

Tribhuvan University

Emma as a Feminist Spirit in Jane Austen's *Emma*

A Thesis Submitted to the

faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi
Campus, Tribhuvan University, in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of
Masters of Arts in English

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May 2008

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Emma as a Feminist Spirit in Jane Austen’s *Emma*”, submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University by Ms. Deepa Poudel has been approved by the undersigned members of Research committee.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my honourable supervisor Mr. Ramesh Lamsal, Teacher in the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus for providing me invaluable suggestions and guidance without whose scholarly support this thesis would not have been completed in the present form.

Likewise, I am highly indebted to Dr. Ananda Sharma, Head of the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, for accepting my thesis and encouraging me to proceed in my work. I am equally grateful to my all teachers who provided me constructive guidelines, valuable books and information about the resources.

I deeply owe my gratitude to my dear friends Puja, Ramu and Sabitri for their immense support and inspiration to complete my studies.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my dearest sister Astha and my parents for their constant support and inspiration not only to complete this thesis but also to help me complete my studies successfully.

Deepa Poudel

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Jane Austen and her Vision of Womanhood

Jane Austen (1775-1817) is one of the outstanding figures of the Romantic age of English literature. She was a major English novelist, whose brilliantly witty, elegantly structured satirical fiction marks the transition in English literature from 18th century Neo-Classicism to 19th century Romanticism.

The daughter of the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen, Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775. She was the seventh of eight children and the youngest of two daughters in the middle-class family. She was fond of the family and enjoyed being a part of a large family. She was especially devoted to her elder sister Cassandra, who was her lifelong friend and her brother Henry Austen. Her childhood was full of ups and downs. She suffered from domestic anxiety. Between 1783 and 1786, Austen received formal schooling, first at a boarding school at Oxford, then at the Abbey School in Reading. Around the age of twelve, Austen began writing children's stories. She stayed at Steventon until 1801, reading, writing, and participating in the Hampshire social rounds of balls, visits, and trips to Bath. She began to write for recreation while still on her teens. And after the death of her father in 1805, Austen's family moved to Southampton and then to the village of Chawton, near Alton in Hampshire. Despite the fact that the Austens were poor, they were better educated than the Hampshire people. Jane Austen was therefore, much helped by her own family to mould herself as a great literary figure.

Writing in the romantic vein, Austen was also realistic and has been landed for

her form and structure of plot and intensely detailed characters who struggle with the issues of class-consciousness versus individualism. Her combination of irony, humour, and sophisticated observations of the societal and cultural machinations between the classes epitomise the often absurd problems of inheritance, courtship, morals and marriage in Regency England. Modestly successful during her life, she keeps a distinguished position and popularity among the literary figures because the theme, setting, problem, styles of presenting the problem and their resolutions, as well as the presentation of the characters are all unique. Mostly, her ingenuity is reflected in the presentation of the female characters. Austen's age was very critical for the woman. Austen presents this fact in fiction from a new perspective.

Austen began her career as a novelist in 1796. She wrote novels for her own pleasure. Her six novels were published during the years 1796-1817. She began the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1796 together with *First Impressions*. In the mean time, she started writing *Lady Susan*. She started yet another novel *Northanger Abbey* in the same year. It was published posthumously. On the other hand, the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility*, originally called *Elionor and Marianne* was also completed during the period of 1795-1798. The book was finally published in 1811.

The Austens moved throughout many parts of England. They moved to Bath from Steventon in 1801. George Austen died in 1805 leaving behind a widow and the two daughters. Mrs. Austen together with her daughters left Bath and settled at Southampton in 1806. Again after three years, they moved to the Chawton Cottage in Hampshire. During those years, the Austens suffered with financial crisis. It was a bitter experience they had as they had to struggle for their existence. Jane Austen did not give up her hope

for writing novels. She immediately began the revision of her earlier drafts of her novel. She published *Pride and Prejudice* in the year of 1813 with the help of her own expenses. Her next novel *Emma* was published in 1815. Slowly she was caught by the disease. She had contracted addisons disease, a tubercular disease of the kidneys. She completed *Persuasion* in 1816. Immediately Jane Austen took a lodging in Winchester in order to receive medical treatment. She couldn't improve her health and ultimately passed away on July 18, 1817. She lies buried in the north aisle of the nave in Winchester Cathedral in Winchester, England. Her novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published posthumously in 1818.

Austen's novels are people with characters drawn from her sphere of life: ladies and gentlemen of the landed gentry. The plots of her novels revolve around the intricacies of courtship and marriage between members of the upper class. Austen's novels consider a narrow scope, using wit and irony to develop and further her plots. In many of her novels, women suffer for the joint distinctions of sex and class. Jane and Elizabeth Bennett, in *Pride and Prejudice*, are nearly prevented from marrying their wealthy suitors because of social codes forbidding it. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, in *Sense and Sensibility*, similarly find themselves prohibited from marrying men for lack of adequate resources and social standing to make the connections respectable. As Austen's heroines painfully recognize, being female puts them in a precarious position: the Bennett family's estate will pass into the possession of a male cousin, and the Dashwood sisters and their mother are at the mercy of a half-brother's beneficence after the death of Mr. Dashwood. *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* are more complex works and have been considered less accessible to readers. *Persuasion's* tone is more subdued and poetic than Austen's earlier

work, possibly a reflection of the author's increasing interest in Romanticism and an indication of her greater attention to the pain inflicted by the social mores she examined in her earlier works. Austen's heroines Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Emma Woodhouse are only the most obvious and endless attempts to justify and make Austen's real purpose understandable. The male characters like Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon, Edmund Bertram, and Frank Churchill provide analogous male sites. Austen's plot-designs which can end so suddenly, ironically and tremulously, and which play out a conservative, male-centered and prudential view of life are given unrepressed.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was a time of male dominance in England. Women were married off very early, not always based upon love, sometimes based on convenience. In all six of Jane Austen's main novels, she vividly portrays the lives of woman wanting to be married, yet she herself never married. She rejected the only potential suitor who proposed to her. As a result of Jane Austen's rejection of marriage, her personal independence, and the portrayal of women in dominant roles in her novels, it is very evident that she was an early feminist who tried to hide it by the use of irony and satire.

Austen, as a female writer, had to struggle more than male writers of her time to establish herself as a novelist. There was no organization that favoured women. The consequence was that women developed the sense of unity and began to participate in the activities of the world. Most women intentionally chose the literary field. In Austen's time, instead of feminism, there was just a hope which was expressed indirectly in literature as a media to raise the consciousness of the people with regards to women.

Consciousness is produced by social experience. Austen desired to make the society very pleasant and civilized. For a woman to attempt and to change the society was an impossible task. Unfulfilled desires are often satisfied by the imagination. Thus, Austen would herself have been convinced by creating *Emma* where women are presented very active.

Austen is a social and realistic novelist who proposes *Emma* to develop the society by broadening its views especially with regards to women. She wrote *Emma* to study women in her own male dominated society. She presents an objective view of the limited options available to women in *Emma*. In English society, in the early 1800's, if women were not wealthy they were forced to either work or rely on the charity of their neighbors. However, remarkably few career opportunities for respectable women existed. Those who did work were usually employed as teachers or governesses. Yet when Jane Fairfax discusses working as a governess with Mrs. Elton, she compares the "governess trade" to the slave trade. Through this comparison she insinuates that one of the few self-sufficient things women could do was still not preferable to the idleness of a wealthy lifestyle. In *Jane Austen: A Family Record* Austen Leigh says that even if women earned a sufficient income and established independence, the social hierarchy of the era made upward mobility difficult. A more gentle woman wouldn't work to advance her situation, but marry well (190). Although the protagonist, Emma is witty and intelligent, marriage seems to be the sole thing that she, and other women of similar social standing, can control. The ability to engage in courtship and the power to reject or accept a man's proposal was one of the only things in women's lives that they could influence. Thus, Emma spends the largest portion of her time trying to make good marital

matches for her friends.

Emma was well accepted since its publication and it has not remained an age-oriented. It is Austen's interesting and realistic presentation which attracts her readers. Critics praise *Emma* for the wonderful art of depicting the plain human society. In fact, Austen's performance in the literary field was flourished with *Emma*. She is honoured by both feminists and other critic today. Austen is a novelist of discrimination that not only to set of social codes and languages but to engage the self in the society which is the central practice of her novels. Though Austen likes some conventional norms of the society, she wants change in the rigid ones. Her novels use to carry such types of topic, gender oriented professions, incomes and properties, inherited or acquired social rank, manner of all kinds, dress and fashion, courtship and marriage etc. She presents a complete world creating two or three families of a certain society. All of her novels are written on social and domestic background. She has a keen sense of observing the human behaviour on how people behaved and interacted. The new trend of romantic and sensational fiction also begins with Jane Austen.

Austen's heroines are Austen's dreams of life. They are symbols of courageous womanhood. The most urgent preoccupation of her bright and young heroines is courtship. The females of *Emma* are busy always with their duties. We do not find them wasting their time on trivial activities. They are both feminine and feminist. They are laborious and have taken life as challenge. They do their best to spend life in pleasant way. They like to be human being and live as social beings in a revolutionary period. They are not closed within the four walls of the room. They are seriously involved in the most delicate social custom and marriage. In *Emma*, Emma is a central character not

because she is rich and pretty but because of her purposeful action towards her family and society. Austen's aim is to raise the consciousness of passive women in their respective societies. She gives full priority to womanhood as the distinctive feature of female. Austen cleverly expresses feminist views in the novel, *Emma* through her depiction of the class system, economic realities, and sexual politics of the era. Austen comes across as a realist, someone who knows that life is tough, especially for women. But rather than focus on how society's restrictions could cause someone to have a nervous breakdown, Austen focuses on the reasoning skills women need to survive, which is the ultimate feminist statement. Austen presents the concept that women are rational creatures and the belief that, in order for women to fulfill their potential as human beings, they must learn how to think for themselves. Austen's stories are about the reality of women's lives, which, for women in the eighteenth century, meant living in a straightjacket of propriety.

Critics on *Emma*

When *Emma* was published there were very few writers who liked her. Among them Sir Walter Scott, who praised Austen's art as "Corn fields and collages and meadows," along with, according to him her novels are instructive to "youthful wanderers who may return from their promenade to the ordinary business of life" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic* 108). He appreciated her novels which, according to him, were witty, had variety of characters and presented a remarkable originality of the middle class society.

Margaret Oliphant is one of the female critics who is very closely familiar with Austen's art. She writes in 1870 "Austen is not the judge of the men and women she

collects around her” (294). Her skill was just to pick up what was in environment. Austen’s habit, according to Oliphant, is the result of a feminine mind which helped her to identify human psychology. Oliphant’s study of Austen has proved that the feminine feeling is sufficiently powerful in itself to motivate woman to develop broad views.

Like Austen, Virginia Woolf’s feminist feelings too are expressed directly in literature. Indicating Austen’s success, she says that Austen achieved it only by her rational observation and feminine feelings. She calls Austen “the most perfect artist among women”. With regards to *Emma* Woolf states, it demonstrates the essence of life although there is no tragedy and no heroism, only ball dances and common social action. Furthermore, Woolf asserts, it is Austen’s greatness to be able to filter the reality of society through common life in her novels. Woolf praises Emma and says that “Jane is thus a mistress of much emotion that appears upon the surface she stimulates us to supply what is not there” (26).

Elizabeth Drew, the contemporary of Woolf, writes “The gender differences was as absolute artistically as it was genetically deeper.” And in 1926, Drew presents the masculine attitude which never let woman go ahead in the following words:

... the creative genius of woman remains narrower than that of man, even in the novel. Just as, though Jane Austen is supreme in her own line, she is not as great as Feilding... In spite of equal education and equal opportunities, the scope of women remains still smaller than the scope of men... (113)

In this way, Drew discloses the social reality in which women unfortunately have

to live. So, they are always ranked as second to men. Drew finds much genius in women too. Women are also perfect painters of life in art. Gender difference is the main object which Drew discloses one of the severe social realities, which always keep women behind. She finds *Emma* delightful and didactic. Austen deals with the sophisticated social life for it, she selects a family circle to show the weakness of the society. In this concern, Drew praises her as, “She is a much more penetrating psychologist and a much more finished and subtle artist” (109).

Modern critics have widely differing concepts. Their techniques to criticism are also scientific and their perspective capacities are very high. For this reason, Austen’s novels are better received than they were in the Victorian period. Oliver Elton, a writer of *A Survey of English Literature*, has described Austen’s feminine quality which helped her to keep sole position among literary figures. He also admires her for the simple way of presenting her ideas about life. Oliver says she has innumerable admirers. Of *Emma*, he writes:

It was a sweet view-sheet to the eye and the mind. English verdure,
English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being
oppressive. (197)

Emma is a reaction against the patriarchal society and Austen challenges those writers who asserts biological differences instead of accepting human genius. Le Roy Smith is a critic, devoted to Austen’s arts. Having been influenced by Austen’s art, Smith had a great hope in Austen’s style of writing, which might be a great approach in the history of women writing and woman’s movement. Smith published a book titled *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman* in 1962 to disclose Austen’s extraordinary work. Smith

enjoyed on Austen's courage to oppose here severe society and he desired to remove the barriers between the sexes. In the concern of *Emma*, Smith writes that Austen has emphasized on the individual nature of person Emma, who is more conscious about her society and family. He further states that *Emma* is the story of a sensitive being, who recognizes human value and asserts her own identity innocently despite of patriarchal society. Smith writes:

In Emma the two contests are clearly linked: the struggle within Emma is between internalized patriarchal value and her instinctive sense of selfhood, the self versus the world internalized rather than the self divided.
(132)

David Daiches, one of the most brilliant literary figures of modern criticism, expresses his view of Austen as "the greatest of all the novelists of manners of this or any other period, and who raised the whole genre to a new level of art, was Jane Austen" (743). Daiches asserts that Austen has given her readers a solid sense of social reality. And this social world is more prominent as it covers the various social aspects, social actions and its social reactions. According to Daiches, *Emma* represents the human world where the heroine gets self knowledge and the experience in the process of containing human relations.

Mary Lascelles was very much influenced by Austen as an alert novelist. Lascelles was surprised by Austen's fine and true ear and matured outlook in *Emma* and also by the burlesque style. *Emma* presents a deliberately contrived antithesis between the worlds of actuality and illusion. Lascelles applauds its heroine for maintaining her femininity while solving the social issue (37).

Ruth Perry is one of the feminists who says that critics did not take Austen “seriously as a woman”. She praises Austen for her womanhood which guides her to picture the solid society. She takes Austen’s *Emma* as a novel of education. The quantity and quality of woman in this novel has meant a great deal in terms of women’s abilities which were neglected in patriarchal society. So, women themselves have performed the role of agents for their own existence in the novel. Perry applauds Austen’s conspicuous creation of Emma as a character with the most distinguished manner of a woman. She admires Austen’s capacity to express herself so well despite the suffocating atmosphere of the society of her day (143).

Kate Millet views Austen as an “Early Feminist” who asserts that women are fully capable of doing many things as well as men, and some things even better. *Emma* is not merely a straightforward depiction of England’s social hierarchy, economic realities, and sexual politics, but a criticism. Through the struggles and growth of Emma, a strong independent woman herself, there is no doubt that Jane Austen is criticizing women’s limited role in society, compelling those who read *Emma* today to appreciate all that women have gained, while continuing to take strides towards greater equality (38).

In 1989, Gary Kelly, a modern critic and professor of the University of Alberta, has honoured Austen as a “romantic novelist”. He says Austen’s works exhibit most of the qualities of romantic novels. Kelly argues that Austen’s novels are the interaction between social and cultural values, and as a romantic artist, she holds merely conventional or fashionable responses in contempt. One of the important characteristics of romantic art is an upholding of human values, which we also find in abundance in her novels. Characters in her novels face the social problem of marriage, the cultural problem

of low and high classes, birth backgrounds and also the gender problems. In this way, Kelly evaluates Austen's ability to reflect the face of fashion and commercialized culture. Kelly found Austen's heroine *Emma* humble and modest from the beginning of the novel (112).

Chapter 2

The Discourse of Feminism

Feminism: An Overview

Feminism is related to the feminist social movement that seeks equal rights for women giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life pattern. It studies women as people who are either oppressed or suppressed or deprived of the freedom of personal expression. Feminism is the movement for recognition of the claims of women for rights, equal to those possessed by men. Women are taken weak in terms of education, culture, body, religion and society, whereas males are considered as strong in every aspects of life. Because of this deep-rooted gender conception, men dominate women. Thus, the main target of the feminists has become to change or revolt against such misconceptions and the gender constructions. The female writers have written for the emancipation of females from patriarchy as well as to establish women's position in the society.

The feminists think that femininity is their gift given by god. So, they take it as weapon to fight against patriarchy. They put female in the supreme place and show that women are also bold enough to decide whatever is better for their life. Feminism is the quest for female autonomy.

Feminism is a part of women's movement. It is an aggressive conscious feeling of women who begin to reject their own passivity. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. It, therefore, studies women as people who are either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggle against patriarchy to contain their womanhood are generally

considered feminists. Men may also be feminists, but they cannot be pure feminists because of lack of femininity. That's why, unlike ancient women, today feminists are proud of their femaleness and have made a vital tool to femininity to perceive their existence. In this relation Toril Moi, a feminist has defined it in this way: "The words Feminist of Feminism are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement". She further says:

Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature. (204)

The struggle between man and woman, whether in the field of literature or in general life, is the result of the western thought, culture and philosophy that considers woman as a feeble creature from the time of the Old Testament. Woman is created out of man's rib and therefore she is weak. Aristotle declared that "the female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities". Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is inferior to man. We all know Shakespeare's well known quotation "Frailty thy name is woman". Western culture is thus, shaped by the concept that man is superior and woman is inferior; man is one and woman is other; man is active, first, centre and primary and woman is passive, second, periphery and secondary. Such is the concept found in the western philosophy, history, politics, religion as well as in literature. Patriarchal culture, therefore, is prevalent since the very beginning.

There is no unanimous view about the origin of patriarchy. One traditional belief is that patriarchy is the result of biological difference. The Marxist view about its origin

rests on socio-economic condition. They believe in the degeneration of woman's position only when man owned private property. Religious people believe it as god-given.

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. Mary Wollstonecraft recognized this position of woman in the 18th century and writes

...all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society. (103)

Whatever the views, at the centre of patriarchy is the male and female personality, as assigned of sex-roles and stereotype of masculine and feminine characteristics.

Traditionally it was believed that the difference in temperament and sex-roles was determined by genes. For woman primary role was child bearing and family care, whereas men were supposed to support the family. The concept of male-female hierarchy and cultural assumption of male superiority produced a formidable sex-role ideology which was also reinforced by education and training. It was said, taught and argued that male was always superior to female; male has right and power over female and even women happened to believe this male-made assumption as natural.

But the situation did not always remain the same. Women gradually started to become conscious of their secondary situation and began to question it. They began to question the sex-roles assigned to them. One of the vital events of the 18th century was the changing role and increasing importance of woman. They made concern with the woman question without thinking of themselves as feminist. The main concern of the

women in the 18th century was the woman's right to choose her husband and her right to education. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) was the culmination of the increasing female consciousness of the 18th century and which also marks the beginning of modern feminism.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a rambling, indignant, and forceful indictment of how the education system of Wollstonecraft's day conspired to keep women in a state of slavish dependency:

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove their minds are not in a healthy state; for like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season they ought to have arrived at maturity.

(7, Wollstonecraft)

The novelists like Wollstonecraft, Fanny Burney, Charlotte Smith and others dramatized the actual circumstance of female existence. With this they questioned the traditional assumptions about sex-role. These female writers prepared a strong foundation to modern feminism as an approach to literature. When feminism was inaugurated, "behind it", says M.H. Abrams, however, lie two centuries of struggle for women's rights, marked by such books as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, John Stuart Mill's *The subjection of women* (1869) and Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Abrams says, "Feminism continues in our time to be closely inter-related with the movement by political feminists for social, economic and cultural freedom and equality" (234). His view about feminism states it as

a woman's fight for freedom. It is search for equality in social, political, educational, cultural aspects. Or in short, feminism is the quest for autonomous existence required by women.

Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist critical theory can be said to have begun in the 1960s and 1970s with the work that questioned the representation of female characters in the male authored texts and also questioned the exclusion of the women writers from the canvas. Kate Millet has said in *Sexual Politics* (1969), "The essence of politics is power" (205). Feminist criticism is a politically powerful tool whose main task is to make patriarchal society realize their rigid rules and regulations and to make women conscious of the age. Millet reminds the faultfinding primary condition of feminism. To set out in literary field with pluralistic choice of literary methods and theories, the feminist had to act as a socialist with a great patience. Thus, Millet emphasizes pure pluralistic feminists to determine in their field by coming out from the marginalized position.

Edwin Ardener uses the term 'dominant' to designate the male and 'muted' to designate the female. He draws two circles for his diagram of the relationship of the dominant and the muted group. He draws two circles for this diagram. According to him, the two circles indicated two zones. The distinct, dark sector symbolizes the dominant and the other dim or wild zone for woman's life (346).

Like other male critics, Ardener is trying to define a separate culture for women or a subculture. Men and women are the product of the same society but a man is called cultured being and women, wild. Indeed, men have got the power of decision maker, bread winner by the reason of social favor, and women home maker. These shouldn't be

main cause of inferiority and superiority for women and men. In the primitive age, the women began to look after the home and men took the responsibility of bread. Later, the simple division of work placed women in an inferior position.

Feminist criticism is not a unified subject. It covers media, literature and civilization as well. Taking feminism as a multidisciplinary field of knowledge Mark Hawkins Dady says:

Feminist critical theory has always been an interdisciplinary subject; for those who are primarily engaged in literary criticism, it has always been necessary to look beyond the boundaries of purely textual analysis in order to explore both the factors that contribute to the discriminatory treatment of women and those factors that enable women to resist and counter domination. (264)

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) raises the voice against man woman dichotomy as the male ideology makes woman the second sex. Women are made inferior which is just done artificially. She further says that women are not born, but made. Beauvoir has taken liberty to be extraordinary. In *The Second Sex*, she takes art, literature and philosophy as symbols of liberty. She also says that liberty is essential for creation as it gives power to the artist. Marie Bashkirsev also stresses the importance of liberty. Since the women lack liberty, their participation is negligible in society. Bashkiresv says how could women writers became able to fly in literary sky with the pruned and trimmed wings of the stupid and continual constraint of society (Selden, *The Theory of Criticism* 536).

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is an overall account of women and tags given

women. Giving her notion about the essay, *The second Sex* M. H. Abrams notes, “The second Sex is a wide-ranging criticism of identification of women as merely the negative object or “other” to man as defining and dominating subject who is assumed to represent humanity in general” (234).

It is said that females are mysterious being and there are so many things which cannot be understood about female. Women are mystic that they are vast, something reserved and they undergo different process like menstruation, child birth and so forth. Males never understand those processes, but Beauvoir condemns these myths saying that they are natural process and male made myths are false. She further says males also have own naturalness which are never understood by females such as male sexual desire. She claims:

The myth of a woman is a luxury which can appear only if man escapes from demands of his needs, the more relationships are concretely lived the less they are idealized... but along with luxury there is utility; there dreams where irresistibly guided by interest. Surely most of the myths had roots in the spontaneous attitude of man toward his own existence and toward the world around him. But going beyond experience toward the transcendent idea was deliberately used by patriarchal society for purpose of self justification; through the myths this society imposed its laws and customs upon individuals in a picturesque, effective manner it is under a mythical form that group imperative is indoctrinated into each conscience. (999)

Beauvoir criticizes the male made myths about women that myth is just a mirage which is

not related with reality at all. If one looks them closely that disappears from its existence.

Virginia Woolf has also expresses the same in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1928). She says that women must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. It is taken as the first blow in patriarchal structure. Here, she is not raising the issue of women in general but she is specially talking about the plight of women writers. Woolf imagines a society where man and woman would come together in purpose and desire. She is the first critic to include the socio-economic dimension as the inevitable part of the female's writing. According to her, women writers have been discouraged from the history. She says, "She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest and their married life perfect" (819).

Elaine Showalter, an American feminist critic and professor of English at Princeton University has written many books on feminism. Among them her *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is the outstanding one. Since she finds feminist criticism no more unified she presents her view in her essay entitled *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*. In this essay, she finds that feminist criticism is not unified, but more adventurous in theory. Therefore, pointing out the pluralism of feminist criticism she says that recent criticism comprises many modes. She published one influential work of feminist criticism, *Towards the Feminist Poetics* (1977). In this work Showalter provides a survey of the literatures written by the famous female writers of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through this work Showalter raised a question about the problems of not including the books written by female writers in the literary course and to be printed. Further than this, she argued for the separate

canon building of the female's literary texts. She says, "...women's literature must go beyond these scenarios of compromise, madness, and death... Its purpose is to discover the new world" (1229). She has said that female psyche is influenced by general subculture, but within it there is their own subculture which forms a collective experience of women of everywhere. Generally, feminists have rejected all patriarchal notions. Showalter invented the term 'gynocritics' to describe the study of women as writers, in which, women are invited to speak for themselves from whatever situation they are in. She says that women are different in terms of nature, race, culture and notion so they cannot be studied universally. Women texts should have specific style of reading. The text written by female writers should be read from the gynocritical point of view to justify the womanhood in the text. The difference and the originality of the texts are to be sought by the gynocritics. Gynocriticism is an attempt to establish feminist tradition.

Elaine Showalter distinguishes between two forms of feminist criticism:

There are two distinct modes of feminist criticism and to conflate them (as most commentator does) is to remain permanently bemused by their theoretical potentialities. The first mode is ideological, it is concerned with the feminist as reader, and it offers feminist reader, and offers feminist reading of texts which considers the images and stereotypes of women in literature. The second mode of criticism engendered by this process is the study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psycho dynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective female, and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition. (335)

The first type is concerned with woman as reader, which Showalter labels 'feminist critique'. The second type deals with woman as writer and Showalter calls this 'gynocriticism'. A woman as a writer considers "women as a producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women" (Daiches, 1226). Women are the producer of the text, language, themes, images and so forth. She gives space to her own experience, where women as reader read the text from the women's point of view. She adds:

...it is historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. The omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. (1226)

Showalter has entitled women's writing and women's culture in which she says that women have their own types of culture. They have their own types of body, the speaking styles, the languages, the capacity of thinking and behaving, the psyche, all are their own sorts and males have their own. So, they are naturally different. In the discussion of women languages, Elaine Showalter asserts that feminist criticism is in the wilderness. But the poet Robert Grave's argument in "The White Goddess," at first or in the prehistory, there was matriarchal society and women's language was in existence. But Showalter expresses a private form of women's communication and culture on the basis of ethnographic evidence, which is later blamed on ritualized and unintelligible female language for esoteric knowledge and they were burned (Lodge, *Modern Criticism* 340).

In her book *A literature of their Own*, she discusses women's functions and also women's language. She stresses women's experience which helps her to differentiate

women in Feminist Criticism (Selden, *A Reader's Guide* 134-153): The Feminine, The Feminist, and The Female. The first phase, feminine, is the period between 1840 to 1880. In this phase, women were silent and used to accept male domination. In other words, the women writers followed masculine tradition. However, they wrote for equality with males but could not revolt in the male standard. George Elliot belongs to this phase. The second phase, feminist phase, is the period between 1880 to 1920. This phase is more challenging period for women who were required to protest against male cruelty. They oppose male tradition of writing. They tried to condemn male styles. Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope, Oliver Schreiner belong to this phase. This phase is better known as protest stage. They began to create their own style of writing. In defining the term feminist Troil Moi says:

The word feminist or feminism are political labels indicating supports for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. Feminist criticism, then is a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a gender in literature. (204, Jefferson)

Although behind the feminist literary criticism there lies a long struggle of two centuries for women's right, it got its clear shape only in the 1960s. The terms feminist or feminism are related with the women's political movement. Therefore, feminist criticism is a kind of a political discourse having the aim of struggling against patriarchy and sexism. The primary element of politics is always power and feminist critics always try to show that they are suppressed to a great extent.

According to Showalter, the third phase is dated from 1920 to present, the female

phase. This phase is the period of women's awakening. Women began to develop the idea of female writing. Writers showed more consciousness towards their own sex. Women began to work as activists and revolutionary as well. It includes the writers as Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield. This phase is devoted to the search for female language, freedom, selfhood and individuality by women. Indeed Showalter's historical approach to women's culture allows a feminist critic use theories based on non-feminist disciplines.

In defining female, Troil Moi says that male and female are biological creation unlike the feminine which is culturally created. She is female and he is male for certain biological features. To show the distinction between feminist and female Moi further says, "Men can be feminists but they cannot be women, just as whites can be anti racist but not black" (208).

Moi opines that femaleness is a matter of biology. Female denotes the physical appearance of women. Only politically innocent and theoretically unaware people think that only common female experiences produce feminist analysis of women's situation. Biology has nothing to do with feminist analysis of women's situation. In other words, being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. Moi again emphasizes the point that female tradition in literary criticism is not necessarily a feminist one. Even according to her, man can be feminist and the criticism produced by male feminist critics may not be convincing in that men always speak from a different position than women under patriarchy.

In defining feminine, Moi says:

That feminine represents social construct and female denotes biological

aspect. In this respect she says thus feminine represents nurture and female nature. In this usage, femininity is a cultural construct: one is born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. (209)

However, from the 1970s on, most feminist critics reject the genderless mind, finding that the "imagination" cannot evade the conscious or unconscious structures of gender. Gender, it could be said, is part of that culture-determination which Oates says serves as inspiration. Such a position emphasizes "the impossibility of separating the imagination from a socially, sexually, and historically positioned self." This movement of thought allowed for a feminist critique as critics attacked the meaning of sexual difference in a patriarchal society/ideology. Images of male-wrought representations of women (stereotypes and exclusions) came under fire.

The female experience, then, began to take on positive affirmations. The Female Aesthetic arose expressing a unique female consciousness and a feminine tradition in literature as it celebrated an intuitive female approach in the interpretation of women's texts. It "spoke of a vanished nation, a lost motherland; of female vernacular or Mother Tongue; and of a powerful but neglected women's culture." Writers like Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, emerging out of the Victorian period and influenced by its writings were perhaps the first women to recognize this. In "Professions for Women," Woolf discusses how a woman writer seeks within herself "the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber," inevitably colliding against her own sexuality to confront "something about the body, about the passions."

Showalter agrees with Sandra Gilbert that feminist criticism "wants to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the

connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority" (Gilbert, 310). However, Showalter is concerned with the way that the feminist critique continually challenges male critical theory, "the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems" (Showalter, 310). In saying this, Showalter is acknowledging that feminist criticism must look towards a new way of understanding female writing and literature.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) concern themselves with well-known women writers of the nineteenth century, but they too find that general concerns, images, themes because the authors that they have treated wrote on a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are both overtly and covertly patriarchal. The main propose of gynocriticism is to study well-known women authors and another is to rediscover women's history and culture, particularly women's community that have nurtured female creativity. Another related purpose is to discover neglected or forgotten women writers.

Gerda Learner has refuted most of the anti-feminist notion of women's subculture. He says that it is very hard to live in subculture. But he agrees upon women's culture. He defines it as, "Women live a duality – as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture" (346). Thus, in the general society they have to go with norms but they are wise and active in their own culture. He has explained why history is only male centered and women are completely absent. The concept of history for women was inappropriate (Lodge, *Modern Criticism* 345). By this description one thing is clear

that women themselves are not the reason to be unfit, but it was a male desire, not to give the women any respect in the history. Women's interest of reading, during the time at their home was considered unnatural. Learner felt sorry in the absence of women's activities in the history. However, in the English history, both queen Elizabeth and queen Victoria were mindful of their nation.

Males have thought themselves as the ruler of the world. This conception has biased their thinking and judgement. Instead of believing in labour, they prioritise sex. Whereas women's distinctive views are broad in the literary field. That is anatomy is textuality to destiny. Helen Cixous has also supported this views saying, "More body, hence more writing" (Lodge, *Modern Criticism* 336). She gives importance to woman's body. Cixous says, "Write yourselves, your body must be heard, only then will the immense resource of the conscious spring forth". She continues elsewhere, "I write woman, woman must write woman, and man, man". She further expresses her experience of a woman who is a unique being. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible and her writing is wonderful like music and painting (Selden, *The Theory of Criticism* 541). As men and women are biologically different, human writing must contain the diverse biological reality of each sex.

Cixous is a modern feminist critic. She has researched the status of women at the end of the twentieth century. She is searching for woman's existence and her actual human right by raising the question 'Where is She?' in "Stories" (Lodge, *Modern Criticism* 288). The crowd is no company this saying has been appropriate in women's lives because patriarchal authority is all round which makes women writers to do more struggle for self-definition.

Perception differs from individual to individual. Diverse textuality is the consequence of diverse bodies. If anatomy is destiny all the males of society should be perfect; but it is not so. Human destiny is dependent on social environment, individual effort, and inheritance. And Showalter's research on womanhood and the third phase female leads a woman to be proud upon self. According to her, it is source of imagery. Thus, the feminist writer now learns about biological power, through which an actual idea can be conceptualized. They began to count on themselves, as a crucial person and want a fundamental solidity in their writing.

Literary history gives us a record of women participation in literature since ancient times. According to *A history of English Literature*, the constant effort of women writers has been seen with their autobiography from the seventeenth century. It says, women writers chose fiction as a research about their womanhood and the purpose of the novels was to change the social history. Woolf has also prioritized fiction in her book *A Room of One's Own* and has said, "Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction" (15). To succeed in any field she accents genius and constant effort. With relation to genius, Woolf says, "Lock up your libraries if you like, but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (70). Woolf praises Jane Austen as fore-runner for their great ability to write even in strong masculine period. Woolf dislikes the pure masculine and feminine and considers them fatal for creation. So, she has taken the support of S T Coleridge's view of two head on one body of the fusion of masculine and feminine which is useful for the art of creation. Most of the great writers do have these qualities. Whatever they present looks natural.

Michele Barrett, another feminist raises an exciting argument that writers

shouldn't be bound to any particular culture and gender. Instead, they should be free. The evaluation of a text on the basis of gender is quite false. She says that texts have no fixed meanings; their interpretations depend on the situation and the ideology of readers (140). Barrett is quite right on the text division. Before some decades, the texts were analysed from the gender point of view. Accordingly history up to the Victorian period, many women writers had changed their actual names into male ones for right judgement. Before Austen and after her, there were well-thought of women writers, but they were forgotten after their death. There are also examples of many women writers who have committed suicide because they did not get social support of literary appreciation. Among these, the most remarkable were the suicides of Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf.

Women's writing is quite different from that of men's. Some psychoanalytical oriented feminists' criticism helped to discover the cause of it. According to the feminist's belief, these are the main tools such as author's psyche, gender, mastery over language, sex roles and socialization. Yet female identity stimulates women's writing because at first women writers had taken their own gender as a painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy. Gubar and Gilbert have made clear of the fact of women writers who have been mentally, physically, economically paralysed in their texts. They are in search of sisterhood as a support to defend themselves from alienation of male writers. They are frightened with the insult of inferiority from their male counterparts (Lodge, *Modern Criticism* 343). So, they struggle more than needed for artistic self-definition.

Everywhere women are neglected to some extent or other. Many women writers have a very tender feeling towards women's pitiable identity. They really appreciate the

feminist politics for social change. Sasha Walby in 1990 has also pressed one of the reality of the end of the twentieth century. In *Practicing Feminism: Identity, Difference and Power*, she appreciates the feminists for their effective transformations through direct challenge to patriarchal dominant modes of thinking and hegemonic gender identities.

Walby says:

women are formally equal citizens and most women are paid workers, women are still expected to be domestic creatures first and foremost, as wives, and to put the needs and interests of others before their own. (100)

In 1974, Nancy Chodorow talked about the challenging future of women.

According to her, sex-role development of girls in modern society is very complex. They go to school to prepare for life in a technologically and socially complex society (54).

Caroline O. N. Moser, a recent feminist, also agrees with her and says that the modern responsibility of women is more challenging to them because they have to pay a triple role in the third world: the roles of reproductive work, productive work and community managing work (27).

Belindra Kermer in 1991 talks about gender issue which affects feminist researchers. She also agrees with Sandra Gilbert's demand of sisterhood of 1979. Kermer asserts that women's knowledge and experience are crucial to understand the socially constructed world and only one woman can truly and fully understand others. To develop women, women themselves have to face with difficulties and dilemma of patriarchal setting.

Feminism came into existence to solve women's social problems. There are different kinds of attempts to classify feminism, according to ideological streams such

as liberal, radical, socialist and Marxist. Liberal feminism focuses on social equality and opportunity for the development of women. Radical feminists give importance to femaleness and celebrate the feminine values and traits. Socialists are particularly concerned about women's social rights. Their aims are to unionize women workers on the matter of better wages and conditions. And according to Marxism, all human beings are politically and socially at the same level and they should also have the same economic power to maintain a dominant role in society.

In *Women and Human rights* (1995) Katering Tomasevski has demanded human rights for women. She writes "Women indeed do not enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled by the mere fact that they are human" (ix). "Women's rights are allowances that societies have made for motherhood, not for their womanhood".

Tomasevski quite disagrees with the social notion and says:

Not all women are mothers. More important those who are not mothers only they are also workers, electors, medical doctors, political prisoners, trade union leaders, immigrants, soldiers, or refugees. (ix)

The writer here demands equal human rights which should be protected for possible women's advancement.

Thus, modern feminists are more alert of their existence. The earlier aim of feminism is different from the recent aim. The women writers express their desire that women should also be a part of history, and to emphasize on equality or legal reform for women's rights.

Chapter 3

Emma as a Voice of Feminist

Anger is not the word that comes to mind when one thinks about Jane Austen. But Austen is also a formidable feminist critic. Austen's voice is, to be sure, a gentler one, softened by end-of-the-book marriages and a wonderful irony and sense of humor. Austen comes across as a realist, someone who knows that life is tough, especially for women. But rather than focus on how society's restrictions could cause someone to have a nervous breakdown, Austen focuses on the reasoning skills women need to survive, which, to me, is the ultimate feminist statement.

Before starting the novel, she had said, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* 157). So, Austen began the first word of the novel with the name of her heroine, Miss Emma Woodhouse and describes her as:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. (1)

Emma Woodhouse, the clever heiress, learns to use her mind responsibly by reflecting on the lessons learned from her botched attempts at match-making and her misbehavior at Box Hill. She is physically pretty with a beautiful face and figure, tall elegant and hazel eyed. Austen has presented Emma as a generous human whose humanity is not limited to her family only; she is very vigorous outside as well. She is a media of the social interaction of Highbury. She is a simple and easy going female.

Though she is heirless to Hartfield, she never displays superior attitudes. She always presents a balanced self.

The story of Emma is set in a large pompous village of Highbury, sixteen miles from the crowded city of London. However, Austen has not described the natural sceneries of the village, only seasonal. We can imagine that is a beautiful small civilized family's practice of generosity upon one another. The thin population of plain people, its location and the style of transport remind us that it is ancient.

Woman is one of the two biological categories of a human being. Culturally, she is quite different. As a woman, Emma is quite unique in that she teaches other women to spend their lives. Emma has introduced herself in an original way. However, she is culturally as active and gentle lady. In her time, a woman had a very confined role. Nevertheless, Emma liked her culture, despite all its rigid traditional norms. At that time, women used to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families and others. Emma looks at this tradition from a different perspective. Emma as a social being has been involved in social work. Her activities are wonderful and uncommon against the background of her age. She has very skillfully handled her own home and society. Her attachment with all the characters of the novel makes her to be very popular and dear in Highbury. It is her humanly feminine feeling which trains her to behave equally to all.

Emma's cultural role as femininity is also a very energetic. Though she has just stepped into adolescence, she is quite familiar with human life. The refinement she acquired might be by her social experience and her hobby of reading books. Mrs. Weston talks about Emma's fondness of book since the age of twelve to Mr. Knightley. She says that Emma has arranged very neatly and sometimes alphabetically the lists of her books

which she needs. She tells him of Emma's genius even at the age of ten by recounting how Emma used to puzzle her seventeen years old sister by asking difficult question.

Mr. Woodhouse is Emma's father but he is just the guardian. Emma manages her home since she was twelve. He loves Emma but he never worries about her necessities as a young girl. She receives neither company nor other responsibilities from her father. Mr. Woodhouse dislikes the social norms, especially those regarding marriage, which according to him, destroys a well constructed family. He mostly worries about her elder daughter and Miss Taylor's accounts of who get married. He wants to keep Isabella with her family at Hartfield. And he is also internally dissatisfied with Emma's match-making job and says, "My dear, pray do not make any more matches, they are silly things and break up one's family circle grievously" (11). In a sense, he is imposing patriarchal nature upon her daughter.

Hence, he is not anxious of his daughter's marriage. He perhaps might have left the decision solely on Emma. But when the marriage between Miss Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley is fixed, he is not happy. Even he becomes able to control himself that his suffering makes his daughter discourage. Mr. Woodhouse indeed, is an odd type of guardian. He lacks good socialization. We find him unlearnt of social rules which might be the cause of his not getting the company of woman. He is a widower, later; Emma introduces him with so many cultural rules and creates a situation of interaction.

Domestic love and care instruct human beings to sacrifice. This type of family exists in the Woodhouse family. Mr. Woodhouse for the sake of her daughter remains a widower. Because of loneliness, he is nervous and easily depressed. Emma is a very self-reliant girl because of the homely freedom. It is perhaps Mr. Woodhouse's desire to see a

novelty in his daughter so which Emma acts, he is silent. Mr. Woodhouse is Emma's guardian, but he never behaves as a guardian. As Gray Kelly has said "the parents of Austen's heroines are useless- if present, foolish; if wise, dead or absent" (115). Here, Mr. Woodhouse dislikes Emma's match-making job and says her not to do. According to him, marriage brings separation in a well-sequenced family.

Social freedom is the most essential thing. Otherwise, whatever be the noble thought and talent, all will probably be useless. Emma thus, tries to give the message that free domesticity is needed to be flourished in the society because the free domesticity means getting individual liberty which is root of opportunities despite the hard and rigid social norms.

Emma disapproves of all anti-feminist notions which state man's existence is possible without women and women hold narrow and conservative disposition. Her interest in match-making shows that she is an open-minded woman. She plays an active role to perform the job very successfully. She never depends upon others suggestions and decisions. Despite oppositions, she tries to solve the marriage problem. She establishes herself as a feminist by doing social work and by paying attention to women's welfare.

Even before Austen, there were novels with the heroine's name: *Pamela* (1740), *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782). These novels might have contained important women's roles. But the women of those novels have been interpreted as feminine beings in a patriarchal society where Emma is a feminist. Every move she takes, she tends to resist the patriarchal notion. She seems very strong and holds enough power so that she faces the less suffering.

Concept of Marriage

Marriage is a main theme in almost every one of Jane Austen's works. Knowing this, it makes many raise their eyebrows when hearing an accusation of Jane Austen being a feminist. It is important however, to look at the context in which Jane uses marriage as a theme and the tone of it. The view of marriage is always portrayed in the woman's point of view. No matter what novel is read, this can be observed by the reader. In *Emma*, it is clearly evident the view of marriage that the men have is rather obsolete. So, it means that the men must be in want of the woman, and not the other way around. The man being in need of the woman is clearly a feminist view.

To the modern readers, the theme of marriage in *Emma* seems to be narrower one. It is so because the social structure, values and norms of the eighteenth century have been greatly changed during the last two centuries. The women of Eighteenth century were entirely depended either on their fathers or husbands. Woman was taken simply as a machine to produce babies and as object to fill man's desire without any distinctive identity in the society. Thus, in such social background marriage, then, was taken as a contract made on the basis of money and social dignity. There was in fact, no room for the spiritual love. The society was entirely guided by the traditional thoughts. However to a modern reader, the blatant class distinctions of *Emma* seem to be tasteless. But both the social class and money have played an important part affecting the concept of marriage in *Emma*.

In such a social background of *Emma*, a question arises, how did at least affection take place in Austen's concept of marriage? Austen pleads for the spiritual love which she thinks can be the only remedy for the suffering in life. So, she was deeply conscious

of the emotional as well as sensational notion of love. Though this type of notion of love was opposed by the orthodox, it is reflected in *Emma*. The match making of Emma Woodhouse depends on her psychological study of different marriageable people. But ultimately Emma Woodhouse becomes unsuccessful in her mission of matchmaking. Though she fails, she never regrets and it shows her feminist move.

Emma's future aim is quite different, that is, to be independent. She has contrived the carpet business and makes others also independent by employment. At first, Emma didn't prioritize marriage in human life. Her opinion is that if one is rich and hearty, they needn't marry. It seems that those days money matters for happy life. Emma personally dislikes getting married because of several reasons. First, her domestic love and care for her father and the next, the fear of losing freedom and independence. It is her cultural knowledge where after marriages such types of days would not be sure in women's lives. So, Emma is afraid of the general condition of women in her culture and describes the actual reason for not marrying as:

I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield: and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's. (66)

Emma therefore, doesn't want to marry though most of the women of Highbury are mistresses of their husband's home. If marriage is for partner, she claims, she has nephews and a niece. However, she is reminded by Harriet that to be an old maid like Miss Bates is a very dreadful thing. She replies:

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 a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sort of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as any body else. (79)

This statement evokes frustration with the fact that only affluent women could literally afford independence, while women of lower classes had to marry to avoid ridicule.

Emma believes that socialization leads to proper marriage. So, she chooses ideal marriage because it is meant to signify a civilized society. Match-making is a critical job especially for a young girl like Emma. Her attempt is a challenge to society. This proves if the will is strong, neither youth nor gender nor society can become a barrier to anything. She is an intelligent young woman with too little to do and no ability to change her location or everyday routine. Though her family is loving and her economic circumstances comfortable, her everyday life is dull indeed, and she has few companions of her own age when the novel begins. Emma's determined and inept matchmaking may represent a muted protest against the narrow scope of a wealthy woman's life, especially that of a woman who is single and childless.

Austen's *Emma* presents the philosophy about marriage that is of ideal marriage, which emphasizes the marriage of the true minds. Emma has proved that sex is not an obstacle to do anything in the world. The social rules and regulations stand as boundaries in each step of women's success. So, unnecessary social norms should be removed.

Women's World in *Emma*

Austen's *Emma* is about the reality of women's lives, which, for women in the

eighteenth century, meant living in a straightjacket of propriety. Women's education consisted of a smattering of a variety of ultimately useless skills only served to sacrifice women's strength of mind and body in exchange for beauty. Austen was interested in how the education of her day shaped both men and women's personalities, and, while her tone is comic but not strident, the picture she presents is not a pretty one.

Austen comments on the sexual politics of the time through her comparisons of the men and women in *Emma*. She illustrates a clear picture of the traditional women's sphere by restricting her female character's influence to the home and their children. While her male characters are in control of their households, finances, and careers, women's concerns appear to be significantly more trivial. In *Emma*, it is apparent that women are considered the weaker sex by male characters. Mr. Knightly illustrates this belief when he criticizes Frank Churchill's handwriting citing that, "It is too small – wants strength. It is like a woman's writing." (272). It was really hard for women to be independent those days. Mrs. Elton's acute surprise to discovering that Mrs. Weston is Emma's governess is in accordance with such views. She remarks to Emma that "Having understood as much, I was rather surprised to find her so very ladylike. But she is really quite the gentlewomen." (254). Emma's indignation towards this remark reverberates with Austen's frustrations that independent, hard-working women were considered vulgar or inferior, and shown little respect.

Another area where men had advantage over women was in marriage. It was considered more acceptable for men to marry above their social standing than for women. Mr. Weston marries Mrs. Churchill, who is his superior, as Augusta Hawkins is similarly superior to Mr. Elton. However, Mr. Elton ridicules the idea of an attachment

between himself and Harriet, exclaiming to Emma, “I am not so totally despair of an equal alliance as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!” (122).

Austen uses Isabella, Emma’s sister, to represent married women in 19th century England. Although Isabella is popular for her “tenderness of heart” (245), she is not a strong portrayal of motherhood. She dulls in comparison to Emma’s wit and energy. Mr. Knightly proclaims that “Emma is...the cleverest in her family” while Isabella is described as “slow and diffident.”(33). Through Isabella’s character Austen conveys that a mother’s life offered women little opportunity for intellectual growth. Furthermore, whether married or single, women’s pastimes were limited and trivial, consisting of social visits, charity, or refining their musical or artistic abilities.

Austen chose to make women’s economic anxiety a dominant theme in her work, be it through cautionary tales of fallen women who have gone down a slippery slope into abject poverty, Jane Fairfax’s fear of becoming a governess, or the careful economy of Mrs. Smith, left penniless because of the profligacy of her late husband. Austen captured every moments in great detail, focusing narrowly on the lives of the landed gentry in rural England and more particularly, the little triumphs and defeats faced by the young women attempting to secure their future survival through respectable marriage.

Happiness is a matter of chance and marriage provides a state of security. One would think that a writer intent on celebrating the institution of marriage would lavish a tremendous amount of ink on the actual ceremony, but that is not the case with Austen. All of the weddings take place in the last chapter and action is dispatched with quickly, often in as little as a paragraph, as we see in the last paragraph of *Emma*:

The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have

no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own. – “Very little white satin, very few white lace veils; a most pitiful business! – Selina would stare when she heard of it.” – But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. (484)

Clearly, then, the wedding, while it signals the end of the story, is not that important to Austen. Instead, what matters is the reality of women’s lives, which is very much in sync with Wollstonecraft’s ideas about how a false system of education denies women the skills they need to make good choices for themselves and their families.

Women’s Existence and Victory in *Emma*

There are altogether about seventy-three characters in the novel. About forty one of these are females and thirty two males. Emma, the central figure uses her womanhood in very gentle way as a power. As Virginia Woolf has said in *A Room of One’s Own*, money and certain status are necessary for a woman to do something in the society. Emma is the most significant character because she represents the feminist or powerful woman of the novel. Emma has many roles and she succeeds in all because of her sensibility and sincerity towards her roles.

Emma is a heart of Hartfield. She has the ability to identify as a human and to base all her activities on humanitarian ground. She understands her culture well with all its patriarchal rules. It is her humanity that teaches her to be conscious and she is capable of presenting a very favourable way of life. It seems that Emma has invented the concept

of the struggle for existence. Here existence means reputed personality. To get social reputation one must struggle. So, Emma is famous among other characters because she overrides culture in her struggle for the self. It is her personality spontaneously leads her to do social work. Emma has command over her own home and society in the sector of socialization. One should have one's own self-realization. Although Emma doesn't oppose Mr. Martin's marriage proposal to Harriet by refusing to encourage this match, she expresses her anti-patriarchal tendencies.

Including Emma, other female characters have also learnt about their self-hoods. Miss Bates seems to be proud of her self. So, she never realizes that she is an ugly spinster. Harriet Smith's marriage is performed with her agreement only. Later, Mrs. Elton is one of the women who gives importance to herself and has also kept a desire to help others. Likewise, Mrs. Wetson also values herself and is always kind to others. Mrs. Bates, an old woman, has suffered much. But she never troubles her future by past event. She is strong and can go with times. In this way, we get women's self-recognition and their responses on this basis.

Families that live in Hartfield include the families of Woodhouse, Bate, Martin, Knightly, Wetson and Elton. The Bates family symbolizes the middle class family, they have bitter past but they never talk about and be sorry. There is the good understanding between the mother and the daughters. Miss Bates doesn't complain of fate on being a spinster. Instead, she is satisfied to take care of her mother. Martin's family presents one of the common lives of the society. The family is socially dishonored by their farming occupation. So, they are absent in most of the social functions of Highbury. Yet they are civilized and live in harmony with each other. Mr. Martin's desire to marry Miss Smith is

not opposed by the family, although Miss Smith is illegitimate. Elizabeth, Mr. Martin's sister, actually helps him to deliver the letter of a marriage proposal to Miss Smith. Thus, the Martins are progressive in terms of the current cultural standards. The Wetson family lives at Randall. Mrs. Wetson is lucky for Wetson's family. She was the first governess of the Woodhouse family. She is a motherly-hearted woman. Emma, who is a representative figure of Highbury is the product of her care and affection. It is Mrs. Wetson well-experienced femininity that enables her to inspire Mr. Frank Churchill who is motherless and brought up at the uncle's home. Mr. Frank also praises her disposition and honors her as a mother. And like a mother, she worries about Mr. Frank and always wants his presence at home. Hence, women members in every family are considered useful not only for their home but for the society as well. Most of the women are mistress of their home. They very adeptly have become favourable to their families. It is like what Mary Wollstonecraft says, "Some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves because intellect will always govern" (9).

The frantic attempt of Emma in the match-making activity, which appears funny to us in our more enlightened age, is actually painful and somewhat pathetic to read about. But her interest on match-making is some what related to give safety and respect to the women. The Woodhouse's accompany enables Miss Taylor to command over human competence which serves her to be a mistress of Mr. Weston's home at Randall. Emma gets them married. Mr. Weston is a widower and is uninterested to marry. Miss Taylor is a governess. By performing marriage between the two Emma gave her a safety, social status and save Mr. Weston from being loneliness. Emma is kind to others as well. If she hears that anyone is sick in the village, she goes to visit and to help if

possible. Her love of parties is an expression of her desire to know people intimately.

Harriet is another social being who is orphan and alone. Emma loves her as her sister or intimate friend because she is very innocent. Harriet is a seventeen years old pretty girl. She is described by Austen as:

Harriet certainly was not clever, but she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to. (20)

It is Harriet's virtuous nature and beauty; Emma keeps a hope of her being a gentle man's daughter. In Emma's period, society was so cruel that it used to degrade such a girl whose parental history was unknown. Because Harriet is beautiful, Emma would like to see her get some social respect. She says to Harriet;

I would have you so firmly established in good society, as to be independent even of Hartfield and Miss Woodhouse. I want to see you permanently well- connected. (24)

Emma finds Harriet more innocent than Miss Jane so, she ranks Harriet over Jane Fairfax, Mrs. Elton and herself. To help Harriet's adjustment with the new age, Emma educates her with regards to the worldly things which are needed to meet the demands of life, Emma's opinion is as follows:

Oh! The coldness of Jane Fairfax! Harriet is worth a hundred such. And for a wife-a sensible man's wife-it is invaluable. I mention no names; but happy the man who changes Emma for Harriet. (201)

Emma thinks it is her duty to find a deserving wife for Mr. Elton who will make him an useful person in the society. She finds in Miss Smith a good match for Mr. Elton.

She imagined that the marriage of the two would be excellent. Harriet would achieve social respect and Mr. Elton would achieve a comfortable domestic life. And Emma began to plan to make them close. But her plans were wasted as she saw Mr. Elton's real face:

Miss Smith! I never thought of Miss Smith in the whole course of my existence-never paid her any attention, but as your friend.... Oh! Miss Woodhouse! Who can think of Miss Smith, when Miss Woodhouse is near. (100)

But Emma's scheme fails. However, she was less sorry for being a failure than for the adverse affect that it had on Harriet. She tries her best to keep Harriet engaged by offering books and her company.

Emma's second attempt at match-making for Harriet with Mr. Frank Churchill also fails because she follows the conventional method of match-making. She still believes the dream of a young girl is a rich husband and that of a young man is a beautiful wife. Harriet has faith in Emma and obeys her innocently. Mr. Martin is a young farmer who has sent a letter to Harriet with a marriage proposal, even then Emma is planning the union between Harriet and Mr. Elton. Harriet knowing Emma's intention, rejects the letter of Mr. Martin. Though Emma doesn't say it directly and has left the decision on Harriet herself, she still advises Harriet with respect to the choice. She says:

You must be the best judges of your own happiness. If you prefer Mr. Martin to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with, why should you hesitate? You blush Harriet. (41)

At the same time, Emma also reminds Harriet of the human existence and importance of woman saying, “A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked, or because he is attached to her, and can write a tolerable letter” (42). From these statements we can assume that, she is trying to awaken Harriet to the reality of a new age where human self identity is important. In a sense, it is the female identity that a woman must hold to exist in the society.

In the novel, Emma has a revelation of her self-centeredness.

The first error, and the worst, lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious—a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more. (64)

Emma’s self realization helped Emma to change the flaws of her character, but that did not mean compromising who she was and what she stood for.

At first, Emma believes that if one can be happy as a single, then it is not necessary to marry. Marriage can become a means to confining a woman’s role and of killing her will and desire. Miss Bates and Emma are free in their gentle way. Though Emma doesn’t think marriage is essential to a happy life, she still believes that it is necessary for the lonely people of the world. In Harriet’s case, despite Emma’s endeavours to see Harriet tied to an honourable family, later she gets married to a person of low economic class but a person of Harriet’s own choice. Mr. Knightley has interfered many times on Elton’s account, saying that beauty doesn’t matter because men of sense don’t want silly wives and obscure girls like Harriet. And Mr. Elton is an ill-humoured

person who never consents to an imprudent match. Though he may talk sentimentally, he will act rationally. Mr. Knightley accuses Emma for rejecting the match between Mr. Martin and Miss Smith. He advises her that Mr. Martin will be a suitable match for Harriet who then, will be safe, respectable and happy for ever after. But Emma is happy for her own decision, and does what she thinks, is good for Harriet. But on the other hand, she also becomes happy when she hears about Harriet's marriage with Mr. Martin. Harriet herself has decided to marry him. Emma is very much excited by Harriet's decision which disproves the social expectation that a woman will always marry one who asks her to marry him. In a sense, she always wants to break such false notions which go against female right and refinement.

Emma thinks that other people are like she is. Most of the time she is deceived, but she thinks "The world is not theirs, nor the world's law" (301). Though *Emma* contains a few small families of middle class, but their way of living is very unique only because of the women's role in the family. And, the relationship between women is much effective and definite than that of men. Emma's relationship with Mrs. Weston is more like that of a mother than a governess. Because of her affection, Emma becomes a sensible lady of a society. And, at least, when she becomes more matured, they become more friendly and share their secrets. When Mrs. Weston feels uneasy at home she seeks Emma's company more than that of her own husband. Once, Mrs. Weston is troubled by the secret engagement of her step son Mr. Frank with Miss Fairfax. She confines her anxiety with Emma who took it lightly and even complimented Mrs. Weston on this special engagement, although she herself would have liked Mr. Frank to be engaged to Miss Harriet. Mr. Weston clarifies Knightley's doubt upon Emma's friendship with

Harriet. He supposes the friendship will be harmful for both. Mrs. Weston claims their intimacy: “Emma, must do Harriet good and Harriet may be said to do Emma good” (28)

Mrs. Weston feels surprised and sorry for Mr. Knightley’s narrow mind and says:

Mr. knightley, I shall not allow you to be a fair judge in this case. You are so much used to live alone, that you do not know the value of a companion; and perhaps no man can be a good judge of the comfort a woman feels in the society of one of her own sex, after being used to it all her life. I can imagine your objection to Harriet Smith. She is not the superior young woman which Emma’s friend ought to be. (28)

She further states to understand Emma’s noble qualities which she mentions to Mr. Knightley; “She is an excellent creature.... Where Emma errs once, she is in the right a hundred times” (31). It shows how Emma’s genuine character and the female power that she holds in her life have affected other women member in the novel.

Finally, Emma accepts the marriage proposal of Mr. Knightley who seems to be fully owed by Emma’s grace and her positive attitude towards the women in her society. Mr. Knightley’s full devotion towards Emma can be seen through these lines:

If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. You hear nothing but truth from me. I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it. (379)

If we give a closer look at the relationship between men and women in the novel, we find, it is women’s emotion which makes them liberal in their attitudes towards the male family members. For instance, there is a very close intimacy between Emma and

Mr. Woodhouse. They become ready to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of each other. Mrs. Weston also takes much care of her husband and her step son. In return, they too love her much. The affection of Mrs. Martin and Miss Martin for Mr. Martin is praiseworthy. The mother Mrs. Martin ignores her culture and social standard for the sake of her son. The relation between husband and wife of Mr/Mrs. Knightley and Mr/Mrs. Elton seems very comprehensive. Thus, the relation between men and women can be commended only in some relation. Austen has grasped it as one of the truths of her society. Because during that time, English society had a very hard rule and regulation in this context.

In *Emma*, only the patriarchal decisions are not affirmed in family plan. Mostly men lack the feeling to be close to home and their neighbours. It might be their egoism and perhaps self-independent nature which is provided by society. Men are normal among family members in *Emma*, but they seem weak to make good relationship outside of the society among their own category. The Knightley brothers Mr. George Knightley and Mr. John Knightley, being the same family don't talk to each other. Mr. Weston and Mr. Frank are father and son, but they have very little contact. Mr. Frank is less obedient in comparison with women. Mr. Frank is fond of fashion. He doesn't seem to be a sincere son for his parents and his uncles and aunts who adopt him as a son. He is master of his own will.

Mr. Knightley is one of the peculiar persons with his rationality, good judgment and knowledge of human psychology but his narrow and suspicious nature makes him lower in the comparison with Emma's broad and frank vision. Mr. Knightley behaves nicely to Miss Smith but he doesn't like Emma's closeness with Miss Smith. He is

jealous of Mr. Frank whose good personality attracts Emma. In a sense, he tries to assert the full authority on Emma. In this way, Austen tries to put women power on the top and carefully reflects the social reality where women's roles seem more important than that of men.

When Harriet receives a letter containing a marriage proposal from Robert Martin, Emma remarks that, "It is a good letter, so good in fact...that one of his sisters must have helped him with it." (46). Through this seemingly light humorous remark Austen appears to be making an essential point that women are not only equal to men in regards to writing and expressing themselves, but they are superior. Emma describes the letter's style in detail, asserting that "there were not merely no grammatical errors...the language was strong...and the sentiments it conveyed very much the credit to the writer." (45). Through this clever exchange Austen asserts that women are fully capable of doing many things as well as men, and some things even better.

Nonetheless, Austen tweaks the ending to give it a more feminist turn. Knightley's agreement to move into Hartfield, Emma's home, can be taken as a recognition of her power. The conclusion which seemed tame and placidly conservative thus takes an unexpected turn, as the guarantor of order himself cedes a considerable portion of the power which custom has allowed him to expect. In moving to Hartfield, Knightley is sharing her home, and in placing himself within her domain, Knightley gives his blessing to her rule.

Emma prefers the risky job just for the sake of ideal marriage which is one of the quests of human life. She has once said to her father, "It is the greatest amusement in the world! And after such success you know!" (10). The term "success" here denotes the

victory over the conservative rules of the society. Emma knows that women participation will be more effective and crucial for the society because their sincerity and sentimentality enforce them to be noble towards all human beings. They see only individuality rather than gender.

Austen's *Emma* understands the depths of the female psyche which takes marriage as the ideal paradigm for the most perfect fusion between the individual and society. Austen was able to consistently portray her female characters in the dominant positions without the public objecting or taking offence. Women as the aggressors were a fairly untouched subject at the time, and it was also very questionable. Aggressive women at that time could be considered foolish, which was not at all a desirable reputation. Austen somehow manages in *Emma* to have her women be strong, independent, and aggressive. The female characters do all this, while keeping a spotless reputation, just as Jane succeeded in doing during her life.

Conclusion: Emma as a Feminist Spirit in *Emma*

I have tried to analyze *Emma* through the feminist perspective. Writing within a rigid society, Austen succeeds in giving a spontaneous flow of her feelings regarding what a real human society should be like. The protagonist Emma Woodhouse deviates from the traditional role of women in the nineteenth-century by demonstrating competency and sagacity, suggesting that women in the nineteenth-century refuted their inferior position and started brandishing qualities of intelligence and finesse in society. In a sense, Emma is a true feminist who struggles for her own identity to create a space in a male dominating society.

Although it was uncommon for nineteenth-century women to conduct intellectual conversations, Emma plays an integral role in discussions with Mr. Knightley, her friend and, eventually, her husband. Instead of discussing traditionally female topics of health, children, and family, she gives more priority to intellectual interests that are considered to be more masculine. Personally, I am inspired by Austen's angle of looking at society and at women.

Jane Austen occupies a unique position in the field of fiction. Mostly, her ingenuity is reflected in her presentation of female characters. She wrote *Emma* to study women in her own male dominated society. The role of women members in the novel is very strong despite the tough patriarchal society. The females are very active and they are very positive to outside business as well. The novel was well-accepted since its publication and it has not remained merely age-oriented.

I have recognized Austen as a feminist spirit forever in literary field not only for her keen observation of life and her moral and social perspectives but also for her art that

seeks to remove the barriers between the sexes. Austen's vision of womanhood should be appreciated which guides her to create a realistic picture of the women of her society.

Feminism stands for women's rights and liberty. Austen has raised the voice against man/woman dichotomy where women are made inferior which is just done artificially. In *Emma*, we can take several examples of how women are dominated but at the same moment, Austen has succeeded in presenting Emma and other female characters maintaining their strong stand-points in their homes and society. They are committed to the struggle against the patriarchy and sexism.

The novel shows women's maximum involvement inside and outside the home and its result on socialization. Though Emma's act may be taken as trivial one regarding her attempts of match-making, at a deeper level, her every step is bold which proves her to be an actual feminist. In her attempts of match-making, she fails to match the couples but one should praise her at least for her attempts. She has tried to create her own individuality. She has the abilities to meet the demand of life alone and that matters the most though she fails. So, she never listens to her father and her lover. She is happy in her own decisions. Taking firm decisions within the conservative social norms is itself a strong move and Emma holds such move and proves herself as a true feminist.

In the nineteenth-century, women were expected to marry and be innocent, virtuous, biddable, dutiful and be ignorant of intellectual opinion. However, Emma dictates where she and Mr. Knightley will reside after their marriage. Because Emma is her father Mr. Woodhouse's primary caregiver, she wishes to continue living at her residence, Hartfield, while her father is alive. In order to accommodate Emma's wishes, Mr. Knightley proposes that he move to Hartfield. Mr. Knightley's willingness to

sacrifice his own estate to accommodate Emma's lifestyle illustrates that Emma plays a dominant role in their marriage. The concept of marriage is always seen from the view point of women but the fact is that the men are also in favour of marriage because they want the company of women. And, a male wanting the company of a woman is against the anti-feminist notion. Mr. Knightley relinquishes the traditional male role of head of household, thus allowing Emma to enter a mutual relationship with him. Emma is free from the traditional feminine role of passive subjection to her husband. She demonstrates her competency through making important decisions with her husband, illustrating how women progressed from their traditional roles to undertaking more responsibility. Hence, Austen has succeeded in presenting Emma as a feminist spirit.

Emma is an expression of Austen's feeling of suffocation in an age where a woman's role was defined by subjugated domestic chores. It is probably free from gender conflict. Austen, being influenced by the age, has added the masculine voices in her novel. She has her own vision of life and her ambition is to raise women's status in the society. The female protagonist, Emma, which Austen has created, has played a variety of woman roles: female, feminine and feminist. As a female, Emma is a young beautiful girl of twenty-one. Secondly, her feminine role is very much special. She is a loving and a kind-hearted daughter and sister. She pities her maids and she socializes with her neighbours. She is a good daughter, sister, mistress and neighbour. She is a remarkable woman because she actively participates in the society. She is a social worker, a match-maker and a home-governor.

Emma is famous for her social work. If she hears of anyone's sickness, she immediately visits them and helps them as needed. Because of her match-making job, she

is honoured as the future-maker of Miss Taylor and Miss Smith. She gives them shelter at home and helps them become socially fit women of the age. She wants each person to be happy. In Austen's age, it was not permitted for a woman to work as a homemaker. In defiance of such practice, Emma manages her home. She makes her father familiar with many social rules. She takes care of not only her father but also of her married sister whom she invites to Hartfield from time to time.

Not only Emma, other female characters are also good examples of femininity. They behave as modern females not like ancient ones. They know their duties towards the family and the society. Miss Smith is very faithful towards her mistress. Likewise, Mrs. Weston is also a good example of a woman for her husband and step son. She is sincere to her mistress Emma. Mrs. and Miss Bates are both bold women and happy with their own family circles. Mrs. Elton has a happy home and her attitude is noble to other women. Miss Jane likes to be independent and wants to do job of governess. Austen's fictional world is like her own age where women are not allowed for socially respectable jobs. But the women have always proved themselves better. Thus, Austen wants to prove that women are good at both homes and society. Their roles are not only confined within the limited area. They can equally maintain their family as well as outside business.

In fact, at first, the women's condition was very pitiable. They were neglected mentally, economically and physically by the society as inferior beings. Their involvement outside the home was not allowed. Because of this suppression, the women rebelled. They expressed the reality of the biological difference of man. Their own condition excited them to love themselves. So, feminists brought feminism as a politics for the uplift of women. They began to love their own sex and ignored the past rigid ways

of spending their lives and came out openly to do something for the society. In *Emma*, we too can feel Emma's love for her own sex which always encourages her to be bold in the patriarchal society. She loves the way of her being. She is happy and satisfied with every decisions she makes. Through *Emma*, Jane Austen tries to highlight very gently women's power in each field of social life. She tries to break the patriarchal norms to establish a genderless society. A society should always maintain a good balance between the two different sexes. Austen gave a concrete form to her imagination and feeling by writing *Emma* where all the characters struggle for their existence. Their struggle is for self identity. The research depicts how women participation turns out to be more effective and crucial for society.

Emma is the epitome of a woman rejecting the traditional roles of nineteenth century women by flaunting her acumen and adeptness through engaging in intellectual discussion and decision making. She demonstrates that women can prevail against masculine domination and provide input into decisions. Because women today are following the footsteps of progressive nineteenth-century women, they are continuing to garner larger roles in society. By analyzing *Emma* from the perspective of feminism, I have come across the fact that Austen demanded equality and security for womankind. Her demands have really left a positive mark in the development of women's living standard.

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