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WAR OF THE MIND and HEART IN JANE AUSTEN'S *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*:  
EDUCATING THE EMOTIONS AND INTELLECT IN BEING AGREEABLE

RENU GOSWAMI<sup>1</sup>, Dr. RITU KUMARAN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, RABINDRANATH TAGORE UNIVERSITY (Formerly AISECT UNIVERSITY), Bhopal, India, Email:renugoswami2010@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of English, RABINDRANATH TAGORE UNIVERSITY (formerly AISECT UNIVERSITY), Bhopal, India Email:ritukumaran08@gmail.com

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RENU GOSWAMI

ABSTRACT

Also known as the novel of manners Jane Austen's novels point out the significance of social graces and mannerisms in being judged in nineteenth century England. However she also points out the significance of education of her female protagonists through reading and observations of the surroundings. This paper analyses the conflict between emotions and intellect, heart and the mind of young women faced because of lack of appropriate guidance and governance of actions. In addition this paper is multi-disciplinary in approach addressing the role of the family and society in educating the curious minds. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* describes the journey of her female protagonist, Marianne Dashwood in her endeavor to balance between sense and sensibility in being socially agreeable and in experiencing personal happiness.

**KEYWORDS:** Education, Jane Austen, Marianne, nineteenth century, Sense and Sensibility

1. Introduction

Initially titled *Elinor and Marianne*, the novel was published anonymously in 1811 with the credit 'By a Lady'. Austen's co-protagonists Elinor and Marianne represent metaphors of sense and sensibility, respectively that are ordained to a modest living from a life of luxuries. Although Elinor appears to be Austen's ideal woman characterized by 'sense', she is surprisingly unhappy from within and conceals her true feelings though seems balanced on the surface. Marianne, Austen's 'sensibility' is high-spirited, passionate and gullible with lack of self-control on her emotions.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen highlights the impact of ignorance and improper guidance of the mother in the absence of a father figure, while describing Marianne's journey through adolescence in the hardships and turbulences she faces. Elinor takes on the role of the father in guiding her sister to reason while Marianne learns to take responsibility for her actions and models Elinor's sense. Austen's heroine Marianne transcends her internal conflicts caused by the ignorance of her mother, and adapts to the societal expectations through her conscientious efforts, in the Victorian society judged by conduct and social graces.

Marianne's sensibility, her free-spiritedness and her liberty to take independent decisions are misjudged as inappropriate conduct in a society which she learns to govern with the advice of Elinor.

By Sense, I refer to the awareness, consciousness, perception and recognition of the environment and the society one lives in and guiding one's actions and judgments with prudence, restraint and reasoning. The nineteenth-century Victorian society granted men with intelligence, logic, reason and sense whereas women were expected to be weak, fragile and emotional synonymous to Austen's sensibility. Men were deemed to be less emotional and more rational. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* condemns women who do not use reason in favour of sensibility. "Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become prey to their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. Ever restless and anxious, their over-exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others." (Wollstonecraft 129) Hence sensibility is an outlet to feelings and emotions. In differentiating sense and sensibility, sense is the perception through the intellect whereas sensibility in the context of the novel is the acute response and passion to emotions and feelings.

## 2 Mother and Daughters: Education of the Emotions and Intellect

Marianne Dashwood at less than seventeen years is forced into sharing the impoverished life of her mother along with her two sisters Elinor (19) and Margaret (12). After the death of Mr Dashwood, the family shifts from Norland Park to Barton Park an unexpected shift from luxuries to modesty.

The four females are faced with the challenge of adapting to their modest cottage and the new environment that they live in. Marianne is emotional about the sixteen years that she spends in Norland Park and is melodramatic in expressing her sensibility.

The absence of a father figure instils a feeling of insecurity in the Dashwood sisters because of the disorganisation of the family but takes a more expressive form in Marianne. However, the modest living at Barton Cottage with the help of distant relatives secures the family physically if not emotionally. A woman in the nineteenth century was respected if she was married or engaged; single women were less respected in society. The ideal age for marriage was eighteen to twenty years in Austen's England; Elinor is nineteen and Marianne almost seventeen which also instils anxiety, more prominent in Marianne.

Marianne is also unaware of her weaknesses of vanity and insensitivity to the environment which she initially refused to contemplate. She does not accept the family circumstances and continues to live in a dilemma of her father's name even with a modest living. The inability to accept herself and the current circumstances of her family and the environment create a superficial psychological barrier that prevents the development of her personality. Marianne is not agreeable in society; she has a hostile sense of humour and develops feelings of remorse.

She is ignorant of her imperfections demeaning the principled Col Brandon's proposal for his age. Marianne is guilty of her reputation and the constant realization of her follies in the family, community and society becomes a reason for her illness. However, Marianne is born to an extraordinary fate that is able to overcome the falsehood of her opinion and conduct with Elinor's constant advice, assistance and guidance during her ignorant years of adolescence and realizes that her happiness could never be with Willoughby.

Marianne's mother Mrs Dashwood lacks prudence, reason and good judgement in providing sound grooming to her daughter. Romantic and whimsical, Mrs Dashwood is a loving, caring and nurturing mother but lacks the education and awareness of grooming her daughters into proper ladies as required by society. She is optimistic that her daughters would be as fortunate as her in marrying a wealthy man. This points out her ignorance and short-sightedness in not contemplating the consequences of the English law of entailment as Norland Park is deemed to be entailed to Mr Dashwood's son from his first wife. The past experience of becoming destitute has not credited her with the slightest wisdom and foresight that she could always share with her adolescent girls in educating them. Mrs Dashwood is an over-indulgent mother and grants excess

freedom to her daughters in taking their own decisions without any guidance and trusts Willoughby in courting Marianne which becomes the reason of her disgrace in society.

The political theorist John Locke charges parents with the responsibility of guiding the ignorant minds in discovering and experiencing the world and granting liberty in a constrained manner to govern their actions. Had Mrs Dashwood taken responsibility in governing her wrong judgments and actions, Marianne would not have been a prey to the wrong intentions of Willoughby damaging her reputation. Because of the overindulgence of her mother, Marianne is unable to exercise her reason in judging the character and superficiality of Willoughby.

Mrs Dashwood does not provide any guidance and instructions to her daughters in making them proper ladies, but they are accomplished in their own ways. Marianne has a passion for music and does not play for impressing for marriage. When she plays at Barton Park, everyone appreciates her for her talent. Learning music was a part of proper grooming of girls, and is a well-rounded education according to Wollstonecraft and Austen. Elinor is accomplished in drawing although she lacks the passion and enthusiasm of Marianne. Mrs Dashwood is casual regarding the accomplishments of her daughters in strengthening their strengths. Marianne's inclination for music is her natural talent and good habits can be inculcated while enhancing the natural inclination.

Through reason and capitalization of the natural tendencies can an individual develop prudence, and hence dignity and individuality. Sensibility as a trait balanced with prudence makes one useful to oneself and society. In comparing the two sisters, Austen describes Marianne as: Marianne was equally competent as Elinor; she was sensible and clever; but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting; she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.(10) Marianne is passionate and emotional about everything, the house and trees in Norland Park she leaves brings tears to her eyes. Elinor with her patience and forbearance tried her best to exert herself, in governing Marianne's sensibilities which are valued and cherished by their mother. In the absence of their father, Elinor takes on the adult paternal role in governing her sister's actions.

John Locke discusses the diversity in tempers, personalities, likes and dislikes in deviating from the path of reason. Hence it is important to guide them to prohibit from becoming irrational and insensitive. Marianne is temperamental, emotional and gullible because of lack of parental guidance. Marianne seeks a lot of attention at home and in public and is blindfolded with her sensibility and refusal to accept her weaknesses. Locke further compares the ignorant minds to the form of water, which needs to be moulded in the right shape. Furthermore considering individual differences all human beings are in possession of natural tendencies of curiosity, pride, desire for liberty and want of dominion.

She sets high aspirations in Marianne's mind who in her fit of sensibility, builds castles in the air. John Locke asserts that children look up to their parents and idolize them; they are role models to the ignorant and innocent minds who have no experience of the world. In the case of Marianne Mrs Dashwood should groom her to submit her fantasies to reason and being left to her whims and fancies, she becomes vulnerable to her sensibilities mistaking her infatuation for Willoughby as true love. Her infatuation for Willoughby brings disgrace to the family because of their excessive display of affections, unacceptable in society.

Marianne does not abide by the social codes of conduct in courting Willoughby even willing to accept gifts which were against the English society's rules and codes for women. She is ridiculed for flouting the prescribed rules of courting and the codes of conduct during dances at the social gatherings. Mrs Dashwood encourages Marianne endearing her unconditionally; consequently falling prey to the deceptive emotions of Willoughby.

Elinor is prudent to bear sarcastic remarks with earnestness but Marianne and her mother are sensitive and become defensive. Mrs Dashwood is a nurturing mother to Marianne and when Marianne falls ill, she desperately looks forward to her mother, who keeps up all night with patience and prudence for Marianne. Locke advises that the ignorant mind should be treated rationally, i.e. sensibly and not out of

passion. But Mrs Dashwood needs to enhance her own skills of reason and rationalism in guiding and educating Marianne. She is in constant praise and encouragement of her daughters.

Elinor tries to share her thoughts and feelings for the well-being of the family educating Elinor on the relation to society and personal relationships. Taking on the paternal role, Elinor aims to guide Marianne rather than disciplining her in being rational. Marianne learns from her own experiences and mistakes; learns to judge people and take correct decisions. She realizes her follies, self-centredness and the role of the family as a pillar of strength and support when faced with hard knocks in life. The ignorant Marianne in discovering the world has no guidance from her mother and the sensibility that she inherited from her mother earns her family an unacceptable reputation.

Locke charges parents the responsibility of guiding the ignorant minds in exploring and experiencing the society and the lack of proper guidance puts Marianne in an embarrassing position. Locke also asserts that the loss of reputation will make the bearer less careful about other's good thoughts. On cognizance of her weakness of sensibility, Marianne makes a resolution to her sister Elinor, "... my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved.

They shall no longer worry others, nor torture myself." (357) Marianne's consciousness to the true essence of her family undergoes a revolution: I shall now live solely for my family. You, my mother and Margaret, must henceforth be all the world to me; ... From you, from my home, I shall never again have the smallest incitement to move; and if I do move in other society, it will be only to show that my spirit is humbled, my heart amended, and that I can practice the civilities, the lesser duties of life, with gentleness and forbearance. (357) Elinor's kindness has given Marianne the opportunity of serious recollection of the past and reflection of her conduct when she remarks, "Whenever I look towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged. Everyone seemed injured by me." (356) Marianne's self-reproving spirit is reciprocated with praise and support and she realizes the importance of her family and promises to live solely for them. She decides to socialize when obligatory with gentleness and a humble spirit according to the societal codes of conduct. Marianne has undergone a transformation in her inter-personal relations exhibiting affection and friendliness to all but wary of being intimate with anyone which is an indication of being driven towards self-actualization.

The learning and guidance she receives from Elinor in correcting her conduct and undesirable habits highlight the significance of educating the intellect and emotions by parental guidance which according to Locke is superior to formal education. Wisdom and reason inculcate the right virtues and habits of becoming good citizens. Elinor's patience and kindness also instil a realization in Mrs Dashwood of her imprudence in grooming Marianne and considers herself answerable for Marianne's miseries.

Marianne appreciates Elinor's moderated behaviour with Edward Ferrars whom Elinor marries, and decides to model her sense. She accepts the true love of Col. Brandon and her happiness lies in his character, compassion and virtues as Austen points out, "Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion ... she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (389)

She is empathetic towards her sister and is problem-centred rather than self-centred. She accepts Marianne's advises and declares to Elinor, "... you [Elinor], my nurse, my friend, my sister! [.....], you who had known all the murmurings of my heart." (356) This bond of sisterhood is crucial to Marianne's self-actualization.

Initially, Marianne is self-centred but she realizes the sufferings and miseries caused to her sister Elinor which she always concealed in her heart. Marianne accepts her faults to Elinor, "... I had been insolent and unjust; with a heart hardened ... and a temper irritated ...." (356) Marianne accepts her flaws and hence the people around her including Col Brandon and the environment she lives in. She is able to seek the truth and regrets her heart being deserted and wronged; her acceptance of the circumstances allows her to experience the transient moments of self-actualization, also called 'peak experiences' by Maslow. Like the self-

actualized, she takes responsibility for her actions and mistakes that she committed. Marianne is a social person assigning a higher priority to her relations outside till she is emotionally shattered and her heart broken.

Like the self-actualized, she has transcended the superficiality of the environment and culture being detached and achieving autonomy of thoughts and actions. Although she is full of anxiety on accepting Willoughby's reality, she becomes stable and is able to face the hard knocks of life. As Marianne acknowledges Elinor as her mentor and role model, she emulates her sense in reasoning and judging people.

“Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby. At nineteen she found herself submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village.” (389) In becoming oneself, Abraham Maslow emphasizes on moral and ethical values that guide one in discovering and becoming oneself. Marianne's potential to be happy lies in her experiences of self-actualization once she acknowledges her need to be democratic in being humble to learn from her self-introspection and the environment.

The bitter experiences and pains of relying completely on her sensibility is a barrier to experiencing happiness and ultimate self-actualization. Although she gains cognizance in being prudent and wise, she faces the challenge of balancing sense and sensibility, and the power of objective reasoning. Marianne's growth and development in the novel are important as she transcends Maslow's deficiency needs that guide her behaviour in early adolescence and is guided by her self-awareness and self-introspection during her late adolescent years enabling her to be what she ought to become.

Austen has not crafted Elinor as a role model for her readers rather she questions Elinor's sensibility. “Always resignation and acceptance. Always prudence and honour and duty. Elinor, where is your heart?” (256) In being prudent and patient, Elinor sacrifices her mental peace and happiness concealing her emotions to which Austen points out the significance of sensibility in moderation with sense. Austen's moderation of sense and sensibility personified as Elinor and Marianne reflects the influence of John Locke's philosophy which emphasizes on wisdom and reason. Marianne's mistakes and poor judgment have been a stepping stone for self-improvement. In learning from Elinor's disposition, Marianne is democratic in her approach which itself is a manifestation of self-actualization.

## CONCLUSION

Through Elinor and Marianne, Austen educates her readers on sense and sensibility as the two sides of a coin; a balance between the head and the heart. Sensibility, emotions, compassion and receptivity to the environment is significant to a relationship, but the sense, prudence and wisdom is a pre-requisite for survival in the patriarchal society. By equating sense and sensibility on an equal platform, associated as male and female privileges, she is propagating Locke's philosophy of a companionate relationship based on equality of both partners. By education, Austen does not emphasize on formal education, but on self-knowledge and self-introspection that can be achieved in reading and being receptive to the society and environment one lives in.

Jane Austen's heroines are strong women who are autonomous and independent of their circumstances in balancing personal desires with the societal expectations. Austen highlights the consequences of one's existence on extremes of either sense or sensibility; and emphasizes on moderation of the two in being happy.

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