

## **The Relationship between Woman's Power and Marriage in the Eighteenth Century English Society in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice***

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### **Introduction to Marriage in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century English Society and Women's Power**

As far as conventional use of the term marriage is concerned, the institution of marriage is the legally or formally recognized union between a man and a woman as partners or spouses. Marriage establishes rights and obligations between spouses, their children and their in-laws.

In the eighteenth century England, the term marriage was evermore legally used as a contract that imposes financial responsibility upon both parties and the term was absolutely used against moral and ethical standards. At such time, marriage sees no standard of one's personal disposition but only one's financial state. Marriage financially connects two people rather than emotional connection. Marrying someone who is financially stable was of monumental importance in the eighteenth century England scenario.

At the beginning of the 18th century, most marriages in England were essentially designed to build up powerful alliances, exchange or acquire land and property. Although people with financially low status were more or less free to choose their own partners for life, the vast majority of marriages among aristocratic, wealthy, and middle-class families were arranged by parents where the prospective bride and bridegroom had little or no say, leaving no room for a man or a woman to marry for their own personal interest.

Children were often betrothed in infancy and married in their teens, frequently to partners they hardly knew, risking disastrous consequences. Marriage was exceedingly tied to social class. Financial status defines one's social class. Women were seldom married to someone from lower social class. Women were constantly meant to tag with a man of high social class. It came with heavy social implications for the family's legacy and reputation among their peers. Marrying someone from a high class completely redefines one's social status in English society. With the prime importance of marrying someone from the high social class and moving beyond histories of English society which have prioritized male opinions, women recognized the importance of maintaining an attractive appearance across the lifecycle. In the marriage market of the eighteenth century English society, particular attention was paid to the emergence of good looks, alongside possessing other qualities. Women became more or less like a commodity to be sold. A degree of beauty of a woman was a stark mark of her promising future. Physical attractiveness was the only source of obtaining a stable finance for a lifetime in the eighteenth century English women's lives. Authors like Jane Austen and many of her contemporaries believed that marriage was deteriorating into a business contract. Rather than being respected as an institution ordained by God and necessary to social stability, marriage was turned out to be an object of mockery, used only as a cynical means of increasing wealth. Brides were being bought and sold with no regard for their future happiness or compatibility with their lifetime partners.

### **The Married Women's Property Act, 1882**

English law, The Married Women's Property Act 1882, was an act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, played a high key in the pitiful reduction of the identity of English women. The law defined the role of the wife as a sole subordinate to her husband, placing her under 'the protection and influence of her husband, her baron or lord'. Upon marriage, the husband and wife became one person under the law, as the property of the wife was surrendered to her husband and her legal identity ceased to exist. Any personal property acquired by the wife during the marriage, unless specified that it was for her own separate use, went automatically to her husband. A married woman was unable to draft a will or dispose of any property without her husband's consent. Women were often limited in what they could inherit. Males were more likely to receive real property (land), while females with brothers were sometimes limited to inherit personal property, which included clothing, jewelry, household furniture, food and all moveable goods. The law automatically gave the oldest son the right to all real property, and the daughter only inherited real property in the absence of a male heir. Aware of their daughter's unfortunate situation, fathers often provided them with dowries or worked into a prenuptial agreement pin money, the estate which the wife was to possess for her sole and separate use not subject to the control of her husband to provide her with an income separate from his.

In contrast to wives, women who never married or who were widowed maintained control over their property and inheritance, owned land and controlled property disposal, since by law any unmarried adult female

was considered to be a feme sole. Once married, the only way that woman could reclaim property was through widowhood.

The dissolution of a marriage, whether initiated by the husband or wife, usually left the divorced females impoverished, as the law offered them no rights to marital property.

Therefore, English women of the eighteenth century were bound by the law. They were left under the mercy of the patriarchal society. The law which gave no property rights for woman as an individual, was accountable for the reduction of women's identity, leading every woman to have marriage as their sole aim. Marriage was the only choice left to women to define their identity in their society. With respect to the law passed, the institution of marriage became a sole means of survival in every women's life. On prudence of developing strong and stable financial and social status, the eighteenth century English women could not afford to be perspective on compatibility in terms of skills or personality a man possess. Taking all sorts of the mentioned statements into account, rather than manipulating their lawfully wedded husbands, women had no power in marriage to pursue anything they desire as they were charged financially crippled by law and were left under the sole protection of their husbands.

Set in the late 1700s, and early 1800s, Austen's two novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, take place in a world where roles and opportunities of women are highly restricted in her English society of her times. In her novels, Austen's female characters do not inherit property and cannot have careers. Their future and fortunes depend almost exclusively on the men they marry and they are expected to be dutiful upstanding ladies of society. But, Austen depicts her female characters as thoughtful, clever, ambitious, and sometimes scheming women. Even while living in a male-dominated world, characters like Lucy, Fanny, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* and Charlotte Lucas, Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Miss Caroline Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* (younger sister of Charles Bingley and Louisa Hurst) are able to exert some power and agency.

Lucy Steele persistently and tenaciously chases after what she wants, even speaking of conquests of men and eventually does find herself with a suitably wealthy husband Robert Ferrars. Lucy indeed represents scheming women who renders to pursue her lifetime fortune. She has little regard for anyone with less fortune as she switch in her choice of life partner from Edward Ferrars to his brother Robert Ferrars. Mrs. Ferrars' exercising her power in transferring Edward Ferrars' fortune to her younger son Robert Ferrars, compelled the ambitious woman figure like Lucy Steele to switch her life partner.

We can draw parallels between Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* and Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*:

Charlotte Lucas, an intimate friend of Elizabeth Bennet, is initially described as "a sensible, intelligent woman... who was Elizabeth's intimate friend." (Austen 15). Charlotte makes a series of speeches explaining that "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." (Austen 19) highlighting the importance of choosing a partner with economic stability. Like Lucy, Charlotte accurately assesses her priorities, what she needs and chooses accordingly. She regards her marriage as a source to take off financial burden of the family. Although the narrative of *Pride and Prejudice* is not centered on Charlotte Lucas, she is far from being a two-dimensional character. Charlotte's character- like those of the other figures in the novel is revealed through her actions. The action of Charlotte's, has the biggest impact on her life and on her decision to marry Mr. Collins, who ventured to propose Jane and Elizabeth Bennet before Charlotte Lucas'. Acceptance of the proposal of Mr. Collins despite her knowing the proposal of Mr. Collins towards Elizabeth Bennet, marks the character of Charlotte Lucas to be a woman figure who is anxious for a stable future. As a result, characters like Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* and Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* regard economic prospects to be the most important aspects of marriage. They stand quite contrast to the characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood.

Fanny in *Sense and Sensibility*, meanwhile, practically controls her husband, persuading him not to give any money to his half- sisters as we witnessed at the very beginning of the novel and not to invite them to stay with them in London.

**"Well, then, let something be done for them; but that something need not be three thousand pounds. Consider", she added, "that when the money is once parted with, it never can return. Your sisters will marry, and it will be gone for ever. If, indeed, it could be restored to our poor little boy-".** (Austen 5)

We witness John Dashwood's extreme reduction in giving a part of his fortune to his half sisters. Through this event, Austen highlights leaving women under the sole protection of man is not guaranteed.

**"I believe you are right, my love; it will be better that there should be no annuity in the case; whatever I may give them occasionally will be of far greater assistance than a yearly allowance, because they would only enlarge their style of living if they felt sure of a larger income, and would not be sixpence the richer for it at the end of the year. It will certainly be much the best way. A present of fifty pounds, now and then, will prevent their ever being distressed for money, and will, I think, be amply discharging my promise to my father."** (Austen 7)

Maintenance of a stable finance of family, being the sole purpose of women's survival, most English women of the eighteenth century England like Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* has no alternative but to manipulate her husband John Dashwood in renege of the promise given by John Dashwood to his father Henry Dashwood's death bed, to take care of his half- sisters. John Dashwood who intends to extract three thousand pounds from his son's fortune to help his half sisters, reduce to five hundred a piece under the manipulation of his wife. The fact that John Dashwood's reduction to five hundred a piece, reduces Mrs. Fanny Dashwood's character to a narrow- minded, self- centered character without a doubt, in the eyes of the readers. The law of inheritance of the eighteenth century England, plays a huge role in cultivating such narrow mindset of English women of the time as developing financial security in one's life was prioritized in pursuit of high social standing, which women seldom had the rights to inheritance but left to manipulate their husbands at such events.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs. Dashwood, a mother to three daughters, step-mother to John Dashwood, mother-in-law to Fanny Dashwood is left under the mercy of her step-son by her late husband Henry Dashwood. As the narrative progresses, readers witness that the promise given by John Dashwood to Henry Dashwood to be a less fulfilling of which John settles to give five hundred a piece is not of a helpful one.

We witness some parallel situation between Mr. Collins on being the male issue to inherit the Bennet's property in *Pride and Prejudice* and John Dashwood inheriting Norland Park in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Mr. William Collins, a clergyman and holder of a valuable living at the Hunsford parsonage near Rosing's Park, the distant cousin of Mr. Bennet, being the presumptive heir to the Bennet's family estate of Longbourn House, in Meryton, Hertfordshire as Bennet's family has no male issue, weighs heavily on Bennet's mind. Mr. Collins made a decision to settle the matter by marrying one of his distant cousins. On his being unfavoured by any of his cousins, he married Miss Charlotte Lucas, the closest and the best friend of Elizabeth Bennet. The situation compelled Bennet's family to marry one of their daughters to the male heir of their estate, their distant cousin Mr. Collins, in exchange of retaining their property. While Elizabeth Bennet bent on marrying no one for future fortune, Mrs. Bennet had future worries for their daughters' means of survival. The law of inheritance of the eighteenth century England reduced women in particular to such a piteous state.

The abandonment of Marianne by Willoughby in pursuit of financial stability, also exemplify the reality of the eighteenth century English society. As the structure of the novel is built with little financial stability in Mrs. Dashwood's family, Willoughby by all means could not choose Marianne as his life partner, for which reason he chooses to marry Miss Grey and her fifty thousand pounds. Marianne is designed as a victim of the law of the inheritance in the society.

Elinor and Marianne are constantly confronting the threat of this kind of fate, should they be unable to find a husband. As Elinor tells Marianne, she should be thankful for her fate that Willoughby did not leave her like Eliza who was left with a baby. Only by marrying eligible men both the sisters are expected to have a guarantee of comfortable and stable life.

The constant trouble of Elinor with Edward Ferrars, with whom Elinor is romantically involved on account of the inheritance held by Mrs. Ferrars on being a widow to Mr. Ferrars, father to Robert and Edward Ferrars, Edward Ferrars, holds no personal freedom on his choice of life partner. He was restricted by his mother on his choice of life partner. This occasion accounts that an individual of huge fortune has the sole power in manipulating anyone to pursue a promising future under one's control. She determines which one of her sons inherits their family's fortune.

Austen's novels thus present the dangers and limited possibilities for women in a rigidly patriarchal society, while also showing how some women in such a society can still find ways of exercising certain forms of power and influence.

A character like Mrs. Jennings is created by Austen to reflect how women obtain their rights to property, which is only by being widow. But a character like Mrs. Dashwood, although a widow like Mrs. Ferrars, has no right to inherit her husband's property as the sole inheritor of Norland. Mr. Old Dashwood has passed on his property on whole to John and to Henry. Henry Dashwood, the late husband to Mrs. Dashwood is left with no alternative to leave any part of Mr. Old Dashwood's property to his wife as it has wholly passed on to John Dashwood. Henry Dashwood has had a life interest in the estate, that is, the right to live there and to receive the income. He hasn't had the right to depreciate the estate, to sell off the lands to enrich himself and to pass down the property to his wife and daughters because the full value of the estate has to be passed down to his son as per the will of the Mr. Old Dashwood.

Henceforth, we observe nothing but a distinct difference of fate which falls on these two widows. Had the fate been interchange between Mrs. Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars, all the daughters of Mrs. Dashwood, Miss Elinor Dashwood and Miss Marianne Dashwood in particular, wouldn't have encountered any unfortunate events of not being financially stable, of which they were often abandoned; Elinor abandoned by Edward Ferrars and Marianne by Willoughby.

As the characters like Mrs. Dashwood, Miss Elinor, Marianne and Margaret care little for a stable financial status or high social standing, there wouldn't be any victim of the law of inheritance in the narrative, if decent economy like Mrs. Ferrars', was in the possession of Mrs. Dashwood. In such state being a case, without an encounter of unfortunate events, Elinor's marriage with Edward would be in ease as Mrs. Ferrars desires to have in-laws of decent financial status. In another case, Willoughby would have had a fulfilling life with fortune and a compatible life partner like Marianne.

Austen proves in the first three pages of *Sense and Sensibility*, that wills and entailments keep a family joined in the legal sense. By making Henry Dashwood, the "legal inheritor of the Norwood estate" and ensuring the Norwood is passed on whole to John and then Henry. Old Mr. Dashwood guarantees family connection. But it is a connection that excludes the very women who had "from goodness of heart him every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive and it added a relish to his existence". (Austen 1)

Under the law of coverture, a woman's property, legal money became the husband's upon marriage. A married woman could not even make a will without her husband's permission. For this reason, if an unmarried woman was rich, there was an effort made to preserve her property in a way that the husband could not squander it- if her fortune was put in a trust, or settled upon her (so that the principle would be available to her when she was widowed), the husband was often able to have use of the interest. If a woman had a real property, she might be given a life interest, while the property itself was held in trust for the children. This was the Dashwood situation.

Women like Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Smith could indeed inherit property and money and property could be entailed through the female line. However, under the laws of coverture, a married woman's property and money came into possession of her husband upon marriage. Property was often preserved for a woman by placing it in a trust, which kept it out of the husband's hands (he might retain a life interest); premarital settlements often included a stipulation for "pin money", which was an allowance given to a wife for her sole and exclusive use.

Likewise, another woman figure, Mrs. Smith exercises the privilege of riches upon her dependent cousin by disinheriting Willoughby on account of his deceitful character on deceiving Eliza Williams as she is seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by John Willoughby on finding a supreme romantic attraction towards Marianne. On his aunt's disinheriting him, he has high inclination on preferring fortune over his life partner, as he gets himself engaged to a fashionable young woman named Miss Sophia Grey who has a fortune of fifty thousand pounds. As days roll by, Mrs. Smith forgiving him, makes him have a turn of mind towards Marianne when it was already too late when he wish to turn the clock back. Willoughby is caught up between fortune and romantic interest. His perpetual fluctuation in preferring life partner is entirely on account of his dependence on his aunt Mrs. Smith in terms of economy. In the narrative, readers witness that an economically self sufficient, strong woman figure like Mrs. Smith with assets in abundance, exercises enormous power derived from marriage with a husband with fortune. Marriage in the eighteenth century, is the only means of survival for women of the time.

Miss Bingley's behaviour towards Darcy makes the reader recall the first sentence of the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Austen 3). Austen shows how desperately the mothers of Hertfordshire county have thrown their daughters at Bingley, and made clear that Darcy is much wealthier than Bingley. The only thing saving him from matchmaking schemes is his reserved, proud demeanour attitude. However, his demeanour does not put off Caroline Bingley, and it is probable that he receives similar fawning treatment from a great number of aristocratic women.

The creation of a two dimensional character like Caroline Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* serves to exhibit women of the eighteenth century who exercises her own power in obtaining what they want by scheming. One of the prevailing opinion is that Caroline sensed Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth, and thereafter, she separates Charles, her brother from Jane, while her real inclination is to part Darcy from Elizabeth. She takes delight in their separation. This character reveals the highest state of effort, one attempts so as to satisfy their greed for fortune. At some length, Caroline Bingley's way of exerting her power in parting the romantically involved couples, is quite similar to Fanny's in *Sense and Sensibility*; who separates her husband from his half- sisters to maintain a stable fortune and Elinor from Edward Ferrars. Both ways of scheming deliver negative impact to the main protagonists of the two novels. With the use of such characters, Austen attempts to reveal the negative role that women play to obtain their fortune.

Mrs. Jennings enjoys the comfortable estate of widowhood obtained from the marriage with her rich late husband. The comfortable estate of widowhood is the only hope that keeps up a wife's spirits. Through a character like Mrs. Jennings, Austen reflects the potential benefits of being an English widow with a handsome jointure, and her independent and active widow, Mrs. Jennings of *Sense and Sensibility*, certainly embodies "the comfortable estate of widowhood". Austen portrays the pleasures and responsibilities of the comfortably well-off widow who is free to act on her own behalf and on the behalf of others in her fictional world. The eighteenth century English widow held a unique place among women. With the creation of a English widow character like Mrs. Jennings, Austen puts in her effort to her heart's content to convey a degree of feminine authority and freedom that would not be entirely possible in married life of English woman. Austen introduces Mrs. Jennings as "a widow, with an ample jointure". Mrs. Jennings's jointure may be solely the generous provision of a considerate husband. John Dashwood, who weights all relationships in a monetary light, rates Mrs. Jennings as a woman "of good fortune". Mrs. Jennings might also have had an active interest in the business of her late husband, "who had traded with success in a less elegant part of the town", understanding and sharing in his financial affairs. All the more, Austen assures readers of this widow's warm heart and affection for her husband as Mrs. Jennings says of herself, "Aye, it is a fine thing to be young and handsome. Well! I was young once, but I never was very handsome- worse luck for me. However, I got a very good husband, and I don't know what the greatest beauty can do more. Ah! Poor man! He has been dead these eight years and better". (Austen 144)

A widow's fiscal well-being depended largely on financial agreements made many years earlier. Negotiations before marriage largely determined the jointure or dower rights and consequently, the financial solvency a widow would enjoy later. Among the gentry, but also among the professional and mercantile classes, financial negotiations, or marriage settlements, were a necessary and expected part of courtship rituals. Before a wedding took place, representatives of both families would meet to draw pre "marriage articles" – settlement documents detailing the amount of dowry to be provided by the bride's parents, specifying when and how payable: maintenance for the couple until the groom would come into his inheritance, if he was not already independent; jointure provisions for his wife if left a widow; and marriage portions of children yet to be born. A woman's financial protection under the law depended on these marriage articles being settled justly.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the two daughters of Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Charlotte Palmer and Lady Middleton stand in contrast to the unmarried sisters, Elinor and Marianne at the very heart of the story both in personality and fortune. Unlike Elinor and Marianne, Mrs. Palmer is characterized as a character determined to be happy, laughing off the insults and sour nature of her husband and generally enjoying life. Mrs. Palmer appears to be more similar to her gossipy, talkative mother than her elder sister, Lady Middleton. Austen's inclination on throwing a spotlight on the monetary spectrum of which Mr. Palmer's possession of assets with a promising career provides a thread of connection with Mrs. Palmer's submissive in nature and her preference of playing low key towards her consistently rude and perpetually grumpy husband Mr. Thomas Palmer. A portrayal of characters like Mr. Palmer and Mrs. Palmer, convey that one's social standing and monetary holding could affect the nature of spouses in their married life of the time. Had Mrs. Palmer been from a high social standing above him, Mr. Palmer would have treated her much better. The negative attitude of Mr. Palmer, clearly provides a strong image of a less happy marriage, dwelling much on getting along with one another in terms of monetary status they hold. "Mr. Palmer does not hear me" "He never does, sometimes. It is ridiculous!" (Austen 76). Charlotte's attitude clearly proves that she tries hard to cover up the unpleasant inattentiveness of her husband. Lack of mutual respect, Mrs. Palmer being submissive and the inclination to accept any form of humiliation from her husband for the sake of maintaining social class is highly evident.

A minor character like Lady Middleton, Austen's creation shadows the image of women of lower social standing playing a submissive attitude towards her own husband who is in possession of much better fortune, although she is in the safe hands of a good husband, unlike Mr. Thomas Palmer, husband to her sister Mrs. Palmer. The class and the accompanying dynamic consciousness of Lady Middleton when they decide to invite over her cousins Lucy and Anne Steele, illustrate the deleterious effect of class and power structures on civil discourse.

Another woman character like Anne Steele, the elder sister of Lucy Steele, appears to highlight the reason of her unmarried status, on possessing silly, annoying, a severe lack of both common sense and discretion and possess no striking features to admire, "they found in the appearance of the eldest, who was nearly thirty, with a very plain and not a sensible face, nothing to admire" (Austen 85) which perhaps gives the perfect reason of the time to remain her unmarried. Anne Steele is a character constructed merely as a means to reveal Lucy and Edward's engagement to Mrs. Ferrars, which gives a much better impact towards the relationship of Edward and Elinor. Although designed for such purpose, Anne Steele represents the unfortunate, unmarried, unwanted women of the time, who remain unmarried as they possess neither beauty nor high social class, which was an essential aspects of woman to be possessed in pursuit of marriage, which directly paves the way to power and high social standing.

It is customary for Jane Austen's heroines to undergo trials before they triumphantly emerge with the assured felicity of advantageous and love marriages, so also it is customary for the imprudent and vulgar women to fall after their many indiscretions.

Although, the two female leads of the story, Elinor and Marianne appeal to a wide spectrum of readers and portray romantic experiences that most audiences can relate to, the strong character construction of them has a firm root of the aspects of the position of women in the typical English society of the eighteenth century with the supreme social standing consciousness. On developing characters like Elinor and Marianne, Austen conveys that women's education leads them to develop in sensibility and utilitarianism. Austen firmly believes that women, in order to maintain their selves, must cultivate their sense. To make a perfect marriage, women should consider not only money, but compatibility.

The majority of Austen's characters are members of the upper class. At the opening of the novel she tells us that Fitzwilliam Darcy, one of the main characters, has an income of ten thousand pounds a year. In spite of his enormous yearly income and his origins, he is technically not a member of aristocracy due to the absence of the title that a real aristocrat was supposed to have.

The Bennets, as well as most of the people who live in Meryton and its surroundings, are members of the gentry. Their income does not come near ten thousand a year but rather around two thousand to five thousand.

On pursuance of marriage with a man from high social standing, unlike women characters like Elizabeth, Elinor, Jane and Marianne, common women of the eighteenth century employ physical attractiveness and scheming as a weapon.

As a reader, we often witness Austen's heavy descriptions on the physical appearance of the characters in detail which evidently implies that the more beautiful she looks, the higher the chance she has to hook up in a marriage with a high social standing. She exhibits the conventional social culture of marriage of the eighteenth century English society.

Quotation from *Pride and Prejudice*, "He could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as every other woman in the room." (Austen 13)

"Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it. Everybody said how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice! Only think of that, my dear; he actually danced with her twice! And she was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time." (Austen 11)

The quotations which speak of the physical attractiveness of Jane Bennet ascertain the readers that Jane will hereafter play her beauty as a card to gain marriage with a high social class. Charles Bingley's further romantic involvement with Jane meets readers' expectation. Although Jane speaks nothing much about the financial structure of Charles Bingley in the narratives, we know that she is aware of it. At the very beginning of the novel, readers are aware of the fact that Mrs. Bennet sets her heart upon marrying her girls to a fine man of large fortune, "Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Austen 4)

"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; I am in no humor at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men." (Austen 11)

The above stated quotation of Darcy, which speaks about Elizabeth being inferior to her sister Jane in terms of physical attractiveness, marks the supreme importance of women's physical attractiveness which sets to be women's power to pursue their marriage in the eighteenth century.

"When their promised visit to the Park and consequent introduction to these young ladies took place, they found in the appearance of the eldest, who was nearly thirty, with a very plain and not a sensible face, nothing to admire; but in the other, who was not more than two or three and twenty, they acknowledged considerable beauty; her features were pretty, and she had a sharp quick eye, and smartness of air, which though it did not give actual elegance or grace, gave distinction to her person-". (Austen 85)

A strong emphasis on the physical appearances of the two sisters, Anne Steele and Lucy Steele are witnessed by readers in the above stated quotation of Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*. As the narratives progress, we witness the differences in the consequence that they bear for the difference in their beauty as Anne Steele remains as a spinster on account of her inferior in beauty, which is in stark contrast to her sister Lucy Steele who is fortunate enough to choose man of her likes.

Although romance plays the background in the two novels, romantic involvements of the characters are constructed on the financial structure and size of the individual characters. Often we find Austen throwing spotlights on the size of an individual economic structure. It reflects the social class consciousness of the eighteenth century English society which is derived much upon one's economic size.

In the novel, with no male heir, the Bennet family estate is to pass on to a cousin after her father's time. With no suitor in sight and no dowry to recommend her in case one turned up, marriage and financial security seem like distant dreams. But Elizabeth is not daunted. Marriage, to her, is not an ideal in itself. Her mother's one aim in life is to marry five daughters. Her younger sisters cannot wait for their turn to marry. Her best friend goads her to do all she can to secure a wealthy husband, be he a fool or villain. But Elizabeth feels differently, and fear of neither spinsterhood nor poverty can dilute her values. At a time in England, where marrying for love hardly ever happened, like her creator Jane Austen, Elizabeth is determined to marry a man she loves and respects, or not marry at all.

The first marriage we encounter in *Pride and Prejudice* is Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's. These two illustrate magnificently by negative example just how crucial respect for one another is to marital bliss. Mr. Bennet treats Mrs. Bennet like a fool she assuredly is, exerts the only authority she has: nagging. The narratives portray the patterns of gender norms and roles of masculine and feminine. The ironic truth in these novels is the position of women who are always lack in fortune. Women seem always depending on marriage and money. In the two novels, Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* are created different. Even Elizabeth Bennet, as much as she loves her father and as much as he respects her, admits she "could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort" (Austen 182) based on her parents' marriage.

### Conclusion

Throughout history money has always meant the same thing which is power. In the nineteenth century it usually opened a way to the upper class. However, it does not mean that everyone who were rich were a member of the upper class. But without money, people sink awfully fast. Austen's novels reflect it in these two novels.

These novels do not display typical romantic characteristics. It may be said that its style and characteristics foreshadow the upcoming Victorian era. As Victorian novels do, these novels portray and comment on the social conventions of the period. It is generally known that the society of the nineteenth century England was nothing like today: class differences were visible crystal clear, polite manners were much appreciated and most importantly, the social status of women was determined according to the status of their family or their husband. Therefore, they had to marry the most appropriate man that was sometimes even imposed on them by their family. Though they could choose whom they would marry, there was very little possibility that they would marry a man they loved, unless he stands in the same social standing and willing to marry her. These novels depict the English society of gentry and their habits and attitudes towards life. The class division is based on money, the more money one has the higher their rank. Women were never the rightful owners of any type of material property. Jane Austen successfully portrays the society of the then England and contemporary anxieties connected with marriage.

This project illustrates that on account of their subordinated position, marriage was the only way through which women could validate their social status. Therefore, it was usually not an institution created for love but rather based on one's social status. Marriage became their only means of acquiring a respectable social status, which implies power. For women of the time, money and social status are the objects as well as the obstacles; sexuality and deft socialization, their means of living. Even smaller amount of money meant some kind of stability at the time- they meant preserving one's social status.

Austen's works brings to the core the essential questions regarding feminine identity that wavers between conforming to patriarchal ideologies and resisting those ideologies. These characters speak of the proper balance between woman's individuality and her societal values and responsibilities. On the construction of such characters, Austen highlights her views on women involving a balance between what was expected of them from society and their individual desires.

The pairs of sisters in her two novels *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are much designed to navigate society to find the right compromise between meeting society's expectations and yet asserting their own minds with the former work stressing a balance of observing some rules of class system and recognizing their limitations on the individual, and the later proving one can have both sense and sensibility. We find in the characters, they are much fashioned to break the code of conduct of the eighteenth century in terms of marriage and raise the value and standard of marriage to a much better level which is not based entirely on one's monetary state but on one's compatibility with romantic involvement and moral responsibility which would serve purpose for a meaningful marriage, rather than marriage based absolutely on financial status. While the other characters weigh much on monetary state, on making their choice of spouses for marriage, for a materially rich future, the pairs of sisters in the two novels are designed to care much on one's personal taste and personality rather than one's fortune in terms of their choice of their life partners.

These female characters inspire women of all ages to marry man of our own choices in terms of compatibility rather than fortune. Women figures like them would indeed give a turn of events in all ages of life. The power as women invested on these character by Jane Austen stress on how powerful a woman's role is, in running a good family rather than weighing on one's fortune.

With the construction of different women figures in the two novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen addresses women of different attitudes towards marriage. The narratives are centered on power which derives from high social standing one holds, which further derives from money. Pragmatically, in terms of power, women possess no power per the law of inheritance. Therefore, marriage stands to be their only means of survival.

In the two novels, women figures like Lucy Steele, Charlotte Lucas, Fanny Dashwood, Charlotte Palmer are designed to address the typical eighteenth century English women, who fails to believe in happy marriage but quite inclined to be greedy on prudence of their future well being.

Women figures like Lady Catherine De Bourgh, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Ferrars are constructed to form a strong and powerful eighteenth century English women with high social standing. These characters reflects how powerful women figures of the time obtained power, which was only possible if there was an effort made to preserve her property in a way that the husband could not squander it- if her fortune was put in a trust, or settled upon her. Property was often preserved for a woman by placing it in a trust, which kept it out of the husband's hands (he might retain a life interest); premarital settlements often included a stipulation for "pin money", which



was an allowance given to a wife for her sole and exclusive use. After all, the power that she obtains hereby with, is entirely from a male figure, from a law set by patriarchy.

But with the women characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood, Austen establishes compatibility as a standard of ethics that women of any ages must be conscious of, in terms of their choice of life partner.

In the two novels, Austen touches different types of women figures of the time. The characters built on the narratives prove the extreme degree of tolerance that women bear to survive and to obtain high social standing to fit in the high strata of their society. The narratives reflect how women make an attempt of supreme degree to acquire their fortune, power and social standing through marriage. The two novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* reveal that a society is blindly constructed from a male perspective which is fashioned on a concept that women must live with the consequences of the culture's distorted and misrepresented conventions and values. The reality of the characters are socially constructed. One of those is about patterns of gender norms and roles which are carried out in everyday life with "masculine" and "feminine". The recognition of female characters is social powerless on difficult and unequal conditions. It is juxtaposed against the author's male characters and the reader's recognition that the use and misuse of social power just only to the male gender. We could see it through the patriarchy that always and explicitly serves men.

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