
A Positions of Women in the Society by Jane Austen

Jane Austen was an English novelist known for her six major novels among which one of them is *Mansfield Park*. According to critics, *Mansfield Park* is the first of Jane Austen's novel to be conceived as well as executed and published in maturity. In this book, Austen lays emphasis on the freedom of women in the 18th century. Even the title of the book has been chosen with lots of accuracies as it speaks of freedom as the name *Mansfield* is synonymous with abolition. Like other women, Jane Austen was not able to separate herself from her role as women when she was writing. as Virginia Woolf noted: "A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best, it's most feminine..." (Showalter, 1968, p.247).

The conscious effort of Austen is to find a plausible way out of the problem found in the book. Since contemporary times, it has been seen that women have been affected by complete patriarchal superiority as to where they were suppressed, oppress and condemned. It is to be noted how at the beginning itself, the three sisters were married off to different sections of society as power is held within a context of rising and falling female fortunes. In chapter one, it has been said, "Miss Maria Ward married... with only seven thousand pounds, had a good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram... raised to the rank of a baronet lady, with all the comfort and consequences of a handsome house and large income." The middle sister, Miss Ward was obliged to marry the Rev. Mr. Norris, with scarcely any private fortune. Miss Frances married a poor lieutenant in a common family.

Hence it can be seen that how marriage which was considered to be sacred constitution was considered to be a market where the women were treated as commodities and passed on among men. Long time back only the man was the breadwinner of the family so women were feeling grateful to whoever protects them. There was gratitude over love. Marriage is important for a woman, as it raised their rank, class, and fortune. During those times women had to be dependent they did not have any freedom at all a man was a father figure, the figure of authority and also as the representative of the family. This is also proven as in Christianity it has been mentioned that one man was chosen and established by God who will educate the rest of the society. In Jane Austen's book: *Pride and Prejudice*, it could be seen how girls were tamed in order to fit into the society. This is shown in the case of Elizabeth, where she has to abide by a code of conducts and had to possess certain talents to be a distinguished woman from the upper-class society.

It is seen in the following quote:

You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!—always wanting me to play and sing before anybody and everybody!—If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable, but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers."

On Miss Lucas's persevering, however, she added, "Very well; if it must be so, it must." And gravely glancing at Mr. Darcy, "There is a fine old saying, which everybody here is, of course, familiar with—"Keep your breath to cool your porridge,"—and I shall keep mine to swell my song. "Her performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before

she could reply to the entreaties of several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display." The patriarchal structure in the society delineates a clear relationship of inequality between men and women. Sir Thomas is shown as a guide and a leader to the female members in terms of how they should maintain their status, image, values, and education. Sir Thomas Bertram's absence in the household soon leads to disaster; though both Edmund and Fanny are witnesses they cannot utter a word due to them being powerless.

On the departure of Sir Thomas, neither Maria nor Julia is sad. "They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at one gratification that would probably have been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach". Maria Bertram, daughter of Sir Thomas, seems to justify "the persistent fear of female sexuality" common in society at that time; including Tom and his friend Mr. Yates in the scheme and with the approval of both Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, the young people decide to put on a play by themselves. The play allows several instances of improper behavior among the actors, including promiscuity on the part of the soon-to-be-married Maria. The order could be restrained only on Sir Thomas arrival. Despite Edmund's unsuccessful attempts to prevent the play, on Sir Thomas arrival, the "frivolities of the young people stop at once".

Sir Thomas's presence was required in the West Indies to restore order to the efforts of his colonial estate; he provides necessary guidance to uphold the respectability of the household. Due to lack of maturity, constant guidance is required for the women present in his family. Fanny has been outcasted and considered inferior as her mother married to a man of lower class hence Fanny struggles in finding a place in the structure of Mansfield Park as Mansfield Park consists of a small strip of society namely of an upper- middle class. Her sense of belonging comes as she is used to the Bertram family. She gives a companion to Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, attempting to provide them with amusement in company or aid to complete their tasks. "Lady Bertram, sunk back in one corner of the sofa, the picture of health, wealth, ease, and tranquility, was just falling into a gentle doze, while Fanny was getting through the few difficulties of her work for her". While Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram dote on the caprices of their daughters, Fanny must in turn work to please her aunts in order to win their favor. The dividing issue of class places Fanny at a disadvantage in social value to that of her more affluent cousins and aunts, and without the bolstering of a husband's influence, she can do little to change her circumstances. In the end, Fanny's situation as a ward of the Bertram family at Mansfield Park is the same as the eventual fate of all women in nineteenth-century English society.

Marriage is the ultimate goal for the respectable young lady, and while it may seem a move towards independence, in reality, marriage signifies the commencement of submission to a new patriarch—the husband. Maria marries Mr. Rushworth as a mean of escapism "the restraint which her father imposed." Independence did not await Maria after her nuptials, however. "Maria Bertram's marriage gave her independence from her father, but only by placing her in a position of dependence on her husband". For a woman, there can be no real freedom—the constraints mandated by society upon their gender do not allow the independence of a woman without the custody of a man. Before being married she is in the authority of her father after getting married, she is in the custody of her husband. Maria disregarding her husband's authority earns her a bad reputation and exile from her family's society, Fanny's receiving a

marriage proposal from Henry Crawford raises her in the opinion of Sir Thomas. Her subsequent refusal, however, receives severe verbal retribution. He sternly observes, “you have disappointed every expectation I had formed and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed”. To receive the attention of a well-established man was the greatest honor for a woman of Fanny’s position, but to ignore them was the worst sort of behavior that could be expected of a woman.

A woman’s deference to the male affirmation of her character remained the surest method in which she could hope to attain the approval of those around her and a comfortable position in the society of which she is meant to become a part. Marriage is a form of submission for women, and the ultimate model of socially expected female subjugation to male authority. To protect her marriage, the wife must bend to accommodate and support the man they marry. Similar is the circumstance of the conditions faced by colonized peoples, and the workers who “are forced (by a system of punishment and reward) to adopt the oppressor’s standards, values, and identification” so must women learn to accept the complete authority of their husbands in order to maintain societal acceptance. Fanny triumphs over Mary Crawford in the bid for Edmund’s affection by virtue of her unquestioning submission to Edmund as the leading male figure in her life.

Mary remains unmarried, and thus must search for her security within society. She could not succeed in beginning a life with Edmund because she could not accept him as her superior; romantic interest alone is not enough to validate a marriage when the wife will not look to the husband as principal guardian of their life within society. Mary constantly questioned the validity of Edmund’s conviction to pursue the life of a clergyman and did not respect his authority in the guidance of his own life—let alone in the life they would have led together. “They had talked—and they had been silent—he had reasoned—she had ridiculed—and they had parted at last with mutual vexation”. Ultimately, the relationship fails before marriage is proposed because Edmund believes that Mary has not been brought up correctly, and must be forgotten because he is unable to change her. Fanny, conversely, shows her love for Edmund in her constant devotion to his happiness, and belief in the near-infallibility of his opinions and intentions. She never disagrees with him, and in truth, her unquestioning admiration of his character, actions, and opinions form the basis of her romantic attachment. “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him”.

In fact, Fanny’s introduction to the world of romance was based on her willing submission and subsequent admiration for a male authority—Edmund. Ultimately, Fanny’s submission to Edmund’s will as her patriarchal authority in married life permanently raises her from the socially and economically vulnerable presence as a ward of Mansfield Park to that of a distinguished, respectably married woman. The combination of submission and deep fondness in the marriage of Fanny In her work, Austen presents a society which positions women as merciless compounds of economic and patriarchal oppression that made them helpless in their own regression from free-thinking individuals to servants of institutions which robs their humanity. Her female protagonists, unique, refuse to abandon their own personal convictions and desires, hence were able to circumvent the greater evils of loveless, pragmatic marriage and the inherent voluntary concession to a joyless future; they could only do so, however, in remaining submissive to the patriarchal structure of society as a whole.

The oppressive nature of this form of society has caused great damage to the female community, placing competing women in opposition to each other with men in the privileged role

of choosing the superior individual.

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