

**Tribhuvan University**

**Critique of the Cult of Sensibility in Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in the Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled “Critique of the Cult of Sensibility in Wollstonecraft’s *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Bhim Prasad Paudel, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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## **Abstract**

This research explores how Mary Wollstonecraft's novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* undercuts the excessive sensibility that was most often associated with women in the then historical period of the late eighteenth century through the projection of reasonable selfhood. Maria and Jemima are the female characters who are never guided by emotion and passion rather by the reason they have, even in the situation of oppression and suppression. Wollstonecraft's depiction of reasonable characters by assimilating the Kantian uses of reason critiques the writing pattern prevalent during the movement of sensibility as well as romanticism on the backdrop of which the novel was written. Thus, Wollstonecraft rewrites the new female's history of the late eighteenth century by interrogating upon the power structure in constructing the official history of the particular era.

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## **I. Introduction to Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* as a Historical Fiction**

The research endeavors to excavate the historical and socio-cultural atmosphere of the late eighteenth century through Mary Wollstonecraft's posthumously published historical novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). By bringing forth the then politico-historical circumstances of the eighteenth century interwoven in the story of Maria, the female protagonist of the novel, it seeks to explore the way Wollstonecraft questions upon sensibility through the projection of reason upon her female characters. In fact, during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, sensibility was often seen as social a phenomenon and literary mode associated with femininity and women writers respectively. On the contrary, Wollstonecraft depicts the reasonable female characters with focusing on the urgency of reasonable mind in the life of oppressed females, which implicitly undercuts the mainstream historical movement of sensibility prevalent during the contemporary period.

Relying on the evidences established in the novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, this project aims to critique upon the excessive sensibility, prevalent in the literary scenario of the eighteenth century. Through the conceptual framework of new historicism, this research explores the genealogical history rooted on the unfinished novel which denaturalizes the conventional traditional history, created by the power structure of male dominated society. It also tries to put spotlight upon Wollstonecraft's idea of reason which is dominant in female characters like Maria and Jemima.

Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* was written against the tumultuous backdrop of sensibility, the most fascinating literary and cultural

movement that spread across Europe in the late of the Eighteenth century. Sensibility as a literary movement has brought new style of writing that focuses on human emotion and subjectivity. During this movement, the literary texts glorified and elicited sensitive emotional reaction from the characters. Likewise, as a cultural movement, the movement of sensibility affected the lives of men and women across Europe and America. It was flourished in response to the vast social change of the Eighteenth century that had developed the consumer culture in the European society. The language of sensibility had crucial place in such society. Wollstonecraft came forward with the view that the sensibility is the cause of backwardness among the women; what they need is the education to get rid from such excessive sensibility.

Moreover, *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* was written during the heyday of Enlightenment. Enlightenment refers to the intellectual movement and cultural vibes that focus upon the human reason as a means to solve the crucial problems of life. In 1784, Immanuel Kant wrote his famous essay on Enlightenment by focusing upon the use of reason as the liberation of mankind from the self-caused state of tutelage. Wollstonecraft, like Kant, has seen reason as the means of redemption of female from their marginalization in the patriarchal society.

*Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* was written in 1798. The historical period when women were suffering as the female subjects of Enlightenment, because the male dominated society did not allow practicing reason to female. The character Maria represents all the marginal women of the century, dominated and trapped by the biased patriarchal society. In that society females are not allowed to take part in politics and education as well. They are trapped in the tyranny of laws that are made by the society. Maria is the victim of that patriarchal society which considers home as the best place for women.

The romantic era gained much energy from the culture of sensibility i.e. the interest in individual feelings. Fiction in the age of sensibility also brought about some surprising invocations in narrative form. When subjected to plot summary, most of the novels of sensibility either sound predictably melodramatic or dissolve into nothingness. Thus, sensibility novelists anticipated and participated in the interest in fragments so important to the romantic poets. The innovation of forms and the emphasis upon emotional effects in the novel of sensibility opened up the experimentation of the novels of the romantic era. Though we can think of sensibility as having a continuous presence throughout the Romantic era and beyond, it is most comprehensive belief and forms did eventually die out in the nineteenth century. The word itself ceased to denote a whole set of beliefs about emotion, morality, and art.

In the novel *Maria or Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft shows the wrongs of different class of women equally oppressed and tortured by the male in the patriarchal society. Maria, the female character tolerates difficult kind of subordination and tortures which are given by her cruel husband. Enduring all sorts of insults and tortures Maria is obliged to live in a madhouse despite being sane. The character Maria declares that, to the contrary, lack of passion and coldness of heart undermine virtue, and she argues that desire must be reciprocal and women must have the freedom to express that fire at imagination, which produces positive virtue. Later she rails against the tyranny of laws that past women's reason in opposite to their inclinations.

Mary Wollstonecraft dramatizes the suffering and painful condition of women in her novel, that prevailed in the contemporary society, Maria, in other words, chronicles one determined women's struggle to get rid of male ideality. Maria is a suppressed and dominated woman in the novel. She has been imprisoned in a 'mad

house', and her infant daughter has been snatched by her cruel husband so that he could gain control over the independent fortunes of both Maria and her daughter. Maria's subject is female sexuality that is controlled by bourgeois society. In England, a married woman had no independent legal rights in the eighteenth century. Women should depend on their husband and take care of the children. Women could not act upon their desire like Maria. As Maria recognizes, a married woman is as much as man's property as his ass. In the eighteenth century England, women were characteristically treated as counters in an economic exchange; they were valued as much for what they repressed as for who they were men have a property in their wives and daughters.

So, Maria has many desires and feelings which are limited in her. She does not express her own desire and free imagination which are playing in her mind. She traps herself to the house and is not allowed to free from her bondage. She faces many humiliations and insults under patriarchal society. So that Mary Wollstonecraft tries to answer its painful question through the feminist reasoning. She tries to create equality among all human beings. There is no difference between male and female; they all are created equal by the creatures. Throughout the history, females are struggling against the male patriarchy or male dominance over female. Through this enlightenment society, females are the subject of domination, humiliation and poverty, controlled by their husband. So, Mary Wollstonecraft tries to establish feminist reasoning against patriarchal society.

Although Enlightenment age is dominated by reason that focuses upon the urgency of avoiding sentiments and emotions by the use of reason through education women are considered as emotional and fast-tempted under patriarchal society. Women are never allowed to express their desires and feelings under patriarchal

society; women are treated as property of their husbands. Women cannot use their rights and equal reason. Mary Wollstonecraft tries to practice reason through education in order to avoid excessive sentiments and emotions. Proper use of reason helps to avoid sentiments and feelings. Education helps women to go ahead and become independent. So, Wollstonecraft tries to establish feminist reasoning which answers the humiliations of femininity under enlightenment patriarchy. Education also helps them to assert their individuality and independence because it opens the outside world for them. Women must be educated in the proper use of reason so that they can overcome the hindrances on the way of their life. Happiness among human beings is to be found in reason, virtue and knowledge and that knowledge and virtue come only from the proper exercise of reason. Education strengthens the body instead of making a virtue of weakness and fits the mind for independence.

Mainly considered as a feminist writer, Mary Wollstonecraft raises the issues of female domination and the role of patriarchal power politics in exploiting females. Strongly believing upon the rational capacities of women, she discards the discourses, created by the powerful rulers of the society in order to dominate the female. In her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, she claims that men and women are mortal and intellectually equal and thus equally entitled to the natural rights. She argues that women have been kept in a state that inhibits moral and intellectual growth and only increases the dependence on men. According to Wollstonecraft, independence, which sees its real basis for true equality can only come about through a revolution in female manners, is built in the recognition that women are capable of moral and intellectual improvement as men are. The novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, which discards the sensibility as the sole cause of female subjugation, is regarded as the continuation of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in terms of rational advocacy.

Mary Wollstonecraft's novel, *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* has elicited a lot of critical attention and massive argument from the large number of critics and scholars. Some critics have paid attention to the thematic analysis of the novel, whereas the others have gone through the experimental aspect of the novel. Although most of the critics have analyzed her book from the feminist perspective, some others have interpreted from different theoretical framework like that of gothic and trauma. Danielle Mallinick interprets the novel by focusing on the gothic and sublime elements on the self affirming oral and written means of expression. She says:

In *Maria, or, the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Wollstonecraft argues that a self-affirming version of the sublime, regulated by reason and grounded in religious conviction, enables individuals to imagine their own agency in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In the novel, the sublime functions as a prompt for individuals to remember their own powers of reason, their origin, and destination. Her attempt to advocate for a revised sublime, one that forms the basis of a new, non-Alexandrian heroic agency that will in turn have a powerful effect on readers, constitutes one of the era's many programs to "create a taste" for unconventional characters or themes. Wollstonecraft's reformulation also contributes to broader debates regarding the interplay of passion and regulation. (27)

She clarifies her view that subliminal characteristic in the novel which enables to practice reason over sensibility. She also advocates it as constituting a new era for unconventional character or themes by creating a new taste.

Elaine Jordan comments on the novel regarding its feminine sensibility and considers it as the next version of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's

theoretical expression of feminism. She regards the novel as more radical in terms of sexuality:

Maria's representation of herself in *The Wrongs of Woman*: as a sexual subject in her memoir to her daughter, and as a would-be citizen in her letter to the judge. *The Wrongs of Woman*, although using the novel form, can be taken as the promised second volume of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, on the "partial laws" of England. I argue that it also revises the *Vindication's* view of feminine sensibility, and experiments with a more radical and generous account of sexuality.

(221)

What above mentioned lines say that this novel as a second volume or continuation of her idea expressed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She also argues that it is a revival of the *Vindication's* view and also experiments with more radically.

Christine M. Cooper observes the politics of abortion throughout the novel by associating it with the lack of female agency over them. According to her:

Yet abortion became in Wollstonecraft's final, unfinished work, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, a means to argue for women's political capacities. Whereas their lack of agency, over their bodies and over processes dependent on their successful delivery of future generations of citizens, allowed for a continuance of things as they are, any moment in which women's control with the reproductive process become evident signaled a more general political agency. (737)

The above quote makes it clear that the novel presents the female subjugation in the male dominated society, which considers the female as the weak creature made to

fulfill the coveted desires of male. The novel does not only talk about the individual story of Maria but of the whole women in the world who are doomed to be suffered under the suppressive patriarchy.

Another critic Diane Long Hoeveler reads this novel from the prospective of traumatic experiences. In Wollstonecraft's last unfinished novel *Maria or Wrongs of Woman*, she would appear to have been paralyzed or in the grip of a compulsion that allowed her only to imagine various scenarios of traumatic disaster for her heroine. She further writes:

She exposed and at the same time reified the tyranny of sentimental literary formula for women. Wollstonecraft also revealed that for women of all classes, life really was the way it was depicted in sentimental fiction- a series of insults, humiliations, deprivation, beatings and fatal or near-fatal disaster. I have conclude that *the wrongs of women or Maria* was intended to be read and understood as both personally therapeutic and at the same time historically significant for what it reveals about women's lives under patriarchy and an increasingly claustrophobic capitalistic system. (388)

She argues that therapeutic value and women's lives under patriarchy are under-rooted in the novel. It stands as one of the earliest and most important document in the history of feminist movement. She valorizes this novel which provides one test case for revealing the cognitive value of trauma as a source for literary creativity.

Another prominent critic Ashley Tauchert criticizes this novel on Mary's argument for female reason which remains a standing article in the feminist canon. The historical struggle between claims to equality and difference for women, her

work is remarkable for its dramatic grasp of the antinomy within European enlightenment thought exposed by simply being female. He further writes:

Positioned between Burke and Paine, she voices an abiding contradiction for feminist awareness: the necessary failure of arguments for female embodied reason. Her novel *Maria, or wrongs of woman* grasps with bloodied nails the questions of sexed embodiment and gender raised by positing reason for women in writing. Her work in total redefined our understanding of women in an unprecedented move towards an analysis of femininity as social construction. (144)

Here, Ashley advocates this novel for its positing reason for women on the radical patriarchal society. This novel tries to redefine the understanding of women in an extraordinary move towards an analysis of femininity as a 'social construct'.

Wollstonecraft offers a quite different mode of writing about reason for women in her novel. Wollstonecraft raises deep struggles between female embodied subjectivity and enlightenment reason to become a symptomatic disturbance in her polemic and narrative writing.

Although many critics have observed and interpreted the text from different critical perspectives, none of them has analyzed the novel as a historical novel by analyzing from the perspective of new historicism. Danielle Mallinck has interpreted the text from the perspective of sublimity where she has explored the elements that produce sublimity from the novel. For her, the novel is written with the lofty ideas with lofty language to produce sublime experience among the readers but our project focuses upon the historical dimension of the novel in order to excavate the genealogical history of sensibility rooted in it.

Similarly, Elaine Jordan analyzes the novel from the feminist perspective, whereby she claims that the novel revises the feminine sensibility with its experimentation upon the radical account of sexuality. Our research claims, on the contrary, that the novel criticizes the excessive sensibility of the late eighteenth century rather than revising it. By associating the feminine sensibility as the cause of female suffering Wollstonecraft discards the sensibility by focusing upon reasonable capacity of female characters. In the novel, Wollstonecraft gives Maria the female agency with full of reason and rescues her from suicide “the conflict is over! I will live for my child!”(37). Here, the nature of Maria departs from the heroines of romance, in which women become ready to die, when they are guided by the emotion.

Another critic Diane Long Hoeveler interprets this novel from the theoretical framework of Trauma. She attempts to put forward the traumatic experience of Maria but never goes towards the historical dimension of the text. Although another critic Ashley Tauchert tries to historicize the sufferings of Maria, considering her as the representative figure of eighteenth century women, he never traces the power politics behind the oppression of women, which our project endeavors the excavates with the help of Foucauldian notion power.

Moreover, Foucault's concept of power and discourse theory will be applied with special reference to new historicists. Application of a critical perspective to a certain literary work aims at to provide a deeper knowledge, effective understanding, and more productive outcomes. In other words, interpretation of a piece of literary work in the light of certain theoretical modality makes it not only more concrete, fruitful and interesting but deepens the knowledge in the particular areas and opens up many doors for further investigation. A text can be studied from diverse perspectives and interpretations become multiple and plural. Whatever tool we choose to apply,

our goal in choosing these approaches is to see, to learn, and to understand some important aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly and so deeply without these perspectives. As Louis Montrose argues that the job of new historicists is to read a given piece of literary text in relation to other discursive practices in which it occurred.

To put it differently, since the meaning of a literary text is situated in the complex web of discursive formations, the project of new historicists is to "analyze the interplay of culture- specific discursive practices" (Montrose 415). Thus, the primary aim of this research is to throw spotlight into discursive practices intermingled in the life story of Maria on the basis of the theoretical framework of new historicism as developed by Stephen Greenblatt, Luis Montrose, H. Aram Veerer and Jane Gallop in general and the concept of genealogical history as developed by Michel Foucault in particular.

The research has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents the objectives of the research with the contextual framework of the novel. At the same time, it presents the brief introduction of the novel along with the literature review and the brief discussion on the tool of new historicism. The second chapter will be a textual analysis that will apply the theoretical tool along the text to prove the hypothesis. Finally, the last chapter will be the conclusion of the research on the basis of the textual analysis.

## II. Critique of the Cult of Sensibility in Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*

The research analyzes Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* as the historical novel that subverts the available modes of sexualized femininity by offering the rational female subject who challenges the excess of sensibility with sound reason. Written during the second half of the eighteenth century, this novel captures the bitter reality of women in the contemporary historical period and attempts to rewrite the history by keeping the rational female self at the center. In the novel, Wollstonecraft raises deep struggle between female embodied subjectivity and enlightenment reason. Depicting the female subjects like Maria and Jemima, under the Enlightenment 'patriarchy', Wollstonecraft focuses upon the autonomy of rationality under the strong oppression and suppression. Indeed, the novel calls up a history of feminist reasoning to account for its complicated and pained condition.

By 1790s, when the novel was written, the movement of sensibility was in its heyday whereby the excessive use of sensibility in the literature had paved the way for romantic literature; the romantic period was in the verge of its inception. Human sensation was at the center of the literary production as the sensibility was considered as the virtue of human being. The novels with the human emotion, passion that was written by female writers were the best seller of the time. Such novels not only advocated sensibility but also aroused the sensation mainly on women for the readers of such novels were women more than men. Poetry, considered as the highest literary genre, was also thought as the production of imagination, as the poets like William Wordsworth, St. Coleridge, John Keats were advocating the creative potentiality that remains in the imaginative power of the

poets. Thus the acute feeling of sensibility and imagination were considered as the highest virtues of human being.

On the contrary, in the philosophical and scientific domain, the use of reason was considered as the means of liberating human being from the guidance of others. The effect of Cartesian's rationality founded upon 'I think therefore I am' was prevalent throughout the society. One of the advocates of reason, Immanuel Kant, has focused upon the reason as the means of enlightenment. It is the period of Enlightenment, which focuses upon reason at the cost of discarding emotion and passion.

Within this discursive context, Wollstonecraft attempts to make women readers of the late eighteenth century to be aware of the adverse effect of emotion, passion and imagination encountered in the pages of sentimental novel through her novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* which focuses upon the reason by discarding sensibility. Her novel has captured the condition of women and their reasonable selfhood in the oppressed situation under the patriarchal Enlightenment. Like her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in this novel, Wollstonecraft advocates for the urgency of education for women to get rid of patriarchal oppression and suppression.

Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* blurs the boundary between fiction and history by presenting the facts of the then historical period through the story of Maria and Jemima. It corresponds to the tendency of new historicism which puts forward the idea of its 'textuality of history' and 'historicity of text'. This novel assists in blurring the age old demarcation between history and fiction by going through the historical truth in the fictional genre. In fact, the concept of historicity of text emerges because of the thinking that sought to connect

a text to the social control and economic circumstances of its production.

According to new historicism, the text is not to be read with the motto of 'art for art's sake' rather to be read in connection with all discursive practices and power relations exposed in it. New historicists are of opinion that by the language that is as argued by necessarily dialogical and materially determined.

As often quoted phrase that describes new historicism's reciprocal concern with 'historicity of text' and 'textuality of history' seems to have emerged from Stephen Greenblatt's clarification of Foucault's notion, which calls text "a disclosure which, although, it may seem to present, or reflect on external reality in fact, consists of what are called representations" (qtd. In Abrams 183). Foucauldian notion that views a text as verbal formation in the form of ideological product or construct of a certain historical era assists the concept of historicization of text.

The text, for Foucault, never represents or reflects pre-existing entities and orders of a historical situation rather it speaks of the power structure, oppositions and hierarchies which are after all the products and propagations of the power. With corresponding to Foucault new historicists analyze the text by associating it with its context. As Liu says, "new historicism sees the context, text and in between a relation of pure suggestiveness" (qtd. in Veese4). In the issue of intermingling between text and context, H. Aram Veese in his *The New Historicism Reader* quotes from Simpson, whereby he argues new historicism from its "Geertzian paradigm of semiotic saturation . . . wherein all facets of a culture are imbued with fictional-expressive meaning, so that any interpretation of text and context is by definition charged with exemplary significance" (qtd. in Veese5). While interpreting any text, it is essential to go through its context, for the text is the product of the context in which it is written. Simpson further says that a text, in fact,

is not the outcome of any writer's creativity or his imagination rather the writer's perception of the then historic cultural circumstances.

*Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* is the eighteenth century British feminist Wollstonecraft's unfinished novelistic sequel to her revolutionary political treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* was published posthumously in 1798 by her husband, William Godwin. It is often considered as the most radical novel in its theme of rationalism. This novel undercuts the cult of the sensibility prevalent in the pattern of writing during the second half of the eighteenth century. During the age of Sensibility, women's writing was to be taken as emotional with full of fancy and imagination that were motivated to arouse such feelings upon the readers especially females whom the society considered as having the similar kind of feelings. But, on the contrary, Wollstonecraft as a rationalist writer picks up the issue of reasoning through her revolutionary novel *Maria or The Wrongs of the Woman* to undercut the existing pattern of novel writing tradition. Through the mouthpiece character Maria who uses her rational capacity under the oppression, Wollstonecraft undercuts the notion of sensibility. Maria as a woman of having her own reason, is not guided by excessive sensibility, she goes on using her own logic to make her life meaningful. When she is imprisoned by her husband in a mad house, frequently she is haunted by the thought of suicide, but she abandons it for her child, which can be taken as a rational decision:

‘Behold your child!’ Exclaimed Jemima. Maria Started off the bed, and fainted. Violent vomiting followed. . . . she caught her to her bosom, and burst into a passion of tears, then resting the child gently on her bed, as if afraid of killing it, she put her hand to her eyes, to

conceal as it were the agonizing struggle of her soul. She remained silent for five minutes, crossing her bosom and reclining her head, - then exclaimed: the conflict is over! I will live for my child! (72)

Her desire to kill herself vanishes when Maria assumes the responsibility of her daughter through the rational capacity. She has an insight that universal benevolence is the primary virtue, but mother must ensure that her child is able to deal with the inevitable problems of life. Resignation is not an option. She swallows laudanum only to be immediately reunited with her daughter; the reunion is followed by tears, a fear of spiritual torment, before Maria summons her reason and makes a choice to live as a mother.

In this way, Wollstonecraft makes her character Maria use her reason at the time when she is killing herself; she is guided by her reason and thinks about her child and changes her decision. It indicates that she is not guided by excessive sensibility. Indeed, Maria represents women to be recognized as reasonable being with the potential for higher genius. They should be endowed with the rights of subject participation by representing a rational public sphere despite their productive capacity.

Sensibility is defined in terms of nice and delicious perception of pleasure or pain, beauty or deformity which seems to depend upon the organization of the nervous system that is shaped accordance to the linear motion of surrounding environment. While defining the concept of sensibility Nicolas Roe quotes from Adela Pinch and writes:

Sensibility refers to one of the most fascinating literary and cultural movements of all time. It spreads across Europe and Euro-American in the middle of the eighteenth century and its effects persisted until

the middle of nineteenth century, and indeed have endured in some ways into our own era. Its epicenter, however was late eighteenth century England. (49)

The above lines provide clear vision that sensibility is not only a literary movement; it is also cultural phenomenon that affected the lives of men and women across Europe and America. What can make a culture place such a high value on extravagant emotional sensibility both in literature and in life? It is very difficult to provide firm historical explanations for changes in people's emotional lives.

The way sensibility defines, in its opposite way, Maria performs her action by using her own logic and reason without being touched by the prevalent notion of sensibility. As a rational woman, she is not guided by excessive sensibility on the ground that she does not bow on the feet of the then code and conducts and frequently escapes from the claptrap of sexual predators. Jemima, like Maria, has the rational selfhood to challenge the society which imposes the feminine sensibility with the female self. Jemima uses her reason to help Maria in escaping from the madhouse in which she has been spending her traumatic life for months, for she is kept in such asylum despite being sane. Terrified though she is, she has full determination while escaping from the asylum:

Jemima went first. A being, with a visage that would have suited one possessed by a devil, crossed the path, and seized Maria by the arm. Maria had no fear but of being detained--"Who are you? What are you?" for the form was scarcely human. . . ."what have I to do with thee?"--Still he grasped her hand, muttering a curse. "No, no; you have nothing to do with me," she exclaimed, "This is a moment of life and death!"-- With supernatural force she broke from him, and,

throwing her arms round Jemima, cried, "Save me!" The being, from whose grasp she had loosed herself, took up a stone as they opened the door, and with a kind of hellish sport threw it after them. They were out of his reach. (70)

Maria detaches herself with Danford because she wants to live an independent life and likes to save her daughter. Her thought to save her daughter inspires her to escape from the asylum. She uses her mind and leaves Danford who has been trying to impose an artificial sensibility upon her. Similarly, Jemima shows the way to Maria to escape the traumatic world of madhouse. By giving sense to live as mother Wollstonecraft detaches Maria from Danford, her lover inside asylum. Wollstonecraft's presentation of her protagonist with reason goes against the then rhetoric tradition of novel in which female protagonists are ready to die for their lover.

During the last half of the eighteenth century, sensibility was the discourse to hypnotize the common people and mainly the female. Those women who have such sensual qualities were considered as the good ones in the society. Such a discourse was created by the powerful groups of male in the society. As the creation of powerful ones, such discourses were considered as truth which was eventually internalized in the culture. In this connection, Michel Foucault defines that the truth, morality and meaning are created through discourse. Everyone has a dominant group of discursive elements that people live in unconsciously. Within Foucault's world view "there is no absolute morality because any sort of morality is created through the exercise of power" (*Foucault Reader* 140). He further states that the pervasive and horizontal mode of power is prevalent everywhere but those who create discourse through the true understanding of power can reach in the top

rank. According to him, power creates discourse and through the representation of discourse, truth is created.

By discourse, Foucault means a group of statements which provides a convincing language for talking about a particular subject at the particular historical moment. Discourse, for Michel Foucault, constructs a topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conducts of others. Similarly, the power is generated in society by producing the discourse, and by constructing the truths of subjects. Such power is creative to support not those weak and fragile but to those who possess all forms of domination and dominant. This power is accepted in society and the acceptance of this very power by powerless is the outcome of constructed discursive practice which is presented here. Parents create discourse about their children saying what they should or should not do. By generating power through discourse, parents even beat their children if they disobey. Such kind of notion of Foucault has been implemented in the life of Jimmie, Maggie and others. In this connection, Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* emphasizes the new historicist notion and states “history is a matter of interpretation, not facts, and that interpretations always occur within a framework of social conventions” (286).

Corresponding with Foucauldian concept of discourse, Wollstonecraft presents discourse using to dominate the powerless group in the society through Maria and Jemima who have been pressed down by creating certain discourse:

Such are the partial laws enacted by men, for only to lay a stress on the dependent state of a woman in the grand question of the comforts arising from the possession of property, she is much more injured by the loss of the husband’s affection, than he by that of his wife; yet

where is she, condemned to the solitude of a deserted home, to look for compensation from the woman, who seduces him from her. (48)

These above lines provide clear hint that how different sorts of laws and constraints are formulated to dominate the powerless people. Such rules are created to impose the oppressive authority upon females. They have made the discourse that female should be sensible, humble, meek and passive in front of them and their writing also should be followed by such norms and values.

Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* argues, "It is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created. Discourse joins power and knowledge and its power follows from our causal acceptance of the reality with which we are presented" (82). By discourse Foucault meant a group of statements which provide a system for making about a particular interest at a particular historical moment, "discourse is about the production of knowledge" (84). Through the help of knowledge one dominates other. During the age of sensibility too, there was created a sort of discourse that literature should be based on sensibility. This idea is critique of Kantian concept of pure reason or public use of reason as Kant in his essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" asserts, "The public use of reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. By the public use of one's reason I understand the use which a person makes of as a scholar before the reading public" (16). Sensibility is reaction over the Kantian concept of Enlightenment, it is a sort of discourse which is circulated through various ways in the society and that has shaped the mind of social creatures. During the time of Sensibility, there was a sort of trend to write literature that a handsome man used to be hero and he would fall in love with

beautiful heroine in romantic mood. Characters were presented as mainly guided by the emotions and passions they have.

Maria directly criticizes the novelists and the moralists of the contemporary period. In her letters to her daughter, Maria shows her disgust towards the novelists and the moralists who eulogize emotion and passion as the highest virtue of human being. She, implicitly, suggests her daughter not to be guided by the emotion and passion but rather to develop her reasonable self. Through Maria's letter to her daughter, Wollstonecraft criticizes the prevalent writing pattern governed with the sensibility more than reason:

When novelists or moralists praise as a virtue, a woman's coldness of constitution, and want of passion; and make her yield to the ardor of her lover out of sheer compassion, or to promote a frigid plan of future comfort, I am disgusted. They may be good women, in the ordinary acceptation of the phrase, and do no harm; but they appear to me not to have those 'finely fashioned nerves,' which render the senses exquisite. They may possess tenderness; but they want that fire of the imagination, which produces active sensibility and positive virtue. (47)

As it is clear from the lines above, Maria considers the novels with praising women's sensibility as the means to corrupt the women's mind by diverting it towards the sensation. Women's way of identifying the heroine of the fiction, in fact, develops their fantasy to be lost in the imaginary world. By undercutting the prevalent pattern of novel writing, Wollstonecraft invokes the rationalist belief in human perfectibility, and argues that the progress of reason gradually improves the women life and helps in social relations. In this context it is appropriate to cite

Anne k. Mellor as quoted by Nicholas Roe who raises the issue of novelist of the late eighteenth century. As she says, “perhaps the most important, women readers provide a new and increasingly large market for women writers, since women preferred to read novel by women” (183). She further says that women writers of the period were mostly guided by the movement of romanticism, thus incorporated the elements of emotion and passions. Such incorporation has adverse effect upon the female readers as they identified with the emotional heroines of the novel. But on the contrary, Wollstonecraft incorporates the rational characters so as to arouse the rationality within female readers.

The spirit of sensibility where women are praised by men so as to win her heart and the function of woman is to beatify herself to attract the attention of handsome man. Nobody evaluated the intellectual power and the reasonable capacity females had. In the age of sensibility, women were more praised for their virtue of being sensible, and if they became romantic, emotional and coquette they would get a sort of respect in the society:

Those who support a system of what I term false refinement, and will not allow great part of love in the female, as well as male breast, to spring in some respects involuntarily, may not admit that charms are as necessary to feed the passion, as virtues to convert the mellowing spirit into friendship. To such observers I have nothing to say, any more than to the moralists, who insist that women ought to, and can love their husbands, because it is their duty. (47)

Those moralists of that historical period are supporting the social power structure that advocates the feminine sensibility by discarding the rational selfhood that Wollstonecraft thinks, females must have. The novelists guided by the so called

morality of the than period consider the feminine sensibility as an essential virtue of women. Wollstonecraft undercuts such feminine sensibility through her character Maria who hates those moralists and asserts her rational self in her letter to her daughter.

During the age of sensibility, women were presented as the submissive, humble meek docile and passive and their function is to involve in romantic affairs with handsome males. But on the contrary of this general understanding of sensibility, Wollstonecraft has present woman as a protagonist who challenges the core of sensibility in the ground of reasoning. She is not guided by sensibility rather she uses reason in her each and every steps of life. One never finds any trace of sensibility in her decisions even in the situation of suppression and oppression.

When she escapes from the mad house at that time her husband tries to revitalize their relationship and also tries to win her heart again but Maria as a woman of having firm decision rejects such thing and turns her back towards him: “My husband’s renewal caresses then became hateful to me; his brutality was tolerable, compared to his distasteful fondness” (71). This event also proves that Maria uses her own reason to free herself from the chronological linear time; she does not bow on the pervasive notion of emotional sensibility.

Sensibility, in the second half of the eighteenth century, was considered both a physical and a moral phenomenon. Physicians and anatomists believed that the more sensitive people's nerves, the more emotionally affected they would be by their surroundings. Since women were thought to have keener nerves than men, it was also believed that women were more emotional than men. The emotional excess associated with sensibility also theoretically produced an ethic of compassion on the basis of discourse as Foucault in his book *History of Sexuality*

argues "discourse provides ways of talking about a particular topic with repeated motifs or clusters of ideas, practices or forms of knowledge"(108). Thus historians have credited the discourse of sensibility and those who promoted it with the increased humanitarian efforts, such as the movement to abolish the slave trade, of the eighteenth century. But sensibility was also thought to paralyze those who had too much of it; they were weakened by constant vicarious suffering, it also created a sort of fake discourse that presented in this novel:

And unless 'youth, and genial years were flown,' it would be thought equally unreasonable to insist, [under penalty of] forfeiting almost everything reckoned valuable in life, that he should not love another: whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, laboring to reform her imbruted mate. (47)

These lines carry the jumble of discourses that are circulated through different sorts of genres where women are presented as weak and in reason and impotent in will, they have only emotional touch and they are guided by sensibility not of sense. Without evaluating actual ability of women they are labeled as weak creature with considerably less intellectual power and logical capacity. They are living for the discourse already created for them. These discourses are actually created to impose an authority over them.

By the time, Wollstonecraft was writing *Maria* or *The Wrongs of Woman*, sensibility had already been under sustained attack for a number of years.

Sensibility, which had initially promised to draw individuals together through sympathy, was viewed as 'profoundly separatist'. Novels, plays, and poems that employed the language of sensibility asserted individual rights, sexual freedom,

and unconventional familial relationships based only upon feeling. The great poets of the period focused upon the power of imagination. They expressed that the power of imaginative truth to exceed the truth found out by reason. Maria frequently undercuts such notion of romantic poets by daring to courage to have her own reason as Kant says “sapere aude! Have courage to use your own reason!”

(15). The way Kant defines is the way Maria uses her own reason by reading different varieties of books:

The books she had obtained were soon devoured, by one who had no other resource to escape from sorrow, and the feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity, which equally weaken the intoxicated sensibility. Writing was then the only alternative, and she wrote some rhapsodies descriptive of the state of her mind; but the events of her past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny; her mother knew not how to avoid. (5)

These lines are sufficient to understand the mind of Maria, as a rational woman she reads different sorts of theoretical books so as to free herself from the memory of her child. Her reading act of books even in prison indicates that she is oriented towards reasoning pole that challenges the notion of sensibility. Wollstonecraft is intentionally breaking the conventions of sentimental fiction, but exactly what her goal in doing so is unclear. But one thing is clear that she strives in flourishing urgency of rational self rather than the emotional one to get rid from the

suppression that female are living with. For example, Maria and Jemima can seemingly be identified as reasonable female characters.

As the connection between sensibility and romanticism is close and complex, literary historians see sensibility as the literary movement that precedes romanticism. Emerged from European nations, romanticism embraces the features like passion, emotions and imagination. However, some of the writers like Jane Austen and Wollstonecraft attempted to distance themselves from the effect of romanticism despite writing against the backdrop of romanticism. In *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, while writing the letters to her daughter Maria, explains her newly developed friendship with Danford. She comes to know that she has been imposed the feelings of sentiments. Danford time and again attempts to imprint the sensibility which she has been taking as something abnormal in her own sentiments:

Endeavoring to prove to me that nothing which deserved the name of love or friendship, existed in the world, he drew such animated pictures of his own feelings, rendered permanent by disappointment, as imprinted the sentiments strongly on my heart, and animated my imagination. These remarks are necessary to elucidate some peculiarities in my character, which by the world are indefinitely termed romantic.

In the above lines, Maria criticizes Danford's false attempt to divert her towards the distress thorough an artificial sensibility. Danford tries his best to impose the emotions and passion upon Maria, for he is guided by the notion that females are sensible and are longing for it. Maria is implicitly suggesting her daughter to remain far away from such romanticist feelings.

Rousseau, one of the precursors of romanticism, argues in *Emile* that women ought to be weak and passive because they are physically weaker than men, they should be subordinate to man, to whom they must render themselves agreeable. To compensate for the dependency and inferiority women have been given the facility to excite, desire through which men are made dependent. Rousseau asserts that most important quality in women is good nature and sweetness of temper. Yet he appears to contradict this later when he considers that subtlety or animal cunning and sexual attractiveness are the only advantages of women to compare with men's physical strength and intellect.

Wollstonecraft undercuts Rousseau's idea in *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* while commenting and at the same time rationalizing Maria's growing emotional feelings after Danford's attempt of imposing an artificial sensibility upon her, "how difficult it is for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits" (69). Wollstonecraft hates this contradiction and laments for the unhappy confusion it creates in the minds of women who are exhorted to cultivate good nature and yet are surrounded by examples of the success and power of cunning and seductiveness. In her *Vindication of Rights of Women* Wollstonecraft argues that men and women differ physically, mentally and emotionally, Rousseau of course purposes different educational schemes for the sexes:

The education of women should be always relative to the men. To please to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable, these are the duties of women yet all times and what they should be taught in their infancy." (qtd. in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* 181)

Again he argues that physical development in boys is the development of power, whereas in girls it is the personal charm and they are always guided by sensibility. Rousseau's discrimination between male and female in terms of education depicts his internal psyche of inferiorizing female; he considers female with lower reasonable capacity in comparison to male. In response to this idea of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft is mainly concerned with the ideas and argues that men and women are equally possessed of reason they must be equally educated in its use, she refuses to accept that women were less capable of reason than men. She further asserts that men's and Women's common humanity is based on their shared and not given possession of reason, then virtue must be the same for both sexes.

Her novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* is the continuation of her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* as she focuses upon the education of women in the former as in the latter. Maria, in her letter to her daughter, feels disappointment in her sister's leaving of school. She takes an education as the means equate female with male by developing the rationality:

My sisters had left school, but were unable to endure home, which my father's wife rendered as disagreeable as possible, to get rid of girls whom she regarded as spies on her conduct. They were accomplished, yet you can scarcely conceive the trouble I had to place them in the situation of governesses, the only one in which a well-educated woman, with more than ordinary talents, can struggle for a subsistence; and even this is a dependence next to menial. Is it then surprising, that so many forlorn women, with human passions and feelings, take refuge in infamy? (44)

Maria's distress in her sister's breaking up of education is her implicit implication of the necessity of education in the human life in order to develop their rational capacity. Education is the means by which women could achieve reason, equality, and virtue. It is needed to teach children how to analyze and to generalize.

Wollstonecraft asserts the rights of women especially to an education that would render them bringing the worthy of respect or at least immune to prejudice. She further argues that when women possess reason, and it emanates, from divinity and supports virtue.

While defining the reasoning ability of women and men, Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* argues:

The protection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue and knowledge that distinguish the individual and direct the laws which binds society and that form the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow I equally undeniable. (39)

While summoning upon the reason, Wollstonecraft supports the enlightenment concept of use of reason by undercutting the dominant notion of sensibility prevalent during the second half of eighteenth century. The way she uses her reason in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* is the way she has also used in *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* so as to justify that women are not guided by sensibility rather they are guided by sense or reason.

Indeed, in her novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft attempts to reevaluate the volatile relationship of reason and sensibility. She valorizes reason over sensibility with an aim to cut the old link of sensibility and woman; this statement still holds true even when we admit that the real object of

her attack is 'artificial' sensibility as opposed to natural heart. Romantic writers try to reclaim sensibility as something like a formative or empowering potentiality for the formation of meaningful life of women.

However, Wollstonecraft presents sensibility as a negative and artificial corruption in *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*. And her shifted attitudes to sensibility are presumably most evident in her valorization of reason in her female characters, Maria and Jemima. This novel criticizes the sensibility where heroine Maria uses her reason and logic so as to prove that she is not guided by sensibility that represents the ideal woman having her own reason. Furthermore, most female characters in *Maria* are portrayed as rational beings for they struggle against the artificial imposition of sensibility upon them by the power structure of the contemporary social system. In this way, Wollstonecraft's novel tends to deconstruct the old dichotomy of reason and sensibility, the focus of her previous political work.

As it has dealt with the use of reason, the novel has developed its close affinity with the concept of emancipation developed during the Enlightenment period. Dominated by reason, the Enlightenment age was focused upon the elimination of the role of feelings that emerges from heart, in the decision making. Wollstonecraft as an author of this novel is the product of such historic-cultural circumstances and her novel is the outcome of her perception of the then circumstances. Corresponding this Stephen Greenblatt views the work of art as “the product of a set of matriculations [. . .] the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of certain equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions and the institutions and products of society (Vesser12). Her novel is the product of the historical circumstance of Sensibility as well as Enlightenment.

Since human beings can achieve emancipation from reason, for Wollstonecraft, females must use of it for their emancipation from the oppression in the social structure. During the era of Sensibility, there were certain norms and values for women. On the basis of such rules and norms they used to perform their action, in such condition they were forced to be guided by sensibility. In the middle half of Eighteen century, there was a sort of trend to produce literature under the influence of sensibility.

The things so governed were a sort of discourse posed the oppressive authority so as to operate their rules over females. But on the contrary of such norms and values, Wollstonecraft asserts her identity through the effort of reasoning against the prevalent pattern of writing. While doing so, she creates a realistic character Jemima and tries to establish feminist reasoning which answers the humiliations of femininity under the Age of Enlightenment. Jemima as a servant becomes pregnant from her master. After knowing this fact, one day the master could kill her to escape from the social stigma. By thinking so, she flees from the master's home it is her own reason she used, she narrates this event:

In the morning I ventures out, to throw myself I my master's way, at his usual hour of going abroad. I approached him, he damned me for a b- - - , declared I had sworn to his wife, never to take any more notice of me. He left me; but, instantly returning, he told me that he should speak to his friend, a parish-officer, to get a nurse for the brat I laid to him and advised me, if I wished to keep out of the house of correction not to make free with his name. (22)

These lines are sufficient to understand the reasoning mentality of Jemima who has understood the corrupted mentality of her master. Through her rational faculty of

judgment she undercuts the notion to sensibility in the ground of her audacious decision to flee from the house of her master. It is her radical action as assumed by the then society. She has also blurred the biased mentality of romanticism that women bear everything during the state of extreme pressure too.

Originating in philosophical and scientific writings, sensibility became an English-language literary movement, particularly in the then-new genre of the novel. Such works, called sentimental novels, featured individuals who were prone to sensibility, often weeping, fainting, feeling weak, or having fits in reaction to an emotionally moving experience. If one were especially sensible, one might react this way to scenes or objects that appear insignificant to others. This reactivity was considered an indication of a sensible person's ability to perceive something intellectually or emotionally stirring in the world around them. In this connection, Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard in their “Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay” write:

Sensibility appears, quite suddenly, as a central notion in the first half of the eighteenth century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word is rarely used before that time. When used, the word had referred solely to the physiological power of sensation or perception, as exemplified in the sensory organs. Later, it also came to stand for the sensitiveness of these organs. Sensibility came to stand for a disposition of being easily and strongly affected—physiologically as well as psychologically—by emotional influences. First applied to physical sensation, in the mid eighteenth century, sensibility became the refinement of passionate responses, delicate sensitiveness of taste and sympathy for suffering. (22-23)

This definition clearly defines that sensibility is an emotional and romantic touch that is embedded within the mental and physical sphere of the women. In middle half of the Eighteen century sensibility used to be taken as romantic phenomena in literary genre

This general assumption of concept of sensibility is blurred through the effort of Mary Wollstonecraft who has subverted the existing pattern of writing by creating the reasonable characters who challenge the root of sensibility through their rational action. Jemima as a woman of having reasonable ability takes the bold decision at the critical moment of her life. After being pregnant, she aborts her child with the logic that she wants to be independent from the claptrap of her master. She narrates her experience:

I hurried back to my hole, and, rage giving place to despair, sought for the potion that was to procure abortion, and swallowed it, with a wish that it might destroy me, at the same time that it stopped the sensations of new-born life, which I felt with indescribable emotion. My head turned round, my heart grew sick, and in the horrors of approaching dissolution, mental anguish was swallowed up. The effect of the medicine was violent, and I was confined to my bed several days; but, youth and a strong constitution prevailing, I once more crawled out, to ask myself the cruel question, 'Whither I should go?' I had but two shillings left in my pocket, the rest had been expended, by a poor woman who slept in the same room, to pay for my lodging, and purchase the necessaries of which she partook. (22)

Such revolutionary act of Jemima is an outcome of her logical reason that she does not want to bow on the feet of her master and she also wants to escape for a

lifelong burden. This act of Jemima challenges the masculinist tendency of depicting the woman as having no brain with rational ability. This event also subverts prevalent notion of sensibility that women bear while making any decision.

As a woman of having her own reason, Jemima does not get pleasure in reading novels because she uses her rational ability while judging anything. She says, “I have since read in novels of the blandishments of seduction, but I had not even the pleasure of being enticed into vice” (22). This proves that she is not interested in reading novels which is direct challenge to the notion of romantic sensibility that women are interested in sentimental novels. Literature in the period of romanticism used to be guided by romance, love, passion and happiness and the characters of novel used to be romantic, emotional, docile and passive but on the contrary of the then novel writing convention, Wollstonecraft has presented her characters in the real like way and they are not touched by the excessive sensibility. They are straight forward and use their own logic while making any decision. They feel that they have been enslaved in the name of discourse of sensibility, Jemima says, “I was still a slave” (22).

According to Antonio Gramsci’s opinion, powerless people are subject to the hegemonic exploitation and they have less access to the social and cultural institutions which are the important center of representation. While defining the concept of hegemony Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin quote from Gramsci's book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*:

Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but

by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. (116)

This concept of Gramsci indicates that common people are hegemonized by discourse of truth that is created through the representation of power. Gramsci defines that people are hegemonized on the basis of representation of power which is circulated as if it is true. The ruling class people are succeeded to create such power so as to maintain their pervasive existence.

The way Gramsci defines is the way romantic writers have created discourse of sensibility in literature. According to them literature should be sensitive and romantic and the main task of literature is to render romance to the reader and they also created a sort of discourse that women are interested in sentimental novels so, the essence of novel should be guided by sensibility. Being hegemonized through such discourse of sensibility, so many novels were written by following the footsteps of sensibility during the time of second half of Eighteenth century. The literary creation of this period presented women as emotional and erotic being and their main task is to idealize themselves through their coquette activities.

This very essence of sensibility is overthrown by the progressive literature of Wollstonecraft. She has blurred the prevalent pattern of writing by orienting towards the revolutionary activities of using reason by women in every step of their decision. Jemima as a reasonable character presented in the novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Women* subverts the traditional assumption of society through her strong faculty of judgment. She has courage to blame her father that he had wronged her mother and her mother had been died by the cause of misbehaving attitude of her

father. This is her ability to judge her father on the basis of his vices and virtues through her own reason. She blames his father in this way:

MY FATHER, seduced my mother, a pretty girl, with whom he lived fellow servant; and she no sooner perceived the natural, the dreaded consequence, than the terrible conviction flashed on her-that she was ruined. Honesty, and a regard for her reputation, had been the only principles inculcated by her mother; and they had been so forcibly impressed, that she feared shame, more than the poverty to which it would lead. Her incessant importunities to prevail upon my father to screen her from reproach marrying her and he began to hate, as well as despise me, before I was born. (18)

In these above lines, there is clear trace of applying reasoning by using her judgmental ability. She has blamed to her father in the ground of factual reality and also provides clear evidences that how he treated her mother and obliged to end her life. This ability of reasoning lucidly cuts the undercurrent of the essence of sensibility.

Wollstonecraft as a radical writer criticizes the mainstream of romanticism. She deconstructs the major notion of romanticism in the ground of rational use of reason. Romanticism was an artistic, literary and intellectual movement that originated in the late eighteenth century in Europe, and gained strength in reaction to the Industrial Revolution. In part, it was a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but had a major impact on historiography, education and natural history.

The movement validated strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as trepidation, terror and especially that which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed nature and its picturesque qualities, both new aesthetic categories. It elevated art and ancient custom to something noble, made of spontaneity a desirable character as in the musical impromptu, and argued for a natural epistemology of human activities as conditioned by nature in the form of language and customary usage.

This very assumption of main stream romanticism is undercut by Wollstonecraft in the ground of Kantian concept of using logical reason. Kant as the rational philosopher gives emphasis on using reason as much as one can. In this connection Michel Foucault quotes from Kant in his essay “What is an Enlightenment?” in this way:

When one is reasoning only in order to use one’s reason, when one is reasoning as a reasonable being (and not a cog in a machine), when one is reasoning as a member of reasonable humanity, then the use of reason must be free and public. Enlightenment is thus not merely the process by which individuals would see their own personal freedom of thought guaranteed. There is Enlightenment when the universal, the free and the public uses of reason are superimposed one another. (107)

This very concept of Kantian use of reason provides knowledge that one should be free from self incurred tutelage so as to be a reasonable being. And by using his or her own reason, one can challenge the existing pattern of discourse, otherwise one become like cog in a machine.

This brilliant and vibrant philosophy of Kant is applied by Wollstonecraft so as to cut the cult of sensibility and romanticism through her historical novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*. While doing so, she has created the rational female characters who are not guided by sensibility rather they are oriented towards using their one reason while taking any decision. Maria as a rational woman proves her as a reasonable being through her radical action. Her actions are shaking the foundation of romantic sensibility. As a so-called mad woman, her husband has imprisoned her in the mad house. At that critical moment too, she uses her own reason to prove herself that she is not insane with her reasonable voice:

"Come to me often," said Maria, with a tone of persuasion, in consequence of a vague plan that she had hastily adopted, when, after surveying this woman's form and features, she felt convinced that she had an understanding above the common standard, and believe me mad, till you are obliged to acknowledge the contrary. The woman was no fool, that is, she was superior to her class; nor had misery quite petrified the life's-blood of humanity, to which reflections on our own misfortunes only give a more orderly course.

(3)

These utterances are sufficient to understand the reasonable mind of Maria. She has not remained silent towards the power-oriented discourse that women are mad when they go against the prevalent law. She puts forward her reasoning in the line of Kantian concept of Public use of reason. She also challenges the law-making custodians in the realistic ground that women are above from existing biased assumption and claims that women are not fools.

Finally, as a product of the then historico-cultural circumstances during the second half of seventeenth century, Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* captures the historical power structure of the era of Sensibility and the age of Enlightenment, and thus is the historical novel. While representing the historical circumstances of the late eighteenth century, the novel undercuts the cult of sensibility which most of the novelists, moralists and the other literary writers of the contemporary period had focused upon. The prevalent writing pattern focuses much more upon the emotional feelings by mainly associating with the female figures, for the sensibility was imposed upon female by the historic-cultural power structure. Wollstonecraft undercuts such prevalent patterns of writing through her novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* in which she has created the female characters with their rational capacity in making decisions in the situation of oppression.

### III. Conclusion

The research explores how Mary Wollstonecraft's posthumously published novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* historicizes the then socio cultural circumstances of the late eighteenth century through the story of Maria, the protagonist of the novel and the other character like Jemima. While capturing the politico-historical reality, the novel critiques the cult of sensibility prevalent during the 'era of Sensibility' through the portrayal of rational female characters. Unlike the existing pattern of writing that focused upon the emotion and passion with the feminine sensibility, Wollstonecraft focuses more upon the rationality by creating rational female self. Considered as the outcome of the movement of sensibility, romanticism focused more upon imaginative truth rather than the reason. Written against the backdrop of Romantic period, the novel undercuts their concept of sensibility by discarding it for the need of rationality for women.

The novel blurs the boundary between history and fiction as it materializes the new historical concept of 'textuality of history' and 'historicity of text' by presenting the historical facts in the novelistic form. Maria herself is the history of women during the eighteenth century in England when females were oppressed under the enlightenment patriarchy. Like Maria, Jemima also represents the women who were victimized during the contemporary period. Through these two characters, Wollstonecraft historicizes the bitter reality of women in the society in which females were considered as something weak creature in comparison to males.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, when the novel was written, Sensibility was in its heyday. The literary writers focused upon the human passion and emotion mainly by associating it with female figures. In fact, the sensibility was considered as the highest virtue in the human life. The novelists and the moralists of

the period depict the female with full of emotion and passion. They consider females having lower rational capacity than that of males. However, Wollstonecraft depicts the female characters with full of reason. Maria, imprisoned though she is, uses her reason in every decisions of her life. Similarly, Jemima challenges the historical truth about female by doing everything whatever her mind says to her rather than guided by the sensibility she has.

The novel was written against the backdrop of the movement of Romanticism, which is considered as the outcome of the age of Sensibility in Europe and America. However, Wollstonecraft undercuts the motto of romanticism by advocating the concept of ‘use of reason’ developed by the enlightenment philosopher during the contemporary historical period through this novel.

Finally, the present research explores how the novel *Maria or The Wrongs of woman* critiques the cult of sensibility by presenting the reasonable female characters who eventually questions upon the existing pattern of writing guided by the sensibility. Thus Wollstonecraft rewrites the new history of the late eighteenth century female’s history by interrogating upon the power structure in constructing the official history of the particular era.

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