Robert, and I feel sure that Robert loves me...Sometimes I am afraid to speak to him, lest I should be too frank, lest I should seem forward – for I have more than once regretted bitterly overflowing, superfluous words, and feared I had said more than he expected me to say, and that he would disapprove what he might deem my indiscretion.' " (S 75). Dejected and depressed by Robert's cold response, Caroline leads a dull and dreary life with nothing worthwhile to turn to or do in life. She continues to

cherish feelings for him, for her situation leaves her with no other option but to think only of Robert all the time and be wretched in her grief. Being a woman limits her only to the house and it restricts her from entering into business or any other profession and making her way in life. Her guardian, her uncle, a man who never gave women any serious thought or importance, treats her with kindness and care but only out of a sense of duty. Having always treated women lightly, considering them as playthings, he lacks the sensitivity to understand Caroline's needs and keeps her away from taking up the only job she thinks she is capable of i.e. of a governess. With nothing to do, no vocation to look forward to, Caroline cannot help but dwell all the time over her feelings for Robert and be miserable in the face of unrequited love. Her misery and sufferings slowly push her to depths of depression, making her loose the will to live. Robert, on the other hand, has a lot else on his mind to think of than just Caroline Helstone. "Different indeed...is Robert's mental condition to mine. I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure, to think of me. The feeling called love is, and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart – always there, always awake, always astir. Quite other feelings absorb his reflections and govern his faculties." (S 131).

Shirley, on the other hand, is born to wealth and beauty, with a social position to further consolidate her good fortune. But these very attributes set her in different league and position, putting her way above the traditional female duties and responsibilities. She involves herself with spirit and interest in her parish affairs, asserting her independence and status. She is able to handle and deal with the people and workers of her parish, despite the prejudices and reservations held towards a female authority. Shirley, a young heiress, an orphan has inheritance, status, looks, wits, and guts to match and provide her with a strong backing. She is independent, and her situation, "...external circumstances and personal qualities suggest alternative possibilities for a woman's acquisition and use

of power and thus for her realization of self." (Moglen 1984:175). Financially secure and independent, she can make her own decisions and lead her life the way she desires.

Shirley Keeldar is a name that has been bestowed upon her by her parents who had been in expectation of a boy; but when they find that providence had gifted them with a girl instead, they decide to give her the same 'masculine family cognomen' which they would have bestowed had a boy been born to them. And Shirley befits the name and station that has been assigned to her in life. She very much upholds the family name, lend it dignity and grace, and manages very well both affairs of her house and those which involve her in matters of her family business and those of the parish. Whenever she has to make a mark in the outside world or the world outside a woman's domain, so to say, be that of business, politics or a serious discussion, she adorns a different character. Like when discussing Robert Moore with Mr. Helstone she said that she had met him quite a few times since they had business to transact, and added further:

> "Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position. It is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood; and when I see such people as that stately... George Moore- before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentlemanlike." (S 153).

Shirley identifies herself with masculine strength, speaking of herself as Captain Keeldar at times, priding herself on the position and privileges she held in society. On the night of the attack on the mill, in being entrusted with a responsibility by Mr. Helstone, Shirley is almost treated as a 'honorary male' to be exact, but then she realizes the uncertainty and dubiousness of such an acknowledgement and trust when she is kept out of the scheme of

things involving the attack on the mill of which she is the real owner. Bronte also makes it very clear that for Caroline and Shirley, to refrain from taking part in the action of the mill is not because they are incapable or weak hearted towards such step, but they do so out of choice. They have, in fact, shown the guts and courage in running up to the mill in the middle of the night, right through the fields, crossing all hurdles just to inform the men at the mill of the impending attack. Caroline, in fact, wishes to rush towards the mill and Robert Moore, in order to protect him, but Shirley checks her for the impropriety of her action, as it would have only caused embarrassment to Moore to find them there. Shirley's sense and courage are acknowledged in a way, for Mr. Helstone entrusts her with a gun and extracts from her a promise and assurance that she would take care of herself and Caroline in his absence for the night. "In comparison with the exclusively masculine world of the mill, the friendship between Caroline and Shirley in its own way similarly exclusive, offering to each of the women what they cannot find elsewhere." (Pauline 1985:115) The friendship not only provides them with a secure sense of equality but it is even more vital for Caroline for it offers her respite from a world bound by conventions.

Shirley disregards the traditional role assigned to a woman and refuses to play the role men seek in her. She even feels wary of marriage as she fears it would lead to her loss of independence. She felt that if married " '... I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! It suffocates me... Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be." ' (S 161). Shirley is an ardent feminist. She refuses to accept the inferior status that has been assigned to a woman and maintains her belief that women were, in fact, far superior to men by their very nature. She was of the view that women could never be inferior to men since they

were the ones responsible for the origin of life. Women were, thus, on par with men or rather their superiors. Yet the very dictates she swore by were not exactly the yardsticks she chooses to live by. And this was not because society forbids her, for with wealth and beauty to begin with, she was well above social compulsions but because somewhere her own nature and thoughts falsify her. "In one of the most painful of her many studies of the conflict between mind and emotion, Charlotte depicts Shirley as held prisoner in a psychological trap. For despite all of Shirley's protestations that she and must continue to be the equal of any man, she admits that in choosing a mate, " '... I prefer a master one in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good; one whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge...a man I shall feel impossible not to love and very possible to fear?' " (S 410) Louis Moore was attracted towards and in love with Shirley despite the difference in their status and station in life. And Louis in a way did influence and master the spirited Shirley by checking her faults, pointing out to her, her weaknesses and guiding and moulding her to be a better individual and to grow.

Despite being born to independence and a spirit that craved for freedom, Shirley seeks a 'master' in her man, one who would be her superior not exactly in status but in maturity and intelligence, is able to have a hold over her and control and guide her into being a better and much more responsible person. She even refuses to consider her uncle's proposal of Sir Philips as being a suitable match and choice, befitting her station in life. For apart from the fact that they had similar backgrounds of wealth and position, Shirley found hardly anything compatible between them. Averse to the idea of marriage of material advantage, she moreover felt that he was too young for her and neither did their dispositions match. She wished her husband to be at least of thirty but in possession of a maturity well beyond those thirty years. Like she says: " 'I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check.' " (S 409). And Louis Moore did complement her fully, if not in

wealth and position then at least in maturity and intelligence, and she despite her aggressive and assertive nature, she is happy to be submissive to, and mastered by, Louis for her knowledge of his nature make her claim that in doing so she followed the 'system'; for Louis "... would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern." (S 476).

Shirley thus presents,

> Caroline and Shirley as martyrs to perverse social and religious doctrines. The novel is a bitter polemic which fully reveals the inferior status of women, the injustices consistently practiced upon them, and their consequent misery. Deprived of power and totally unable to reform or even to alter the tyrannical system under which they suffer, these women are also betrayed by their own natures, which turn traitor against them and urge them into destructive conformity. (Blom 1997:110).

When it comes to set social conventions, scenario and outlook, Shirley's stature and position of privilege does not exactly place her any different than most women in her relationship with men. Neither fortune nor position can get her the status of equality. It however turns her into a valuable commodity; a prized catch: to be won and flaunted. "And since men approach her with motives similar to those with which they approach all other women, they naturally attribute to her, motives typical of all courting females." (Moglen 1984:177).Shirley admires and respects Robert Moore for the man that he is. Shirley sees in him a hard-working, upright gentleman and since he is her tenant and runs the mill she actually owned, she has business interests and other matters to converse with him too. He becomes more of a friend to her, she likes him, feels goodwill towards him, and is always interested in his welfare. Her behaviour, her friendship towards him, her frankness, however, are interpreted wrongly by Robert Moore who thinks her actions and

her feelings to be guided by her love for him and hence he places before her a business like proposal of marriage, not doubting her consent at all. He thinks her intentions to be no different than that of any other woman seeking marriage and this enrages Shirley and she feels cheated and humiliated:

" "You have made a strange proposal – strange from you; and if you knew how strongly you worded it and looked it, you would be startled at yourself. You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart." " (S 397). She feels deceived at being so misunderstood and passionately words her anger at him in no uncertain terms. Robert stands silently unable to defend his feelings for her, knowing fully well that it is not for love that he wishes to have her for a wife. Shirley confronts him further:

> "You conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman's feeling... You have announced it in a fashion revolting to a woman's soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manoeuvre to ensnare a husband....Let me say this: your sight is jaundiced; you have seen wrong. Your tongue betrays you; you now speak wrong. I never loved you. Be at rest here. My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me." (S 398)

Shirley judges and estimates men too evidently to allow them to feel at ease with her. Her knowing smile, one which came to her when she could understand or see through their minds, sets her up as a woman who does not adorn that soft blindness that men find so innocent, lovable, and attractive in a woman. But, at the same time, she knows that if she has a motive to accomplish, she would be able to do it only through coquettish and winsome ways, using men to her advantage under the pretext that they are the ones manipulating her instead. As the lady of the manor house, with estate and tenants to look

after, she wields authority and her station in life commands respect. Her opinions are listened to, she could well mock the curates, lecture the workers of her parish, ignore and avoid everybody who irritated or displeased her. In short, she could be and do what she likes and also garner respect all around, but when it came to real issues be those of happiness, politics or money, she is never in the know, kept out of the affairs even when they concerned her own business interests. When the rioters attacked the mill, Robert Moore and others carry out a well made plan to defend the mill, but without letting Shirley have any idea of the impending threat or their own scheme of things, despite the fact that she is the real owner of the mill. Being a woman she is excluded from their plan.

> Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women, especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness, to have mild, dim eyes that never penetrate below the surface of things....Thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids dropped on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can on occasion take its sentinel-survey of life. (S 204-205).

Hence despite the status and independence to which she is born to, Shirley, too, at times ends up lonely and helpless in some ways as Caroline does. But to their credit, both Caroline and Shirley share a friendship, indeed unique and rare, despite the jealousies and insecurities that prevailed so common among women owing to the pressures and manoeuvres compelled by the demands of the marriage market. Both of them respect and compliment each other despite their varied natures and difference in status and position of each.

> Between most women competing relentlessly with one another or husbands, relationships are superficially polite but equally blocked and frustrated. It is, of course the intelligence and decency of Caroline and

> Shirley, their mutual awareness and shared concerns, which make their friendship possible. It is also because Shirley's position, inhabited with full of confidence, is supported by Caroline's deference, that their friendship can thrive. While both girls feel comfortable occupying the relative positions with which they are familiar, the absence of strain within the acknowledged hierarchy derives from the fact that, on another level, both are as women, outsiders and equals. (Moglen 1984:178).

With Shirley, Caroline feels a sense of bonding, a sense of comfort which she finds lacking whenever she has to interact with men. She can be open about her feelings with her, talk herself through, express her opinions and ideas without any fear or complex of being shamed for her thoughts or views. Both Shirley and Caroline seek and provide each other that unflinching support and friendship which Jane happened to find in Helen Burns and Miss Temple, and later the same in her relationship with Diana and Mary that helped her deal with the lows of her life and recover. "Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar- to their despair – are not blind to the horror of their situation, and the stories of these women- one by nature a passive sufferer; the other a natural rebel – fully illuminate the pain born of knowledge of what their society and their natures condemn them." (Blom 1997:119).

From *Shirley* to *Villette* (V), Charlotte's "... consideration moved her from the oppressive society to the repressed individual." (Moglen 1984:195). For Charlotte to write *Villette* was not a mean feat, she really had to strive for it. No longer able to shield herself with a pseudonym anymore, she realised that anything unconventional from her pen would make her susceptible to direct and personal assaults. And it speaks volumes of her courage, commitment and determination that she still went ahead and followed her beliefs. Though it may only be through art, Charlotte in *Villette* saw to it that she

remained true to her own person, true to being a woman with a mind of her own. She did not glossify or compromised or lend mildness to her character just to please critics and readers alike.

> Villette is in many ways Charlotte Bronte's most overtly and despairingly feminist novel. The Professor and Shirley... at least pretended to have other intentions, disguising their powerful preoccupations with the anxieties of femaleness behind cool, pseudo-masculine facades; and Jane Eyre though rebelliously feminist in its implications, used a sort of fairy tale structure to enable the novelist to conceal even from herself her deepening pessimism about woman's place in a man's society. But Lucy Snowe, Villette's protagonist – narrator, older and wise than any of Bronte's other heroines is from first to last a woman without outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health- and her story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:399-400).

Villette is the story of a woman's struggle to sustain and stand against almost insurmountable odds. It portrays passion, power and disdain of conventions and its heroine Lucy Snowe, though quiet and retiring on the surface, nurtures within her a seething rebellion. *Villette* is the story of a young girl, Lucy Snowe, an orphan whose search for livelihood and her destiny takes her from England to the capital of great kingdom of Labseecour, Villette, where she takes up the job of a teacher in a girl's Pensionnat. It also traces the relationship that she has with Dr. John and Paul Emanuel. Lucy is drawn towards, and infatuated with, Dr. John who though kind, attractive and charming is really a superficial man; and though her love is never returned she continues

to cherish feelings for him in some corner of her heart. But her relationship with Paul Emanuel is a complex one. Initially, they remain on strained relations due to his overbearing and dictatorial attitude, but behind the tough exterior is a caring and sensitive man, and after they get over their differences and get to know each other, they go on to share a worthy friendship. But the true theme of the novel centres on Lucy's tumultuous inner world. *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Professor* are in a way all "... investigations of the self-sufficiency and strategies of survival necessary to preserve the protagonist in the world, and find a middle way between the repression of passion and surrender to it." (Skilton 1977:139).

Villette begins with Lucy being a girl of fourteen paying a visit to her godmother, Louisa Bretton, and here she narrates her experience and observation of little Paulina Home, who arrives with her father at Bretton House and draws Lucy's interest and attention for being quite a unique child. Polly is extremely sensitive and emotional and feels everything a bit too strongly. On seeing her overcome by grief after her father left for France, Lucy feels that if Polly does not learn to control her feelings or keep her emotions in check, she would experience greater pain, for though only a child, she would live on in this life to face and bear greater tests and miseries and this may well take a toll upon her. During her stay at the Bretton House, Polly gets herself attached to Graham Bretton with a fervour that makes her susceptible to further misery. Lucy disapproves and is critical of little Polly's excessive need for male dependence, be it first on her father and later on in her desire for the love and attention of Graham Bretton. He merely treats and looks upon her for the child that she is. Unable to identify or approve of Polly's demonstrative ways and emotions, Lucy rates herself superior to her in being controlled and calm. Lucy's calmness is in total contrast to Polly's passionate and intense nature. "Her responses to Polly's open emotionality are disproportionate. For Lucy, the

expression of feeling cannot be understood as a healthful restorative release. She sees it instead as a danger which can overwhelm and obliterate the self..." (Moglen 19984:198) Obsessed as she is with Graham, Polly places herself in a vulnerable position since she is much likely to get hurt or feel pained whenever he is indifferent to her. Not to expect too much from him is what she advises Polly and this is how she herself acts towards him. She did admire Graham since he is quite different from the other boys of his age but then she does so quietly and from a distance without being too involved. Lucy behaves so "... towards everyone... never demanding; reticent and withdrawn, yet always watching, priding herself on being an amused observer of character." (Moglen 1984:199).

Lack of beauty and rank along with unalterable circumstances and incidents place her in situations which make her suffer much in life. Her lack of money compels her to a life of labour for which she is not cut out for. Her lack of beauty denies her the influence necessary to win the heart of the man she admires. "...her "troubled mind" robs her of the ability to handle effectively the exigencies of daily existence in her brutal society and, far from important, drives her to the verge of a spiritual despair which condemns its sufferer to a life of negative withdrawal..." (Blom 1997:136) Right from the very beginning Lucy submits to her lot with a passive finality and resignation, knowing fully well that whatever her deep longings or desires, it is highly unlikely that they would ever be fulfilled. Behind her cool and calm exterior, lies her true person, safe from the prying and pitying eyes of the tough and indifferent world. Hence when she is offered the post of Miss Marchmont's nurse, she knows that she would have to spend her entire time in a sphere of two closed rooms with an invalid old lady and be a witness to her suffering and, at times, even bear her anger and temper; still she takes up the job with a calm resignation to her lot and absence of alternatives in her situation. These two rooms became her entire world for the period. In the constricted atmosphere of these rooms Lucy came to develop

a relationship of trust, affection, and that of commitment with Miss Marchmont. It is here that she discovers a sense of self-worth, what with her efforts being a source of comfort and support to Miss Marchmont. Though in life she has nothing to boast of, but atleast now it has some meaning and aim to it. Lucy, starving for affection, finds contentment even in having to spend her life confined and restricted and not any different from Miss Marchmont herself.

But Miss Marchmont's death again leaves her on the crossroads; undecided and friendless with none to consult and turn to regarding her future course of action. Her dilemma leads her to an old valued servant of her family for advice and consultation; but though she comforts her, listens her out, she could hardly answer or help her with her problem. When she leaves her, she is still clueless and of course alone; but despite that her spirit remains alive, leads her on and shows her path for the future. And London it is towards which she sets out finally. The sight of London gives a boost to her spirit, raising it to a level of inexperienced ecstasy and excitement. Her heart feels free and elated, open to new ventures and schemes, to take up a whole new path; she decides to go to Brussels. All alone she embarks on a journey towards Brussels with very little savings still left with her. She hopes to have a new beginning in a new land. And though journey towards an unknown future may seem to one as utterly hopeless as Lucy to be desperate, but Lucy looks at it with all the hope and promise of tomorrow. She could even experience happiness during the tranquil hours she spent during her journey on sea, despite the circumstances that leads her to her current situation. But she feels like:

" "Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage",

So peril, loneliness, an uncertain future, are not oppressive evils, so long as the frame is healthy, and the faculties are employed; so long especially, as liberty lends us her wings,

and hope guides us by her star." (V 53).

During her voyage, she meets a young girl, Ginerva Fanshawe, who suggests her to apply for the post of nurse of Madam Berk's children, who runs a girl's pensionnat in the town of Villette in which she too studied. Judging her integrity, intelligence and strength of character, Madam Beck subsequently asks her to take up the post of English teacher at the pensionnate and, thus, opens for her a door to a new career. For much part of the novel there remains an inherent passivity in her that makes it imperative that she be dependent on others in being forced or aroused to act. It is Madam Beck who impells her to teach and 'I want you' is how she offers her the post of a teacher, and pressing her still further she says: " "Will you ... go backward or forward?" Indicating with her hand, first the small door of communication with the dwelling, house, and then the great double portals of the classes or schoolrooms." (V 76). And it is M Paul who literally forces her to act in a play against her wishes and Mrs.Bretton compels her to wear a pink dress which she has bought for her. In all these cases she is either told, asked, or persuaded into doing things without giving a thought to what Lucy wants. But once these decisions are made for her, she slowly comes into her own, giving her stamp of individuality to every role she plays. As a teacher taking her first lesson, she pays strict and commands authority drawing attention and checking the noise in the classroom. She manages three notorious girls of the class by humiliating them to silence and dealing with a sturdy fourth by pushing her into a closet and locking her in. Thus, she gets about her way by acting with sense and presence. Similarly, though the decision to act in a play is not hers, she soon makes it her own by taking some decisions. For playing the part of a male, she needs to dress up like one; and though M. Paul insists that she does so, she refuses to budge and asks to be allowed to dress of her own accord. The role taken under compulsion finally leads her to self-assertion and also confidence that one comes across in her performance.

Although Lucy feels uneasy and wary in her new environment and surroundings at Brussels at first, yet she does not give in to her apprehensions and fears. As a teacher at Madam Beck's pensionnat, assigned varied roles to perform, Lucy instead of loosing her much cherished identity finds herself with an opportunity to prove herself and to confirm her independence and individuality.

> Ginerva Fanshawe, the beautiful and flighty young English girl, summons Lucy's independence by making her strong in her assertion of disapproval... the triviality and pettiness of her values allow Lucy to express with unusual openness, her impatience, resentment and jealousy. Ginerva represents a world of fashion and sexual role-playing, a world of values unearned Lucy scorns those values and that world but, as an outsider who has herself been scorned, she cannot help feeling environs of those who "belong". It is, in part, this ambivalence towards society which draws her to Ginerva and allows her to indulge the girl as she would a child. (Moglen 1984:205)

She thus finds herself bonded to Ginerva in a strange way and though they differ greatly in their opinions, life-styles and personalities, they still manage to stay together.

Madam Beck in a way draws out Lucy's inherent capabilities that lend character to her personality. Considering her to be such an Englishwoman, ready to dare anything, she continually poses challenges to her, making her grow in strength and self-confidence and realization of what she could be capable of. In taking up the offer of a teacher at the pensionnat Lucy realizes that she has the power to be aggressive as well. In a way

> "Lucy respects Madam Beck's shrewdness, her cold rationality...And she recognises that Madam Beck might beat her at her own game for, if she watches Madam Beck, Madam Beck also watches her....Lucy is Madam

> Beck's employee, her subordinate and victim it is only be becoming Madam Beck's complicitor, by allowing herself to be watched...that Lucy can maintain the illusion of control. (Moglen 1984:206-207)

Hence, when she discovers Madam Beck secretly going through her belongings and taking great care to leave the things exactly as she found them, she could not help but watch over her with a secret glee. Madam Beck suspects her of romantic liaison but she could not be more wrong in her suspicions and Lucy almost feels triumphant at her error. Jane flees from the scene to laugh herself out in the security of her classroom, for Madam Beck's jealous, distrustful, and desperate measures in a way amused her a lot. "Yet as the laugh died, a kind of wrath smote me and then bitterness followed....I cried hot tears: not because Madame mistrusted me – I did not care two pence for her mistrust- but for other reason....However, that turmoil subsided: next day I was again Lucy Snowe." (V 119) But now it would not be easy for her to subdue herself back to being her old self. "... because her repressed self has been awakened, because she has become active and feels what it means to have a stake in life..." (Moglen 1984:207). Having always allowed herself to be guided, controlled and led by reason solely, Lucy undergoes a crisis where she can no longer suppress or negate her feelings; it becomes imperative for her to give them an outlet. She is not able to bear the pain alone any longer. Hopelessness, dejection and loneliness leads her one evening by impulse and chance right to the church door and she finally finds release and solace in confession to the priest. This outpour does her a world of good. She feels free from a burden that she has carried on for years. And though on her way back to Pensionnat she faints due to fever and weakness, yet she has been able to find that strength and spirit back which has once been hers in troubled times and gives her courage and hope to seek and start a life in Brussels.

When she regains consciousness she finds herself to be in her Godmother Mrs.

Bretton's home and a conformation of what she already suspected, that of Dr. John in fact being Graham Bretton. Finding herself in the midst of the people who loved and cared for her and to whom she found herself attached, Lucy's heart and mind are in a flutter, content and happy, and in hope of a beginning of a new stable relationship. But then as always she appeals in the name of reason to keep her feelings and emotions in check so as to atleast appear controlled, in command and calm on the exterior for that is what people take notice of in general, but though her pride makes her yield to reason, in truth she craves to voice her true feelings, struggling with herself to subdue them, but nonetheless believing in their strength and intensity all the while. In replying to one of Graham's letters Lucy decides to remain true to her self and so she in a way reaches a compromise between reason, feeling and social dictates. She writes two letters, one to give an outlet to and satisfy her heart-felt feelings and emotions and the other for Graham to read. If social compulsions are catered to, then she even recognizes her own needs in doing so.

> "... Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt then we sat down... dipped in the ink an eager pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done when tow sheets were covered with the language of s strongly, adherent affections, a rooted and active gratitude- (once, for all, in this parenthesis, I disclaim with the utmost scorn, every sneaking suspicion of what are called "warmer feelings": women do not entertain these "warmer feelings" where, from the commencement, through the whole progress of an acquaintance, they have never once been cheated of the conviction that to do so would be to commit a mortal absurdity...) – when, then, I had given expression to a closely clinging and deeply honouring attachment...then, just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shade, bolt and bar will

> yield, Reason would leap in vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right." (V 259).

After Polly re-enters into their lives and Graham ends up being close to her, Lucy finally sees reason and accepts the bitter and agonising fact that whatever her feelings for him, she would never be that special someone in Graham's life. She then decides to hide away his letters and do away with them. Precious as they were to her, she wants them away from the prying and scrutinizing gaze of Madam Beck and this leads her to seal them in a bottle and bury in the garden. Thus she finally buries her treasure and so too her grief. It is on an impulse that she makes such a move similar to the one that had led her to confession and in a way, "Both are acts of self-preservations, self-control is healthfully born of self-knowledge." (Moglen 1984:212).

Lucy always knows that she is plain. And she is forced to view this fact or rather the way other people see her, when at a concert she sees a mirror image of herself with Graham and Mrs. Bretton. And the effect is nothing to feel good about, instead it comes with disappointment and regret and a bitter truth but on a more positive note she feels that she should be grateful for it, as it could have been still worse for her. She also realizes that Graham is a sort of person who could hardly look beyond the exterior and who would fail to comprehend beyond his own expectations and illusions. "To him, she is only "quiet Lucy Snow" ... His public self-generous, benevolent, modest approves her: to his private self-vain, selfish, full of masculine egotism – she is unacceptable." " (Moglen 1984:213).

Lucy certainly does not measure up to the yardsticks by which men judge beauty and desirability in a female. She is devoid of physical loveliness that men find attractive and defining for an ideal woman. However, Polly could well shape herself into being someone in accordance to the expectation of those for whom she cares and hence she

would not be the one to falsify Graham's illusions. And the fact that she has wealth, beauty and status to go, she would not endanger his vanity either. And Lucy could not help but wonder whether she could have been or meant something more to him had she too belonged to a status and station in life with money to grace her position. When Lucy, by chance, sees Graham at the fete, at night, (for the last time in the novel) from afar, her eyes beseech him not to let her presence there from being known to others and the silent look and understanding that passes between them rekindles those emotions long suppressed and buried. "Graham is her adolescent hero, the romantic love unmasked, but tempting still. The immature longings remain, but it is contained by an ego increasingly capable of assertion and control." (Moglen 1984:214)

M. Paul is a professor of literature at the pensionnat. Stern and commanding, "... fiery and grasping....Lucy seeing his love of power compares him to Napoleon. She comprehends his capacity for deep and irrational passion, the volatility of his temper, his jealousy. A rebel at heart, he has another side to his character. He is benevolent and charitable, given to acts of extraordinary kindness." (Moglen 1984:215) He possesses an attraction for theatre and to motivate and extract performances out of amateurs. He even urges and influences Lucy to take up the part of a man, that of Ginerva's suitor and though reluctant and unpolished she goes ahead with what is assigned to her. And despite an unsatisfactory preparation and an average start to her performance, she gradually comes on her own, discovers a hold and power, giving idea to her performance and getting into the skin of the character. And the role that she has taken to please someone else, she now enacts to satisfy herself. She even goes on to enjoy and find delight in her experience which also gives her a chance to explore the hidden aspects of her own person but at the same time she also "...took a firm resolution never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature... but

it would not do for a mere looker - on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by..." (V 142). However, Paul Emanuel keeps on assigning role-playing situations to her so that she is not merely reduced to a spectator of life but forms an important part of it. Lucy sees M. Paul as so many others who assign to her roles based upon how they themselves view her to be, all the time doing nothing but to limit and restrict her in 'false postures'. But not M. Paul, he is able to read and understand her for her self and

> ... he responds to the spark of her being instead of the shadow of her seeming ... Initially, responding to her strength... Paul sees her as a competitor...His urge to dominate, inspires her resistance...his jealousy of Graham, which moves him to petulant accusations concerning her "frivolity" and "vanity", amuses her while awakening a sense of the power of her own femininity. Asserting herself in opposition to him, Lucy discovers a range of responses, feelings, opinions and ideas....He sparks her to growth... But he does not... frustrate the spirit he arouses. (Moglen 1984:218).

Despite the differences, gradually a bond of caring friendship begins to grow between Paul and Lucy, developing into a beautiful relationship. But Lucy's state of bliss is at threat by the vested interests of Paul Emanuel's friends and so also by his own commitment to them verging almost on self-sacrifice, and his failure to assert for his own commitment to his own rights and happiness. However, Madam Beck's cunning attempt at separating Paul and Lucy fails when the drug she administers to Lucy to get her to doze off instead awakens her senses, arouses her to action in seeking the truth. She sets out not knowing where the night would lead her to. The night leads her to various known faces, enjoying, celebrating together, but her surprise recognition comes on viewing M. Paul

with his pack of selfish friends when all she knows is that he has left Europe to go on a voyage for an indefinite period. Also finding him at the Park with a girl by the name of Justine Marie misleads her to gather that she is the one to be his bride, whereas she is in fact his god-daughter. The realisation of this rages within her such emotions and reactions, the intensity of which she never knew before. "Nothing remained now but to take my freedom to my chamber, to carry it with me to my bed, and see what I could make of it... something tore me so cruelly under my shawl... I must be alone to grapple with it." (V 481) It is her jealousy that brings forth the intensity and true depth of her feelings for M. Paul.

After the fete night, Lucy back at the pensionnat awaits one last meeting with M. Paul before his ship sails off, not knowing for sure whether he would indeed come or not and this suspense and wait is almost agonising and painful to her. Though still in dark about his relation with Justine Marie and despite what she saw at Park, she decides not to let all those issues cloud over what would be probably her last chance to be with him. The novel *Villette* traces Lucy's "...developing ability to change that which lies within her power and to accept without despair the miseries which she cannot escape." (Blom 1997:149).Lucy does not accept any more than before of having a life of bliss, but then she does not try to escape or avoid the misery that she thinks life has in for her, nor does she try to deny or repress the pain she does feel. Of the faith that for her to suffer in this life is part of God's great plan only for a chosen few, she decides to face the future with patience and stoicism, and with a will to act rather than to remain submissive and inert. And her time to act comes when she is faced with Paul with the knowledge that it must be for the last time that she may be doing so, since she is in dark of his intent as well as his plans. Despite the pain, dejection, and heartbreak she is going through, she decides not to withdraw but to embrace the situation. "If this were my last moment with him...I loved

him well – too well not to smite out of my path even Jealousy herself... A cordial word from his lips...would be comfort in the last strait of loneliness." (V 492).This very meeting however, re-establishes her faith in his feelings and intentions towards her and in a way re-unites her to him. Still somewhere that sense of insecurity remains that gives her the boldness to risk her modesty and she bluntly questions M. Paul as to whether her appearance displeased him.

> ' "Oh! I am not pleasant to look at - ?" '
>
> "I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden: I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency; this dread pressed me at the moment with special force." She further prodded on,
>
> "Do I displease your eyes much?" I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me.
>
> "He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer; an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied, even after that I knew what I was for him; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care." (V 495).

Lucy who had always been reserved and quiet, holding everything within herself, finds her voice, an outlet to her feelings and emotions through M. Paul's confidence and love for her. She is able to speak out to him all she felt, she wishes to tell him all and so she does by revealing to him all her insecurities, fears and reservations. She even speaks out her love for him. "Her capacity for love, newly discovered, newly explored, brings with it self-knowledge and expression." (Moglen 1984:224). In his love, even M. Paul discovers a determination and need to self-assert, to look for his own happiness. He decides to embark on one final journey for the sake of Justine Marie, the return from which would

make him commit to Lucy in marriage for life. But before going he plans to set her up in independence and to achieve this he first takes up a home for her on rent and establishes a school in her name, thus providing her with a much valuable independence, one that would help her to come into her own. But like the various other painful episodes in her life, M. Paul's death leaves her all alone once again, robbing her of a life of bliss and happiness.

Thus the true understanding of Charlotte's work reveals that "Charlotte Bronte's fiction has a universal quality not only because of the power of her expression but also because the emotions she felt in extreme degree are universal ones: she is the poet of the troubled reaches of the mind, of the imagination and of the sub-conscious." (Blom 1997:161). Charlotte's feministic concern asserts and influences even today, for it embodies and signifies the need for a woman to have a life beyond the stifling and demanding atmosphere of home and her belief in a woman's right to be able to fulfil her desires as well as her potential.

If Charlotte's works were revolutionary for the age then Emily Bronte's vision that shaped her literary masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* (WH) shocked, appalled and influenced readers and critics alike with the sheer intensity and volatility of its all consuming passion. It was indeed a stroke of genius.

> ... the most confident celebration of the individual's will and passions in English fiction is Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, a novel whose action is deliberately set far away from the populous haunts of men, and in which social conventions, duties and restraints as are allowed room appear only in order to be swept away in a tempest of uncurbed emotion. In this, the novel is exceptional in Victorian fiction, where one of the principal concerns is usually the relationship – complex or strained though it may be – of the individual with his or her society. (Skilton 1977:136)

Wuthering Heights depicts the emotional and psychological dilemmas and insecurities of Catherine Earnshaw projecting the extremities of her passion and desires. Caught between the demands of her social self and the self that she yearns for, she finds an escape and release only in embracing death. She refuses to forsake her relationship with Heathcliff and though social restrictions force her to do so, she refuses to live by them; and in loosing herself to death she is free of the shackles of society that have bogged her life and soul for too long.

As a young girl, Catherine was wild, carefree, unruly and temperamental but a few days of company with the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange transforms her into a dignified lady. The environment at the Lintons subdues the wild streak in her or so it appears at the time, for the wildness and freedom of her nature is merely contained and not removed altogether, under the influence of culture and refinement. Unknown to everybody and even Catherine herself, this transformation is merely external; for in the deep recesses of her heart she still very much desires and craves for the wild and free life that she once enjoyed with Heathcliff. She could never alter or suppress the cravings of her soul; none could extinguish her desire for freedom. But if only externally, influenced she certainly is at the time. And though Edgar differed from her in being a product of culture and refinement whereas Heathcliff, who possesses a burning, passionate and soulful love for her, draws from her an equally passionate and inextinguishable love and response. But at a certain point of time Catherine feels ashamed of Heathcliff's uncouthness and coarseness, and is attracted and tempted into marrying Edgar. Heathcliff was a bleak, hilly, coal country in comparison with the 'beautiful fertile valley' of Edgar and the phase which Catherine was at the time going through, signified and highlighted the difference in all its intensity. Catherine, at first, was happy to marry into the culture and dignity of the Lintons; but after having lived the life which was not meant for her, she soon came to

term with her true self and then she no longer made an effort to hide her feelings and was able to both acknowledge and reveal her true desires and emotions.

Years after Catherine's death when Lockwood arrives at *Wuthering Height*, he finds varied names inscribed on the window sill of her room, where he stays for a night. Such names like Catherine Earnshaw to Catherine Heathcliff and then to Catherine Linton, confuses him about what the identity of person named Catherine would have actually been. In this context, Gilbert and Gubar have said that "... just as triumphant self-discovery is the ultimate goal of the male *Bildungsroman*, anxious self-denied, Bronte suggests is the ultimate product of a female education. What Catherine, or any girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name, and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:276).There was a general repressiveness in the way nineteenth-century educated its young ladies. Catherine's training in lady like decorum leads to a split in her personality, for she is made to become what she is not. She adopts a calm and genteel lifestyle but her spirit remains wild and free as ever. She deliberately detaches herself from the world of Heathcliff but couldn't survive without him. Heathcliff was "...her rebellious alter ego, her whip, her id..." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:275). As the respected daughter of *Wuthering Heights* it is expected out of Catherine to stand upto and maintain the honour and dignity appropriate to her station in life and this outlook plays a major role in influencing Catherine to marry Edgar Linton. But Catherine's acceptance of Edgar's marriage proposal on the grounds of money, culture, and status rather than on significant factors like love and compatibility, is her first step towards self-destruction. She could never imagine her life without Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights, her home. These two factors are a part of her being and they dominate and influence her life so much that divided from them, even heaven would feel like the curse of hell. But then Catherine confides in Nelly

that it is a socially conscious decision on her part to marry Edgar over Heathcliff since it would have degraded her to marry him.

> 'If I were in heaven Nelly, I should be extremely miserable... I dreamt once that I was there... heaven did not seem to be my home... I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy... I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he is handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.' (WH 57).

When Catherine says of Heathcliff that " he's more myself than I am," (WH 57) she means to say that her inner most hidden desires and her wild free spirit finds an outlet and residence in the person of Heathcliff, her soul is retained more in him than her. But Heathcliff, who overhears the conversation not beyond that it would degrade her to marry him, is hurt, humiliated, and disillusioned; and before Catherine could manage to stop him and explain herself, he leaves Wuthering Heights that very moment for an unknown destination and does not return until after her marriage has taken place and she has become Mrs. Edgar Linton of Thursheroess Grange. That night standing in the rain seeing her self, a part of her own, her very soul depart, left her heartbroken and taken by illness and this marks the beginning of her future decline.

> "My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is

> himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees, my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable." (WH 59)

Here Catherine is struggling hard to explain and justify her emotions and feelings for Heathcliff, emotions which transcend beyond all social norms, traditions and bindings. Heathcliff's and Catherine's craving and longing for each other was not so much as to physically possess one another but " ... rather to be made free each through the other, of his own identity, and of the universe." (Buckley 1968:91). Catherine drew her strength and energy from Heathcliff. She identified with him for she proclaimed 'I am Heathcliff!', her self felt akin to his. Catherine was a headstrong, energetic girl with wild instincts. In Heathcliff, Catherine recognizes her won energies no longer confined by the reserves imposed on her sex, she finds a fulfillment of her desires in him. His presence makes her feel strong and masculine with a motivation to face and surmount all odds but whereas his presence gets her commanding and confident, separation from him makes her loose her will and power and takes away her strength to face and bear pain and adversity. All that she desires and wishes to be but her gender restricts her from, finds an expression and realization in and through the person of Heahcliff. Her true self is contained in him. But Catherine's socially motivated impulsive decision to marry Edgar Linton gets her separated from Heathcliff and " ... the once androgynous Heathcliff - and-Catherine are

now conquered by the concerted forces of patriarchy, the Lintons of Thruschcross Grange acting together with Hindley and Frances, thus emissaries at the Heights." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:276).

Heathcliff's return after Caltherine's marriage with Edger did not sort matters out for Catherine, who is already reeling under the pressure of a marriage which has trapped her into a social system that she is not cut out for. She could never be the ideal lady of the house, sacrificing, self-denying, oblivious to her own needs and happy to be in such a state of being. Return of Heathcliff re-ignited her old self, a return of all her suppressed desires, her need to be free and carefree and a longing to be with Heathcliff, doing all those things, wild and impulsive, which they once did as children free from all constraints. She yearns for running across the moors, wild and liberated, as if there is nothing in this world that could chain her body and soul. However, Edgar who is a product of genteel culture and society, fails to understand the wild streak possessed by his wife. Catherine's desire for freedom and affinity towards Heathcliff baffles completely his concept of education and social culture. They could never be compatible, for their spirits are so very different from each other, they think and live on an entirely different plane altogether. He is calm whereas she is stormy. But, Heathcliff understands her as she is one of his own. Both of them are the children of storm. Their souls are similar in desires and wants. Edgar has often been referred to as weak, timid and soft, but as a part of the cultured society and patriarchal system, he commands a power and status that is independent of his physical strength. According to Gilbert and Gubar "Emily Bronte demonstrates that the power of the patriarch, Edgar's power... does not need a strong, conventionally masculine body, because his mastery is contained in books, wills, testaments, leases, titles, rentrolls, documents, languages, all the paraphernalia by which patriarchal culture is transmitted from generation to generation." (Gilbert & Gubar

2000:281). Hence Edgar, as the keeper and guardian of society's moral and culture code, cannot support and understand Catherine's desires and her need for freedom and autonomy, whereas, on the other hand, Heathcliff, who knows and understands Catherine as if she were a part of his own, acts her "...childish and desirous id." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:281)

Catherine is unable to come to terms with the fact that her marriage has reduced her very person from an autonomous being to a mere role, an image which she has to keep up and a function which has to be carried out in keeping with the demands of society. In her delirius and sick state, Catherine is unable to recognize her own image in the mirror and though this may to be hallucination on her part, it is symbolic of the transformation that has taken place in her real life. Her marriage has turned her into Mrs. Edgar Linton and her self in being merged with another and described as such, loses its own identity and this leads to a fragmentation of Catharine's personality. Powerless in the hands of the system, she loses grip over herself for she no longer knows who she is and why does she need to change herself and be what she is not, why not the society grants her, her freedom of self and happiness. She, in the final stages of her illness, makes a fanatic cry to Nelly to open the window from the moors. " 'I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed...I am sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. Open the window again wide: fasten open! Quick...' " (WH 91). She feels that once back in the surroundings that she inhabited as a young girl, once "...back into the androgynous wholeness of childhood...", (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:284) the fragmented self that the mirror-image symbolizes, could be restored back to its true self. Her cry is a cry for escape not merely from the prison-house of her body but from her hollow marriage and from her fragmented self and life. She wishes to be free

again if only in death. She is tired of living a life which requires her to crush her spirit and desires in keeping with social compulsions.

When Linton decides to prevent Catherine from seeing Heathchliff, she threatens him by starvation and negligence towards her health, and such methods as she adopts to prove her point reveal female feelings of powerlessness and rage. The "... suicidal behaviour expresses the furious power hunger of the powerless... she whips herself because she cannot whip the world and she must whip something." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:285). In the eyes of society, Catherine sick of her marriage and husband, craving for Heathcliff and freedom, could be none but a woman depraved. Hence, "... for a "fallen" woman trapped in the distorting mirrors of patriarchy, the journey into death is the only way out..." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:284) Caught in the dilemma and situation that she is in, Catherine is well aware that her soul could be free and fulfilled only in her death. She could never be free as long as she is living. "Wuthering Heights is quite uncompromising in following the fullest development of the passions and impulses of the romantic individual, but despite the overthrow of or, rather the total disregard for conventional morality, the novel is not in any acceptable sense of the word immoral." (Skilton 1977:137).

Anne Bronte's *The Tennat of Wildfell Hall* (TOWH) was eclipsed by the more phenomenal works of her celebrated sisters, Charlotte and Emily. The novel is about the bitter, suffocating, and unhappy marriage of Helen Huntingdon whose body and soul is so repulsed by the debasement of husband that she is forced to flee her home along with her son and search for a new identity and beginning. It has been said by one critic that "'... slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England' ". (Carter & Rae 1997:291).

When Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* came out in 1848, it shocked,

appalled, and offended critics to no end by its brutal honesty, for call it coarse or harsh the novel did indeed spell honesty and the result was that it ended up further aggravating and intensifying the critical indignation that surrounded the Eells' writing.

> In its uncompromising attack on masculine vice and on the law, as which bound a wife to an abusive husband, it offered a more explicit piece of social and moral criticism that can be found in the work of Charlotte or Emily. Those who were disgusted... found it too graphic in its portrayal of Arthur Huntingdon's violence, drunkenness, bad language, adultery, and attempts to corrupt his infant son. (Miller 2001:157).

When Anne wrote the preface to the second edition, she demanded equality and openly challenged such double standards that chalked out different norms and yardsticks to judge, separate, and justify what was and was not proper and allowed in male and female writings. She wrote:

> '... when we have to do with vice and vicious characters I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear... All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.' These sentiments now integral to the mores of the late twentieth century, were a significant statement in the evolution of modern fiction and an early manifesto for female emancipation and ensure The Tenant of Wildfell Hall its legitimate place as a classic work of English Literature. (TOWH Introduction).

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall traces the story of a lady named Helen Graham, the depiction of her unhappy and humiliating married life, and her sufferings and frustrations, the result

of the drunkenness, licentiousness and downright blackguardism of her husband and his friend-circle. Sickened by the depravity of her husband, disgusted by his habits, heartbroken by his infidelity, aware of her helplessness and impossibility in reforming him, and insecured by tempting gallants, she masterminds an escape from her husband's house in the middle of the night along with her son and maid to a secret and secured destination arranged by her brother, where in oblivion she struggles to reshape and dignify her life as well as her son's. Helen, like any other vulnerable female, is shown to fall for the handsome, sensual and secret talking personality of Arthur Huntingdon; and for this initial infatuation she suffers much after the early bliss of marriage with him. She has to watch and bear his "... metamorphose from a fallen angel into a fiend, as he relentlessly and self-destructively pursues a diabolical career of gaming, whoring and drinking." (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:81) Although Helen marries Huntingdon, a man of family and fortune but blinded by love and oblivious to his faults, she does so against the wishes of her family and friends, and contrary to her faith and hope concerning him, he turns out to be sensual brute who treats her to every indignity, insult, and humiliation only short of physical violence. But Helen is a strong woman who feels that in marrying him she could reform him and though she succeeds to an extent in the initial phase of marriage, he soon goes beyond all help and hope, sunk too low for reform.

"Helen Huntingdon... fights for herself and her son against an abhorrent social and legal system. Readers and audiences who knew Anne only through the purple-heatherish novels and plays of the mid-twentieth century, would have been amazed to discover that she had arguably shocked her contemporaries more than her sister."(Miller 2001:157-158). Helen, who bears every sort of dejection, depression, and humiliation in her suffocating marriage, is unable to bear any longer when she discovers that her husband has been cheating her and that too under her very nose, under the roof of their

own home, and hence as the cup of her woes spills over, she is forced to run away from a drunken, vicious, and tyrannical husband in order to safeguard herself and her son. She has silently borne her fate but when she realizes that her husband's bad influence would one day cause their son's downfall by imbibing all the wrong values in him, she gathers and braces herself to bear no longer. To leave her husband was the only way out.if she has to save her son from a valueless upbringing and to prevent him from following his father's footsteps. Helen, in order to elude her husband from finding her whereabouts, marks her painted landscapes with false initials and titles them in such a manner as to create confusion regarding her place of residence. In short, she uses her art both to express her creativity as well as to hide herself. This use of art both to express as well as disguise her thoughts was something that she had practiced even as a young girl. When she once showed her paintings to her future husband, he discovered a pencil sketch of his own face at the back of a canvas. Helen has been using the back portion of her canvases as an outlet for her secret desires and likings and though she has been careful to erase all others, Huntingdon manages to have a look at one and thus finds a chance to play up and emotionalise her feelings for him and have a hold over her. In sketching the character of Helen Graham, Anne Bronte has given

> ...a wonderfully useful paradigm of the female artist. Whether Helen covertly uses a supposedly modest young lady's "accomplishments" for unladylike self-expression or flaunts her professionalism and independence, she must in some sense deny or conceal her own art, or at least deny the self-expression implicit in her art... when, as a girl, she draws on the back of her painting, she must make the painting themselves work as public masks to hide her private dreams, and only behind such masks does she feel free to choose her own subjects. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000:81)

However, the guilt of using her paintings for her so called unladylike passionate desires makes her erase them and this is like denying her private self and cravings from expression in keeping with social restrictions.

Charles Kingsley feels that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is indeed a strong and hard-hitting book and though it is a general opinion that going by the crudeness of the language and indelicacy of the subject, it is not to be taken as fit reading for girls, he does not grudge it. Instead he feels that "There are foul and accursed undercurrents in plenty, in this same, smug, respectable whitewashed English society, which must be exposed now and then; and society owes thanks not sneers to those who dare to show her the image of her own ugly, hypocritical visage." (Allott 1974:270)

Thus the Bronte Sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne, came to herald a radical concept of the Victorian heroine as self-assured, strong-willed, and passionate to the very core. Low-profile and retiring in their personal lives, they went on to be described as the 'Stormy Sisterhood' of English fiction. Their heroines, led by the dictates of heart and passion, came to challenge and defy social dictates and conventions. If Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* was the first major feminist text of the era then Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* shocked yet interested people by the blunt frankness and shocking honesty with which they talked of and presented their heroines. One does not love Jane for her beauty, for she was extremely plain nor for the fact that she was extremely intelligent but one admired her for her sheer will and honesty, for the passion that defined her very nature, for the struggle that she puts up to defend her integrity and for being a woman of strength and character. If Jane was unconventional, then in *Wuthering Heights* Catherine Earnshaw was shocking and rebellious. The soulful love and passion that defined the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship broke all barriers of social conventions and reservations when it came to the way in which Catherine lived her

life. Similarly, Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* raised a storm of protest over its violent and appalling tale of love and betrayal, but at the same time it was remarkable and refreshing for its heroine Helen Graham's strength, resolution, and courage in the face of bleakness and adversity. Thus though completely different characters, the heroines of Bronte sisters were similar in that they rose above the conventionalities of the age and voiced not only their passions and desires, but also fought for the fact that they were individuals in their own right.

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Chapter – 6

Conclusion: Progress of Feminism from Austen to the Bronte Sisters

> On the one hand, the sexual ideology of the era was in many ways particularly oppressive, confining women...to the "Private House," with all its deprivations and discontents. But on the other hand, its aesthetic and political imperatives were especially inspiring not just a range of revolutionary movements but some of the richest productions of the female imagination... "The Nineteenth Century and After" – best summarizes a feminist sense of belatedness that occasionally sweeps over those of us who are the readers, scholars and inheritors of a tradition forged by Austen and the Brontes.... (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: Introduction-xxxi)

Prior to the feminist struggle of the second half of the 20th century, a lot of groundwork had been done by the early 19th century English novelists like Jane Austen and Bronte Sisters. Jane Austen was the first real feminist author of consequence in the early 19th century. In a very muted, subtle and shrewd way, she had created wonderful heroines when the English society was completely male-dominated and a woman writer had to restrict herself to certain permissible areas of life. She had to give proper consideration to social decorum and prudish notions of femininity. But despite the restrictions, Jane Austen " '...was sensitive to [her society's] crudeness and complacencies and knew that her real existence depended on resisting many of the values they implied. The novels gave her a way out of this dilemma." (Waldron 1999:7).

She was one of the most popular English novelists of all times, who wrote with a

keen sense of irony about the social scenario of her age, and very few have been able to match the minuteness and particularity with which she looked at and spoke of human weaknesses and foibles; described with perfection, ease and minuteness the common everyday existence and, at the same time she made use of the subtlety of her art and writings in exposing and ridiculing social and personal morality of the time. Jane Austen's vision and writings revealed her knowledge and understanding of the private and personal history of women like her own, confined, restricted, and caught in the trappings of the patriarchal society, aware of the superficiality and corrosiveness of its values, yet with no other world to escape to or exist in: "...the apparently placid texture of her novels conceals a tension between protest and acceptance, rebellion and conformity, held in equilibrium by the controlling device of comedy." (Mukherjee 1991:4). On the surface her novels give the appearance of 'feel-good' romances in that they are only stories of a series of social adventures of their heroines, finally leading to the ultimate aim of matrimony. But more than the events and adventures, what remains important is the way in which events or situations turn out and how they mould and prepare the heroine to face and deal with what she is faced, analyse what is right for her, and ultimately take steps and decisions to shape the suitable sort of life for herself. Her novels are concerned with the journey of a woman's struggle to be able to sustain her self in a demanding and materialistic society, and finally be able to hold out on her own, uphold those decisions and values by which she chooses to live by. Thus, Jane Austen is concerned with the heroine for the individual that she is but also of her relationship with society and of a way in which they could co-exist without letting her give away her independence and individuality. For her, the individual is important, but equally important is for the individual to be able to live and sustain in the given social scenario, to be independent, without being rebellious.

Jane Austen's novels were reflective of her stress on reason and stability, not merely in an individual's life but in the society at large. She was of the view that the individual's individuality had to be maintained within the norms and demands of the social decorum as long as it did not suppress or curtail an individual's freedom and spirit. A person was not beyond and above society and the harmonious existence of the two was very much necessary for a stable social order and existence. Though Jane Austen's

> ...women lead restricted lives, her novels are not about restriction, nor even about expression, but about the relationship between the two, about how women find ways to develop and assert their womanhood despite the restriction placed upon them...The world in which we find her at the close of the novel is as much molded by her as she is molded by the world. (Brown 1996:32)

Her heroines are not placed in fantastic situations or circumstances, nor do they take drastic steps to assert themselves; instead their femininity is expressed in the common everyday things that they do to individualise their lives. Her novels uphold a conventional moral standard, but she had the power to depict tradition with individual freedom.

Till the "...feminist movement began to succeed, feminine history was, by and large, a great anonymous tradition, a set of values and beliefs that were passed on through generations of women from older to younger women, from mothers to daughters." (Browm 1996:33). And Jane Austen's novels were the first to voice this unacknowledged 'female consciousness' in a proper manner, doing full justice to female sense and feeling.

Unlike the Bronte Sisters, Jane Austen felt wary of, and shied away from, depicting the passionate and intense side to a woman's nature and similar emotions; but then again in her own way all her novels were centred upon women and women related issues and problems. Jane Austen made an emphatic statement by simply ignoring and

disregarding certain restrictions and compulsions of her era pertaining to women that may not seem obvious or important in the modern context. For example, most of Austen heroines, be it Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, Anne Elliot or even Emma Woodhouse (though she had for a time a companion like Mrs. Weston) none had a confidante to boast of, one with whom they could share their deep secrets and innermost feelings or whose advice they could seek or rely on in delicate matters and situations. Hence, they must look within themselves for strength and support, judge on their own and take decisions independently. Such 'moral autonomy' on part of the young women of the age was unthought of and socially disapproving in Jane Austen's day. And this is evident in Sir Thomas's strong censure and disapprobation of Fanny's resistance against his wish and advice to marry Henry Crawford. Jane Austen also made a strong and radical statement in Elizabeth's demand to be taken and treated as a 'rational creature' and to have her strong 'no' to be taken exactly as that to Mr. Collins without any diabolical reason or motive associated with it. Also, Austen's age forbade women of the 'genteel' classes to seek out for themselves career options or independence. Professions, universities, and politics were not meant for them. Occupation, if any, available and open to them was that either of a governess or teacher of young children in some family, with neither being accepted or respected as a way of living. Moreover, such jobs were not only ill-paid but came with poor working conditions on top, and hence could hardly be considered as suitable alternatives for the age but inevitable for those who had no other means to independent living. The age saw women acquire money either by marrying or inheriting it, and that too only if she had no brothers to pass the inheritance to. It was a time when money and social manoeuvring reigned supreme. Through the sisters' stories, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the moral dilemma they raise, Jane Austen explored, in a wonderful and dramatic romance, the limitations and pitfalls of romantic sensibility in a

world where money mattered. Very few women turned out to be successful professionals, chiefly as writers, by earning a decent living sufficient to support themselves and their families. Failing all these options, an unmarried woman finally had to spend her life with her family or with some family approved protector, but no way could she live by herself or on her own, even if she happened to be a heiress. Thus, though on the surface Jane Austen novels may appear to talk merely of money, matrimony and love, essentially in that order, but in fact her novels provide a radical outlook and survey to the deep complex relation between the three and of theirs to society and how all these compulsions, reservations and social pressures affected, shaped, moulded and decided a woman's destiny of the age.

Leroy W. Smith "...rejects the label 'feminist' for Jane Austen, since it implies a concept of 'rights' and deliberate political action that she probably did not have and did not exist in her society; however, he suggests that she can be called 'pre-feminist' because she shows much of a feminine analysis of the patriarchal society around her; but she is engaged in a 'limited' rebellion...her dissatisfaction does not cause an open break with her society.' " (Marsh 1998:224-225).

The three major and dynamic women writers who, in fact, changed the direction of the English novel in the 19th century were the Bronte Sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. Completely different from Jane Austen in tone and temper, were these Sisters; yet there was one common factor between them – the independent portrayal of women characters who were not necessarily bound by social taboos and traditions. They indicate further growth on the feminist theme of Austen. The Bronte Sisters were not interested in the portrayal of social life; instead they chose to study the feminine heart. They were concerned with the nature and meaning of feminine life. What sets their novels apart is the emotional intensity which arises due to particular concentration upon human passions in their novels.

Brontes found the atmosphere in Jane Austen's novels as suffocating, for theirs was all about power of passion. Sudden rush of blood, fierce tempers and throbbing passions, were what marked Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Compared to Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily were romantic in disposition and were concerned with the exploration of passionate and fiery emotions, whereas Jane Austen explored the individual life within the constraints, demands and decorum of social order and existence. "Jane Austen was determined for a life of restricted mobility, and subjected to an education and a moral code calculated to resist the forces of history...interest in Jane Austen lies in her ability to subvert the limitations imposed on her by the society and to undermine the values she was supposed to uphold." (Mukherjee 1991:4).

However, Charlotte could never come to terms with Jane Austen's attitude. Her novels were concerned with overwhelmingly intense feelings and rush of emotions as opposed to the ones of social manners by Austen. In Austen's time, middle-class morality reigned supreme, which a few years later came to be characterized as 'Victorian prudery' and proved to be bothersome, stifling, and a hindrance to the novelists of the age like the Brontes. Charlotte could never identify with the constraint and restrictions that the Austen heroine was placed under. The fire and passion in Charlotte found nothing in common with the quiet elegance and subtle wit of Austen. Charlotte dealt with the elements of passion in man and woman and her novels were absorbing in their wild and strenuous action. "Charlotte writings are full of explosive emotion, bursting out like a volcano." (Myer 1990;114).

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* was the earliest major feminist text of the nineteenth century. Jane Austen was revolutionary in that shocked people in its heroine's need and demand to be taken as an independent, thinking, and autonomous being rather than as a helpless female. *Jane Eyre* was much ahead of its time in its heroine's struggle and need

for independence in a humiliating male dominated social context when even the most basic political, educational, emotional, and physical rights were denied to women. Though passionate to the very core, Jane insists that love and passion should not be allowed to overwhelm or negate an individual's independence. When Rochester proposes marriage to her, she declares her wish to go on working to maintain herself economically, independent of him; and when he entreats her in the name of love and passion to stay along as his mistress, she refuses to budge from her stand of leaving him. And in thus overcoming her own love and emotion for Rochester, Jane upholds her need for emotional independence and by implication a sexual one. And this was a revolutionary demand for the woman of the time. "...the strength of Jane Eyre lies in its close personal involvement with...contemporary and continuing issues. At the same time they are also universal issues in the sense that the cry for the emergence of the individual spirit from the strains and stresses imposed by the society or fate is valid for everyone, irrespective of time, place or sex." (Phelps 1979:259). In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte is seen at her best in her struggle for equality and individuality and independence for women. Outwardly, Jane looks a poor, plain, obscure little governess; but inwardly she is a soul made of fire. Precisely speaking, she is downright assertive and indomitable character, vindicating her cause and, thereby, the cause of womankind. If *Jane Eyre* was a celebration of individual will and womanhood then in complete contrast to it was her last novel *Villette*. But

> Still even if there can be no joyous celebration, not even abundant recompense, at least Bronte provides in *Villette* an honest elegy for all those women who cannot find ways out and are robbed of their will to live. At the same time, *Villette* is also the story of writer's way out. Implying that the female artist is as confined by male conventions as her characters are imprisoned in the institutions of patriarchal society. (Showalter 1999:403)

However, Lucy, despite the bleakness of her situation, is similar to Jane in her acknowledgment of her need for love, her fear of being single, and especially in her struggle to seek for herself an independent identity. Lucy had the heart and the spirit to bear the trials that life had in store for her with strength and fortitude and, in giving herself to her fate, she realizes that if life brings pain then somewhere along the line it lends peace too: "Lucy does not break down; the stasis is not permanent. The novel is not one of surrender to suffering and destiny. It is, on the contrary, one of courageous progress – slow and painful but nevertheless certain – towards the inner tranquility that comes from self-acceptance." (Phelps 1979:327).

In sharp contrast to Charlotte's novels was Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, a story that stunned readers and critics alike with its all consuming tale of passion between Catherine and Heathcliff. The bold portrayal of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff (though one which was more soulful than physical), one that defied society and tradition alike, puts Catherine on the pedestal of the early prototype of feminism, which is based not on the rhetoric of politics but on the call of passion.

Thus, Bronte writings were in essence all about basic human passions, the exploration and portrayal of the emotional and psychological dilemmas of the female predicament. What made their novels unconventional and path-breaking was the frankness and emotional intensity with which they spoke of a woman's life and point of view, and boldly presented a new image of the heroine as a woman of vital strength and passionate feelings, especially when convention forbid them from doing so.

Thus though the women writers in the nineteenth century dealt with such issues as quest in life and issues of power, they felt social pressures which demanded curtailment of powers. "...and it is the experience of these pressures, which are at once acceded to and rebelled against, that gives rise to the peculiar dominance in these novels of tension,

disguise and ultimately disjunctions of form." (Newton 1991:770). However, it is a well known fact that it is not merely what is obviously revealed through the text, but what is conveyed and expressed in a disguised manner that determines its link to 'dominant images, ideas and values'. It is the speechless and the hidden meaning of the text, presented so due to social reservations, which is reflective of the 'feminist ideology' of the age. But in these very novels of the pressurized women "...the very covertness of power, the nature and degree of its disguise, the very omission of over reference are of the greatest interest, for subversion, indirection and disguise are natural tactics of the resisting weak, are social strategies for managing the most intense and most compelling rebellions." (Newton 1991:70). These novels are highly significant due to their authors' unique attitude and approach, their defiance against conventions, their refusal to let their heroines bow down to conventions and ultimate submission and, most importantly, for creating a social awareness and responsibility among women by such works. Thus, the novels of Austen and Brontes, all taken together, register a simmering tension over 'women's power' and in their attempt to subvert set social norms and 'power divisions' they "...delineate a line of covert, ambivalent but finally radical resistance to the ideology of their day." (Newton 1991:770).

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