

## **JANE AUSTEN : AN IMPECCABLE STAR IN THE ZENITH OF LITERARY EXPLORATIONS**

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In the field of English literature, the name of Jane Austen will always hold a remarkable place. As a woman writer, it must be taken into account that amidst all ups and downs, she reached a position where she was quite ahead of many of her fellow writers. It should also be noted that she was very close to her only sister Cassandra Elizabeth who was older to her. Jane was the seventh of eight children having six brothers & one sister. She was born on 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 1775 in England & took breath her last on 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1817 in England. In March 1817, her health began to deteriorate & she was forced to stop her last work “Sanditon” in the middle, which was never completed. In April she wrote out her will & thereafter moved to Winchester on May 24<sup>th</sup> along with her sister Cassandra, in order to be in contact with her physician. Her death was not natural. Towards the end of her life it was noticed that she was suffering from the ‘Addisons’ disease which eventually took her life. Jane took her last breath in the arms of her dearest sister Cassandra, in Winchester. She died at a very early age of just 41. Jane never got married all through her life. On July 24<sup>th</sup>, she got buried at the Winchester Cathedral. Her contributions to the world of literature will always remain incomparable.

Some of Jane Austen’s finer points that attract the mind of the literary creative are as follows. She was listed in “People Weekly”’s “Most Intriguing People” list. (December 25, 1995/January 01, 1996 issue) She was fluent in French. The Prince Regent was such a fan of her work that he asked her to dedicate her next book to him, which she did. In July 2002, a first edition of “Pride & Prejudice” was auctioned & sold for £40,000, nearly doubling the previous record set for an Austen novel in 2001 of £23,500. Her books have never been out of print since they were first published. Between 1900 & 1975, there were more than 60 radio, television & stage productions of Austen novels. The first film adaptation was of “Pride & Prejudice” in 1940, although there had been a television version two years previously. Her brother Edward’s descendant married the daughter of Louis Mountbatten aka Lord Mountbatten, who in turn was a descendant of Queen Victoria. Anne Hathaway the famous actress, portrayed her in “Becoming Jane” (2007) Her seventh generation aunt (through her brother Edward) of actress Anna

Chancellor, appeared in Jane's favoured romance *Pride & Prejudice* (1995) mini series & also narrates the documentary *The Real Jane Austen* (2002) The film *Clueless* (1995) is based on her novel "Emma".

It would be worth significant to place some of Austen's Famous quotes:-

'If any one faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient - - at others, so bewildered & so weak - - & at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond control! We are to be sure a miracle every way - - but our powers of recollecting & of forgetting, do seem peculiarly past finding out.'

"Nothing but death." These were her last words when asked by her sister Cassandra, if there was anything she wanted.

"Pictures of perfection make me sick & wicked." This was her answer when asked why her heroines always flawed.

'One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other.'

'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.'

Austen started writing at a very early age. Poems, short-stories, novels, plays all she started writing when she was quite young. Between 1787 to 1793 she had gathered quite a lot of works to herself and she did it for the sole purpose of making her family members feel surprised. It displays how much emotionally she was attached to her family. All the works that she made during the period between 1787 to 1793 is collectively known as *Juvenilia*. Thus, it can be said *Juvenilia* (a collection of her works from 1787 to 1793) is her first work.

"Lady Susan" she started writing next in the year 1794 but she left it incomplete till 1805, the year in which she gave it her final touch and got it ready for the readers. During this gap she concentrated upon her other works. In 1795 she wrote "Sense and Sensibility" and it got published in the year 1811. In 1796 she started writing "Pride and Prejudice" which got published in the year 1813.

In 1798 - '99 she wrote "Susan" later which was given the name "Catherine" and was posthumously published by the name of "Northanger Abbey" in the year 1818. In 1804 she started writing "The Watsons" but it remained incomplete and got never published. In 1811 she began her work "Mansfield Park" just to get published in 1814. In the year 1814 she started "Emma" just to get it finished in 1815. In the very same year i.e 1815 "Persuasion" started but it got published posthumously in the year 1818. In the year 1817 she started to write "Sanditon" but it remained unpublished and unfinished.

From her unfinished works it is clearly visible that how much dedicated she was towards her work. Even when she was suffering from the fatal disease towards the end of her life, she didn't stop writing and she kept on moving. The deadly disease "Addisons" couldn't make her stop till she was not able to breathe anymore and finally left the world. And her two works, "The Watsons" and "Sanditon" remained incomplete. Such was her devotion towards her works. All her life she dedicated towards writing. From her life story it's very much clear that her devotion, feelings were greatly towards her works and next towards her beloved sister Cassandra.

In later years, producers and directors found her novels very much interesting cum catchy which they thought could be adapted into feature films. So we get to see many of her novels been made into motion pictures and mini television series also. "Emma", "Pride and Prejudice", "Lady Susan", "Mansfield Park", "Persuasion", "Sense and Sensibility", "Northanger

Abbey” etc those which come under the category of some of her most famous and widely read novels have all been made into successful feature films and television series also. Audiences also have praised a lot these films and t.v series.

“Becoming Jane”, “The Real Jane Austen” etc are popular movies which have been made based on Jane Austen’s letters.

Since long actors, directors, screen-play writers, producers all have tried very carefully to capture the spirit and essence of each of the works of Jane Austen and put in front of the audiences/viewers in the form of movies/t.v series. There seems no doubt that all of Jane Austen’s work have entertained the readers not only in the writing format but also in the motion picture format also.

A.C. Bradley wrote an essay on Austen and it got published on 1911. It’s only after the publication of this essay which made Jane Austen receive major attention by many. It all started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was in this century that everyone lover of her works and others also got to witness her works through movies that took form from her novel.

One can discuss here about “Emma”, a very famous and widely acclaimed novel of her, got to take the form of a motion picture during this century only. Not only once but multiple times “Emma” has been adapted to films. “Clueless”, “Emma and The Werewolves” are some famous movie titles for her novel “Emma”.

“Emma” got first published by John Murray in December of 1815. This was the last novel to be published before her death. Nearly two thousand of the novel’s copies were printed in the first edition. Sadly enough more than quarter couldn’t be sold after four years of its publication. The novel was widely appreciated and was accepted by the readers. Though Austen’s profit from this novel was not that satisfactory. Unlike her other novels “Emma” was a little different. The central theme of this novel revolves around a wealthy and beautiful heroine with no financial concern or need to marry. Whereas the search for financial security and a proper husband used to be the central theme in most of Austen’s other novels, adding serious elements to their narrative skills. “Emma” is slightly different and has a lighter side lacking this type of dramatic conflict. The heroine of the novel is also unique because of her attracting nature towards romantic sensibility. It’s towards the end of the novel that Emma falls into love but before that she shows little romantic interest towards the male characters.

Since Austen’s most of the novels were published anonymously, they got less attention during her time period. Although her books were well sold and were appreciated by eminent figures of the british society, Austen received a very few reviews.

The theme of “Emma” the novel, carries within itself near about sixteen major, minor characters. 1. Emma Woodhouse, 2. Mr. Woodhouse, 3. Mr. George Knightley, 4. Harriet Smith, 5. Frank Churchill, 6. Jane Fairfax, 7. Mr. Philip Elton, 8. Miss Bates, 9. Mrs. Anne Weston (Miss Taylor), 10. Mrs. Elton (Miss Augusta Hawkins), 11. Mr. Weston, 12. Mrs. Bates, 13. Mr. John Knightley, 14. Robert Martin, 15. Mrs. Isabella Knightley, 16. Mr. Goddard.

Emma Woodhouse is a twenty one years old daughter of a wealthy, clever, handsome gentleman. Emma always has her own way of doing things, is always engaged in thinking of herself very highly. She is always well intentioned. The main story of the novel is about how Emma Woodhouse matures from a clever young woman into a more experienced, modest, considerate woman, making herself able to accept the idea of love.

Mr. Woodhouse is Emma’s father. He is the owner of a very large estate, Hartfield. He is a wealthy man. He has very few relaxations to him. He is always after Emma and is not satisfied

with her for her selfish tendencies. His complaints and few activities, movements make him appear more aged than he actually is.

Mr. George Knightley is of thirty seven years. He is a very sensible man. His brother had married to Emma's elder sister Isabella. He is noble, sincere, intelligent and courteous. He's a very well behaved person. At any point in the novel he shows no fear in correcting Emma for her behavioural manners. At the end of the novel he gets married to Emma.

Harriet Smith is of seventeen years of age. She is short, plump and quite fair in her appearance. Through Emma's efforts she manages to get into the Highbury society and Emma constantly tries to instruct and advise her. Towards the end Harriet gets married to Mr. Martin, a farmer.

Frank Churchill happens to be the son of Mr. Weston. He was brought up by his uncles, the Churchills. He is somewhat shallow and always interested in persuing pleasurable things rather than any fruitful activity. He is handsome and charming enough to attract Emma. Frank is secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax but always keeps it a secret and never reveals the fact as the aunt who raised her would strongly oppose to his relation to Jane.

Jane Fairfax is an orphan. She's the only child of Mrs. Bates' youngest daughter. After her mother passed away, she was looked after by Colonel Campbell who served the army along with her father. She's of the same age as of Emma. Charming, talented, well regarded no less than Emma. A fact that makes Emma feel a bit jealous of Jane. Jane is secretly engaged to Frank Churchill.

Mr. Philip Elton is the vicar of the church in Highbury. Emma finds him as an ideal candidate for Harriet Smith. On the other-side Mr. Philip ultimately puts forward his great interest in Emma herself to which Emma reacts negatively, turns his request down. Finally he gets married to the rude Augusta Hawkins.

Miss. Bates is the daughter of Mrs. Bates. She is neither rich nor young or married. She's also not that beautiful. She doesn't possess any qualities of intelligence, cleverness. But she is usually happy with herself and treats others with great goodwill. One of the turning point of the novel comes when Emma adopts a cruel way of treating Miss. Bates during the picnic at Box Hill.

Mrs. Anne Weston (Miss Taylor) happens to be the governess of Emma. She raised Emma after her mother passed away. She gets married to an elderly gentleman by the name of Mr. Weston in the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Weston is very modest and self-possessed. Still though she fails to find many faults in Emma. Which Mr. Knightley tries to correct throughout the novel.

Mrs. Elton (Miss Augusta Hawkins) happens to be the daughter of a Bristol merchant. She gets married to Mr. Elton. Everyone in the society is well aware of the fact that he sister is married very well. Her behaviour at Highbury on her arrival is quite rude and arrogant. She denies to treat others with proper respect which others deserve, including Mr. Knightley.

Mr. Weston had been married much earlier. Later he gets married to Miss Taylor. From his earlier marriage Mr. Weston had a son by the name of Frank Churchill. Mr. Weston had sent him away to be looked after by his late wife's relatives. Mr. Weston is from a very respectable family that has been moving forward in the society and had made a good fortune.

Mrs. Bates is the widow of the former vicar of Highbury. She happens to be the mother of Miss Bates. She is believed to be a harmless old lady and is ignored at large by the Highbury society.

Mr. John Knightley is a tall gentleman. He is quite a clever-man. Respectable and reserved too. He is married to Emma's sister Isabella. Emma somewhat doesn't like him for his lack of patience and all.

Robert Martin is a farmer, a very good farmer. He stays at Mr. Knightley's estate. When he first proposes to Harriet, Emma tries to convince her to reject his proposal. Emma is somewhat not in favour Robert. But ultimately Robert gets married to Harriet in the end.

Mrs. Isabella Knightley is Emma's elder sister. She's quite an elegant woman, pretty too in her appearance. She's somewhat delicate from all angles in comparison to Emma, the sharp witted, clever minded lady.

Mrs. Goddard is the Mistress of a boarding school. One of her former student is Harriet who now assists her in her work.

The novel "Emma" circles around a few major and minor themes that forms the structure of the entire work. Social conduct, love, moral relativism, miscommunication, oppression of women, social class, courtship and marriage etc are some themes without which one just cannot imagine the work taking place.

All through the novel special attention has been paid towards social interaction and society and hence one can come to the conclusion that 'social-conduct' plays an important part in the formation of the "Emma". The writer uses it as the best way in order to find out how worthy her characters are in terms of social interaction/ behaviour. She also tries to find out who have inappropriate manners. Though Emma seems to be unaware of her faults through most part of the novel still she is aware of the appropriate manners and conduct in herself. She's also very quick in enabling herself to find out the bad conducts within those around her, e.g. Mr. Elton, Mrs. Elton, Frank Churchill and her very own brother in-law. Considerably, while being rude and bad at her conduct in insulting Miss Bates during the picnic at Box Hill, Emma's self-realization of her behaviour serves as an important medium in her self-improvement, towards the end of the novel. Coming under the influence of Frank Churchill, Emma had drastically given away her proper social conduct and had gradually lowered her status. She's forced to make adjustments to Miss Bates directly. However, towards the end of the novel, Emma regains her sense of conduct, her social behaviour and mannerism and gets married to the character Mr. Knightley who is equally aware of manners and breeding.

Through most part of the novel, Emma finds herself to be addicted to romantic 'love'. Even though she accepts the chance of getting married to Frank Churchill, she agrees to the fact of not being in love with him. As she is as much happier in his absence as she is in his presence. This gift of existing without love relates to the larger theme of marriage that influences the writer. The writer points out that love is not a necessity to marriage and at times it can also damage a relationship, as was true with Mr. Weston's first marriage. While selecting a match one should always try to give importance to social position, fortune and certain other qualities in a candidate. But in case of Emma, these conditions didn't have any place as she was socially and financially sound and independent from all angles. Keeping all this in view she was in such a high position that she could marry for the sole purpose of love. As luck would have it, when Emma's final choice is made, out of love, it so happens that Mr. Knightley too, possesses all the logical qualities of wealth, social status and breeding that brings out a very good and efficient husband in the eyes of a bride. Towards the end of the novel, Austen also makes it clear that Harriet Smith and Jane Fairfax are able to get married, for the sake of love.

For the most part of the novel, Emma behaves in a way that, she knows pretty well what's good for those, around her. We can find a very good example of this in the relationship

between Emma and Harriet Smith. Here Emma is under the illusion that she knows what's best for Harriet. She has the right to choose Harriet's future husband and she's the only one to decide Harriet's future happiness. Emma also thinks herself responsible for Harriet's personality thus always tries to improve Harriet in all angles. Emma engages herself in similar insulting/humiliating behaviour with many other characters in the novel. Including Mr. and Mrs. Weston, her sister and father, Mr. Elton, and Frank Churchill. Emma's belief in her own perfectness is demoralized, taken down by her behaviour that she shows towards Miss Bates at Box Hill during the picnic. Though Emma has already done mistakes with Harriet and Mr. Elton, this is the first time that Emma is severely wrong in her behaviour. This makes her accept the fact that her belief in her absolute perfectness, that she knows what's best for those around her, is nothing more, but her utter ego and arrogance and all that.

After going through the novel we can make out that some of the major conflicts that the novel "Emma" carries within itself is nothing but a direct result of 'miscommunication' between the characters. One such example is Mr. Elton's misguided courtship of Emma during which Emma is under the belief that Mr. Elton is actually courting Harriet Smith. This misconception is kept alive further when Mr. Elton presents Emma with a riddle for Harriet's book. Since no real communication takes place between the three characters, the disclosure of Mr. Elton's true feelings becomes rather more problematic. Similar problems pop up because of miscommunication between Frank Churchill and Emma. Emma looks upon Frank Churchill as her future husband whereas Frank is secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax, and controls Emma to cover it up. Even Mr. Knightley also engages himself in miscommunication, to such an extent that he fails to express his feelings for Emma, until the very end of the novel. Which results in making Emma believe that Harriet and Mr. Knightley are in love with each other. In each of these cases, the formal social interactions, that was required ends up with nothing but confusion and hurt feelings. Still, towards the end, all this social misunderstandings are solved properly and each character gets hold of the right partner.

Emma has a heroine, possesses beauty, wealth, intelligence, high social status and financial independence. Austen points it out and makes it clear that Emma is at a very high position in society. Most of the other women characters in the novel do not possess that 'financially sound' quality of that of Emma's. Hence, have much more limited chances of their happy future. This speaks a lot of the deep rooted 'oppression of women' in the British society at that time. Most occupation were taken as not suitable for women. Which made women incapable of doing anything independently that could support them. One character Jane Fairfax can be taken as an example of this deep rooted oppression of women. Although she is no different from Emma, possesses all the very same qualities as Emma does, still then, she lacks the wealth, that could provide her social security and make her financially sound and independent. The only way out for her is of a marriage or becoming a governess. Most of the other women character of the novel are left with the same choice. Harriet Smith can either marry or can continue to work with Mrs. Goddard. Mrs. Weston gets married to Mr. Weston only after working as Emma's governess. Though Emma is lucky as compared to others, she still has limited options for her future. She can either marry or she can remain as a wealthy-single, for the rest of her life. Even Austen herself had to submit to this deep rooted oppression. Throughout her life she remained unmarried and could never claim her novels publicly.

All through the novel we can find Austen highlighting the theme of 'social class'. Particularly when it comes to the relationship between Emma and Harriet Smith. Since Emma belongs to the wealthiest family of Highbury, she carries the highest social position in the

community. While her interaction with other characters such a Mr. Knoghtley, is at an equal level, she also has some social responsibilities towards the other less fortunate characters, such as Miss Bates, Harriet Smith, and towards those poor families who live on her estate. While encouraging compassion and charity in the members of the higher classes Austen also maintains the importance of class distinction. One of Emma’s biggest mistake is when she brings Harriet Smith belonging to a lower class and giving her the equal status in the Highbury society. Bringing her up to an equal social level. While Harriet happens to be an extremely benevolent, decent character, still, Austen believes it is not appropriate making her a member of the high society. And this would not have been possible if Emma’s influence had not been there. As a result of this clash of classes, Harriet grows a kind of inappropriate expectations for her marriage as well as for her future, and thus risks herself of getting rejected by her own family members. Austen also cites Mr. Weston’s first marriage as an example of this social class. Since his first wife was from a higher social class, she was unable to adjust with the lower standard of living. And ultimately, the marriage ended in an unhappy note.

‘Courtship and marriage’, like in all other Austen’s novels, play a major role in this novel also. “Emma. The novel, from beginning till end, is structured around various courtships and romantic connections. From Harriet and Robert Martin to Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill to Emma and Mr. Knightley. All of the clash in the novel circle around this topic. Specially in terms of characters determined to find out proper matches. In this way, Austen tries to project marriage as a fundamental characteristic of society during that period. Marriage encourages families and serves romantic purposes. It also upholds the class structure of the society by ensuring that individuals marry in the same class. Such as Harriet Smith and Robert Martin. Who are in the same class. Thus Austen projects courtship and marriage as the sole medium of conflict or excitement, all through the novel.

Like all other novels of Jane Austen, this novel “Emma” is mainly of courtship and social manners. In most past of the novel, focus is given on the question of marriage. Who would marry whom and for what reasons? For the sake of just love, or because of dare necessity or out of practicality. Emma Woodhouse is the central character around whom the narration of the play takes place. She lives with her father a wealthy rich owner of a estate, “Hartfield”. Very much popular for her beauty and talent, Emma becomes wasted in the small village of Highbury. But she takes the pride for her great matchmaking skills. At her age, like others, she is not in a great need of marrying anyone. Rather, she’s in such a high, unique position in the society, where she’s not in need of a husband to provide her with a great fortune.

Thus, Jane Austen’s contribution to the English literature through her romantic fiction as an English novelist earned her a place of zenith as per historical importance be it realism, irony or social commentary.

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