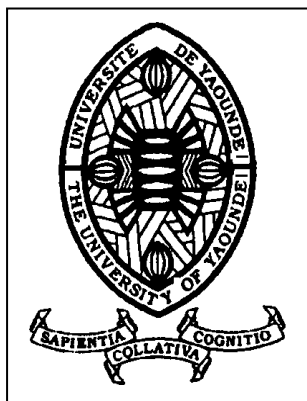


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UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE 1
FACULTE DES ARTS, LETTRES
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CENTRE DE RECHERCHE
ET FORMATION DOCTORALE

UNITE DE RECHERCHE ET
DE FORMATION
DOCTORALE
LANGUES ET LITERATURES

**TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF WOMENS RIGHTS
FROM THE 19TH TO 20TH CENTURY: A READING OF
JANE AUSTENS *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND
VIRGINIA WOOLFS *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE***

**A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of a
Master's Degree in English**

Specialization: British Literature

BY

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DEDICATION

To my mentor, Siaka Nestor and my son Liam Ezekiel

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, titled "Tracing the Evolution of Women's Rights from the 19th to the 20th Century: A Reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*" examines the transformation of women's rights and societal roles through a comparative literary analysis. By examining Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, set in the early 19th century, the study illustrates the limited agency available to women, emphasizing themes of marriage, class, and societal expectations. In contrast, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, written in the early 20th century, portrays a significant shift in feminist thought, showcasing women's struggle for independence and the complexities of their identities beyond domestic confines. The central hypothesis was based on the fact that the struggles portrayed in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* have greatly contributed in the achievements celebrated in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Through a detailed analysis of character development, narrative structure, and thematic evolution, the dissertation argues that Woolf's work embodies the advancements in women's rights and the gradual growth of female autonomy. This exploration not only illuminates the historical context of women's rights but also shows the enduring influence of these literary works in shaping contemporary feminist discourse.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse, intitulée « Retracer l'évolution des droits des femmes du 19^e au 20^{ème} siècle : Une lecture de *Orgueil et Préjugés* de Jane Austen et de *To the Lighthouse* de Virginia Woolf examine la transformation des droits des femmes et des rôles sociétaux à travers une littérature comparée analyse. En examinant *Orgueil et préjugés* d'Austen, qui se déroule au début du XIX^e siècle, l'étude illustre l'action limitée dont disposent les femmes, mettant l'accent sur les thèmes du mariage, de la classe sociale et de la société attentes. En revanche, *To the Lighthouse* de Woolf, écrit au début du XX^e siècle, dépeint un changement significatif dans la pensée féministe, mettant en valeur la lutte des femmes pour l'indépendance et la complexités de leur identité au-delà des limites nationales. L'hypothèse centrale reposait sur le fait que les luttes décrites dans *Orgueil et préjugés* d'Austen ont grandement contribué à la réalisations célébrées dans *To the Lighthouse* de Woolf. Grâce à une analyse détaillée du caractère développement, structure narrative et évolution thématique, la thèse soutient que le travail de Woolf incarne les progrès des droits des femmes et la croissance progressive de l'autonomie féminine. Cette exploration éclaire non seulement le contexte historique des droits des femmes, mais montre également les influence de ces œuvres littéraires dans la formation du discours féministe contemporain et également les influence de ces œuvres littéraires dans la formation du discours féministe contemporain.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The 19th and 20th centuries were significant eras in human history. These centuries were marked by enormous transformative events and developments. The 19th century witnessed great development in many aspects like the industrial revolution, colonialism and imperialism, American Civil War, Nationalism and Revolution. These greatly added to the evolution of women's right. During the 20th century, World War I, Russian revolution, World War II, Cold War, decolonization and other great events that brought immense changes during this time.

The industrial revolution had a complex relationship with women's rights. It brought great changes in the society, labour market and presented a great challenge for women. In the economic level, the industrial revolution created new employment opportunities for women. Women started advocating better working conditions, fair wages, and improved rights. They formed labour unions and participated in strikes to demand better treatment and protection. Industrial revolution also contributed to the rise of the first wave of feminism and the women's suffrage movement. This exposed new ideas and increased participation in public life which prompted women to demand political rights, including the rights to vote. The industrial revolution also opened up new educational facilities for women. This permitted women to access formal education, and pursue careers in their field of study.

The industrial revolution did not only open up new employment opportunities for women but also challenged the traditional gender roles and societal expectations. In regards to this transformative period, women were largely condemned to the domestic sphere, expected to fulfil the roles of wife, mother, and household caretaker. The rise of factories and mills created a demand for a larger workforce, and women began to enter the labour market in great numbers. Women's participation in the workforce had influence on their economic and social standing. Women were able to gain their own income, gaining independence and financial autonomy. This also presented great challenges, as women often faced discrimination, exploitation, and unequal pay compared to their male colleagues. As a reaction to this, women began to organize and advocate for better working conditions, fair wages, and improved rights.

The formation of labour unions and the participation in strikes were important steps in the women's rights movement. These general actions not only demanded better treatment for

female workers but also exposed the inequalities that women faced in the workplace. This contributed to the rise of the first wave of feminism, as women began to challenge the traditional gender norms and assert their right to political representation and participation in public life.

The women's suffrage movement was a significant result of this growing feminist consciousness. Women across Britain and other parts of the world fought bravely and tirelessly to secure the right to vote, recognizing that political representation was important for achieving true equality and independence. The struggle for women's suffrage was met with great opposition and even violent suppression, but the determination and resilience of the female supporters led to the gradual expansion of voting rights for women.

Alongside the fight for political rights, the industrial revolution also opened up new educational opportunities for women during the time. The establishment of educational facilities for women allowed them to access formal education, acquire skills, and pursue careers in various fields. This access to education was a great step in empowering women and challenging the societal perceptions of their intellectual and professional capabilities.

The impact of the industrial revolution on women's rights was later fortified by the two world wars that followed. During times of conflict, women took on roles that had traditionally been reserved for men, such as factory workers, nurses, and resistance fighters. This experience of getting into non-traditional roles not only challenged the notion of women's suitability for domestic and caregiving duties but also showed their capabilities and resilience in the face of adversity. The experiences of women during the world wars played a great role in redefining gender roles and promoting greater gender equality. The wartime contributions of women challenged the on-going societal attitudes and opened the way for a more progressive and inclusive understanding of women's place in society. This contributed to the on-going struggle for women's rights and the gradual evolution of societal views towards the independence and capabilities of women.

World War I and II contributed significantly to the rise of women's rights as it led to redefining gender roles. During times of war, women have taken on roles that challenge traditional gender norms. Women played the role of nurses, factory workers, and resistant fighters, works reserved only for men. By so doing, they have challenged the notion that women are solely suited for domestic and caregiving roles, thus promoting gender equality.

The 19th century was a transitional era in women's lives as it transcended from the traditional woman to the modern woman (20th century). The conflict and ideology about the woman's position in the society in comparison of men's has always been a subject of debate and concern.

Women in Britain have started to fight for their rights and independence since the beginning of the 19th century. The aim was to have the same opportunity of education, occupation and life as men. The perception of an independent woman has changed throughout the centuries as well, from a woman who was supposed to be a wife, mother and keeper of a household more precisely how Martin Luther claimed;

Women should remain at home, and bear and bring up children. A woman is or at least should be, a friendly, courteous, and a merry companion in life, the honour and ornament of a house, and inclined to tenderness, for thereunto are they chiefly created to bear children, and to be a pleasure joy and solace of their husbands'' (Halirova, Martina: The Development of Feminism in English Literature of the 19th and 20th century. 2016).

Women have gone through a lot of limitations in terms of social, economic and political spheres. In the 19th century, women were still in the chains of domestic responsibilities. They had no right to vote or to partake in any form of political activities and they had no right to own properties and worse still, they had no legal rights to their children. Despite the alarming shout for women's emancipation, the situation hypocritically changed just to blindfold the notion of equality.

The struggle for women rights has been a long and arduous journey through centuries and continents. Also, the depiction of women and their rights in literature reflects the societal attitudes and norms prevalent during a specific period of time. British literature is renowned of its rich literary heritage, has witnessed the evolution of women and their rights and the portrayal of women characters over centuries.

Significant numbers of the world's population are routinely subjected to torture, starvation, terrorism, humiliation, mutilation, and even murder simply because they are female. Crimes such as these against any group other than women would be recognized as a civil and political emergency as well as a gross violation of the victims' humanity. Yet, despite a clear record of deaths and demonstrable abuse, women's rights are not commonly classified as human rights. This is problematic both theoretically and practically, because it

has grave consequences for the way society views and treats the fundamental issues of women's lives.

Women's human rights are violated in a variety of ways. Of course, women sometimes suffer abuses such as political repression that are similar to abuses suffered by men. In these situations, female victims are often invisible, because the dominant image of the political in our world is male. However, many violations of women's human rights are distinctly connected to being female- that is, women are discriminated against and abused on the basis of gender. Women also experience sexual abuse in situations where their other human rights are being violated, as political prisoners or members of persecuted ethnic groups, for example.

Woman is the mother of humanity as rightfully said. There is no humanity if there is no woman. Women have been considered as subordinates through centuries. Just like all humans, women deserve their rights in all domains of life. They need the right to life and liberty despite their statuses without any form of discrimination. Back in the 1990s _'women's right were not generally accepted as human's right' _and consequently, they suffered from several violations. Women are also subjected to equal employment opportunities, so as to upgrade their living standards just like the Men do.

To best understand the progress of women's rights, it is crucial to examine the historical context. That explores the suffrage movement, which fought for women's rights to vote, as a pivotal moment in the struggle for gender equality. It also delves into the feminist movements of the 20th century and their impact on societal attitudes towards women's rights. Women's rights in Britain experienced significant transformations during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the emergence of women's suffrage movements, advocating women's rights to vote. These movements played an important role in achieving political rights and promoting gender equality. Activists like Susan B. Anthony, Elisabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott played crucial roles in advocating for women's political rights. The movement achieved success in countries like New Zealand (1893), Australia (1902), Finland (1906), Norway (1913), and the United States (1920).

The first organised movement aimed at gaining rights for American women effectively began in July, with the convention organised by Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott at Seneca Falls, New York. Attendees signed the declaration of sentiments, which affirmed

women's equality with men, and passed a dozen resolutions calling for various specific rights, including the right to vote. Although the early women's rights movement was linked to abolitionism, passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870 angered some women's rights leaders who resented Black men being granted suffrage before white women. Similarly, the women's suffrage movement also largely marginalized or excluded Black feminists like Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells. Though ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 fulfilled the principal goal of feminism's first wave—guaranteeing white women the right to vote—Black women and other women of colour faced continued obstacles until passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which argued that women were chafing against the confines of their roles as wives and mothers. The book was a massive success, selling 3 million copies in three years and launching what became known as the second wave of feminism. Inspired by the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam War, second-wave feminists called for a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles in society and an end to sexist discrimination.

Feminism or —women's liberation‖ gained strength as a political force in the 1970s, as Friedan, Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug founded the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. High points of the second wave included passage of the equal pay Act and the landmark Supreme Court decisions in *Griswold V. Connecticut* (1965) and *Roe V. Wade* (1973) related to reproductive freedom. But while Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, a conservative backlash ensured it fell short of the number of states needed for ratification.

Like the suffrage movement, second-wave feminism drew criticism for centering privileged white women, and some Black women formed their own feminist organisations, including the National Feminist Organisation (NBFO). Despite its achievements, the women's liberation movement had begun to lose momentum by 1980, when conservative forces swept Ronald Reagan to the White House.

While the advances of second-wave feminism had undoubtedly achieved more equality and right for women, the movement that emerged in the early 1990s focused on tackling problems that still existed, including sexual harassment in the workplace and a shortage of women in positions of power. Rebecca Walker, the mixed-race daughter of the second wave leader Alice Walker, announced the arrival of feminism's —third wave‖ in 1992, while watching Anita Hill testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee about her

accusations of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. That same year dubbed the —Year of the Woman‡, saw an unprecedented number of women elected to Congress.

Embracing the spirit of rebellion instead of reform, third-wave feminists encouraged women to express their sexuality and individuality. Many embraced a more traditional feminine style of dressing and grooming, and even rejected the term —feminist‡ as a way of distancing themselves from their second-wave predecessors. —Riot Girl‡ groups like Bikini Kill, Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy brought their brand feminism into pop music, including songs that addressed issues of sexism, patriarchy, abuse, racism and rape.

Third wave feminism also sought to be more inclusive when it came to race and gender. The work of scholar and theorist Kimberly Crenshaw on the concept of —intersectionality‡, or how types of oppression (based on race, gender, class, etc.) can overlap, was particularly influential in this area. Third-wave feminists also drew on the work of gender theorist Judith Butler, including support for women’s rights in this type of intersectional feminism.

The 20th century continued with the achievements of women’s rights in various domains. Like the Equal Franchise Act 1928 which granted voting rights to all women over the age of 21, regardless of their property qualifications, bringing women’s suffrage in line with men’s suffrage. Also, Married Women’s Property Act 1882 enabled married women to own and control their property and earnings, previously under the control of their husbands. More to this was the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 that made it illegal to discriminate against women on the grounds of sex or marital status in employment, education, and the provision of goods and services. Women also achieved The Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, which played a crucial role in accompanying for women’s suffrage. And finally, the Abortion Act 1967 was not set aside. It legalized abortions in certain circumstances, granting women more control over their reproductive choices.

Writers during these periods centered their subject matters based on the economic, social and political on-goings. Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* alongside Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* throw more light on these societal happenings especially women’s experiences, expectations and challenges.

The evolution of women’s rights from the 19th to the 20th century represents a deep transformation in societal norms, legal frameworks, and literary representations. This period

was marked by significant social troubles, emerging feminist movements, and an uprising consciousness in view of gender equality. At the core of this evolution lies a rich landscape of literature that not only reflects the changing roles of women but also criticizes the patriarchal structures of their times. Two vital works that illustrate these shifts are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* offers a lens into the rigid societal expectations of early 19th-century England, where women's worth was often measured by their marital prospects and economic reliance on men. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Austen challenges these conventions, showing a woman who seeks autonomy and self-fulfilment beyond the boundaries of marriage. Elizabeth's journey reflects feminist thoughts, showing the tension between individual desire and societal expectation. Austen's intelligence and keen social observation and commentary illuminate the limitations placed on women, while also suggesting the potential for change through personal agency and intellectual independence.

Contrarily, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is set in a period when the fight for women's rights gained ground, as women began to impose their presence in public life and the literary sphere. Woolf's narrative, with its stream-of-consciousness style and introspective character studies, gets deeper into the complexities of women's experiences in a post-World War I society. The novel portrays themes of identity, creativity, and the impact of gender roles on personal and artistic expression. Through the character of Lily Briscoe, Woolf portrays a vision of female empowerment, laying more emphasis on the importance of self-expression and the rejection of traditional beliefs and barriers.

This dissertation will analyse how these two authors, separated by over a century, engage with the evolving discourse on women's rights and identity. By analysing the characters, themes, and social contexts of *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*, this study aims to demonstrate the literary reflections of women's struggles and aspirations during a transformative era. More so, it will explore how these texts not only document the historical journey toward gender equality but also serve as Cultural criticism that moves hands in gloves with contemporary feminist discourse.

Biography of Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in Steventon, Hampshire, England. She was the seventh of eight children in the Austen family, which included her brothers James, George, Edward, Henry, and Francis, and sisters Cassandra and Martha. Her father, George Austen, was a clergyman and an educated man who encouraged his children to pursue knowledge and literature. This environment gave way to Jane's early love for reading and writing. From a young age, she exhibited a remarkable talent for storytelling, crafting plays and stories that entertained her family. The Austens lived in a rural setting that provided great inspiration for her later works. In 1801, the family moved to Bath after her father's retirement, a transition that significantly changed Jane's life and write-ups. The social dynamics of Bath would later influence her portrayal of society in her different novels.

Austen's education was largely informal, conducted within the family home. She and Cassandra received instruction from their father and were also sent to a boarding school in Reading for a short time. However, the education available to women during this period was limited, focusing primarily on accomplishments like music and needlework rather than academic study. Despite these constraints, Jane's continuous reading and keen interest in writing flourished. She began writing stories and plays as a teenager, often sharing them with her family, which laid a supportive environment for her creative expression.

Despite limited formal education for women, Jane had access to her father's library and was an avid reader. This exposure to literature shaped her writing style, characterized by sharp wit, irony, and a keen observational eye. Her reading included works by authors such as Samuel Johnson and Fanny Burney, whose styles and themes influenced her own narrative techniques and character development. Austen began writing seriously during her teenage years. One of her earliest works, *Lady Susan*, is an epistolary novel that illustrates her sharp intelligence and understanding of human relationships. In 1795, she started working on *First Impressions*, which would eventually become *Pride and Prejudice*. Though talented, Austen faced numerous rejections from publishers early in her career. It wasn't until 1811 that she achieved publication success with *Sense and Sensibility* which was well-received and established her as a novelist. After the death of her father in 1805, the Austen family faced financial difficulties that forced them to relocate several times. Eventually settling in Chawton Cottage in 1809 provided Jane with the stability she needed to focus on her writing. Austen experienced periods of financial instability, particularly after her father's death in 1805. This reality informed her writing, where economic considerations often engraved her characters'

motivations and decisions. Themes of wealth, inheritance, and social mobility are prevalent in her works, highlighting the economic aspects of marriage and social standing.

Austen's literary write-ups during her time at Chawton Cottage was prolific. Her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), tells the story of the Dashwood sisters Elinor and Marianne as they navigate love and heartbreak in a society that emphasizes financial security through marriage. This novel explores the tension between reason and emotion, themes that would recur throughout her work. Following this success, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) solidified and gratified her reputation as one of England's foremost novelists. This beloved story centers on Elizabeth Bennet and her evolving relationship with the proud Mr. Darcy while criticizing social class distinctions and gender roles.

In 1814, Austen published *Mansfield Park* which follows Fanny Price as she grows up among wealthy relatives. This novel looks into themes of morality and class disparity while examining the complexities of human relationships. The following year saw the publication of *Emma*, featuring the headstrong heroine Emma Woodhouse, whose misguided matchmaking efforts lead to self-discovery and growth. After her death, *Northanger Abbey* (published posthumously in 1817) was released; this novel parodies Gothic fiction through the experiences of Catherine Morland as she struggles between imagination and reality. Lastly, *Persuasion* (also published posthumously in 1817) tells the interesting story of Anne Elliot, who is given a second chance at love after being persuaded to break off an engagement years earlier.

Even though Jane succeeded in her artistic life as an author, she maintained a relatively private personal life. She never married but had several close relationships with men throughout her life, including a brief romantic involvement with Tom Lefroy in her youth. Her letters reveal a greater awareness of societal norms regarding marriage and gender roles during the Regency era. Austen's close relationship with her sister Cassandra was particularly significant; they shared confidences about their lives and aspirations. Austen remained unmarried throughout her life, which was uncommon for women of her social standing. This choice allowed her the freedom to write and explore themes of independence and selfhood. Her nuanced portrayals of women navigating the marriage market reflect her understanding of societal pressures and the limited choices available to women, as seen in characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse.

Austen came from a close-knit family that encouraged intellectual discourse and creativity. Growing up in the rural gentry of Hampshire, she had first-hand experience of the social structures and class distinctions she would later criticize in her novels. The dynamics within her family, particularly her close relationship with her sister Cassandra, influenced her understanding of female companionship and the complexities of relationships, themes that recur throughout her work.

Austen's health began to decline in 1816 when she started experiencing various complications that would later be suspected to be related to Addison's disease or possibly Hodgkin's lymphoma. Despite these health challenges, she continued to write until shortly before her death on July 18, 1817. Her final unfinished work was *Sanditon*. Which reflects her evolving style and themes. Jane Austen's work was largely unrecognized during her lifetime; she published anonymously under titles like "By a Lady." Only a few people were aware of her identity as the author behind these popular novels. However, after her death, Austen's novels gained immense popularity and critical acclaim. Today, she is celebrated as one of the greatest novelists in English literature for her keen observations on society—particularly regarding women's roles and relationships during the Regency era.

Her witty social commentary continues to resurface with readers today as they explore themes of love, marriage, class distinctions, and individual agency within societal constraints. Austen's influence extends beyond literature, she has inspired feminist discourse about marriage and independence through her portrayals of female characters who seek fulfilment beyond traditional roles.

Austen was buried in Winchester Cathedral, where a memorial stone honours her contributions to literature. Her legacy endures through adaptations of her novels into films, television series, and stage productions that introduce new generations to her stories. The timeless nature of Austen's insights into human relationships ensures that she remains relevant in contemporary discussions about society and gender roles.

In a nutshell, Jane Austen's personal life greatly influenced her writing style and themes. Her experiences with family, education, social norms, and personal challenges informed her diverse portrayals of characters and relationships, allowing her to craft enduring narratives that resonate with readers across generations. Her ability to blend humour with social commentary remains a print of her literary legacy.

Biography of Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf was born into a well-connected family in Kensington, London. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was a distinguished author, critic, and the first editor of the Dictionary of National Biography. Her mother, Julia Stephen, was a prominent figure in the pre-Raphaelite movement and an advocate for women's issues. The family's literary and intellectual atmosphere was enriched by regular visits from notable figures such as George Eliot and Henry James. Virginia Woolf's childhood was marked by both privilege and tragedy. The death of her mother in 1895 greatly affected her, leading to her first mental breakdown.

Following this, Woolf experienced further trauma with the passing of her half-siblings and the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her half-brothers, which compounded her struggles with mental health. Following her mother's death, Virginia and her siblings moved to the family's summer home in St. Ives, Cornwall. This setting became a source of inspiration for her later works. Woolf received education, primarily at home, and her literary talent began to develop in her teenage years. She contributed to her father's magazine and wrote her first stories during this period. In 1906, Woolf began her own writing career, producing essays and articles for various publications. Her early work received modest attention but laid the groundwork for her future literary endeavors.

In 1904, Virginia met Leonard Woolf, whom she would marry in 1912. They became central figures in the Bloomsbury Group, a collective of artists and intellectuals who rejected the conventions of Victorian society. The group's discussions on art, politics, and sexuality profoundly influenced Woolf's work and provided her with a supportive environment for her creative pursuits.

The Woolfs established the Hogarth Press in 1917, which allowed them to publish their own works and those of other avant-garde writers, including T.S. Eliot and Katherine Mansfield. This venture not only boosted Woolf's literary career but also contributed significantly to modernist literature. Woolf's writing is characterized by its experimental narrative style, particularly her use of stream-of-consciousness technique. This approach allows readers to experience characters' thoughts and feelings in an intimate manner. Some of her major works include: *Mrs. Dalloway* which captures a single day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a party, full with flashbacks and the inner thoughts of various characters, highlighting themes of time, memory, and mental health. Another Woolf's major work is *To the Lighthouse* which explores the dynamics of the Ramsay family over a decade,

using the trip to a lighthouse as a metaphor for the passage of time and the search for meaning. The novel is notable for its shifting perspectives and lyrical prose. *Orlando* is another masterpiece which is a ground-breaking exploration of gender fluidity, this novel follows its protagonist's transformation from a man to a woman over centuries, challenging conventional notions of identity and sexuality. *The Waves* is a unique narrative that presents the thoughts of six characters, this novel is celebrated for its poetic language and exploration of the theme of individuality versus collectivity. Woolf's feminist writings challenged the patriarchal structures of her time. In *A Room of One's Own*, she argues that women need financial independence and a space of their own to write. This essay remains a seminal work in feminist literature, advocating for women's voices in a male-dominated literary world. Also, her novel *The Years* (1937) reflects the changing roles of women and societal expectations in early 20th-century England, showcasing the evolving landscape of gender and class.

Throughout her life, Woolf faced significant mental health challenges, including depression and bipolar disorder. These struggles often influenced her writing, offering a profound exploration of the human psyche. Woolf's diaries, published posthumously, provide insight into her thoughts and feelings, revealing her battles with mental illness and her creativity.

In the late 1930s, Woolf's mental health deteriorated, as a result of the pressures of World War II and personal crises. On March 28, 1941, she filled her pockets with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse near her home in Sussex. In her last letter to Leonard, she expressed her fear of losing her sanity and her love for him, revealing the depth of her struggles.

Virginia Woolf's impact on literature and feminist thought is remarkable. Her innovative narrative techniques and exploration of complex themes such as identity, gender, and mental health have inspired generations of writers and thinkers. Woolf's works continue to be studied for their artistry and their commentary on the human condition. Her life and writings remain a testament to the challenges faced by women in literature, as well as the broader societal changes of her time. Virginia Woolf is remembered not only as a pioneer of modernist literature but also as a powerful voice advocating for women's rights and creative freedom.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the characters are often chained up with a lot of complexities due to gender roles and societal expectations. These characters are often in conflict with social and moral demands and they face this challenge individually. This hereby implies that characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* have desires and aspirations that are above societal expectations and thus, they face certain limitations. This creates inner conflict in these characters as they struggle to achieve their goals but are held by the judgmental view of the people around them. These conflicts are not limited by external factors but it also as internal conflicts and struggles. These struggles, empowered by limitations due to societal expectations and gender roles are seen in Elisabeth and Lily Briscoe's journey towards achieving their goals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Although a lot has been said about women's right, what are the innovations? And have they brought a broad smile to womanhood? The most alarming questions are;

- ❖ What is the condition of women in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*?
- ❖ What are the challenges of the woman's condition in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*? What changed? What did not change?
- ❖ To what extent have women's rights evolved in both text?

These questions are just so enormous and it keeps raising a lot of questions about the evolution of women's right.

HYPOTHESIS

This research is based on the hypothesis that Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* trace women's right from the 19th to the 20th century women's. The struggles for women's right or assertiveness in Jane Austen find an almost complete version in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* especially Elisabeth Bennet and Lily Briscoe. The woman has moved from a suppressed version to an outstanding version.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research work aims at exploring women's experiences based on gender norms and societal expectations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More emphasis is laid on the notion of marriage, education, profession and other spheres where women faced a certain degree of limitations. This paper goes deeper into these limitations and challenges through in the patriarchal society in which they find themselves. By examining these loopholes and challenges women face, a greater attention is paid at the level in which women of these centuries strive hard to change their conditions and rights for a better living.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By studying the evolution of women's right from the 19th to 20th century, this dissertation contributes to the broader field of study of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf in terms of her feminist perspectives. By delving into women experiences, gender norms and societal expectations of these eras, a broader understanding of women's rights is attained. This work contributes to social warfare especially in the domain of women's right in particular and human rights as a whole. This work is equally significant in that it handles themes that are prevalent in our contemporary society. It therefore provides critical analysis, contextual understanding, comparative study, and furthering critical discourse surrounding Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Tracing the evolution of women's rights is exclusively devoted to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. As a result, it does not completely cover everything they have written. Whenever need arises, the consultation of autobiographical and biographical sources will be used as they are closely linked to the epochs under study.

MOTIVATION

The realities in analyzing of Jane Austen's *pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's, *To the Lighthouse* are real and captivating. The exploration of morals and ethics, alongside societal critiques, historical context just to name a few, are attractive zones for academic research and curiously. It has noticed and analyzed that despite the grandiose evolution of women and their rights, there are still some loopholes in certain domains. That is why tracing the evolution of women's right in regards to the eras and societal happenings is of great benefit Thus, getting deeper into the development of women's rights from the nineteenth century and twentieth

century provides a profound insight into the social, political and economic conditions of the Victorian England, which provides a wider understanding of societal expectations, gender roles, morality, social hierarchy and most of all, the consequences of individualistic actions. The research is hereby motivated by these factors as it handles universal realities and themes.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

For better understanding of the crux of the subject matter of this dissertation, it is important to give a contextualized definition of the key terms used in this research. The major terms to be defined here are tracing , evolution and women's rights .

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines tracing as the act or process of following the course or development of something.

The Oxford English dictionary defines tracing as the action of following the course or track of something; the act of tracking or pursuing. In a general manner, tracing is the process of following the path, progression or direction of something, often with the aim of understanding its history, origin or development.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines evolution as a gradual process of change and development often through a series of natural reaction or progressive step. In a more contextual sense, evolution is the gradual, progressive development and advancement of women's legal, economic, political and social status over time.

Stephen Jay Gould defines evolution as a process of branching and diversification, not just linear progression.

Women's right refers to the social, political, and economic rights and freedoms that are granted to women, advocating for their equality with men. The concept encompasses various aspects, including the right to vote, access to education, employment opportunities, reproductive rights, freedom from discrimination and violence, and participation in decision making processes.

The specific definition and scope of women's rights may vary across different countries and cultures, but the underlying principle is to ensure that women are treated as equal and autonomous individuals, with the same rights and opportunities as men. The pursuit of women's right is rooted in the recognition of historical and ongoing gender-based discrimination and the belief in gender equality.

Women's rights have been a subject of advocacy and activism around the world for centuries, with significant milestones achieved through various movements and legal reforms. The first wave of feminism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries focused on securing women's suffrage rights, leading to the right to vote for women in many countries. The second-wave Feminism of the 1960s and 1970s broadened the agenda to address issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and gender-based violence. Subsequent waves of feminism and on-going activism have continued to challenge gender inequality and advocate for women's rights in various spheres of life.

STRUCTURE OF WORK

This dissertation is made up of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The Introduction consists of fundamental elements like the research problem, research questions, a hypothesis, research objectives, motivation, significance of study, a scope of study, a definition of key terms.

Chapter one entitled, —Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature handles the theoretical framework chosen for this research, which is New Historicism (Gendered New Historicism) and Feminism. It focuses on the definition. The development of the theory, their tenets and why they are deemed appropriate for this study. The second part of this chapter dwells on the works of previous researchers on the novels under study.

Chapter two, captioned —The Condition of Women in *Pride and Prejudice*” sets out to analyze the various condition of women in this novel. It also sets out to illustrate the limitations women faced during the 19th century due to societal norms and expectations that govern the male dominated society of the time. This chapter explores the significance of characters experiences at these junctions, where their aspirations and autonomy are tampered with. It seeks to understand the on-going discourse of women’s struggles and strive for equality in a chauvinistic society and epoch, which shows the negative impacts in the lives of characters, especially female characters.

Chapter three, titled "The Condition of Women in *To the Lighthouse*" sets out to examine lives of women in the text and the challenges they face in navigating through their aspirations and autonomy. It provides a deeper understanding of the societal and cultural factors that govern women’s rights in the 20th century. This involves exploring the role of gender, class, and societal expectations in influencing their decisions, as well as the consequences of conforming to or deviating from these norms.

Chapter four entitled —Evolution of Women’s Rights in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the lighthouse*" focuses on the analysis of women’s rights from the 19th to the 20th century. It examines the condition of women in both texts and through a comparative study, this chapter sets out to demonstrate the rights of women in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and further expatiate on women’s rights gained in Woolf’s —*To the lighthouse* “.

The conclusion summarizes the research findings, and validates the research hypotheses.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of two major sections. The first section gives an account of the theoretical framework which has been chosen for the analysis of the novels under study. In this regard, this section will expatiate on New Historicism and Feminism and their importance in the interpretation and analysis of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The second part of this chapter will review works which have been written on the novels under study in order to prove the novelty of the present research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the twentieth century, many theories evolved like New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism and Deconstruction. These approaches focused only on the linguistic analysis aspects of literary texts. New Criticism focused plainly in the _close textual analysis 'as the revolted against historical and biographical approaches of analyzing a literary text [Ryan 128]. Formalism on the other hand share the same notions like the new critics as they argue that literature is an expression of language and the form or the intrinsic elements of a literary text give a meaningful interpretation without necessarily looking into the extrinsic or external elements of the text like the author's biography, the era in which the text was written and the happenings of that time. The formalists believe that a text should be studied as an _'autonomous entity'', wherein critics try to _decode' the language of the text. Thus, the formalists arose with the principle of _'defamiliarisation of language''. Structuralism also shared the same point of view as it also focused on the structure and linguistic aspects of the text. Structuralism embedded its analysis and interpretation of texts based on the notion of signs, signifiers and signified. All these approaches mentioned are _autonomous' and have absolutely nothing to do with neither the author's biography, culture nor the society in which the text was contextualised. Thus, New Historicism rebels against these approaches as it embraces the extrinsic analysis of literary text. New historicists believe that literary texts are social creations and do not exist out of a vacuum. Consequently, a text cannot be taken away neither from the author nor the society. This justifies why the texts *Pride and Prejudices* and *To the Lighthouse* cannot just be studied as an autonomous entity but great attention must be paid in regards the author's biography, their philosophy of life, the time in which their texts

were written and most especially, the society in which the text is contextualized. This is reason enough why the two major intrinsic approaches; New Historicism and Feminism are used in analyzing the texts under study. I have chosen these approaches because it openly exposes the authors' philosophies of life which makes the interpretation of the text less stressful.

NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism is a literary approach that gained popularity in the 1980s. The term New Historicism was coined by Stephen Greenblatt, in his introduction to special issue of *Genre*, Vol 15 [1982]. Stephen Greenblatt was a professor of Harvard University, a literary critic, theorist and scholar. New Historicism came up as a reaction against purely linguistic and formal analysis of texts. It emphasizes the importance of historical context, particularly the social, cultural and political forces that shape and are shaped by literary works. New Historicism argue that literature is not created in isolation but deeply embedded in the cultural historical conditions of its production. They examine the ways in which literary works reflect and engage with issues such as class, gender race, and power. Rather than seeking to uncover an author's intended meaning, New Historicists look at how the text functions within a larger web of social and historical forces.

__'New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation of genius'__[Stephen J. Greenblatt].Greenblatt inspires new historicists like Walter Benn Michael, Louis A. Montrose and Catherine Gallagher. New Historicism came as a result of concepts and ideas in the analysis and interpretation of societal happenings based on post-structural theorists like Michael Foucault's discuss and power, Clifford's Geert's anthropology, Louis Althusser's Marxist ideology and many more. As a counter discourse to the American text based approach called New Criticism, the new critics focused on the intrinsic analysis of literary texts. These new critics believed that a literary text is __'autonomous, self-sufficient and self-sustained entity quiet separate from the society, history or any external causal agent'__. Contrarily to the new critics, new historicists had the conviction that literature is not an __'abstract object; it is the product of the socio-historical and cultural context and should therefore be interpreted within the backdrop of its content'__. Therefore, a text can be interpreted meaningfully when the historical facts under which the text was written is taken into consideration.

New Historicism is a critical approach that is primarily associated with literary theorists like Stephen Greenblatt. This method highlights the relationship between literature and its historical context, arguing that literary texts cannot be fully understood without considering the social, political, and cultural circumstances of their time or periods. To this effect, New Historicists believe that literature is a product of its time and should be analysed hand in gloves with historical events and cultural practices. This perspective often examines how power structures influence both literary production and the interpretation of texts. New Historicism looks at who has the authority to define history and literature, highlighting the dynamics of power that shape our comprehension. In addition, another important aspect of New Historicism is intertextuality, which emphasizes the connections between texts and the historical documents, social practices, and cultural aspects surrounding them. This suggests that texts are interconnected and in constant dialogue with each other. New Historicists analyse how literary works reference and respond to other texts, historical events and cultural discourses.

They also highlight the ways in which the dominant ideologies of a particular historical moment shape the production and reception of literature. This approach explores how literature can both reflect and resist prevailing ideologies, focusing on the role of authors and audiences in shaping meaning. Additionally, it raises questions about the reliability of historical narratives and literary representations, suggesting that both can be constructed and subjective. Stephen Greenblatt is known for his influential work entitled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and Louis Montrose, who contributed significantly to the theory by focusing on the interceptions between literature and culture. Though New Historicism has been influential in literary studies, it has also faced criticism for overemphasizing historical context at the expense of the text itself. Critics argue that this may lead to a relativism that undermines the unique qualities of literary works. This focus can lead to a neglect of literary form, style, and aesthetics, diminishing the intrinsic value of literature as an art form. By prioritizing context, New Historicism may overlook the unique qualities that make literary works significant. This approach is often applied to texts from the Renaissance and other periods, allowing for a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and impacts its historical moment. It has been greatly influential in the study of Shakespeare and other great authors.

It is firmly believe that New Historicism often downplays the role of the author and their intentions, choosing instead to focus on broader cultural and historical forces. Critics

argue that this approach can overlook important insights that arise from considering an author's purpose and perspective, which can enrich the understanding of a text. Critics turn to also question the historical accuracy while using New Historicism. Some scholars question the reliability of the historical contexts employed, suggesting that interpretations of historical data may be selective or biased. This raises issues about the validity of the literary analyses that depend on such contexts. More so, the methodologies used in New Historicism can be seen as vague or inconsistent. Critics argue that the lack of a clear methodological framework makes the approach difficult to apply systematically, which can lead to varied interpretations and analyses that lack coherence. Finally, while examining power dynamics is a strength of New Historicism, Some critics argue that this emphasis can result in a reductive analysis. By focusing primarily on conflict and oppression, the approach may overlook other dimensions of human experience, such as joy, creativity, and personal relationships, which are also vital to understanding literature, to cut it short. New Historicism provides a framework for examining the intricate relationships between literature, history, and culture, emphasising the importance of context in understanding literary works.

Exploring the tensions and contractions with texts as well as examining the power dynamics at play in the production and reception of literature has been of greater concern to\ New Historicists. They often draw on non-literary sources like diaries, letters, legal documents and political tracts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the historical context in which a work was created.

The great supporters of this approach include; Laurence Lerner, Jerome McGann, Irving Howe, Paul Ricoer, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher. In regards to the contexts of New Historicism, Laurence Lerner in *History and Fiction* distinctively and clearly portrays the close relation between historical contexts and literary imagination. He argues and states that _‘any text can be related to at least three contexts; its ideology, its strategies of writings and social reality‘_. Lerner at this point makes it clear that a literary text does not exist out of nothing. Thus, Jane’s *Pride and Prejudice* alongside Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* are not written out of a vacuum as they have specific ideological aesthetic and socio-historical realities of the society. Literature is a construction of history and consequently, Literature cannot do without history. Lerner proves the validity of this assertion by declaring that _‘the world of Literature or fiction is not purely imaginary but overlaps with the world of history ‘_. This statement justifies the fact that literature provides information that can be useful to history as well as history provides information that can also be useful to literature. Sharing the

same point of view with Lerner, Jerome McGann in „*The Text, the Poem and the Problem of Historical Method*““ argues in favour of the inseparable relationship between history and literature. He firmly believes that creativity and imagination are moulded from a specific society and he also makes it clear that „every work of art is a product of an interaction between the artist, on one hand, and the variety of society determiners on the other hand“.

New Historicism had basic tenets on which they laid their principles. New Historicists were greatly focused on the political and social situations of the time, which was a great tool in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. They did not just focus solely on predominant social views but they also take into consideration major crisis that have to do with marginal or suppressed views at the time the text was written. New Historicists did not ignore the authors of the literary texts. The author's background is an integral part of the text as it provides the background idea of the text, which facilitates the understanding and interpreting the text under study. The author's background also permit critics have a clear understanding about the happenings of that era, which sharpens both the reader and the critic's mind to know the author's philosophy of life and his social class. These new historicists also showed great concern in the power dynamics of the society. These power dynamics vary at the level of gender, class and politics. To cut it short, the new historicists were focused in the negotiation of the power structures of the society. It can also be affirmed that new historicists were also concerned with political function of works arts. In other words, they are in search of the purpose of the work. As a matter of fact and precision, the new historicists rejected the new formalist notion of close reading [a reading in which the text is taken as „itself“ with no attention paid to the context or background of which it was written].

By focusing on the historical context of literary works, New Historicism aims to challenge traditional interpretations and uncover the underlying power structures and ideologies that shape both the text and its reception. It has been influential in shaping the field of literary and cultural studies, encouraging scholars to consider literature as a product of its time and to engage with the social and political implications of literary texts.

Nevertheless, New Historicism is an effective framework for analysing Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for several reasons. To begin, it emphasizes the importance of historical context in understanding literary texts. Austen wrote in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a time marked by significant Social change, while Woolf's work emerged in the early 20th century during the rise of modernism and the women's suffrage movement. Analysing their works within the socio- political context of

their times allows for a deeper understanding of how issues such as gender roles, class, and economic conditions influence their narratives and character development. In addition, New Historicism considers literature as part of a larger cultural conversation. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen focuses on marriage and social status, reflecting the complexities of class dynamics in her era. Contrarily,, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* explores women's inner lives, criticizing the limitations imposed by societal expectations and norms. By closely analysing these texts alongside contemporary historical documents, social criticism, and feminist theories, the analysis becomes richer and reveals how both authors engage with and respond to their cultural contexts. Also, this framework allows for an exploration of power relationships, particularly in terms of gender. Austen criticizes the institution of marriage and the dependence of women on men for social standing and financial security. In contrast, Woolf challenges traditional notions of femininity and domesticity, presenting characters who seek autonomy and self-expression.

New Historicism facilitates an examination of how these power dynamics are constructed and represented in their works, throwing light to the struggles faced by women in their respective societies. To lay more emphasis, New Historicism also acknowledges the role of the reader within historical contexts. It invites consideration of how contemporary readers interpret these texts differently than audiences in Austen's and Woolf's times. This approach highlights the evolving nature of feminist thought and the on-going relevance of the themes present in both novels, fostering discussions about women's rights and identity that remain pertinent today. In a nutshell, both authors get deeper into the complexities of identity shaped by societal expectations. Austen's characters navigate the constraints of their social milieu, while Woolf's characters struggle with modernist themes of self and consciousness. New Historicism allows for a greater exploration of how these identities are formed, challenged, and transformed in response to historical pressures, this making it the best approach to be used in analyzing Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.

New Historicism has a variety of approaches and methodologies within its framework, reflects the diversity of perspectives among its users. One of these approaches is Cultural Materialism which deals with the conditions of culture, including the influence of economics, class, and social structures. Cultural materialists often focus on how literature reflects and shapes the material realities of its time, challenging traditional notions of literary value by foregrounding the social and economic contexts in which texts are produced. Another important approach is Postcolonial New Historicism that merges postcolonial theory with

New Historicism to examine how colonial and postcolonial contexts shape literary texts. This approach focuses on issues of identity, power, and resistance, often highlighting marginalized voices and perspectives that challenge dominant historical narratives. By doing so, it seeks to uncover the complexities of cultural interactions and the legacies of colonialism in literature. In addition to the above approaches is the Psychoanalytic New Historicism which combines psychoanalytic theory with New Historicism to analyze the psychological dimensions of historical contexts and literary characters.

This approach examines how unconscious desires, fears, and motivations influence both the creation of texts and their reception, offering a deeper understanding of the complexities of human behavior in literature. Furthermore, Ecocritical New Historicism deals with ecological concerns into New Historicist analysis, focusing on how literature reflects environmental issues and human relationships with nature. This approach emphasizes the historical context of ecological thought and the impact of environmental crises on literary production, allowing for a better examination of the intersections between literature and the environment. Another great approach is Interdisciplinary New Historicism which cut across different disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and history, to enrich the analysis of literary texts. By incorporating diverse methodologies, this approach aims to create a better understanding of the interplay between literature and its historical context, fostering a comprehensive exploration of cultural, social, and political issues. Lastly, we have the Gendered New Historicism which merge feminist theory into the New Historicist framework, analyzing how gender influences both the creation and interpretation of literary texts. This approach aims to reveal the ways in which literature reflects and challenges gender norms and power dynamics within historical contexts, providing insights into the experiences of women and other marginalized genders in literary history.

The Gendered New Historicism is an approach that merges feminist theory with New Historicism, focusing on how gender influences the creation, interpretation, and representation of literary texts. This perspective emphasizes the importance of situating literature within its historical and cultural contexts, particularly regarding the roles and experiences of various genders. By doing so, it seeks to uncover the ways in which societal norms and expectations shape both literary production and the narratives within texts. This is the approach that is vital in the analysis of the evolution of women's rights from the 19th to the 20th century, making use of our important texts, *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* by Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf respectively.

A central characteristic of Gendered New Historicism is its exploration of gender dynamics. This approach investigates how traditional gender roles influence the relationships between characters, as well as the motivations of authors. It examines how male and female authors respond to and challenge these societal norms. This focus allows scholars to analyze literature not only as a reflection of gendered experiences but also as a medium that can both reinforce and subvert these norms. It should be noted that the historical context in which a literary work is produced is crucial to Gendered New Historicism. Scholars in this field emphasize the intertwined relationship between literature and its surrounding cultural, social, and political factors. They explore how historical events, such as wars, social movements, or shifts in political power, shape gender roles and identities. This contextualization enables a deeper understanding of how literature serves as both a product of its time and a commentary on the gender dynamics that evolve within it. Another great aspect of this approach is its focus on the representation of women in literature. Gendered New Historicism illuminates how female characters are portrayed in relation to their male counterparts and the societal expectations that govern their actions.

By analysing these representations, scholars can criticize the traditional literary canon, which often marginalizes or misrepresents women's experiences. This criticism is essential for laying a solid ground a more inclusive literary landscape that recognizes diverse voices and perspectives. More to this is the notion of Intersectionality which is a critical component of Gendered New Historicism, acknowledging that gender intersects with other identity markers such as race, class, and sexuality. This intersectional approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how these factors influence characters' experiences and identities within literary texts. By examining these intersections, scholars can uncover the complexities of identity and the ways in which literature reflects and shapes societal understandings of gender. The approach also involves a consideration of authorial intent and context, exploring how an author's gender may inform their writing and the themes they choose to address. Understanding an author's background, influences, and societal position can provide valuable insights into the motivations behind their work. This perspective enriches literary analysis by contextualizing texts within the authors' lived experiences and the historical moment in which they were created.

Moreover, Gendered New Historicism evokes the attention of defying the underlying gender biases and to recover the voices of marginalized genders. This process involves re-evaluating established literary works and questioning dominant narratives that have historically excluded or misrepresented certain groups. By doing so, it contributes to a much better understanding of literary history and encourages the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

All in all, Gendered New Historicism offers a wider framework for analyzing literature through the lens of gender, providing critical insights into the ways gender dynamics interweave with historical contexts. By integrating feminist theory with New Historicist principles, this approach highlights the complexities of gender representation and the socio-political forces that shape literary production. It can be therefore voiced out that, Gendered New Historicism enriches the study of literature by giving a more inclusive and wider understanding of texts and their cultural significance. And it should be noted that Gendered New Historicism is different from traditional New Historicism in several key areas, particularly through its focus on gender dynamics, intersectionality and the representation of marginalized voices.

FEMINISM

The term ‘Feminism’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘femina’ which means ‘woman’. This term was used in regards to the issues of equality of Women’s Rights Movement. Feminism according to Cambridge Online dictionary is ‘the belief that women should be allowed the same right, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state’. Britain and France were among the first countries where women advocated and started claiming their rights. Feminism in other words is the belief that women should have equal rights and opportunities in terms of education, employment and socio-political activities. Women since civilization have always occupied the second place in the society. They have been given a ‘secondary status by masculine dominated social discourse and western philosophical tradition’. Through the decay of centuries, men have always had dominance over women and nature. This is evidenced as ‘the epidemic and philosophical systems have largely regarded women as non-entity, second mistake, non-existent creature or a sexual object that oscillates between libido and envy’. Feminism thus is a framework used to critically analyse the reasons for women’s inferiority in the society and to explore the ‘literary tradition of women’. The goal of feminism is to challenge and dismantle gender based inequalities and discrimination, promoting the rights, opportunities, and autonomy of women.

Feminism recognizes that throughout history, women have been continuously and systematically disadvantaged and marginalized due to their gender. It addresses issues like

limited educational and employment opportunities, unequal pay, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and stereotypes and expectations placed on women.

Feminism is a social and political movement that seeks to achieve equality between the sexes, addressing the systemic inequalities that have historically marginalized women. At its core, feminism challenges the patriarchal structures in a society that upholds male experiences and views. This includes criticism of the social, cultural, and economic systems that govern gender-based discrimination and oppression. Feminism holds that true equality cannot be achieved until women have the same rights, opportunities, and respect as men across all angles of life. This foundational belief drives feminist activism and scholarship, which aim to demonstrate and breakdown the barriers that obstruct women's progress in various domains of life.

The scope of feminism is extensive and made up of several critical areas aimed at promoting women's rights and addressing gender differences. One of the main areas of focus is political rights, where feminists advocate for women's participation in governance and decision-making processes. This has to do with the right to vote, run for office, and influence legislation that affects women's lives. The fight for political representation is crucial, as it ensures that women's voices and experiences are included in the political discourse, shaping policies that impact their rights and well-being. Also, Economic rights form another great aspect of feminist advocacy. Feminists fight for equal pay for equal work, challenging the persistent wage gap that disfavours women in the workforce. They strive for workplace protections that address discrimination, harassment, and the lack of opportunities for advancement. In addition, economic empowerment is linked to broader issues of financial independence and security, which are vital for women's growth and ability to make choices about their lives. By addressing economic disparities, feminism seeks to create a foundation for women's empowerment that goes beyond mere legal rights.

Also, Social rights are equally important in the feminist agenda, engulfing a wide range of issues related to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Feminists work endlessly to raise awareness about these issues, advocating for legal reforms and societal change to protect individuals from violence and abuse. This includes efforts to support survivors and challenge cultural norms that uphold such behaviours. By addressing these social injustices, feminism aims to create safer and more equitable environments for all individuals, regardless of gender.

Moreover, reproductive rights is an important aspect of feminist activism, emphasizing women's autonomy over their bodies and reproductive health. This includes rights for access to contraception, safe and legal abortion, and comprehensive healthcare that addresses women's specific needs. The ability to make informed choices about reproduction is important to women's freedom and equality, allowing them to pursue education, careers, and personal goals without the problems of unwanted pregnancies. Feminists argue that reproductive rights are important not only for individual growth but also for broader societal progress toward gender equality. Cultural representation is another critical area of focus within feminism. Feminists challenge the limited portrayals of women in media and literature, fighting for more diverse and accurate representations that reflect the complexities of women's lives and experiences. By promoting narratives that highlight women's achievements, struggles, and identities, feminism seeks to reshape cultural perceptions and challenge prescribed stereotypes. This cultural work is essential for encouraging a more inclusive society where women's contributions are recognized and valued.

The concept of intersectionality is vital when talking about feminism as it recognizes that individuals experience oppression based on various aspects of their identities, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. This literary framework allows feminists to address the challenges faced by women from different backgrounds, highlighting that the feminist movement must be inclusive and responsive to all women's experiences. By exploring intersectionality, feminism seeks to create a better understanding of gender inequality and advocate for solutions that consider the diverse realities of all Women.

The historical context of feminism is important for understanding the evolution of women's rights from the 19th to the 20th century, especially in relation to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The 19th century, during which Austen wrote, marks the beginning of the first wave of feminism. This wave primarily focused on legal issues, particularly women's suffrage, education, and property rights. Influential thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft laid the groundwork for feminist thought with her seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which argued for women's education and rationality. Women began to fight for their rights, advocating for legal reforms that would allow them greater autonomy and opportunities beyond the boundaries of marriage.

In Austen's time, societal norms hold to the fact that a woman's primary role was as a wife and mother, with marriage often seen as the only great path to economic security and social status. The limited options available to women are reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* where characters like Elizabeth Bennet fights societal pressures and expectations surrounding marriage. Austen criticizes these norms through her portrayal of complex female characters who long to assert their individuality and challenge the barriers imposed upon them. The novel illustrates the tensions between romantic love and economic necessity, emphasizing the importance of personal choice in a society that often reduces women to their marital status.

By the early 20th century, when Virginia Woolf was writing, the feminist movement had progressed into its second wave, which expanded its focus to include a wider range of issues, such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and sexual liberation. This period was significantly shaped by the achievements of the suffragette movements, which successfully secured voting rights for women in many Western countries. In the UK, women over 30 gained the right to vote in 1918, with full suffrage achieved in 1928. This political empowerment allowed women to participate more fully in public life and strive for their rights in new spheres.

Woolf's work reflects the complexities of this changing landscape. In *To the Lighthouse*, she explores themes of identity, creativity, and the limitations of domestic life, offering a wider portrayal of women's experiences. Her famous essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), argues that for women to write and create, they need financial independence and a space of their own. Woolf lays more emphasis on the importance of intellectual freedom and the need for women to challenge the societal structures that limit their potential. Her work aligns with the emerging feminist discourse of her time, which sought to address not only legal inequalities but also the cultural and psychological barriers to women's self-realization and artistic expression.

The historical context also covers broader cultural shifts, including the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which transformed economic roles and societal structures. As women increasingly entered the workforce, they started to challenge traditional gender roles and assert their rights to independence and self-determination. The later effects of World War I further accelerated this change, as women took on roles traditionally held by men, leading to a re-evaluation and reconsideration of their capabilities and contributions to society. These changes laid the groundwork for the feminist movements of the 20th century, which would continue to evolve and address the challenges faced by women of diverse backgrounds.

Situating Austen and Woolf within this historical framework allows for a richer understanding of how their works reflect and criticize the changing landscape of women's rights. The evolution from Austen's early 19th-century context, where women's value was often tied to marriage, to Woolf's early 20th-century perspective, where women began to assert their rights and get greater autonomy, highlights the on-going struggle for gender equality. This context enriches our analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*, emphasizing their importance in the broader narrative of feminist literature and thought. By examining these texts through the lens of historical feminism, we can better appreciate the complexities of women's experiences and the societal changes that shaped their paths toward empowerment.

Feminism has evolved through various historical waves, each responding to the specific social and political contexts of its time. The first wave primarily focused on legal issues, particularly women's suffrage and property rights. The second wave expanded the conversation to include a broader range of issues, such as reproductive rights, Workplace equality, and sexual liberation. The third wave emphasized individuality, diversity, and the importance of personal choice within the feminist movement. Today, contemporary feminism continues to address systemic inequalities while advocating for a more inclusive approach that recognizes and values the experiences of all women.

The evolution of women's rights is fully seen in the history of Modern Western Feminist Movement which was divided into three waves, an original idea of Maggie Humm. These waves embodied different aspects of feminist issues. The first wave feminist movement started in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States. The main aim of this first wave was women's campaigned for _'suffragette movements and raised their voices for equal rights to vote and equal access to the parliament''. This wave also focused on women's ownership of properties. Margaret Waters in her book; *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* distinctively and clearly indicate the struggle of married women as she states; _'for a married woman, her home becomes a prison-house. The house itself, as well as everything in it, belongs to the husband, and of all fixtures the most abject is his breeding, the wife. Married women are in fact slaves, their situation no better than that of Negros in the West Indies''. Women at that time had less value and respect in the society. The Pankhurst family, greatly influenced by Emmeline Pankhurst greatly fought for women's right to vote and their struggle was more of a political upheaval through the Women's Social and Political Union [WSPU]. This struggle was not in vain as few women after the World War I, sat in the parliament. This

was a victorious wave as women could carry out some public activities. The second wave of feminist movement began in the 1960s and those involved in this wave advocated for equal legal and social rights for women's liberation from "masculine coded language and philosophical system".

Great writers came up with books that supported this wave and some of these books include Simone Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* [1949], Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* [1969] and Ellen Meer's *Literary Women* [1976], just to name a few. The third wave of the feminist movement resulted from the failure of the second wave. Also known as the post-feminism, this third wave started in the 1990s and extended into postcolonial feminism, ecofeminism and gender studies. This wave had as objective to obtain social justice for women, and most importantly, they were focalised on the individual self-getting deeper into the core of these waves, some literary scholars believe that there is a fourth wave of this feminist movement that started in 2012 which has to do more with technological protest through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other platforms. One of the most influential campaigns were "Every Sexism Project" and "Me too movement" fought against sexual harassments and assaults women face in their work places and elsewhere.

Feminism is highly important to this dissertation as it provides a critical framework for examining the historical shifts in women's rights. By situating Austen's work within the context of early feminist movements and Woolf's in the rise of modern feminism, we can explore how each author reflects and criticizes the social norms and legal restrictions imposed on women during their respective eras. This historical perspective is important for understanding the evolution of women's rights and the societal attitudes towards gender that influenced both authors.

Both Austen and Woolf engage profoundly with themes of gender roles and societal expectations, making feminist analysis particularly interesting. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen criticizes the limited options available to women in terms of marriage and social Class, illustrating the pressures to conform to societal expectations. On the other hand, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* addresses the evolving roles of women and their struggles for personal and artistic identity in a fast changing world. A feminist lens gives way for a critical examination of how these authors portray the barriers faced by their female characters and how they challenge and subvert traditional gender norms.

The concept of female agency is another main theme in both works, making feminism a vital framework for analysis. Elizabeth Bennet's great personality and her refusal to abide to societal pressures in *Pride and Prejudice* serves as an example for early feminist ideals of self-determination and independence. In this same light, Lily Briscoe's pursuit of artistic expression in *To the Lighthouse* portrays the challenges women face in getting their identities in a male-dominated world. Through feminist analysis, you can explore how each character embodies the struggles and triumphs of women seeking autonomy, revealing the complexities of their experiences.

Also, Feminism's emphasis on intersectionality is greatly important when analysing the barriers of women's experiences in both texts. Aspects such as class, marital status, and societal expectations, intersect to shape the lives of the female characters. This intersectional approach creates way for a better understanding of how different identities and circumstances impact women's rights and experiences during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Moreover, both Austen and Woolf offer criticisms of their contemporary societies, particularly concerning the roles and rights of women. Feminist theory provides useful tools for analysing these criticisms, enabling us to engage with how literature reflects and influences social change regarding gender equality. By situating this analysis within feminist discourse, we can highlight the significance of both authors in the broader struggle for women's rights, showing how their works resonate with on-going feminist movements.

Finally, feminism allows for an exploration of the great impact of Austen's and Woolf's writings on feminist literature and thought. Their contributions can be seen as foundational to upcoming feminist movements, making it important to consider how their works connect with modern feminist issues. This connection enriches our analysis by illustrating the continuity and evolution of feminist thought over time, portraying the importance of these literary works in today's discussions about gender equality.

Feminism hence serves as an important theory for analysing this dissertation. It offers critical insights into historical context, character development, societal criticisms, and the evolution of women's rights as shown in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*. Engaging with feminist theory will enhance our understanding and interpretation of these texts and their significance in the on-going conversation about gender equality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This Literature review aims to provide an overview of the representation and evolution of women's rights in British literature throughout different historical periods. This review explores significant events and other dissertations that have explored and shaped the status of women in different spheres of the society in terms of politics, education, employment and social reform which provide a comprehensive understanding of how women's rights have been portrayed, challenged, and transformed in literary works. By examining key literary texts from various eras, this review and analysis will give more light to the struggles, achievements and the on-going challenges faced by women in their pursuit and struggle of equality and empowerment in British literature and the society as a whole.

This literature review adopts a systematic approach to identify and analyse relevant scholarly articles, books and academic papers. Data basis such Google Scholar has been used to facilitate the search of the keywords related to the research topic such as —women's right», «British literature» and specific literary periods in combination. The resources focus on primary and secondary sources that offer critical insights into the portrayal of women's rights throughout British literary history.

Literature has played a vital role in reflecting women's experiences throughout history. By showcasing women's perspectives, challenges, aspirations, literature served as a powerful medium for expressing the complexities of women's lives and contributing to social change. Literature exposes these experiences through the exploration of feminist themes, challenging gender norms, empathy, understanding, inspiration, empowerment, and historical documentation. Through some scholarly articles and books more have been said about women in terms of literature.

Chang in his article "The Impact of the Feminist Heroine: Elisabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*", critically examines the feminist significance of Elisabeth Bennet heroine of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, through a comparative study of Elisabeth alongside other female characters like Caroline, Jane and Charlotte, Chang argues that Elisabeth's character is not feminist in isolation. He further supports this fact with the idea that Elizabeth's feminist qualities find resonance with Duckworth's review of various studies of Jane Austen's literary works. He concludes that her feminism was not as radical as sometimes proclaimed because Austen was aware of the constraints of her time, Duckworth argues that it was only possible to help the feminist cause in a piecemeal way, while questioning certain aspects of patriarchal society, such as submission of women to a higher male authority, Austen especially criticizes

the social Convention of securing a good marriage on economic grounds in *Pride and Prejudice*. Duckworth argues that feminism does not require fundamental change as long as there is progress towards elevating the position of women within the society. Elizabeth, with respect to her defiant nature in opposition to the expectations of proper feminine behavior, shows a true feminist viewpoint.

Newton suggests that the characterization of Elizabeth as judgmental and challenging provided Austen with an Outlet for critical energies that she could not otherwise share with the world. Elizabeth, through her rejection of traditional Regency female behavior, such as her enjoyment of exercise (Johnson, 1989), portrays a want for the autonomy that was unavailable to women of the time (Newton, 1978). Furthermore, Austen's depiction of Elizabeth's character is distinct from many writers of the time who allowed women "sensibility depths of feeling an understanding, but...rarely conceded power or independence" (Toolan, 1988: 245). Austen is able to comment on the social constraints surrounding her own life by allowing Elizabeth to defy them. Elizabeth not only expresses opinions but her views lead to real change in Mr. Darcy's moral character by the end of the story. From Chang's comparative study of Elisabeth alongside other female characters he provides an open landscape for a broader analysis of the text from the feminist point of view and other dimensions.

Andrea Kristić in his theses *Marriage and Women in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*, analysis the notion of marriageability and class structure in the text. The theses analyses how Jane Austen portrays marriage and the role of women in 19th century English society as shown in her famous novel *Pride and Prejudice*. It illustrates how during this time, women were subordinate to men and had little *independence* or agency. Their primary purpose and means of gaining social standing was through securing a marriage. He illustrates this assertion through Mrs. Bennet's attitudes and anxiety of getting her daughters married to rich men.

In the research article, "*Representations and treatments of Women in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*", Sushma Chaudhary critically examines Virginia Woolf's representations of gender roles and expectations of women in early 20th century society as illustrated in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. It analyses characters like Mrs. Ramsay, who fully embodies her role as a housewife and mother, confined to the domestic sphere. Through close examination of Mrs. Ramsay's behaviours and subordinate status within her marriage and family, the author illustrates Woolf's criticism of patriarchal family structures that defined women through their relationships to men. Mrs. Ramsay is stroke down by her thoughts which are not openly and freely expressed. Ramsay finds the silence terrifying, as the clock stopping

seems to show her identity falling apart. Mrs. Ramsay's ambitions can only be achieved when she is dead, and through Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily achieves Mrs. Ramsay's unconscious desires. Yet unconsciously Mrs. Ramsay wants the freedom that Lily has, she rebuffs it because she cannot have the freedom.

To the Lighthouse exemplifies the condition of women when Woolf was writing and to some extent yet today. It offers a solution to remedy the condition of both men and women in the society.

Sushma also analysis Woolf's treatment of the character Lily Briscoe and her struggle to assert independence as a female artist in a male-dominated field. This article looks at how Lily is often overlooked or marginalized due to her gender. It draws upon specific passages where Lily's determination to continue painting despite obstacles she faces provides insights into Woolf's pioneering perspectives on feminism and a woman's quest for agency beyond traditional roles. Sushma further examines Woolf's use of symbolic elements and modernist techniques to convey implicit feminist messages. The analysis identifies symbolic scenes that represent women's oppression, such as Mrs. Ramsay rocking the baby to and fro- suggestive of a life confined by domestic duties. Through a careful reading of the text, Sushma analysis Woolf's commentary on gender inequality within marriage and family models of the period.

This article also contrasts male characters like Mr. Ramsay who wield patriarchal authority, with dependent female characters like his wife, to highlight imbalanced power dynamics in their marriage. Such evaluations of gender contrasts enhance understanding of Woolf's social commentary on women's subordinate status during her time. All in all, Sushma's critical analysis of the representations and treatments of women in *To the Lighthouse* provides insightful perspectives on Woolf's treatment of feminism as a theme through her characters, narrative techniques and implicit social commentary in *To the Lighthouse*.

Susan C. Greenfield in her article "*The Absent-Minded Heroine or, Elizabeth Bennet has a Thought*" examines Elizabeth Bennet's characterization in *Pride and Prejudice* with a focus on her as an "absent-minded heroine." Greenfield argues that Elizabeth is often portrayed as lost in thought and not fully engaged with her surroundings. For example, the article gives instances from the novel where Elizabeth seems "distracted" or "zones out." This characterization sets Elizabeth apart from other heroines of the time period, as the article discusses how her absent-mindedness reveals something about her inner mental life and imagination. Through Greenfield's discussion of Elizabeth's dreaminess, the article provides insights into Austen's portrayal of her protagonist. It considers themes of thought,

imagination and self-reflection in *Pride and Prejudice* through a literary analysis of Elizabeth's character as portrayed as constantly engaged in her inner mental world and removed from external realities at times.

By focusing on Elizabeth Bennet's characterization as an "absent-minded heroine, this article offers an interesting perspective on her character and how her tendency towards getting lost in thought both shapes the story and reveals aspects of her personality and development. The analysis provides thought-provoking insights into Austen's work through a lens of Elizabeth's inner mental life.

Irina Stefanić in her thesis, «*The Case of Elisabeth Bennet Challenging the Notion of an Agreeable Woman in Modern Adaptations of Pride and Prejudice*», examines how modern film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* portray the character of Elizabeth Bennet. It analyses adaptations like the beloved 1995 BBC miniseries and Joe Wright's 2005 film version. These adaptations are argued to develop Elizabeth Bennet's character in a way that challenges the notions of an "agreeable woman" from Regency-era England, as presented in Austen's 1813 original novel.

Furthermore, Irina portrays Elizabeth to be more independent, outspoken, and willing to openly question social norms and the opinions of others. The adaptations update her character for contemporary audiences by showing her as less compliant with societal expectations for women's behaviour at that time. Changes in her dialogue, customs, and interactions emphasize her intelligence, stubbornness, and unwillingness to simply behave as passively as an "agreeable" young lady was expected.

Irina in her theses goes on to analyse specific examples of how Elizabeth is modernized in these adaptations through her revised character development. It discusses how shifts in her portrayal reflect changing views of feminism and gender roles between Austen's era and modern society. The conclusion considers what these character developments in Elizabeth Bennet say about such evolving social perspectives. Overall, the work provides an academic analysis of how *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations have modernized one of literature's most famous heroines for new audiences.

Bouthaina Moussaoui in his article "*Feminist Perspective on Victorian Women in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse*" examines Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* from a feminist literary theory perspective. It focuses on how the female characters portray expectations of Victorian womanhood. Specifically, it looks at representations of women like

Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe to understand Woolf's critique of the prescribed gender roles and domestic duties enforced during the Victorian era.

Moussaoui acknowledges that through her modernist use of stream-of-consciousness narrative and exploration of character psychology, Woolf challenges the social norms regarding femininity and a woman's place in society that were prevalent at this time. Special attention is given to the symbols of motherhood, marriage, and domestic responsibilities that Woolf associates with the repressive nature of typical Victorian gender expectations.

Moussaoui's conclusion reflects on what Woolf's depictions of these characters revealed about her own feminist philosophies and efforts to increase awareness of women's issues through pioneering modernist literature. All in all, analysing *To the Lighthouse* through this feminist lens aims to provide insights into Woolf's commentary on the restrictive rules imposed upon Victorian women as presented through her novel's portrayal of its female protagonists.

Martina Halirova in "*The Development of Feminism in English Literature of the 19th and 20th centuries*" discuss about how feminism is perceived at present¹¹. The main aim of this thesis was to compare the development of relationships between men and women and the perception of sexuality over the course of the two centuries. In the first chapter, he focuses on the development of feminism in Great Britain since the first half of the 19th century up to the present. The aim was to explain feminism from its start, from the meaning of term to the gradual development throughout the 19th and 20th centuries with mentioning the major figures of the movement. The most important figures mentioned were Mary Wollstonecraft, who is considered to be a founding mother of the movement, Florence Nightingale and the Pankhurst family. The chapter depicts the first and second wave of feminism, where women fought for their suffrage, education, and above all equal opportunities and independence.

The first wave of the movement, lasting from the 19th century up to early 20th century, was primarily about fighting for the suffrage and for recognition in the society. The Pankhurst family was very important in the suffragette movement towards the end of the 19th century, the leader of British suffragettes Emmeline Pankhurst was very politically radical and she was considered to be one of the most influential women in British history. Virginia Woolf also addressed the issue of equality in her influential essay *A Room of One's Own* during this period. The second wave of feminism was understood as a continuation of the first wave; however, it was then focused more on women's liberation movement and on social equality

for women. There were attempts to communicate better social position in society and the feminists of this period defined its demands for equal education opportunity, equal payment and contraception and abortion. The first chapter also depicts the perception of feminism today, this period is sometimes called the third wave and it continues up to present since the 1990s. The movement now reacts to the perceived failures of the second wave of feminism and equal rights but not in Great Britain but all over the world.

—Bad Feminist by Roxane Gay (2014) exposes the contemporary and personal exploration of feminism. She discusses a wide range of topics including popular culture, politics, race and body image. Gay challenges the notion of a —perfect feminist and embraces the complexities and contradictions that arise when navigating feminist ideals in everyday life. Siddharth Baral in —*Silencing the past: The Politics of Voice and Representation in Trauma Literature by Women* explores the different challenges faced by women of the century and the strict gender roles. To pinpoint more on this, the Indian scholar T. Vijayasanthi in —The Matrix of Education, Expression and Empowerment of women centers more on how education helps to develop a woman in order to enrich her status in a male-oriented society.

Olufunmilayo L. Fawole in her *Economic Violence to Women and Girls*, draws attention to the types of economic violence women face and the various consequences. She emphasises on the fact that women at work experience unequal ‘remuneration for work done’ unlike men who enjoy all the advantages of the same work done. Olufunmilayo does not only enumerate the various violence and discriminations against women, she also gives possible solutions to bring a change in the life of women. It is confirmed that the tireless struggles of women in upgrading their rights have yielded fruits. In Costa Rica in 2022, the female president of the Legislative Assembly successfully ensured that women could freely make a choice of their dreamlike jobs (Sequeira 2022).

According to analysis and statistics, it is believed that in 2010, there was no woman who had the same legal right to economic activities like men. Still in these analysis carried out by *Women, Business and Law*, statistics confirm that between 2010 and 2022, the latter situation has changed as more than 93 million women of working age (15 to 64) gained the same legal rights as men. *Women, Business and Law 2023* also identify areas where gender inequality still continue.

In the theses, *How Shall I Live? An Analysis of To the Lighthouse, The Bell Jar and Bridget Jones's Diary*, Juliet Hveding Fjellstad explores the evolving concept of "woman" over the course of the 20th century. It examines the conflicts and struggles the female characters face as they try to define their own sense of self, often in the face of restrictive gender norms, roles and expectations. The Key aspects of this theses is the Victorian "angel in the house" ideal, the post-war American "feminine mystique", and the contemporary "myth of self-perfection" that have shaped women's identities. The theses analysis examines how the female characters either conform to or challenge these societal ideologies of womanhood, and how this affects their inner sense of identity. Whether it is Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, Esther Greenwood, or Bridget Jones, the theses has as objective to provide a better understanding of the complex female identities portrayed in these three literary works. It shows the common struggles they face in trying to reconcile their own sense of self with the limiting social norms placed upon them as women. The theses allows for a deeper exploration of how female identity has evolved over the 20th century, as shown in the different perspectives and experiences of the central characters. By examining these literary texts, the study illustrates the challenges women have faced in carving out their own identity, even as the dominant ideals of womanhood have shifted with the changing times.

Hveding's analysis *To the Lighthouse* as a novel that tries to move beyond the concept of the angel and it presents a new feminine ideal through other characters. According to Allison Pease in *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse* (Pease, 129), even though Mrs. Ramsay is never directly referred to as an angel as her actions speak for themselves, Woolf refers to the angel through Mrs. Ramsay's daughter Prue dies in childbirth: "Prue, a perfect angel with the others, and sometimes now, at night especially, she took one's breath away with her beauty" (Woolf, 42). Pease claims that none of Mrs. Ramsay daughters or women she cares for, Lily and Minta, will ever be angels, as they paths are leading them in different ways. She notes that "Cam fights against (patriarchal) tyranny; Rose will presumably be an artist; Lily becomes a painter; and Minta looks for happiness outside home" (Pease, 129). Therefore, *To the Lighthouse* "indicates the new generation's desire to break free from the idea of the Victorian marriage (ibid). Even though the angel was presented and perceived as powerless, Mrs. Ramsay is quite able to reflect upon her own life. She is capable of thinking for herself, which becomes obvious several times in the text.

Even though she insists that she is no thinker, she often reflects on different aspects of life. However, she does not want to express these ideas and feelings to other people and, therefore, in some degree upholds the Victorian, traditional gender roles. When she is reading

the story of The Fisherman and his Wife to her children, she reflects about her marriage with Mr. Ramsay: "Not that [...] she knew precisely what it came from; nor did she let herself put into words her dissatisfaction when she realized [...] How it came from this: she did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband" (Woolf, 28). The tale is about greed and dissatisfaction, and Mrs. Ramsay feels not only "physical fatigue" but also some "faintly disagreeable sensation" (ibid). She realizes that she is disturbed by her husband's dependence on her, and the burden it puts upon her. Mrs. Ramsay is protecting her husband, the same way she would protect her children. She is driven to conceal the truth, and perhaps in some occasions even tell lies. Mrs. Ramsay becomes a tool to mediate Woolf's criticism of how women were limiting their ability to fully be themselves. As a result of the patriarchal society and its restrictive feminine role, Mrs. Ramsay is not able to presents herself as she really is. However, these feelings she has towards her husband seems quite ambivalent.

She is scared of the changes that concern women and therefore still lives her Victorian life. Mrs. Ramsay is engaged in being a respected and socially accepted woman, something she can only achieve when being the ideal of the Victorian woman but it was their relation, and his coming to her like that, openly, so that anyone could see, that discomposed her; for then people said he depended on her, when they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with that he gave, negligible (Woolf, 29). Again, this supports the idea of the complex character of Mrs. Ramsay, as it is challenging to understand what she wants and feels. She feels finer than her husband, but at the same time she moves quickly from the idea by emphasizing that he is far more important. At this point, it is clear that Woolf emphasizes the idea of several layers of identity. By making Mrs. Ramsay into such complex character, by being both inferior and dominant, Woolf adds realness and credibility. Even though Mrs. Ramsay is living according to the Victorian ideals and values, there are aspects and thoughts that go against the Victorian ideology, as it is impossible to always be the angel in the house. Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts of rebellion seem to be feelings she is trying to shake off. Even though these thoughts often occur, she does not want to acknowledge them.

The artist Lily Briscoe emerges as an important character in the novel, representing Woolf's struggle for women to achieve self-realization and overcome restrictive gender stereotypes. Lily's struggle to assert her artistic vision against the pressures of patriarchy shows Woolf's own efforts to break free from traditional gender roles as a female writer. Through the juxtaposition of these female characters, the novel illustrates the conflict between the old, patriarchal order and the emerging feminist consciousness. Lily's final triumph in

completing her painting stands for the possibility of women's emancipation and the potential for a more balanced approach to life and art. This theses also suggests that Woolf uses the novel as a vehicle to work through her own feelings towards her parents and the Victorian values they represented. The dual literary standpoints of Woolf as both a feminist and a modernist writer are highlighted, as she challenges conventional ideologies through innovative narrative techniques.

The theses," the concept of Mothering in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* and *Songs of Solomon*" examines the concept of mothering through the lens of four distinct maternal figures- Mrs. Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and Ruth Dead and Pilate in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Ghogomu presents Mrs. Bennet as a resounding failure as a mother. Driven by her own selfish ambitions to marry off her daughters to rich men, Mrs. Bennet neglects her duties to provide her children, especially her elder daughters Jane and Elizabeth, with the love, guidance and moral support they deeply need. Her inability to look beyond her own materialistic concerns, coupled with her lack of judgement and self-discipline, makes her incapable of fulfilling the true responsibilities of motherhood. Contrarily, *To the Lighthouse* portrays the character of Mrs. Ramsay as a far more complex maternal figure. On one hand, Mrs. Ramsay is presented as a heroic, almost mythical mother who has an artistic power to bring order, beauty and harmony to the chaotic world around her. She serves as a source of strength and inspiration, not only for her own children, but for the many others who seek her nurturing presence. Yet Mrs. Ramsay also has significant Weaknesses - her short-sightedness and inability to see beyond the limited scope of her own perspective at times lead her to make decisions that prove detrimental to the very people she aims to protect. The novel thus presents a conflicting view of motherhood, with Mrs. Ramsay embodying both its triumphs and its tragedies.

Ghogomu in this theses analyses Jane Austen's satirical portrayal of motherhood in the person of Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* says a great deal about the causes and effects of maternal failure. Mrs. Bennet is unsuccessful for several reasons. A simple-minded and extravagant person, to begin with, Mrs. Bennet lacks the judgement and self-discipline needed to raise five children. Furthermore, preoccupied "with the insistent material concerns imposed by society upon a woman of her class neither the will nor understanding to rebel against; a victim of her own banality which has locked her into a role from which she cannot escape; and at the mercy of her husband's cruel sarcasm, condescension, and contempt--Mrs. Bennet has come to appreciate her children only in so far as they can be of use in bringing her the security and comfort which she feels she lacks in her own life. As Lloyd Brown suggests, Mrs. Bennet

reduces her role as mother to that of a "business woman disposing of her which Mrs. Bennet has most 'deserving' (marketable) commodities in the business of marriage." Indeed, Austen herself acknowledges that, "The business of her life was to get her daughters married, its solace was visiting and "The ultimate result of Mrs. Bennet's perception of her daughters as "goods" in a marketplace, to be sold, in effect, to the highest bidder, is that Mrs.

Bennet loses sight of her real obligations as a mother. Her children have become for her mere objects for gratifying her own social and economic ambitions; and, consequently, she becomes incapable of giving them the love and care children look for in a mother. As it has been suggested, Mrs. Ramsay makes mothering into a kind of art, a way of life. Her primary role in *To the Lighthouse* is that of mother, and, to be sure, in her own way, it is as a "mother" that Mrs. Ramsay is most "triumphant" in life. Mrs. Ramsay's role as mother, it must be pointed out, is in no way confined to her own domestic environment. Indeed, she extends that role into her relationships with all kinds of people--especially men.

There is a strong implication throughout *To the Lighthouse* that because Mrs. Ramsay gives so freely of herself to everyone, she denies her own children the individual attention they need from a mother. Indeed, one almost never sees her on a one-to-one basis with her children (except with James); she hardly even talks to them except to make some demand on them: "they all must marry" (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 77), or to reprimand them: "she would not let them laugh at him [Charles Tansley]: (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 12), or to enlighten them to the sufferings of others: Being a woman of great charm and beauty, Mrs. Ramsay surfaces as a very remarkable mother who serves as a support and source of inspiration. In her capacity as mother, her function in *To the Lighthouse*, to many more than anything else, is to protect her children from the unpleasant aspects of reality and, for the most part, she succeeds very well in this protective role. Ramsay also stands in the way of her children's development, her attempts to shield their eyes from the pain and anguish of living demonstrate Mrs. Ramsay's compassion and kindness, they also reveal her lack of judgement as a mother, since hiding the truth from one's children does not always turn out to be in their best interest.

Thus, while Mrs. Ramsay's serving not only as a mother to her eight children but also to scores of other needy people in her community is admirable, it is also the cause for her children's (especially Lily) feeling deprived of Mrs. Ramsay is a good woman, but she spreads her kindness too thinly, so to speak, so that there is not enough left to go around. Close relationship with their mother. Thus, as a mother, Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed as both a positive and negative force in the lives of tier children and the many others who look to her for mothering.

She brings happiness to many; but she is also to blame for some of the hardship and pain that are the results of her unsuccessful mothering. The progress of Lily's painting represents the progress of Lily's coming to grips with the character of Mrs. Ramsay. Throughout the first half of the novel, Lily has a difficult time with her painting. She is constantly frustrated with her work: one minute feeling that the painting is near completion and as she wants it, the next moment despairing that "It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad!" (*To the Lighthouse*, p. 75), Lily is never satisfied with her painting in Part I of *To the Lighthouse* because her impressions of Mrs. Ramsay in the first part of the novel do not coincide with the reality of the woman.

In conclusion, this literature review has provided a comprehensive overview of women's rights evolution through history. By examining a wide range of scholarly articles, books and historical documents key themes have emerged, shedding light on the progress made and the challenges that remain. The findings of this review indicate that women's rights have evolved significantly over time, with notable advancements in areas such as suffrage, education, and employment opportunities. Through the tireless efforts of feminist movements, legal reforms, and changing societal attitudes, women have gained greater recognition and empowerment in various spheres of life. However, it is important to acknowledge that the important journey towards gender equality is far from complete. Despite significant strides, persistent barriers and gender-based violence, wage gaps, and cultural biases still pose significant challenges. The implication of this literature review suggest the need for continued advocacy, political reforms, and societal transformation to address these persistent gaps and inequalities. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that the experiences of women are shaped by various intersecting factors such as race, class, and sexuality. Moving forward, future research should focus on exploring the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality. Additionally, further investigation is needed to understand the cultural and systemic factors that perpetuate gender inequalities and to identify strategies for dismantling them.

In blending the theoretical framework of Feminism and New Historicism, we arrive at a comprehensive and better understanding of how literature not only reflects but actively participates in the construction of gender identities and societal norms. This blending of approaches allow for a critical examination of texts that highlights the great interplay between gender, culture, and history, exposing the ways in which literature can both challenge and reinforce dominant ideologies. Feminism, as a root lens, provides necessary tools for analysing the representation of women in literature and the systemic structures that illustrates gender inequality. Through feminist criticism, we discover the historical silencing of women's voices and the marginalization of their experiences within literary context. This view emphasizes the significance of reclaiming these narratives, not only to represent women's realities but also to question the societal norms that have long controlled their roles and behaviors. By examining female characters, their choices, and their relationships, we can illuminate the ways in which literature serves as both a reflection of and a commentary on the gendered dynamics of its time. Contrarily, gender new historicism situates these literary analyses within specific historical and cultural contexts, allowing us to understand how literature is shaped by the socio-political spheres in which it is produced.

This framework emphasizes that texts are not produced in a vacuum; rather, they are influenced by the on-going ideologies, events, and power structures of their time. By applying gender new historicism, we can investigate how historical forces like economic conditions, legal restrictions, and social movements greatly impact the representation of gender and sexuality in literature. This approach invites a deeper examination of how authors respond to, criticism, or reinforce the power dynamics of their periods, portraying the fluidity of gender roles and the potential for societal change. The merging of these two frameworks leads to a richer, more explicit analysis of *Austen's Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. When examining a text through the feminist lens, we focus on the portrayal of female agency and resistance within a patriarchal framework. Nonetheless, by applying gender new historicism, we can further explore how specific historical events such as the suffrage movement, industrialization, or changes in domestic life inform these representations. This combined illuminates the complexities of women's experiences and the ways in which literature can serve as both a mirror and a critique of societal norms.

Moreover, the synthesis of feminism and gender new historicism encourages a critical examination of the present alongside the past. By understanding historical contexts, we are better equipped to address contemporary issues of gender inequality and representation in literature and culture. This forward-looking aspect of the analysis not only enriches our engagement with literary texts but also fosters a commitment to social justice and advocacy for marginalized voices.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework that combines feminism and gender new historicism provides a robust lens for analysing literature, illuminating the complex dynamics of gender, power, and cultural context. This dual approach enables us to critically engage with texts in ways that reveal the historical and on-going struggles for gender equality, emphasizing the importance of diverse voices in shaping literary narratives. By foregrounding the interplay between individual agency and societal structures, we gain valuable insights into the ways literature can both reflect and influence the cultural landscapes in which it exists. Ultimately, this synthesis not only enhances our understanding of the texts under consideration but also underscores the vital role of literature in articulating and challenging the evolving narratives of gender and identity in society. Through this lens, we are reminded of the continuous fight for representation, equality, and the recognition of women's voices in the literary canon and beyond.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

This chapter aims at analyzing the condition of women in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. It's delves into the lives of both male and female characters in order to better understand the place of women in the 19th century.

During the early 19th century, the era in which *Pride and Prejudice* was set, the lives of women were greatly shaped by the social and legal structures of the time. The position of women is a central thematic concern evolving throughout Austen's novel. Austen observes the challenges and constraints faced by her female characters, while highlighting their intelligence, wit and determination to navigate through these restraints. Austen paints out the realities of womanhood in the Regency Era England through the experiences of the Bennet women, alongside other female characters like Lady Catherine de Bough, Miss Bingley, and Charlotte Lucas. This chapter delves into the specific social, legal, and the economic factors that shaped the lives of women in *Pride and Prejudice*. It will examine the different categories of women in the novel and portrays how their family, marital, economic and educational statues demonstrate the women's condition of the novel. This chapter will provide a glimpse into how Austen's women resist, subvert, or come to terms with the gender norms and expectations placed upon them. By situating the novel's events within a broader historical context in terms of New Historicism and Feminism, we can better understand the condition of women that forms the backdrop to Austen's timeless story.

Women during the Regency Era England, 19th century faced significant social and economic limitations. Through Austen's depiction of her female characters, the condition of women during the 19th century becomes so easy to explore. To better explore the condition of women in this text, character analysis, especially the female characters will be vital.

Confinement and Compliance

Mrs. Bennet; The traditional archetype

Women in the text are conditioned to lay their dependency on men and to consider marriage as a priority. Through Mrs. Bennet, the quintessential 19th century housewife, Austen portrays the traditional woman's condition. Mrs. Bennet's role as a traditional woman is to maintain the social stability and traditional values. As an ideal mother figure, she is seen

as a self-nurturer who designs and shapes the character and morals of the upcoming generation. Her care for her children is her highest calling just like any other traditional woman. Her traits are seen as the ideal role for respectable middle-class women; for they are self-sacrificing mother's focused on raising their children according to societal norms. Mrs. Bennet as a conservative and traditional woman, holds at heart marrying off her daughters to rich men as a means of securing their financial status and future. This is evident when she says; — *If I could but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield... and all the others equally married, I shall have nothing to wish for*". (*Pride and Prejudice*,5). This shows how she considers marriage as priority and strives hard to see all her daughters married. Her main objective of marrying out her daughters is to secure their financial status because women in general were financially dependent on men being it their father, husband, brother or any other male relative of the family. Thus, women are conditioned to be financially dependent.

Mrs. Bennet is preoccupied with marriage and social advancement as her role as a traditional woman entails her to be. *The business of her life was to get her daughters married* (*Pride and Prejudice*, 3). Her foremost and primary purpose is to secure advantageous and profitable marriages for her beautiful daughters in order to secure their future financial and social stability. She holds as priority, offering material security to her daughters unlike genuine affection or compatibility in a marriage. To this regard, women are viewed as mere commodities, to be exchanged in the form of marriage. The very first lines of the novel begins with the assertion that "*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife*" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1). From this assertion, women during the 19th century were considered as mere accessories to men which serves as part of their accomplishments. Laying more emphasis on Mrs. Bennet's marital objectives, her identity and social standing are buried in the marital status of her daughters. In her pursuit of suitable husbands for her daughters, she becomes manipulative and portrays behaviors that are embarrassing just to achieve her goal. This financial dependency of women, especially married women on their husbands, reinforces the patriarchal structures, as women during the 19th century were expected to rely on males for financial assistance and protection.

During the eighteenth century, women received limited education. This was greatly based on their family's social background. This is revealed during Lady Catherine de Bourgh's interaction with Elisabeth.

Then, who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a governess, you must have been neglected. 'Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle certainly might' (Pride and Prejudice, 207).

The above quotation shows how Catherine de Bourgh is surprised to hear the Elizabeth and her sisters grow up without a governess (tutor) of which it is then assumed that Elizabeth's family does not prioritize education. Lady Catherine asks about the education of Elizabeth's family. This question makes Elizabeth silent and pensive. In this case, Lady Catherine is from a high social status and disparages Elizabeth's education with her family who come from low social status. The educational asymmetry between Elizabeth with Lady Catherine happens because of the difference in social status which is a great limitation to women's progress of the 19th century.

Through Mrs. Bennet, Austen portrays women's lack of intellectual autonomy and professional opportunities during the Regency Era England. Mrs. Bennet has limited education and intellectual pursuits for she is most concerned with her family and the 'accomplishments' expected of her conservative traditional nature. Women have faced limitations and restrictions in their opportunities for employment, education, and participation in public affairs. Often, they are expected to consider domestic responsibilities as priorities and conform themselves to societal expectation of femininity, modesty, and obedience. These expectations have promoted gender inequalities and have greatly encouraged and enhanced the marginalization and subordination of women in many domains of life. According to Mr. Bingley, women are accomplished when *"They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses"* (Pride and Prejudice, 26). In addition to this;

A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve a word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved (Pride and Prejudice, 27)

The above quote is a wider explanation that women of this epoch, had no control of their behaviors and manners but only had to cling to the decorum of the society and were restricted to act accordingly. Mrs. Bennet's lack of intellectual autonomy reflects women's limitations of the time as they had less access to knowledge and independent thought. Mrs. Bennet

demonstrates no curiosity or intellectual capabilities and she is contented of being a passive and decorative model of womanhood. This is merely because women, especially low class women, have restricted access to formal education and professional pursuits available to them during this era. Consequently, women like Mrs. Bennet are confined to the private sphere of the household, as housewife and mother in contrast to the public spheres where men excel and dominate over politics, business, and social influence. Thus, this division between private and public spheres occupied by women and men respectively, limits women's ability in the social, economic and political spheres freely and confines them to domestic spheres.

Women during the 19th century generally are subordinations of the male authority. If one takes a closer look at the position of women, it is obvious that they were subordinated to men. The only role they were obliged to play was that of a wife and a mother, especially when it comes to women of the upper class. Since they did not have to work, their only duty was to give birth to their children and to obey their husband. Mrs. Bennet, just like any other traditional woman of the time, is reliant on the authority and decision-making power of the male members of her family, especially her husband and Mr. Collins, the entailed heir. She rarely challenges the patriarchal structures that govern her world. Through her actions and words, she reinforces the traditional gender roles and societal expectations placed on women and she hereby helps in maintaining the patriarchal system rather than challenging it and upholding Feminism.. She is too committed to the traditional marriage market and her indifference to male authority.

To understand women's condition and position better, it is necessary to point out that women, once married, did not have any possessions (Damrosch). Everything they owned became their husband's possession. This was due to —the laws in Britain [that] were based on the idea that women would get married and that their husbands would take care of them (Simkin). Simkin explains this in more detail: —Before the passing of the 1887 Married Woman's Property Act, when a woman got married she could not own property, even inherited property, and her wealth was automatically passed to her husband. If a woman worked after marriage, her earnings also belonged to her husband. The Bennet women are victims of this circumstance for they have no right to own or inherit Mr. Bennet's properties. The entailment of Longbourn Estate is in the hands of Mr. Collins, the closest male relative of the family, who is supposed to inherit the Longbourn Estate when Mr. Bennet dies.

During the 19th century, property ownership belonged to the males and if a family happened not to have a male, the heritage will be given to the closest male of the family. This portrays a great limit of women owning properties of theirs. This is seen when the Bennet

family in lack of a male child are supposed to give their property to Mr. Collins, who is considered to be the closest male to the family. He declares it himself as he says;

But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honored father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place—which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years (Pride and Prejudice,133).

The above quotation illustrates Mr. Collins as the person who will inherit the property from Mr. Bennet. In this case, Mr. Collins senses pride upon all of the property and his position. So, Mr. Bennet's wife feels that her daughters will be poor because she will not get inheritance from Mr. Bennet. In the nineteenth century of British society, if a family does not have boys, their property will be descended to their nephew because this is the effect from patriarchy culture. The position of women in terms of inheritance is weak. They do not have the right to inheritance. Inheritance is Primogeniture lead to discrimination between men and women. In addition, researchers find this quotation related to the above issue of heritage;

You are very kind, I am sure; and I wish with all my heart it may prove so, else they will be destitute enough. Things are settled so oddly. 'You allude, perhaps, to the entail of this estate.' 'Ah! Sir, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor girls, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with you, for such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed. (Pride and Prejudice, 80).

The quotation above is Mrs. Bennet's statement to Mr. Collins who discusses about the fate of her children when the hereditary law says that when she dies Mr. Collins who is also a cousin of the Bennet family will fully inherit from Bennet family. The laws of inheritance at the time says that family that do not have boys are not entitled to bequeath property to their daughter. This sentence shows that the family (Bennet family) would be miserable if later the

inheritance law is established. It illustrates that Mrs. Bennet is a materialistic person and would do anything for the happiness of her daughters, so Mrs. Bennet wants to marry one of her daughter to Mr. Collins with the hope that the inheritance that would fall to Mr. Collins can be enjoyed with her daughter. When the chosen wife to be, Elisabeth Bennet turns down the offer, her mother threatens to disown her. Mrs. Bennet makes it known to Elisabeth that; —If you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead. I shall not be able to keep you and so I warn you. (Pride and Prejudice, 80).

Despite Mrs. Bennet's threats, Elisabeth resolves not to marry Mr. Collins and for this reason, her mother spent couples of months before forgiving her. From the above assertion, Mrs. Bennet makes it clear that unmarried women are burdens to the family and this burden can be erased only when they get married. Thus, marriage is a business of just and only profit making. This shows the limitations of the single and unmarried women of the 19th century. Even the youngest Bennet, disrespects her elder sister Jane to let go of her space so that she, Lydia, can occupy it since she is married. This also adds to the limited space the society provides for the single ladies.

Mr. Collins in regards to this refusal, redirects his interest towards Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend. When the couple pay a visit to the Longbourn Estate;

Mrs. Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of anything concerning the match threw her into an agony of ill-humour, and wherever she went, she was sure of hearing it talk of. The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous abhorrence. When Charlotte came to see them, she concluded her to be anticipating the hour of possession ; and whenever she spoke in a low voice to Mr. Collins, was convinced that they were talking of the Longbourn estate, and revolving to turn herself and her daughters out of the house,as soon as Mr. Bennet were dead. (Pride and Prejudice, 92).

The above quote portrays and pinpoints the complete lack of property rights for women which hereby forces the Bennet family to rely on males for financial security. This is rather unjust to the daughters who have no ownership of the property. This shows how desperate and dependent women are during this era.

Through Mrs. Bennet's character, Austen portrays the limited options and social barriers that women face in Regency England where the primary avenues for self-actualization and security was bound with a successful marriage.

Jane Bennet; The Angel in the house archetype

Austen uses Jane Bennet as a focal point to illustrate the true version and virtues of a typical traditional woman. Jane Bennet, the eldest daughter of the Bennet's family is a gentle-like and virtuous lady, who embodies the —angel in the house —archetype. Characterized by her moral integrity, self-discipline, moral uprightness and sweet temperament, she represents more of traditional model of womanhood that is greatly valued and rewarded during the Regency Era. Her great strength of feeling, a composure of temper, and a uniform cheerfulness of manner (*Pride and Prejudice*, 13), make her domestically-orientated traditional woman full of feminine virtues.

In regards go to Jane's romantic relationship with Mr. Bingley, Austen portrays the condition of women who completely abide to the social norms and expectations placed upon women. Through Jane, Austen shows the traditional gender dynamics that uphold marriage and courtship during the Regency Era. Her deep feelings, emotional intelligence and high sense of morality, characterises most women of this era. As a married-minded woman, her genuine love and affection for Mr. Bingley and her willingness to trust his feelings portrays more active and self-possessed approach of love. Mrs. Hurst confirms this in her saying; "*I have an excessive regard for Miss Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it.*" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 24). This assertion alludes to the fact that despite her perfect nature, she will still face difficulties in getting married because of her family's low connections.

Despite the temporary disruption of her relationship with Mr. Bingley by Darcy and his sister, Miss Bingley, Jane still maintains her dignity, which shows her inner strength and self-assurance. After a lot of effort in order to seek Mr. Bingley's attention, Jane endeavours to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make her happy. She makes this resolution after realizing that her friend, Mrs. Bingley, pays her less attention as before and also informed her that Mr. Bingley is interested in Mrs. Darcy. Charlotte Lucas, another typical traditional woman in this regard says; —We can all begin freely- a slight preference is natural enough: but there are few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a women had better show more affection than she

feelsl. (*Pride and Prejudice*, 14). In this quote, Charlotte believes that Jane has to make an effort for Bingley to love her in return. This means that women must love and show it out before it is being reciprocated and this is quite a pathetic condition women live. This hereby portrays females' experiences and social constraints during this era. Through Jane, Austen portrays a vision of female Agency and self-determination that expand the limited opportunities available to women imposed by the dominant culture.

In relationship with her family, Jane's central role is within the domestic spheres of the Bennet's household. Her unconditioned dedication to her family's well-being reinforces her traditional and conventional feminine duties of nurturing, caregiving and maintaining the integrity of the home which to an extent portrays the woman's condition in the society at that time. Her selfless support of her sisters, especially Lydia, and her efforts of maintaining the family's reputation against social scandals shows the traditional virtue of womanhood through her morals and emotional attachment to the domestic sphere.

Austen's women are conditioned to be under the regulations of the patriarchal structures with Jane Bennet not being an exception. Jane's emotional loopholes was deeply rooted in the patriarchal structures and cultural values of the time. As a woman attached to her domestic duties, Jane denies meaningful participation in the public spheres and is rather concerned in becoming a more refined feminine woman according to societal expectations. During the Regency Era, a lack of self-control was a threat to a woman's virtue and marriageability, which are not suitable traits of a future wife and mother.

Through Jane Bennet, Austen portrays a complex exploration of gendered norms and societal pressures that pin down females' identity and behaviour during this era. Austen hereby invites readers to see into the ways in which the restrictive ideals of womanhood shaped and constrained the live experiences of women during this period.

Caroline Bingley; The traditional archetype

Jane Austen through Caroline Bingley, Mr. Bingley's sister, portrays the condition of upper-class women in the Regency Era. As a member of the upper class gentry, she is one of the most prominent 19th century traditional women who are tied to feminine ideologies. She lays more emphasis on status and wealth. She looks down on the lower class people, especially the Bennet family. As a normal traditional woman will do, Miss Bingley is in search of an upper class man who will marry her and upgrade her social standing. Her financial dependency is redirected towards Mr. Darcy, who is not interested in her. She also depends on her brother,

Bingley, for financial assistance which reveals her manipulative spirit of influencing her brother's choice of wife. As a hypocritical friend to the low class Jane, she openly and fearlessly lies her that her brother is interested in Mrs. Darcy. She selfishly wants her brother to marry a wealthier girl than a poor one. This shows that women's condition of the Regency Era was engulfed with the notion of 'marriage as priority'.

Miss Bingley portrays women's concern with refinement and accomplishments in terms of manners, education and lady-like accomplishments like music and needlework. These are manners of women, especially the middle class women. She condemns Elizabeth Bennet for walking over miles; —...to walk three, or four miles, or five miles or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum (Pride and Prejudice, 24). From this quotation, Caroline Bingley shows a great concern of decorum that govern the society. She criticises Elisabeth for not respecting the norm that women should have lady-like manner of doing things and not doing them awkwardly. Through her, Austen sharpens the challenges and constraints women face during this era.

Charlotte Lucas; The traditional archetype

In portraying the condition of woman in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen uses Charlotte Lucas to expatiate more on the woman's situation. Charlotte Lucas, Elisabeth's best friend, portrays a series of challenges and limited options available to women of the early 19th century English society. Charlotte Lucas, just as all other women, is financially dependent on her future husband. Adding to the fact that she has no inheritance or independent means of financial support, her marital prospects drives her to marrying the pompous clergyman, Mr. Collins in order to secure a financial stability. In regards to her marriage;

Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of happiness, must be the pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (Pride and Prejudice, 87).

The above quote shows how women are conditioned to marry without any emotional feelings nor attachment. She is desperate to an extent of sacrificing her happiness and not caring about her best friend, Elisabeth's, opinion or feelings. She "accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained. (*Pride and Prejudice*, 87). All Charlotte wants is to be married in order to attain her financial difficulties. Thus, marriage is not a matter of feelings but accomplishment. Charlotte herself openly confesses to Elisabeth; —I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins' character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (*Pride and Prejudice*, 89).

Coupled to this harsh and hurry-making decision of marrying Collins, is the fact that she is approaching her late twenties, an age considered quite old for an unmarried woman in this era. It should be noted that Mr. Collins has made "two offers of marriage within three days (89) to three different women and despite this, Charlotte still accepts his proposal. Elisabeth considers her friend's marriage as a —most humiliating picture—. This restraints their relationship and "Elisabeth felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 91).

Charlotte Lucas' limited opportunities, societal expectations and pressure from the society pushes her to make the hasty decision because of the society's unforgivable attitude towards unmarried women. Her economic vulnerability and lack of legal rights and autonomy of owning properties, makes her to face threats of poverty in her future. It is clearly mentioned in the novel that her parents could give her little fortune; and Mr. Collins' "prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair" (87) as he will inherit the Longbourn Estate. Jane Austen through Charlotte Lucas, hereby portrays the condition of woman in the Regency Era.

Defiance and Self determination

Lydia Bennet; The rebellious

Jane Austen in her *Pride and Prejudice*, does not only portray the perfect traditional archetype women who maintain and are self-contented with their conditions of situating themselves in the domestic spheres. She portrays a more agitated traditional archetype woman in the name of Lydia Bennet, who shows the condition and consequences women face when they boycott societal norms and expectations of the 19th century Regency England.

Lydia Bennet, —a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with fine complexion and good-humoured countenance, a favourite with her mother, whose affection has brought her into public at early age (Pride and Prejudice, 31). She is the youngest of the five Bennet sisters. She is the contrast to the —angel in the house genre of woman. She is the rebellious type who holds to an impulsive and attention-seeking type, who scandalizes the Bennet family in particular and the Meryton community as a whole. Her reckless pursuit of romantic attention, her opposite view and disregard of social decorum and her senseless attitude and willingness to get engaged into regrettable and questionable acts like her escape with Mr. Wickham, show her as the antithesis of the self-disciplined, dutiful and domestically orientated —angel in the house.

Lydia Bennet's misbehaviour and her pursuit for personal gratification and pleasure, openly challenges the primary purpose of woman which is her image of virtuous and refined feminine woman, ready to secure a prestigious marriage and holding tight the integrity of the domestic sphere. Her unthoughtful action threatens the family's reputation and social standing, which in great terms, is a violation of the prescribed gender roles to be fulfilled by women. Mr. Bennet describes Lydia and Catherine as the —two of the silliest girls in the country (Pride and Prejudice, 19).

Furthermore, Lydia's character exposes the hypocritical and double standards that determines the treatment of men and women during the Regency Era. As a result of Lydia and Wickham's misbehavior, Wickham predatory behavior and moral transgressions are condemned but Lydia's behavior is a scandal as it is considered as part of moral decadence. Lydia is greatly blamed as compared to her —partner in crime, Wickham simply because she is a woman. The only blame Wickham faces is his choice of Lydia as a wife which to a greater extent will bring a painful —blight up his future prospects. Unlike the way Wickham is being judged, Lydia's situation is an abominable one through which Mr. Collins in one of his letters to Mr. Bennet, tells him that;

The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this ... Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others;... Let me advise you, dear sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection forever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offense (Pride and Prejudice, 206).

The above quotation shows the harsh judgment Mr. Collins holds in Lydia's case. He has exaggerated the judgment to the extent of asking Mr. Bennet not to consider her as before and wish she were dead. Added to this is the fact that had Lydia married according to societal norms, the family would have benefited from the match but it is rather unfortunate because her behaviour threatens the well-being and comfort of the Bennet family as a whole and this also threatens the marriageability of her sisters and the family's reputation. Without a husband who is financially stable, without the prospect of a substantial dowry or family connection, the Bennet women will face economic restraints in the future. This is evident as Elisabeth in her observation and analysis asserts that Lydia's chance of equality and dignity will be tampered upon with such a husband as Wickham. This hypocritical judgment of this case is a clear proof that women are conditioned and governed by a lot of social decorum and restraints of which Lydia is a victim. Thus, the success or failure of a single daughter's marriage could reinforce, as well as destroy the entire family's well-being and social standing.

Jane Austen uses Lydia Bennet to portray the regrettable acts single women get into in their pursuit of marriage. Lydia just like any other woman during the Regency Era, wants to marry young and this justifies her flirtatious manners of gaining males' attention. Despite her age, she shamelessly portrays her interest in men and after meeting her sisters for a while, she audaciously asks them flirtatious questions which goes this;

Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hope that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three-and -twenty! Lord how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty! My aunt Phillips wants you so to get husbands, you can't think. (Pride and Prejudice, 153-154).

Lydia's statements as seen above are real proofs and realities of unmarried women's condition. She openly bullies her elder sister because of her unmarried state and gives herself a personal drive and objective of getting married as soon as possible before she turns twenty three years old. This portrays the societal view of unmarried women, who are somehow considered as burdens to the society. To expatiate more on the critical conditions unmarried women go through, Jane on her wedding day remorselessly as Jane to leave her position to her because she is a married woman; — Ah! Jane! I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman —(*Pride and Prejudice*, 220). Lydia thus disrespects her eldest sister Jane simply because decorum permits. She even exaggerates by promising to get husbands for them.

Lydia's misbehavior is not completely condemnable because on the other side, her character reveals a certain youthful vitality and wishes to have a personal autonomy, free from the constraints and barriers of societal expectations placed upon her in particular and women in general. Her relentless pursuit of romantic attention and her resistance to the moral judgement of her family and community suggest an unapologetic spirit which shows how determined she is to break off societal barriers. As an unmarried woman, Lydia had to guarantee a prestigious marriage. Without the financial and social protections afforded by a husband, Lydia and her sisters have an uncertain future. In regards to her family's situations, it is greatly observed that.

...in the unhappy defects of her family, a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. Her father contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elisabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia, but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Catherine, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance, had been always affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They are ignorant, idle, and vain. (Pride and Prejudice, 149).

From the above quotation, Elizabeth has observed Lydia to be awkward and with Jane's aid, they try to bring her back on the track unsuccessfully. It is seen and believed that Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are primarily responsible for their daughters' misconduct. Mr. Bennet, as a patriarch, ought to have redirected his daughter to the right track but it is unfortunate. Mrs. Bennet makes it worse by praising her young daughters, especially Lydia her favorite, to their own detriment. Elisabeth Bennet foresees and foreshadows Lydia's downfall as she informs her father that;

Our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me, for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt, too in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion

of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty also is comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. (Pride and Prejudice, 161).

In the detriment of not implementing and taking actions against what Elisabeth has alluded, Mr. Bennet makes the greatest mistake of allowing Lydia to go to Brighton as demonstrated in the quote above. This is a loophole as that is where she gets attached to Wickham, which eventually leads to their scandalous elopement. Consequently, Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham represents a stem from a desperation to achieve the financial and social stability that marriage would bring. Lydia understands that her future economic well-being is attached to her marriageability. She thus aims to securing a husband of her own terms even if the match is ill-advised. This eventually means that women's romantic relationships must be supervised by their families in order to maintain their social standing and reputation. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Lydia as she goes astray. Austen through Lydia demonstrates the consequences that women faced for challenging or deviating from social expectations. Lydia's character is a powerful symbol of rebellion against the rigid societal structure that govern women's lives during the Regency Era.

Elisabeth Bennet; Autonomy and Rebellion

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, portrays a variety of female characters who demonstrate the condition of women during the Regency Era. Elisabeth Bennet, the second daughter of the Bennet family, challenges and portrays the condition of women in the 19th century from a different dimension and angle. Contrarily to all female characters of the text, she is outspoken, witty and alienates herself from her societal conventions of the time. She describes herself as —a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart! (*Pride and Prejudice*, 77). This eventually portrays her rebellious nature.

Elisabeth Bennet just like all the other women of the 19th century is financially dependent. To this, she genuinely desires a marriage based on love and mutual respect rather than financial stability. Her financial status is at risk if she does not align her desires in order to get a husband who can secure her financial status and social standing. Though in need of this financial assurance, she distinguishes herself from her fellow gender by being an unmarried independent woman in her state of mind, not desperate and will only marry out of genuine love and affection. This is revealed in her rejection of Mr. Collins, the heir of her

father's property, without any regards to her family's financial situation as whole. She boldly tell Mr. Collins;

I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy; I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so. (Pride and Prejudice, 76).

From the above rational expressions from Elisabeth, she challenges the notion of women being conditioned to forceful marriages which will ruin their happiness. She is not willing to lose her happiness for the pleasure of societal norms and expectations. This shows her as a radical girl who cares less about decorum. Elisabeth's refusal to align to her mother's obsession of marriage brings conflict in their relationship. Mrs. Bennet often scolds and criticises Elisabeth for her so called independent thinking. In addition to the problems Elisabeth faces with other characters, she opposes Charlotte Lucas' doctrines of marriage as the latter gets married to Mr. Collins because of financial stability and security to the detriment of her aspirations and future. Their contrasting views of marriage strains their friendship, but they reconcile and maintain a supportive relationship. Despite all these strains in her relationships, Elisabeth earns her respect and admiration from other characters and her refusal of these societal conventions is what genuinely lead to a happy ending for her character, for she gives a new and authentic view of the 'New Woman's' condition.

Through Elisabeth, Austen throws more flash on the limit choices available to women and the pressures they face and go through just to secure their future through marriage. The extra-ordinary Elizabeth laments at the situation as she says; —Young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow creatures if I am tempted?" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 102).

Elisabeth is a portrayal of personal drive and individuality as she challenges societal norms and expectation as she rejects marriage for convenience, refuses to be silenced, rejecting Mr. Darcy's proposal, seeking love and respect and finally standing up against social prejudices. These brief examples show her determination to direct and forge her own path despite the pressure, judgement and expectations. She serves as a model of individuality and personal

agency towards the direction of equality in order to change the condition of women during the Regency Era.

Still in the marital realm;

Elisabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behavior as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavored to forget what she could overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which is exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children on so unsuitable marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife (Pride and Prejudice, 165).

From the quote above, Elisabeth laments over her parents' marital situation which does not encourage her especially of getting married because she believes that marriage is full of disadvantages than advantages. She blames her father for not interfering in his daughters' decisions to getting married but he abandons all into the hands of his wife, who is solely concerned with her daughters just getting married, careless of their sentiments and other affectionate reasons.

Elisabeth Bennet vehemently refuses to marry solely for economic reasons and prefers to upgrade her own happiness and personal values. The old decorum believes that the elder sisters should marry before the younger sisters but Elisabeth proves the contrary as she says;

I think it will be hard upon younger sisters that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth at first. And to be kept back on such a motive! I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind (Pride and Prejudice, 116).

From Elisabeth's words above, it is clear that her rebellious attitude demonstrates a subtle feminist perspective that delves into reviewing societal expectations and the woman's condition.

Contrarily to the typical conservative traditional woman, Elizabeth Bennet is a conservative and progressive genre, whose manners “*were not those of the fashionable world*” (*Pride and Prejudice*, 15). She contradicts to the so called ‘accomplishments’ through which women are to demonstrate their skills in music, needlework and lady-like manners. To escape from these so called ‘accomplishments’, in terms of music, she says;

My fingers do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault –because I will not take the trouble of practicing. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman’s of superior execution. (Pride and Prejudice, 123).

From the above quote, Elisabeth opposes women’s activity of playing music with the excuse that she cannot go through the struggles just to fill in the game or accomplishments. She hereby minimizes what the 19th century British traditional consider worthy and warmth heartily. Still in this light of opposing societal norms and in the realm of changing the present women’s condition, she dares do what lady-like women dare not, by walking miles away from her house in mud. She clearly reveals in this novel the social phenomenon of the 19th century through several events. For instance, a woman is considered to be inappropriate of travelling alone. Mrs. Bingley in her remark alludes thus;

To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country- town indifference to decorum.” (Pride and Prejudice, 24)).

The above quotation shows Elizabeth’s courage and strength that can be equated with men’s as she dares do something that men are rarely willing to do it. She can stand by herself without a man’s help. Elizabeth has challenged the decorum in order to show the condition of the ‘New Woman’ or in some other words, the ‘modern woman’. Her behavior according to societal expectations is considered to be inappropriate as traveling alone is an abominable act on the part of feminine ideologies.

Most worthy and famously, Austen challenges the former condition of traditional women through her characterisation of Elisabeth. She defies the stereotype of the passive and submissive woman by holding to her opinions and refuses to abide to societal norms. Conversely, characters like Mrs. Bennet, Jane and the others who embody characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, Elisabeth disrupts traditional gender stereotypes. The novel reflects the author's critique of societal expectations and inequalities within the context of early 19th century England, rather than a direct articulation of modern feminist ideologies.

Patriarchal Enforcement and Female Resistance

Mr. Bennet; The negligent patriarch

Male characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to a greater extent, contribute to the women's condition in the novel. The male characters, through their significant roles, shape the condition of women. The majority of Austen's male characters embody patriarchal attitudes that constraints the autonomy of female characters. Mr. Bennet, father of the Bennet daughters, through his significant role, contributes to Bennet women's condition. His patriarchal attitude restrains the females' agency. As an indifferent parent, he fails to prepare his daughters in regards to the realities they face as unmarried women without inheritance. He lacks foresight and his unwillingness to drive his daughters on the right path, restrains the Bennet women's position. Though Elisabeth warned and advise him about Lydia's flirtatious acts, he gives a deaf ear to it, which eventually leads to her consequential elopement with Mr. Wickham, which thus downgrades his family's reputation. After retreating from searching Lydia and Wickham in vain, Mr. Bennet acknowledges the fact that Elisabeth was truthful in her analysis of Lydia's misbehaviour. From this instance, he realizes that he has failed as a father and patriarch. He decides to remedy the situation by warning Kitty against going to Brighton as he says;

I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter into my house again, nor even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your sisters. And you are never to stir out of doors till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of everyday in a rational manner. (Pride and Prejudice, 208).

From the above quote, Mr. Bennet is remorseful of neglecting Elisabeth's advice and failing as a father. Through his words, he endeavours to become a more patriarchal father in order to

correct his mistakes. This instance shows that unmarried women's condition is being manipulated by male influences of which if not done correctly, it ruins their image.

In regards to Mr. Bennet's marital status, the lack of a stable environment is disadvantageous to the daughters as they face challenges of finding suitable marriages. According to Elisabeth's opinion of her family, she;

Could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were over thrown. But Mr. Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly of their vice...He was fond of the country and the books; and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; bit where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as a given. (Pride and Prejudice, 164-165).

The quotation above explains the Mr. And Mrs. Bennet's unfortunate and unstable marriage situation, which greatly affects the Bennet daughters' condition as unmarried women. Mr. Bennet lives as a married and unhappy man because of his wife's ignorance and too much attachment to decorum which do not align with his personality of a non-patriarchal type of man. This psychological conflict Mr. Bennet faces is as a result of incompatibility. Because of social expectations and notion of 'accomplishments', this couple find themselves reaping the consequences of such a union which is could pull down their daughters' view of marriage which will eventually restraint their conditions as unmarried women.

Elisabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, is exposing his wife to the contempt of her own

children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talent, which, rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (Pride and Prejudice, 165).

The quote above is the complete overview of the possible consequences the Bennet daughters face as a result of their parents' unsuitable union. This is lamentable because the Bennet daughters' precarious conditions are being affected by this incompatibility.

Mr. Bennet, view of marriage is greatly used by Austen in order to showcase women's condition in regards to his single daughters' marriageability. His indifferent nature towards the various proposals made to his daughters, portray him as someone who cares less about the decorum that fight against unmarried women like his daughters. Instead of guiding his daughters towards profitable and advantageous marriages, he makes little or no effort to securing suitable suitors for her daughters. He indulges Lydia's reckless behaviour, he puts in no effort in making Mr. Bingley marry Jane and he also make no effort in making Collins insist upon his proposal to Elisabeth. When Mrs. Bennet rely all her efforts in making one of her daughters marry Mr. Bingley after the ball party, Mr. Bennet "*had rather hoped that his wife's view on the stranger would be disappointed* " (*Pride and Prejudice*,8). From these instances, the readers ask a lot of rhetorical questions to know why a man like Mr. Bennet would not rely effort in making his daughters marry in order to secure their financial status after his death, of which he knows that his properties will be inherited by Mr. Collins to the detriment of the Bennet women. Still in this light, Mr. Collins in a manner of solving the inheritance trouble and securing the family's financial status, proposes to marry Elizabeth Bennet. Instead of supporting this fact, Mr. Bennet tells Elizabeth in regards to her refusal of accepting the proposal, tells her that; —An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do. (*Pride and Prejudice*, 79). From this quote, Mrs. Bennet struggles to make Elizabeth accept the proposal in order to change her financial condition but Mr. Bennet in a categorical manner, wants the women's financial condition to remain the same, since he does not give the opportunity to a man to change their financial status. Through Mr. Bennet, Austen portrays the Bennet women's hard condition, encouraged by their father's indifference towards societal expectations.

Mr. Collins; The pragmatic

Adding more strength to the contribution of Austen's male characters to the condition of women in the novel, Mr. Collins, a 'young man of five and twenty' and an obsequious clergyman, is not left aside. Mr. Collins stands as symbol of male authority as he exercises his power over women through his wealth and social status. In regards to his marriageability, he proposed to women as if they were objects of immediate use. He treats women like commodities and believes that by marrying a woman, he is doing her a favour. This is seen in his manner of proposing to Elisabeth. He terms his proposal as a generous act of —condescension which shows that women must be grateful for any offer of marriage. He openly states his reason for marrying to Elisabeth; —My reasons for marrying are first, that I think it is right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness —.(*Pride and Prejudice*, 75).

He adds;

*My reasons for believing it are briefly these; it does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with family of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of your manifold attraction, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. (*Pride and Prejudice*, 77)*

The quotation above portrays Mr. Collins as an odious man, who uses his wealth and institution as a clergyman to downgrade women. He represents the patriarchal power structure of the church whose primary aim is at marginalizing women. His position as a clergyman is a post only occupied by men. Women are not allowed to hold positions in the public spheres during the 19th century Regency Era. Rather, they occupy the domestic sphere of which they are contented.

Through Mr. Collins, Austen explores the patriarchal Law of inheritance, which ties down women's condition of the 19th century. Mr. Collins, the heir of the Longbourn Estate, exploits the patriarchal Law of inheritance which conditions women to owning no property. His eagerness to claim the Longbourn estate portrays a male-centric system wherein, women

are dependent on men as they own properties. He therefore fortifies the woman's condition of the novel in particular, and the 19th century women in general.

Mr. Darcy : The transformative

Jane Austen's, *Pride and Prejudice*, through the complex character of Mr. Darcy, provides a glimpse to women's marital condition of the time. Through his dismissive and arrogant attitude towards the Bennet women, he reveals his patriarchal power. As a progressive patriarchal man, his gradual transformation in the novel reveals how some men can overcome their prejudice and respect the independence and intelligence of female characters as he gradually recognizes women's autonomy. He reveals to Elisabeth that;

As a child, I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit... Such I was from right to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest loveliest Elisabeth! What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, a hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (Pride and Prejudice, 259).

By this, he believes that some women's independence and intelligence are great potential of self-determination that could be exploited. Opposed to the strict patriarchal structures of the Regency Era, and the fellow rigid and oppressive male characters, his gradual transformation redefines gender norms because his marriage to Elisabeth is built on reciprocal love, respect and affection.

Such a change in a man of so much pride exciting not only astonishment but gratitude – for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on her was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. (Pride and Prejudice, 184).

From the above quote, Mr. Darcy has undergone a complete change in character which thus changes the aspect of gender norms and societal expectations that tie down women's marital conditions. He appreciates Elisabeth for her distinguished and rare character for doing what most of his genders cannot do, for instance, walking over miles, through which he is —brightened by the exercise —.

Through Mr. Darcy's constant interference in the Bennet women's lives, he greatly contributes to women's condition of the time. His intrusion into Lydia and Wickham's affair, paying off Wickham's debts, shows his willingness to remedy the hopeless situation and especially to maintain the Bennet family's reputation. This demonstrates the influence men have in the decision makings of women's life. Thus, women are dependent on men in order to maintain their social standing.

Mr. Wickham; The exploitative

Mr. Wickham does not escape from Austen's satirical eyes patterning to women's condition of *Pride and Prejudice*. Considered as —one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain (214), Mr. Wickham through his predatory behavior, abuses men's power within the patriarchal society. Through his exploitative and opportunistic behavior, he downgrades women's autonomy. His premeditated elopement with Georgiana Darcy and his successful, but scandalous elopement with Lydia Bennet is primarily to ruin the ladies reputation. Lydia's family's reputation has been tampered with as her sisters' marriageability become sceptical. This shows that women's reputation of the time is too fragile and could be easily stained.

Mr. Wickham's economic dependence makes him adventure in the pursuit of a profitable marriage. His premeditated elopement with Georgiana Darcy was to gain a sort of financial independence since she's from a wealthy family. His elopement with Lydia Bennet is questionable because her family is not financially independent as compared to the Darcy family. Thus, Mr. Wickham's actions show how the patriarchal system enable men to benefit from women's economic vulnerability. Through his manipulative and exploitative strategies, he constraints the condition of women, especially that of Lydia, to remain financially drained.

Jane Austen through Mr. Bingley, portrays a greater hope of change of women's condition in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Bingley's passivity and deference to male authority, contributes to the well-being of women's condition. He represents a kinder masculine figure as he is well-intentioned in his genuine attention to Jane Bennet. He challenges the patriarchal structures by refusing to abide to Mr. Darcy's advice against him choosing Jane for a partner. His challenge of the prevailing gender hierarchies of the era, offers a glimpse of a possible shift in traditional gender dynamics. He shapes the lived experiences and opportunities available to women within the patriarchal social structure in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* greatly explore the complex condition of women's lives in the early 19th century, portraying their struggles, aspirations, and the societal barriers that shape their identities. Through her brilliant characterization, particularly that of Elizabeth Bennet, Austen criticizes the strict structures of patriarchy while celebrating the intelligence, resilience, and agency of women in a male-dominated society. Elizabeth Bennet emerges as a revolutionary figure, portraying the potential for women to assert their independence and challenge societal norms. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Elizabeth values personal happiness and intellectual compatibility over the societal expectation of marriage as a means to financial security. Her witty nature and refusal to settle for an advantageous but uninspiring match with Mr. Collins highlights a growing awareness among women of their right to choose partners based on love and respect rather than economic necessity. Elizabeth's journey toward self-acceptance and her union with Mr. Darcy, built on mutual respect and understanding, shows a new vision of marriage through which one prioritizes emotional connection and personal agency.

Also, the novel paints a vivid picture of the limitations faced by women through the experiences of other female characters. Charlotte Lucas's approach to marriage starkly contrasts with Elizabeth's ideals. Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins for security, regardless of his lack of charm and compatibility, shows the harsh realities many women faced in a society where economic survival often choices. This contrast highlights the diverse strategies women employed to navigate their problems and circumstances, revealing the tension between societal expectations governed and personal aspirations. More so, Austen's exploration of marriage serves as a criticism of the institution as it existed in her time. While it is shown as a desirable goal, Austen illustrates the loopholes of marrying solely for financial stability. The relationships that flourish in the novel such as that of Elizabeth and Darcy, or Jane and Bingley portray and lay emphasise the importance of true affection and mutual respect, suggesting that true fulfilment lies not solely in social standards but in the quality of interpersonal connections. This view calls for a balanced view of marriage, one that recognizes the equal importance of emotional and intellectual partnership. Also, Austen criticizes the limited educational opportunities afforded to women, advocating for intellectual engagement and personal growth. Elizabeth's intelligence and keen observations reflect the potential of women to contribute meaningfully to society when provided with the opportunity to develop their minds. The contrast between the educated Elizabeth and the more conventional female characters highlights how societal norms slows down women's

intellectual pursuits, emphasizing the need for reform in women's education to allow for the exploitation of their talents and aspirations.

In addition, the novel's setting and societal background provide a critical context for understanding the condition of women. The pressures of social class, reputation, and the necessity of securing a good match create an atmosphere in which women must operate strategically, often at the expense of their personal desires. Austen's keen observations of social dynamics reveal a deep overview of relationships and expectations that define women's lives, illustrating the negative influence of societal norms on individual choices. Hence, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* serves as a rich and vital text in the examination of the condition of women in the early 19th century, capturing the complicated balance between societal expectations and personal aspirations. Through the character of Elizabeth Bennet and her interactions with other characters, Austen criticizes the limitations imposed by gender roles while advocating for women's autonomy and self-definition. The novel's exploration of marriage, education, and the quest for personal fulfilment aligns with contemporary discussions around gender equality and the importance of women's voices in shaping their futures. Thus, Austen's work not only reflects the historical realities of her time but also serves as a timeless commentary on the on-going struggle for women's rights and the significance of individual autonomy. By demonstrating the complexities of women's lives and celebrating their composure and resilience, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* remains a powerful testament to the long quest and search for gender equality, inspiring readers to reflect on the progress made and the challenges that still lie ahead. Austen's insights into the human condition and her advocacy for women's agency ensure that her novel continues to blend with audiences today, reminding us of the importance of love, respect, and the pursuit of happiness in all relationships. Hence, the interplay between the male and female characters of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* reflect the complex nature of women's condition in the early 19th century, Regency England. While most male characters have often reinforce the patriarchal structures that constraints women's autonomy and opportunities, female characters like Elisabeth Bennet vehemently portrays resilience, rebellion and glimpse of a more progressive future, where gender inequality and dynamics may gradually shift towards equity and mutual understanding.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

This chapter sets out to examine the condition of women in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Through Woolf's critical lenses and illustration of her male and female characters, it facilitates the understanding of the lives of women in her novel and how they navigate the challenges and societal norms of the 20th century through their feministic attitudes. It vividly shows women's struggles in their aspirations and autonomy.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is a representation of women's, condition, experiences and challenges during the early 20th century. Woolf explores the limitations and social expectations placed upon women. In this same light, she pinpoints women's desires, struggles, and potentials for liberation. Through the stream of consciousness narrative technique, Woolf gets into the internal lives and perspectives of her female characters. She provides insight into her females' complex emotions, desires, and frustrations. By highlighting the inner world of women, Woolf emphasizes the depth and richness of their experiences, often overlooked or marginalized in a patriarchal society. Woolf in a glimpse critiques gender inequality. She highlights the inequalities and injustices prevalent in society during the twentieth century the novel portrays the different manners in which women are marginalized, their voices silenced, and their desires and aspirations suppressed. Woolf's criticizes the societal norms that perpetuate these inequalities and exposes the detrimental impact they have on women's lives. This chapter is aimed at portraying the condition of women in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Virginia Woolf's selection and choices of her female characters in *To the Lighthouse* reveals the condition of the twentieth century women. Through a complex representation of her female characters, Woolf through her stream of consciousness narrative technique plays a diverse role in analyzing women's conditions in this era. By getting into her female characters' inner thoughts and experiences, she gives voice to women's experiences and challenges. This narrative technique serves to validate and centered women's perspectives, which had been historically marginalized in literature. Meanwhile, the Complexities of women's lives is not kept aside by Woolf. Woolf does not present her characters in a simplified version but instead, she presents them as complex individuals with diverse desires, emotions, and aspirations. These complexities challenge stereotypes and conventional narratives that limit women's agency and potential.

The Silent Rebellion: Women's strategies against Male Authority

Mrs. Ramsay; Traditional Versus Modern Roles

Woolf through her main female character, Mrs. Ramsay, portrays the woman's position and condition in the society which is crowned by the private sphere; housewife and mother. During the twentieth century, more emphasis was laid on the role of motherhood and the sacrifices involved so far as gender roles and expectations were concerned. Mrs. Ramsay, the traditional (old) woman and matriarch of the Ramsay family, embodies the nurturing and self-sacrificing mother figure, the novel also shows the limitations and challenges that come with that role. Mrs. Ramsay embodies the traditional feminine virtues such as gentleness, warmth, and selflessness. Her role as a mother is central to her identity and is seen as essential for maintaining harmony within the family. This portrayal reflects the societal expectations that women find fulfilment primarily through their roles as wives and mothers. The expectations placed upon women as mothers restrict their personal and intellectual development, as seen through Mrs. Ramsay's unfulfilled artistic aspirations. —She wanted something more, though she did not know, could not think what it was that she wanted (Lighthouse, 82). This demonstrates how chained up Mrs. Ramsay is and she yearns for something she does not have and that thing is freedom. Freedom of doing what she likes unlike just being home, working and knitting. Her primary concern according to societal expectations, is to ensure the comfort and happiness of those around her though she is often suppressed by her own desires and ambitions. Just like many typical traditional married women like her, she is confined in the domestic sphere.

Mrs. Ramsay fully occupies her position as a housewife who satisfies her husband at all cost. *To the Lighthouse* portrays the condition of housewives during the twentieth century through Mrs. Ramsay. She represents a caring and self-sacrificing wife to the detriment of her own personal fulfilment. There is a wide gap in the division of labor which greatly demonstrate women's condition. Housewives are primarily associated with domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, and childcare, unlike men who are engaged in intellectual pursuits and professional work. This division reinforces traditional gender roles and limits women's, especially housewives' opportunities for intellectual and creative fulfilment beyond the domestic sphere. Only then they need to cut sandwiches —that was all. They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full

of human emotions (*Lighthouse*, 22). This extract shows how stagnant the condition of housewives has been tied to domestic sphere. Consequently, housewives like Mrs. Ramsay could not excel in the public spheres where her autonomy could be beneficial. During the family dinners, —the room (she looked round it) was very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere... Again she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it (*Lighthouse*, 58). Women are still in general, just like Mrs. Ramsay believes that only women could do house chores and not men. This shows how women are still in the chains of domesticity; taking care of the family as a whole and nothing more.

More to this, Woolf uses Mrs. Ramsay in the novel to represent a duel between Domestic spheres and Artistic expression as a means of reviving and reviewing women's condition during the twentieth century. There is tension between women's domestic responsibilities and their desire for creative and intellectual fulfilment. Mrs. Ramsay, despite her intelligence and insight, is confined to the domestic sphere. Her artistic aspirations are overshadowed by her duties as a wife and mother.

She visited this window, or that struggling wife in person with a bag on her arm, and a note- book and pencil with which she wrote down in columns carefully ruled for the purpose wages and spending, employment and unemployment, in the hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman whose charity was half sop to her own indignation, half a relief to her own curiosity, and become what with her untrained mind she greatly admired, an investigator, elucidating the social problem (Lighthouse, 05).

Just like many housewives of the early twentieth century, Mrs. Ramsay wished she had that opportunity to do what she had always loved to do but with the societal expectations, she is forced to follow the norms to her detriment. Thus, women till the twentieth century were still limited in terms of freedom of choice and opportunities as seen in the quote above. Housewives were still limited in the spheres of employment and depended solely on marriage as a means of income.

The twentieth century was an epoch in which women's opportunities, especially housewives, were greatly limited in terms of education, professional pursuits, and intellectual development which restraint their personal growth and made their conditions permanent. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, women are expected, and to a certain level obligated to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, often at the detriment or expense of their own personal and

intellectual growth. The limitation is seen through characters like Mrs. Ramsay, who longs for intellectual engagement but is confined to the domestic sphere. It is often said and repeated in the novel that: —women can't write, women can't paint^{ll}. Mrs. Ramsay —never had time to read^{ll} because of her domestic duties and to add more to this, Mrs Ramsay believed that —the atmosphere of lecture – rooms was stuffy and depressing to her beyond endurance^{ll} (*Lighthouse*, 49). Mrs. Ramsay's attachment to societal expectations of the time made her believe that —one could not take her(Briscoe) painting very seriously^{ll} but —there was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay like very much indeed, but no man would, feared^{ll} (*Lighthouse*, 73). Mrs. Ramsay in this regard secretly admires the woman Lily is becoming. She sees in Lily what she would have loved to have but she believes that men would not like. This has to do with Lily's personality and her endeavour of creating her own space at her peace. Lily is the modern version of Mrs. Ramsay, the traditional woman. Lily hereby represents a change and progress of women's condition. She hereby shows the path to be followed by her fellow young ladies so that together, they can smile in the future.

Still in the domain of women's conditions as housewife and mother, Mrs. Ramsay, just like many women of the twentieth century, wanted to pursue their dreams. As Woolf asserts; —A model diary and a hospital up here—those two things she would have liked to do, herself. But how? With all these children? When they were older, then perhaps she would have time; when they were all at school. (*Lighthouse*, 40). Just like Mrs. Ramsay, the twentieth century women had no chance to explore a life of their own. Their aspirations and dreams died off because they had to take care of their family. Women's condition of taking care of their children remained the same as Mrs. Ramsay does not want her children to grow fast. —She would have liked always to have had a baby. She was the happiest carrying one in her arms. Then people might say she was tyrannical, domineering, masterful, if they chose; she did not mind^{ll} (*Lighthouse*, 41). Mrs. Ramsay remains comfortable in her domestic sphere as a nursing and nurturing mother. Thus, women's condition of being housewives and mother's still made their conditions stagnant at the level of aspirations and personal developments/skills.

As a married woman and mother, Mrs. Ramsay suffers the burden of societal expectations which is a heavy load for women. Mrs. Ramsay, in particular, is wearing a forceful thorn in the name of societal norms and so called expectations which restraint the

condition of women at the time. Consequently, this burden takes control of her emotional and mental well-being as revealed;

Indeed, she had a whole of the other sex under her protection: for reasons she could not explain, for her chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential ; which an old woman could take from a young man without loss of dignity, and woe beside the girl – pray Heaven it was none of her daughters!—who did not feel the worth of it, and all it implied, to the marrow of her bones! (Lighthouse, 3)

The quote above shows housewives and mothers' internal struggles and conflicts against women's place and condition in the society. Married women and housewives during the twentieth century through their internal struggles hoped that women's condition could be upgraded so that the future generation of women will not suffer the injustice they are going through. Mrs. Ramsay prays that her daughters should not witness what she is going through. This is a silent and internal rebellion against patriarchy and a call for equality as;

She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was of her; and sometimes they parleyed (when she sat alone); there were, she remembered, great reconciliation scenes; but for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance. There were eternal problems; suffering; death; the poor. There was always a woman dying of cancer even here. She had experiences which need not happen to everyone (she did not name them to herself). She was driven on, too quickly she knew, almost as if we're an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children. (Lighthouse, 41)

Mrs. Ramsay in her thoughts as seen in the quote above, critically looks at the injustice of life from all angles. Just like many housewives and mothers of the time, Mrs. Ramsay is tired of this reckless life but as a means of escape from this mischievous nature of life, Mrs. Ramsay seeks refuge in marriage and believes that marriage is the only solution to this burden of life.

At this stage, Mrs. Ramsay's solution still ties down women's condition as they are still forced to live under men's authority and the bondage of domesticity.

Till the twentieth century, married and housewives were conditioned not to express themselves freely in intellectual fields. The suppression of women's voice is a great challenge that the female characters face during the twentieth century. Woolf highlights the silencing of women's voice should be abolished and their struggles to be heard. Mrs. Ramsay, despite her intelligence and insights, often finds her opinions dismissed or overlooked. This reflects the broader social context of the time, where women's voices were frequently marginalized or ignored in public and intellectual spheres. —So they argued about politics, and Lily looked at a leaf on the table- cloth; and Mrs. Ramsay, leaving the argument entirely in the hands of the two men, wondered why she was bored by this talk. (Lighthouse, 66). As rightly said before, this quote, women, especially married women, had no right to talk about intellectual talks like politics. It was —a no go zone to women and reserved only for men. Till the twentieth century, women's condition in terms of politics remained stagnant as before, due to the vagueness of their minds which is hopeless. To lay more emphasis on housewives and mothers' intellectual autonomy, women could not get involved in intellectual discourse. In their discussion of the weather patterning to their visit to the lighthouse the next day, Mrs. Ramsay believes that the weather will be favourable. Enraged with her opinion, Mr. Ramsay thought that —the extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him “(Lighthouse, 22). He believes that she —told lies to the children. In regards to this, Mrs. Ramsay makes no reply and believes that Mr. Ramsay — lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally was to her so horrible an outrage of human decadence — (Lighthouse, 22). Mrs. Ramsay hates the fact that men give no listening ears to women's opinions. At the end of the day, it is confirmed that Mrs. Ramsay was right about the weather prediction but no acknowledgement was made to it. She was triumphant and this is a sign that women could get involved in intellectual discourse but she does not want —to feel dinner than her husband (Lighthouse, 27). This quote restraints women's condition in their intellectual realm. Despite the challenges, some housewives and mothers like Mrs. Ramsay to an extent strives to upgrade her (women's) intellectual skills by searching for intellectual autonomy through books;

She murmured, sticking her needles into the stocking. And she opened the book and began reading here and there at random, and she did so, she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she

only knew this is white or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all (Lighthouse, 83).

Mrs. Ramsay is struggling to climb the ladder of intellectual autonomy but it seems challenging. She does not give up with the pursuit and;

She read and so reading she was ascending, she felt, on to the top, on to the summit. How satisfying! How restful! All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean...you don't look sad now, he (Mr. Ramsay) thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. (Lighthouse, 85).

As seen in the quotes above, the twentieth century married women tried to achieve their intellectual autonomy just like Mrs. Ramsay but the societal pressure in the form of Mr. Ramsay, suppresses and discourages her as she “*could feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind*” (Lighthouse, 87). Mr. Ramsay believes that Mrs. Ramsay’s mind is shallow and she does not understand what she’s reading but this concept is juxtaposed as she understands what she reads. Woolf at this level, criticizes traditional notions of femininity. Woolf criticizes the fact that traditional women are confined in prescribed roles which limit their freedom. Mrs. Ramsay is an epitome at this junction as she navigates the expectations placed on them, but the novel suggests that conforming to these ideals can stifle women’s individuality and self-fulfilment. Mrs. Ramsay is a woman who; —Had experiences which need not happen to everyone (she did not name them to herself); she was driven on, too quickly. She knew, almost as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children. (Lighthouse, 42). As a means of escape from what married women and housewives like Mrs. Ramsay had experienced as seen in the quote above, Woolf hereby encourages a re-evaluation of societal definitions of femininity and the recognition of women’s agency and autonomy as a means of changing their conditions.

Woolf’s representation of relationships and Power dynamics between married women and men affect women’s experiences and condition in the twentieth century. The power dynamics between Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay, for instance, demonstrate the imbalances of power and the sacrifices married women often make for the sake of maintaining harmony in their relationships. The novel also explores the influence of societal expectations on married

women's choices and their impact on their sense of self and fulfilment. At this junction, the twentieth century married women, just like Mrs. Ramsay, are tired of this social imbalance strive hard to smuggle themselves out of this situation. Mrs. Ramsay believes that;

They must find a way out of it all. There must be some simpler way, some less laborious way, she sighed. When she looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought, possibly she might have managed things better—her husband; money; books. But for her own part she would never for a single second regret her decision, evade difficulties, or slur over duties... She was now formidable to behold, and it was only in silence looking up from their plates, after she had spoken so severely about Charles Tansley, that her daughters, Prue, Nancy, Rose—could spot with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a long life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace, though to them all there was something in this of the essence of beauty, which called out the manliness in their girlish hearts. (Lighthouse, 3).

The above quote shows how tired the twentieth century married women are patterning to their conditions. They are tired of the social norms and expectations. They desire a change but can't openly voice them out but thanks to Woolf's intrigues of getting into the subconscious mind of her characters, it is clear that Mrs. Ramsay is exhausted with her life full of routine and male dominance.

Aside from the aspects of power dynamics, in comparison of men and women's physicality, Mrs. Ramsay is —a little resentful that she had grown old, perhaps, by her own fault while Mr. Ramsay —seemed a young man; a man very attractive to women, not burdened, not weighed down with the greatness of his labour and the sorrows of the world and his fame or his failure, but again she had first known him, gaunt but gallant (Lighthouse, 69). From this comparison, there is a clear contrast between married men and married women's physical appearance due to the discriminated amount of societal pressure placed on both sexes. Married women's physical appearances are greatly affected by the numerous societal norms and expectations that they have to follow.

During the twentieth century, marriage was a priority, especially for single women. It was a source of income and fulfilment which greatly contribute to their financial status, social

standing and their condition as a whole. Mrs. Ramsay believes that Minta is —extra ordinarily lucky...she is marrying a man who has a gold watch in a wash- leather bag‖ (Lighthouse, 82). Married women just like Mrs. Ramsay depended financially on men and getting a rich husband meant that the future was secured. Mrs. Ramsay has always been financially dependent on her husband of which she is getting tired. As Mr. And Mrs. Ramsay strolled, Mrs. Ramsay —had at the tip of her tongue to say, as they strolled; _it'll cost fifty pounds' but instead, for her heart failed her about money, she talked about Jasper shooting birds‖ (Lighthouse, 46). It is clear that Mrs. Ramsay wants to run away from being financially dependent on her husband. Though difficult, she tries hard to retrieve herself from asking any financial assistance from her husband. This shows how exhausted married women are, for being financially dependent on their husbands; they want to be financially independent which shows a hope and possible change of their condition.

To the Lighthouse to a greater extend explores and examines marital expectations which portrays and reshape women's condition. The novel portrays the challenges and compromises faced by married women in their relationships. Mrs. Ramsay's marriage to Mr. Ramsay is characterized by power imbalance and emotional distance, reflecting the limitations and complexities of marital expectations during that era. To show that their marriage is not based on compatibility, Mr. Ramsay keeps expecting Mrs. Ramsay to express her feelings for him, which she does not. —He wanted something—wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do... (Lighthouse, 87). It was believed during the twentieth century that —an unmarried woman has missed the best of life (Lighthouse, 34). In this light, marriage was an asset and was not a matter of reciprocal feelings and true love. This is confirmed when Mrs. Ramsay wants William and Lily Briscoe to get marry simply because —they have so many things in common‖ (Lighthouse, 73). This implies that till the twentieth century, unmarried women still faced marital pressure and still had few or no right of choosing their life partners.

To the Lighthouse also circles the repression of married women's sexuality and social expectations surrounding female purity and modesty. Mrs. Ramsay, for instance, embodies the ideal of Victorian femininity, which prioritizes modesty and self-restraint. The novel suggests that such expectations can stifle married women's desires and limit their freedom to explore and express their own sexuality. Mrs. Ramsay is absolutely aware of the power of her influence, and it could be said that she has mastered the use of her social abilities and charm. However, she often questions the morality of her own actions, which proves her complexity

as a character. For instance, she is very compassionate and selfless and loves helping those in need although

[...] all this desire of hers (Mrs. Ramsay) to give, to help, was vanity. For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, 'O Mrs. Ramsay! Dear Mrs. Ramsay ... Mrs. Ramsay, of course!' and need her and send for her and admire her? Was it not secretly this that she wanted [...] she did not feel merely snubbed back in her instinct, but made aware of the pettiness of some part of her, and of human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best. (Lighthouse, 40).

The quote above portrays the characteristics of a woman of virtue in the twentieth century. The presentation of this inner moral dilemma proves that although it may seem that she acts like the ideal Victorian married woman; selfless, compassionate and with no wishes of her own, she is not that simple. As shown in the quote above, Mrs. Ramsay shows a deep reflection about both herself and human relations in general. She questions the motivation of her wishes and actions, which proves that her acts are not guided by an absolute instinct of being good but because of societal expectations. Despite —all this desire of hers to give, to help, was vanity. For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished instinctively to help, to give...‖ (Lighthouse, 29). This shows how valueless married women and housewives' efforts were during the twentieth century. In a sceptical refrain;

Only she thought life--and a little strip of time presented itself to her eyes--her fifty years. There it was before her--life. Life, she thought--but she did not finish her thought. She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another [...] must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance. (Lighthouse, 56).

Married women have longed to have the freedom and anxiety of being alone in order to reflect on their lives. When Mrs. Ramsay has the opportunity to be left alone for the first time in the narration: —[...] it was a relief when they went to bed. For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. [...] When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless.‖ (Woolf, Lighthouse 58-59). Significantly, in this passage

Mrs. Ramsay also expresses a quite deep and meaningful reflection on how she perceives life. The fact of being alone, even if it is for a few minutes, grants her freedom and limitless opportunities. Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts in the quote above may contrast with the image that she had given of herself previously in the novel. In this passage she expresses her relief for not having to worry about anyone, not even her own children. In the context of the early twentieth century, with the —Angel in the House‗ being the imposed role housewives must comply with, this may probably have been seen as extremely selfish and improper behaviour for a woman who is also a wife and a mother.

Most married women during the early twentieth century could not openly show their melancholic attitude in regards to gender norms and societal expectations. Mrs. Ramsay, just like many women of this epoch, represents some silent rebellious attitude against traditional gender norms. She expresses her desire for independence and intellectual engagement, defying the notion that a woman's worth lies solely in her domestic roles. Mrs. Ramsay's moments of resistance highlights the internal conflicts faced by married women who yearn for fulfilment beyond prescribed roles. She has always —wanted something more, though she did not know, could not think what it was that she wanted (*Lighthouse*, 82). Lily in the verge of achieving her goal and freedom believes that;

Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative, to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relations...she rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying in it the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illumined the darkness of the past. (Lighthouse, 119).

The quote above portrays Lily's knowledge about Mrs. Ramsay's greatest desire of freedom. She believes that Mrs. Ramsay will be proud of her, for she has saved the future generation of married women from the trauma she had gone through.

Mrs. Ramsay and all the women folk are not only ridiculed, they are also intimidated, as in this case where Mr. Ramsay speaks and stamps his feet on the stone step. This totally silences Mrs. Ramsay and plays against her opinion of herself. A feeling of being dull and useless sets in and she carries it to her dying bed. But then, she embarks on something like a personality cult for her husband. She has more reverence for him than for anyone else, not even for herself. When people turn to her for help, she thinks it is simply because she is a woman, not because of any importance of hers. Virginia Woolf adds that —she often felt she

was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions...she was not good enough to tie his [Mr. Ramsay's] shoe strings, she felt" (*Lighthouse* 32). Furthermore, "It was painful to feel herself convicted of unworthiness, and impeded in her proper function by lies, these exaggerations" (*Lighthouse* 40). Her relationship with her husband is far from satisfactory. His actions remind her of the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed, and could not bear the examination which, loving her husband, with her instinct for truth, she turned upon it" (*Lighthouse* 40). At this juncture, the woman's place in her society is in the house where she is at the mercy of all. She is at the service of every Tom, Dick and Harry, simply because she is a woman. It is understood that her place is in the house where among other chores, she must take care of the children.

The complexities of Mrs. Ramsay's character needs further exploration, as she serves as a main figure in Woolf's exploration of the condition of women. Through Mrs. Ramsay's inner thoughts and struggles, Woolf exposes the great tension between the societal role expected of her and her personal desires and aspirations. As the "quintessential" embodiment of the selfless, nurturing, and self-sacrificing mother, Mrs. Ramsay's character stands for the societal expectations placed on women during this time. However, Woolf's portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay's inner life, with its emphasis of discontent and unfulfilled artistic yearnings, challenges the notion of the "angel in the house" that was so valuable in the early 20th century. By getting deep into Mrs. Ramsay's complex emotions and desires, Woolf illustrates the ways in which women were forced to navigate the conflicting demands of their societal roles and their individual aspirations, often at the detriment of their own fulfilment and self-actualization.

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roles and their individual aspirations, often at the detriment of their own fulfilment and self-actualization.

Woolf's treatment of other female characters in the novel, such as Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay's daughters, further contributes to the exploration of the condition of Women. These secondary female characters serve to complement or contrast with the portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay, providing additional perspectives on the experiences and challenges faced by women. Lily Briscoe, for instance, represents a more independent and artistically inclined woman, whose struggles to achieve her creative voice and identity within the confines of a patriarchal society provide a counterpoint to Mrs. Ramsay's more traditional role. Similarly, the portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay's daughters, with their varying degrees of conformity and rebellion, shows the different nature of women's experiences and the ways in which they struggle through the societal expectations placed upon them.

Mrs. McNab; The resilient

Virginia Woolf through her minor character, McNab, portrays the condition and occupation of typical traditional women in the twentieth century. Mrs. McNab, —the toothless, bonneted, care-taking woman,¹ who is close to seventy years is tied in the domestic sphere. As a working-class, she represents the traditional role of women in service, maintaining the household in a practical, labour-intensive way. She lives a monotonous life which has to do with house chores and taking care of the Ramsay's family. To a greater extent, this is the kind of job available to women during this era.

To throw more light, on the traditional archetype women, Rose, one of the Ramsay's daughter Woolf portrays the prevailing condition of traditional women as —she had wonderful gift with her hands ... Made the dresses; made everything; liked arranging tables, flowers, anything² (*Lighthouse*, 40). Despite the fact that most women are not satisfied with the condition of traditional women, Rose Ramsay is rather striving to be a typical traditional woman.

Lily Briscoe: Artistic Ambition and Independence

Woolf does not solely portray married women actively taking part in the private sphere of life but she shows unmarried women who venture into public spheres. Virginia Woolf through her portrayal of Lily Briscoe, an unmarried, independent-minded young woman, a close friend to

the Ramsay family and frequent guest at their summer home, illustrates the condition of unmarried women in the twentieth century. Lily Briscoe's character is a foil to Mr. Ramsay's. Her complex character, greatly shows the condition of unmarried women in the twentieth century. Lily Briscoe represents a more independent and artistically inclined woman. She struggles to assert her creative voice and faces societal judgements regarding her unmarried status. In regards to Briscoe's devotion in painting, Mrs. Ramsay says that —she would never marry; one could not take her painting seriously; she was an independent little creature, and Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it. (*Lighthouse*, 11). This quote shows that Mrs. Ramsay, just like any other person, believe that women can't paint and do something reasonable and this is why till the twentieth century, people's mentality revolve around the fact that women have a limited portion in the society and could contribute the least. Certain single women that were not bold enough like Briscoe could not come out of their shells because their minds are engulfed with the notion that —women can't do what men do and consequently, this ideology becomes a barrier to women's personal growth and self-determination. Woolf does not only portray the burdens women go through, but also shows how she subverts gender norms in the betterment of women's condition. She challenges traditional gender norms through her unmarried character, Lily Briscoe, who resists conforming to societal expectations. Woolf hereby represents a more liberated and independent version of womanhood. Lily's struggle to assert her artistic voice and live life on her own terms reflects the challenges faced by unmarried women seeking self-expression and independence.

During the twentieth century, unmarried women seek for personal growth and independence as a means of securing a better condition in the future. As time passes, just like the second part of the book; —Time Passes, with the physical and psychological impacts of the war, women desired independence more than anything else. While the novel portrays the roles imposed on women, it also shows women's desire for independence and self-fulfilment for the betterment of their condition. Through characters like Lily Briscoe, Woolf challenges social expectations and seeks personal and artistic autonomy for women. Lily's journey represents a struggle for self-expression and assertion to individual identity beyond prescribed roles.

She had borne it in her mind all these years. It seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew what she wanted to do. But with Mr. Ramsay bearing down on her, she could do nothing. Every time he approached--he was walking up and down the terrace

– ruin approached, chaos approached. She could not paint... He made it impossible for her to do anything (*Lighthouse*, 103).

Just like Lily Briscoe, many unmarried women in the twentieth century were tied down on their goals because of male influences. As the quote above reveals, Mr. Ramsay represents the social norms that are pressing down women. Unmarried women's conditions during the twentieth century was being held by decorum. The presence of a man was a barrier to a single woman's life, just as mentioned above, it is chaotic and terrifying. —That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all this. Really she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay (Lighthouse, 104). Lily is angry with the late Mrs. Ramsay as she has always satisfied her husband and now he is desperate to have affection from Lily, which she is not willing to offer. Married women's obedience to societal norms and expectations have made it difficult for the new version of women, especially the unmarried ones to navigate through.

Lily is depicted as the self-sufficient artist whose main preoccupation is her work and she hereby calls upon unmarried women to get up and strive for better living conditions including their lifestyle and standard. In Part I of the novel, 'The Window', she expresses a quite severe attitude towards Mrs. Ramsay's conventional ideas about the role women should have in society. In the same way, Mrs. Ramsay ignores Lily's ideals and artistic ambitions: —One could not take her painting very seriously (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 17). Instead, Mrs. Ramsay wishes her to get married, since —she pictures Lily Briscoe's happiness almost exclusively in the terms imposed by society. (Ruotolo, 121) Although Mrs. Ramsay is depicted as an influential character for her loved ones, Lily asserts her independence and decides that she wants her art to be the focus of her life: —He has his work, Lily said to herself. She remembered, all of a sudden, as if she had found a treasure, that she too had her work. (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 78). Interestingly, this realization comes to her while thinking about Mr. Banks. In so doing, Lily expresses her wish to live like a man, since at that time men had the prerogative of ignoring marriage and dedicating themselves to their work.

Here was Lily at forty-four, wasting her time, unable to do a thing, standing there playing at painting, at the one thing one did not play at, and it was all Mrs. Ramsay's fault. She was dead. The step where she used to sit was empty. She was dead. But why repeat this over and over again? Why be always trying to bring up some feeling she had not got? There was a kind of blasphemy in it (Lighthouse, 104).

The above quote demonstrates Lily's unsympathetic attitude in regards to Mrs. Ramsay's death. Mrs. Ramsay, the traditional married woman who suffered the effects of gender norms and societal expectations is dead and gone. This obviously means the death of the old era, the previous and mischievous condition of women. The horrific era where married women and housewives were enslaved in the name of gender norms. Lily Briscoe is not just trying to paint Mrs. Ramsay's portrait, but she is painting the horrific portrait of the past in order to show women of the present and future generation how women were marginalized and considered as subordinates in the past. Lily —hated playing at painting. A brush, the one dependable thing in the world of strife, ruin, chaos—that one should not play with, knowingly even (Lighthouse, 104). Lily Briscoe believes that only her 'brush' can save her from societal pressure and her portrait serves as a demonstration and warning to the future generation of women never to return to the epoch of lamentation, disrespect, marginalization and psychological torture of women.

To continue with the portrayal of unmarried women's condition, some unmarried women like Lily Briscoe's did not consider marriage as a priority. Lily had a different view of marriage as she does not consider it as an 'accomplishment' rather, she believes that —there is nothing more tedious, puerile and inhumane than this; yet it is also beautiful and necessary (Lighthouse, 72). Lily does not believe in love and she thinks that marriage is a sort of burden. In regards to Mrs. Ramsay's failed approbations of marriage, Lily rejoices as seen after the former's death.

Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she (Lily) thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us. Mockingly she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, 'marry, marry!'... And one would have to say to her, it has all gone against your wishes. (Lighthouse, 121).

In the quote above, Lily is triumphantly glad as Minta and Paul's marriage fails. Lily wishes that Mrs. Ramsay would have still been alive to see this humiliation as Paul dumps Minta and marries another woman. She wished Mrs. Ramsay could see this for herself and bare it in mind that marriage is not an accomplishment and does not eventually bring hundred percent happiness. More to this, Lily observes —How old she (Mrs. Ramsay) looks, how worn she looks, Lily thought, and how remote (Lighthouse, 59). Lily pities Mrs. Ramsay's condition and she pitied her for pitying Mr. Bankes, who had no family. Lily winces and says *that* —...

The life in her, her resolve to live again, had been stirred by pity (*Lighthouse*, 59) and according to Lily, Mrs. Ramsay —pitied men as if that lacked something – women never, as if they had something” (*Lighthouse*, 59). In her relationship with the other sex, Lily feels no sympathy or pity. Lily thus openly highlight the _New woman’s condition of being free from the chains of societal norms and expectations. She convinces herself that —she need not marry, thank Heaven; she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution” (*Lighthouse*, 71). Thus, the twentieth century was in another way, a gateway to a new era, an era of change in women’s lives and conditions as unmarried women redefined their goals and accomplishment. Despite the obstacles and challenges Lily Briscoe faced, she gradually and surely achieves her goal of changing the condition of women. For —she had resolved, she had succeeded, she had set her foot on a firm ground of reality, the only enemy she (Briscoe) was likely to meet was a phantom” (*Woolf’s Lighthouse, part III*). Lily, immediately after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, becomes the focus point of the story as part III unfolds

Living with the Ramsays, Lily Briscoe has the time to watch the Ramsay couple; it is seldom different from what she has run away from, with her own parents. She is not a man-hater as such, but the institution of marriage as she knows it of her society, is not worth the attempt. She is happy she is not yet married and will not marry because; she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution” (*Lighthouse* 53). For her, marriage degrades a woman, reduces her in status and rank, makes her less deserving of respect, especially from her husband. The married woman almost has no identity of her own. Briscoe thinks that there is nothing more tedious, puerile and inhumane than love and her wonder is why men should still opt for it on a fraction of nine on ten. She decides to subdue all —her impressions as a woman to something more general” (*Lighthouse* 53).

Woolf’s unmarried woman, Lily Briscoe, in *To the Lighthouse* greatly challenges traditional gender norms and expectations which surely upgrades the condition of women in the twentieth century. Lily Briscoe is at the top of the challenge through her artistic pursuits. Through her artistic aspirations, Briscoe defies societal expectations that women should prioritize domestic duties and instead devotes herself to painting. Briscoe’s commitment to her art represents a rejection of the limited roles prescribed for women and a pursuit of personal fulfilment and self-expression outside of traditional gender boundaries. She has always faced challenges in her artistic pursuit;

It was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her often

brought her to the vergers of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself – struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say; ‘But this is what I see; this is what I See’, and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her version to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. And it was then too, in that chill and windy way, as she began to paint, that they forced themselves upon her other things, her own inadequacy, her insignificance, keeping house for her father off the Brompton Road, and had much ado to control her impulse to fling herself (thank Heaven she had always resisted so far [Lighthouse,13-14].

The above quote shows the obstacles single ladies like Lily faces as she embarks on her journey of artistic achievement. She resists temptations from the society as the world felt that she is inadequate and insignificant, but she holds on strong to her artistic drive. In her devotion and determination in painting;

She heard some voice saying she couldn’t paint, saying she couldn’t create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after certain time experience forms In the mind so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them...can’t paint, can’t write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be. (Lighthouse, 110).

The quote above reveals Lily’s rebellious nature of obtaining what she desires and proving that the famous feminist phrase; —what a man can do, a woman can do much better¹ can be attained. Lily did not give up. Rather, —the war had drawn the sting of her femininity. Poor devil’s, one thought, poor devil’s, of both sexes² (Lighthouse, 111). Lily acclaims as she reviews Charles Tansley’s ideology of women not painting and writing. —She wiped her brush after another upon a piece of old rag menially, on purpose. She took shelter from the reverence which covered all young women; she felt herself praised³ (Lighthouse, 33). Unmarried women through Lily’s voice believe that they have escaped from the umbrella of societal restraints. In this light, the twentieth century unmarried women struggled, going through thick and thin to improve their conditions especially at the level of creativity. Successfully, —with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear from a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision⁴ (Lighthouse, 145). Lily has achieved what the societal norms and expectations have been preventing single women from achieving. She has acquired her vision and dream. She is free from societal pressure.

Lily Briscoe's painting is a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay. This focus on the woman is an attempt to fight for a place for her in the society. She is taking the challenge that Virginia Woolf talked about when she said:

Thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition, I thought at last that it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and impressions and its anger and its laughter and cast it into the hedge (Qtd. in Guiguet 169.)

This is practically the onset of the feminist struggle society in which the women are beginning to stand up to their rights by way of artistic pronouncements. They no longer simply grumble and stay. Timid, though, they begin to show forth dissatisfaction with regards to the manner in which they are treated.

Lily Briscoe's painting in the first part of the novel is aimed at producing a picture of Mrs. Ramsay and James. As she works on her painting, there comes moments when she decides to move the tree to the middle. Earlier on Mrs. Ramsay has been leaning on this tree that she is reproducing, so that for her, the tree and Mrs. Ramsay have become one. Her moving the tree from the periphery to the middle is an artistic endeavor to give the woman a central place in society.

Woolf through a feminist lenses emphasizes on the importance of female relationships and solidarity which highlights more on women's condition in the twentieth century. Through the interactions between married and unmarried women like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe respectively, Woolf highlights the potential for support, understanding, and empowerment that can arise from these relationships. This portrays the importance of women supporting and uplifting each other in the face of societal constraints.

To the Lighthouse further explores female sexuality and desire which also gives a glimpse to women's condition of the time. Through unmarried characters like Lily Briscoe, who grapples her own desires and emotions, the novel challenges the notion that women's sexuality is solely for the pleasure and validation of men. Woolf presents female sexuality as complex and individual, separate from traditional patriarchal narratives. In the second section of the novel, *Time Passes*, Lily Briscoe believes that —she must escape somewhere, be alone somewhere (Lighthouse, 103). Unmarried women just like Lily want to escape from the chains, burden and trauma that women are going through. Through Lily, Woolf portrays unmarried women's conditions and their anxiety of wanting to take control of their lives.

All in all, *To the lighthouse* explores married and unmarried women's experiences and challenges in a multidimensional manner. Woolf's portrayal of female characters reflects the struggles of women in trespassing societal expectations, seeking self-fulfilment, and asserting their individuality. *To the Lighthouse* thereby invites the readers to consider the complexities of women's lives and the limitations imposed upon them, while also celebrating their resilience, desires, and potential for personal growth within the constraints of a patriarchal society.

Nancy Ramsay;

Woolf through Nancy Ramsay, represents the rebellious and not the "angel in the house"—archetype ladies as they represent the opposite version of typical traditional women.

She wore sensible clothes than most women. She wore very short skirts and black knickers bockers. She would jump straight into a stream and flounder across. He (Andrew) liked her rashness, but he saw that it would not do – she would kill herself in some idiotic way one of these days. She seemed to be afraid of nothing – except balls... She didn't seem to mind what she said or did (Lighthouse, 51-52)

From the quote above, Nancy is viewed as a new version of unmarried women, as she abstains from lady-like manners associated to typical traditional woman. Nancy does not love family life as after lunch she escapes the "horror of family life" (51). This shows the condition of the new genre of woman in the twentieth century.

The Male Counterpart

Mr. Ramsay; The self-absorbed

Woolf does not limit herself at the portrayal of her married and unmarried women's experiences, but through a careful selection of her male characters, Woolf throws more light on women's conditions in *To the Lighthouse* in particular and the twentieth century as a whole. Woolf explores patriarchal authority in the novel as a means to clearly show the place and condition of women in the twentieth century. The novel portrays the influence of patriarchal authority on women's lives. Mr. Ramsay with his intellectual and authoritative presence, represents the patriarchal figure who dictates the family's dynamics and exerts control over the women in his life. His continuous dominance and dismissive attitude toward women reflect the power imbalances and the limitations placed on women's autonomy and self-expression. This is evident when; "...when an enormous need urged him, without being

conscious what it was, to approach a woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give Him what he wanted: sympathy. (Lighthouse, 106). This quote shows how women have no right and control over their bodies. Their husbands could have them whenever they wanted without seeking their permission. Lily Briscoe, in response to Mr. Ramsay's urge, ignores and refuses to satisfy his sexual desires. This shows how women have no control over their bodies, which restraints their condition.

In the world of employment and aspirations, most women were restricted to navigate through certain activities while men were given the liberty to navigate through any activity of their choice. The impact of patriarchy limited women's agency and self-expression which restraints the female autonomy. Mr. Ramsay symbolizes the patriarchal dominance that can overshadow and suppress women's desires and aspirations. His dismissive and condescending attitude toward the women around him reflects the power dynamics between men and women during that era. —He like that men should labour and sweat on the windy beach in night : pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in storm. (Lighthouse, 114). This shows how unequal men and women of the twentieth century society were. This equally shows gender norms and expectations which govern the society during this period. Women could not defy the man's authority as it is said about Mr. Ramsay in the quote below;

What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult (Lighthouse, 2).

The quote above, through an exaggerated manner, shows how strict patriarchal married men, like Mr. Ramsay, are during the twentieth century. —He is petty, selfish, vain, and egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death (Lighthouse, 17). Charles Tansley in this same light of patriarchy believes that women;

Never got anything worth having from one year's end to another. They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their _charms_, all their silliness (Lighthouse, 60).

As revealed in the quote above, men, just like Charles Tansley, believed that women could not contribute to the growth and development of the country, thus, women were to remain in the domestic sphere.

In terms of intellectual autonomy and professional pursuits, men progress freely to the detriment of women. Woolf to an extent showcases the double standard that exist between men and women in the novel as men are afforded more freedom and agency in pursuing their interests and aspirations, while women are expected to abide to socially prescribed roles. This disparity of double standard is evident in the manner in which characters' ambitions and desires are treated. Men's pursuits are often seen as valuable and important, while women's desires are dismissed or diminished for —women were not as clever as men^l and they make —civilization impossible with all their charm^l. Lily in opposition of this view, —pitied men always as if they lacked something —women never, as if they had something^l (*Lighthouse*, 59). This is because Mr. Ramsay values men than women, which gets Lily uncomfortable. In regards to this discrimination, Woolf *does* not leave male intellectual dominance uncritically. The novel criticizes the dominance of male intellect and the marginalization of women's intellectual contributions. Characters like Mr. Ramsay embodies the so called traditional patriarchal figure who asserts his intellectual authority and dismisses the thought and ideas of women because —the folly of women's mind enraged him^l (*Lighthouse*, 22). Woolf hereby questions the hierarchy of knowledge and challenges the notion that women's perspectives and insights are inherently less valuable or significant. Even James, his son, hates him for —stopping and looking down on them...he hated him for his exactingness and egotism...of his father's emotions —(*Lighthouse*, 25).

In *To the Lighthouse*, the father figure is a tyrannical one. Taking Mr. Ramsay, for example, all through the novel his postures are those which speak of dominance and torture. We remember him as he rises and stands in the bow of the boat very straight and tall, as if he is above everyone else. He thinks of himself as ranking among the gods and expects to be treated thus. The general picture is that of Mrs. Ramsay sitting on a low chair with Mr. Ramsay standing over her. His son James reveals the following picture of him: "He is a sarcastic brute. He brings the talk round to himself and his books. He is intolerably egotistical. Worst of all, he is a tyrant" (*Lighthouse* 190).

James keeps on dreading the moment his father may speak sharply to him about anything, because if he does, he will take a knife and strike him to the heart. From the example of Mr. Ramsay, we get a glimpse of what it means to be under the rule of a father in

To the Lighthouse. It is from this kind of figure that Lily Briscoe escapes when she leaves her own home, away from her father. It is from the same figure that she flees when she refuses to get married. The husband is also that figure which weighs down on the wife, and, Lily would have none of it. Consequently, she distances herself from the rule of the father and from the demands of a husband. Virginia Woolf remembers her own father with gratitude that he is dead, else there would be no books written by her. He would have constituted a barrier to their being written.

Charles Tansley; The dismissive

Charles Tansley, an unmarried young guest at the Ramsays' house embodies traditional gender expectations which is also a subject of critique in regards to women's conditions. Often referred to as an —atheist‡ and a sarcastic brute‡, he displays traits of intellectual arrogance and condescension, often belittling the women around him. He brings in the saying that —women can't write, women can't paint‡ but this serves as an appropriate reason for Briscoe to forge into achieving her goal. He represents the patriarchal mind-set of the time, openly expressing negative attributes to women's intellectual and creative capacities. However, his behaviour is portrayed as flawed and unappealing, suggesting that such adherence to masculine norms is not admirable. Tansley's dismissiveness portrays the societal barriers women like Lily Briscoe face in pursuing their ambitions. Through Charles Tansley, Woolf portrays societal restraints that pulls down women's progress and makes their conditions stagnant.

August Carmichael

As a result of the discrimination that exist between these opposite sexes, Woolf disrupts gender language and linguistic conventions throughout her novel as a means of condemning patriarchy and elevating women's condition during the twentieth century through modern men presented in the novel. Woolf portrays male characters engaging in activities typically associated with the opposite gender. Women are shown engaging in intellectual discussions, while men are portrayed in more nurturing and domestic roles. These disruptions challenge the notion that certain activities or qualities are inherently gendered. August Carmichael challenges traditional masculinity. He rejects societal expectations of ambitions, competitiveness, and assertiveness typically associated with men. Instead, Carmichael

embraces more introspective and passive nature, finding simple pleasures. He looked unkempt;

He took Opium. The children said he had stained his beard yellow with it. Perhaps. What was obvious to her was that the poor man was unhappy, came to them every year as an escape; and yet every year he felt the same thing; he did not trust her...it was his wife's doings. She remembered that iniquity of his wife towards him, which had made her turn to steel and adamant there, in the horrible little room in Saint John's Wood, when in her own eyes she had seen that odious woman turn him out of the house. (Lighthouse, 28).

This quote proves that some men of the twentieth century failed as patriarchs just like Mr. Carmichael. This shows the diminishing dominance of males on females and that the nonconformity of traditional gender roles challenge the notion of a singular masculine ideal. Woolf through Mr. Carmichael, portrays the consequences of incompatibility of certain marriages which to an extent portrays women's conditions. Mrs. Ramsay believes that he —should have been a great philosopher... But he had made an unfortunate marriage (Lighthouse, 6). This ruined marriage is as a result of early marriage and poverty. Woolf through Mr. Carmichael, preaches against early marriages and believes that marriage is not an accomplishment.

Mr. William Bankes; The supportive

Furthermore, Woolf uses Mr. William Bankes to stress on the condition of widowers and childless men in the twentieth century, which eventually adds more light to women's condition too. As a guest in the Ramsay's house, Bankes is a foil to Mr. Ramsay. They share different ambitions and perspectives of life. Bankes and Mr. Ramsay's friendship patterned when;

Mr. Ramsay striding along a road by himself hung round with that solitude which seemed to be his natural air. But this was suddenly interrupted, Mr. Bankes remembered (and this must refer to some actual incident), by a hen, straddling her wings out in protection of a covey of little chicks, upon which Ramsay stopping, pointing his stick and said ' pretty-pretty ', an odd illumination into his heart, Bankes had thought it, which showed his simplicity, his sympathy with humble things; but it seemed to him as if their friendship has ceased, there, on that stretch of the road. (Lighthouse, 14).

The quote above shows how hurt certain widowers like Mr. Bankes are, for not having a family of his own, for being a widower with no children and Mr. Ramsay is floating in the midst of his family. Mr. Bankes does not reach the standards of a patriarch because he owns no family. He gains no admiration from nobody except Lily Briscoe who;

...felt herself transfixed by the intensity of her perception; it was his severity; his goodness. I respect you (she addressed silently to him in person) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal; you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the first human being that I know; you have neither wife nor child (without any sexual feeling, she longed to cherish that loneliness) you live for science...praise would be an insult to you; generous, pure-hearted, heroic man. (Lighthouse, 16).

The quote above shows how Lily Briscoe appreciates Mr. Bankes for not having any feature of patriarchy in him. She appreciates the fact that he does not have sexual drive that will make him look down on women as sex toys. She continues praising Mr. Bankes contrasting him to Mr. Ramsay as she continues;

You have greatness...but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is pretty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death; but he has what you (she addressed to Mr. Bankes) have not; a fiery unworldliness; he knows nothing about truffles; he loves dogs and his children. He has eight; Mr. Bankes has none. (Lighthouse, 17)

In a stream of consciousness technique, Lily as seen in the above quote expresses her admiration for Mr. Bankes who does not tie to the principles of patriarchy for he —did not enjoy family life^{ll} (Lighthouse, 62). Thus, Mr. Bankes —was entirely free from all such vanity...he attached no importance to changes in fashion^l (Lighthouse, 75) and contrarily to Mr. Ramsay, he cares less about intellectual achievement. Woolf through William Bankes, shows how some men care less about intellectual autonomy and family life of which women would have been free if most men were like him.

James Ramsay;

Jane Austen through the Ramsays' children, portrays in depth the consequences of societal expectations and women's condition of the twentieth century. *To the Lighthouse* explores the emotional and psychological consequences of rigid gender roles and social expectations. The children's internal struggles, frustrations, and unfulfilled desires reflect the toll that

conforming to societal norms can take on individuals. The novel suggests that rigid gender roles do not only women's possibilities but also hinder genuine human connection and understanding. This is vivid in Mr. Ramsay's relationship with his children. James for instance hates his father with passion. At the very opening of the novel, we are introduced to the internal conflict James has in regards to his father's patriarchal attitude.

Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence; standing, as now, lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgement. (Lighthouse, 2).

In the quote above, Woolf in a stream of consciousness technique gets into James psych to demonstrate his hatred for his father's patriarchal nature. He compares his parents to show how much he loves his mother than his father. This shows the view children of the twentieth century had in regards to societal expectations. Woolf camouflages in James voice and vomits her hatred for patriarchy which restraints women's condition.

But his son hates him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures: for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him) but most of all, he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. (Lighthouse, 26).

The quote above further expatiates on James hatred for the societal pressure placed upon women. James hated his father for always demanding sympathy from his mother;

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him his barrenness made futile, and all the room; behind the drawing- room the kitchen; above the kitchen the bedrooms; and beyond them the nurseries; they must be

furnished, they must – be filled with life... James felt the strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the break of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again demanding sympathy (Lighthouse, 26).

Virginia Woolf through James portrays women's condition as they are forced to satisfy their husbands and take care of the family as a whole. James thus represents the new generation of men who are willing to change the condition of women in the society.

The young Ramsays, Prue Ramsay, Nancy and James Ramsay challenge traditional gender roles. Prue Ramsay resists her mother's attempts to shape her into being a demure and obedient girl. In regards to marriage, Mr. Ramsay says that should in case Charles Tansley wants to marry his daughter, Prue, "he'd disinherit her if she married him" (*Lighthouse*, 46). It is quite unfortunate that she —died due to some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy (*Lighthouse*, 93). This shows how women sacrifice their lives because of societal expectations of women bearing children.

James Ramsay defies traditional expectations of masculinity in his sensitive and emotional nature which has a great impact in portraying women's conditions. His emotions are portrayed when his mother dies. Through James, Woolf portrays her anger provoked by Mr. Ramsay's authoritarian character —tyranny, despotism, he called it making people do what they did not want to do (*Lighthouse*, 172). These instances portray the challenge of traditional gender roles in the betterment of women's condition.

More so, it is important to situate Woolf's novel within the broader context of early 20th-century feminism and women's rights movements. By examining and analysing how Woolf's exploration of women's condition in "To the Lighthouse" relates to the social and political struggles of the time, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the novel engages with and contributes to the on-going feminist discourses. Woolf's narrative choices and thematic concerns may tie with or diverge from the dominant feminist perspectives of the era, offering insights into the complexities and struggles of the women's rights movement during this transformative period.

The role of class and social status in shaping women's experiences is closely examined. Woolf's illustration of women from different social backgrounds, such as the upper-class Mrs. Ramsay and the more financially independent Lily Briscoe, reflects the intersections of gender, class, and privilege. These intersections contribute to the complexities and struggles

of women's lived experiences, as they struggle through the unique challenges and opportunities afforded to them by their social positioning.

Extra factors that contribute to women's conditions

Woolf's use of symbolism and imagery to show the limitations and frustrations experienced by her female characters. Throughout the novel, Woolf uses various symbolic elements that serve to represent the confines and restrictions placed on Women's lives and aspirations. For instance, the lighthouse itself can be seen as a metaphor for the societal expectations, norms and barriers that women must go through. The regular presence of the lighthouse, looming in the distance, can be interpreted as a symbol of the ever-present patriarchal structures that shape the lives of Woolf's female characters. Similarly, the domestic sphere, with its emphasis on housework, childcare, and the maintenance of familial harmony, can be seen as a symbolic representation of the limited options and opportunities available to women during this era. Woolf's descriptive language and vivid imagery further shows these symbolic elements, arousing the emotional and psychological experiences of her female characters as they struggle with the frustrations and limitations imposed upon them by a patriarchal society.

The later effects of World War I brought about great shifts in societal dynamics, particularly in regards to the roles and perceptions of women. As men went off to fight, Women occupied the gaps left in the workforce, taking on jobs in factories, hospitals, and offices. This experience of economic independence and agency marked an important moment in women's history. Many women who had participated in the war effort were slow to return to their former roles as homemakers, having gained a sense of self-worth and purpose outside the domestic sphere. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf shows this transitional period through her characters, who go through the tension between traditional expectations and newfound freedoms. The character of Mrs. Ramsay serves as an example of this struggle, embodying the societal pressures to conform to domestic ideals while yearning for deeper fulfilment.

The suffrage movement, which gained ground in the early 20th century, played an important role in advancing the cause of women's rights. The achievement of partial suffrage in 1918, allowing women over 30 to vote, indicated a significant victory in the fight for equality. This was not just a political victory but also a cultural one, challenging the notion that women were incapable of participating in public life. Woolf was deeply concerned in feminist thought, and her writings often reflect her fight for women's rights and intellectual freedom. In *To the Lighthouse*, the character of Lily Briscoe illustrates the struggle for artistic

expression in a male-dominated world. Her desire to create art becomes a metaphor for the fight for women's voices to be heard and valued in society.

The Modernist movement, characterized by its break with traditional narrative forms and its focus on individual consciousness, greatly influenced Woolf's literary style and themes. Writers of this era aimed to explore the complexities of human experience, often getting into the psychological depths of their characters. Woolf's innovative use of stream-of-consciousness in *To the Lighthouse* permits readers to experience the inner thoughts and feelings of her characters in a fluid and intimate manner. This technique shows the emotional landscapes of women's lives, illustrating the conflicts between their desires, societal expectations, and personal identities. For example, Mrs. Ramsay's internal monologues illustrate her deep emotional life and the burdens of her domestic role, while Lily's artistic struggles illuminate the limitations imposed on women's creativity.

Despite the progress represented by the suffrage movement and the increased participation of women in the workforce, the societal ideal of the "angel in the house" continued. This Victorian-era ideal believed that women should be self-sacrificing, nurturing, and devoted to their families, often at the expense of their own aspirations.

The character of Mrs. Ramsay serves as an example of this ideal, as she performs her duties as a wife and mother while caring less of her own desires. Woolf criticizes this notion by showing the emotional trauma it takes on women, particularly in Mrs. Ramsay's moments of reflection and longing. The novel shows the tension between duty and desire, demonstrating the sacrifices women often made to conform to societal norms.

Also, Woolf's exploration of mental health goes alongside with the experiences of many women during this period. The tensions of conforming to societal expectations can lead to feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Characters like Mrs. Ramsay experience existential crises, showing the broader struggles of women to find their identities in a fast changing world. Woolf herself was open about her battles with mental health, and this personal experience informs her empathetic portrayal of her characters' inner lives and experiences. Through her portrayal of mental and emotional struggles, Woolf invites readers to consider the complexities of female identity in a time of transformation.

In a nutshell, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* offers a deep exploration of the condition of women in the early 20th century, capturing the fantastic interplay between personal identity and societal expectations. Through her intended and well developed

characters, particularly Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, Woolf examines the multidimensional experiences of women as they perform their roles within a patriarchal society, portraying both the struggles they face and their acts of defiance. Mrs. Ramsay represents the archetype of the nurturing woman, devoted to her family and the domestic sphere. However, Woolf reveals the inner struggles that accompanies Mrs. Ramsay's reaction to societal norms. Her character illuminates the sacrifices and emotional labor that women often go through, exposing the tension between her fulfilling role as a mother and her unfulfilled desires for personal recognition and artistic expression. Woolf's portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay serves as a criticism of the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles, demonstrating the struggle many women faced in reconciling their aspirations with the expectations of their time. Lily Briscoe, in contrast, represents a more modern perspective on femininity and autonomy. As an aspiring artist, Lily struggles with the challenge of shaping her identity in a male-dominated world. Woolf portrays Lily's creative journey as one of self-discovery, highlighting the importance of female agency and the validation of women's voices in art and literature. Through Lily's insistence in painting, despite societal doubts and barriers, Woolf upholds the necessity of women claiming their space and expressing their inner lives. Her struggle to find a balance between her artistic ambitions and the societal pressures to conform to traditional roles illustrates the broader feminist movement evolving during Woolf's time. Woolf's new narrative structure, with its connectivity of time and consciousness, further enhances the exploration of women's conditions.

The novel's shifts between views and temporal layers allow readers to engage deeply with the characters' inner thoughts and feelings. This technique not only emphasizes the complexity of their experiences but also serves to challenge the narratives surrounding women's lives. Woolf's focus on memory, perception, and the passage of time reflects the evolving nature of women's roles and the historical context in which they exist, suggesting that the fight for autonomy is both timeless and deeply rooted in the lives of individual experience. Moreover, the contrasting settings of the novel between the domestic sphere of the Ramsay household and the abstract space of the lighthouse serve as a powerful metaphor for women's aspirations. The lighthouse symbolizes both hope and the unattainable, representing the importance of personal and artistic fulfillment that remains just out of reach for many women. Woolf's portrayal of this tension illustrates the broader societal struggle for women to assert their identities and achieve recognition in a world that often marginalizes their contributions. Thus, *To the Lighthouse* stands as a seminal and epitome work that deeply

examines the condition of women in the early 20th century. Through the portrayals of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, Woolf criticizes the restrictive societal norms that shape women's lives while celebrating their resilience and creative potential.

The novel's innovative narrative style and thematic concerns invite readers to reflect on the complexities of femininity, identity, and the on-going struggle for autonomy. Woolf's exploration of these themes goes far beyond her time, offering insights that remain relevant in contemporary discussions about gender equality and the quest for a more inclusive understanding of women's experiences. *To the Lighthouse* does not only highlights the historical challenges faced by women but also serves as a powerful reminder of the great importance of women's voices and stories in shaping our understanding of the human experience. Thus, this chapter delved into the experiences of housewives, mothers, unmarried women, married men, single men and even divorced men's experiences in order to clearly portray women's condition in the twentieth century. These characters through their actions, behaviours, and personalities, portray traditional gender roles and expectations which give a glimpse into the condition and place of women in the twentieth century society. By closely analysing the characters who defy societal expectations and the complexities of gendered experiences, the novel criticizes traditional gender roles and encourages the readers to question and reimagine traditional notion of gender.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In the previous chapters, we critically looked at the condition of women in the 19th and 20th Centuries respectively through the works of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. Through a deep comparative analysis of both novels, this chapter sets out to show the transformation of women's rights which shows a great shift from patriarchal oppression to feminist empowerment. In this regards, a greater analysis will be made considering what have changed and what have remained stagnant in women's rights. The evolution of women's rights has been marked by historical milestones that portray the changing perception of gender equality. The historical contexts of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* have significantly and greatly influence their portrayals of women's rights, throwing more light on the societal norms and challenges women faced in the 19th and 20th centuries. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is set during a time when women's roles and positions were in the domestic sphere. The evolution of women's rights from the 19th to 20th century represents a significant cultural and social transformation, marked by shifting perceptions of gender roles and the quest for fulfillment. This chapter hereby examines this evolution through the lens of two great literary works: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* published in 1813 and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927

Comparative Analysis of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* highlights and criticizes the restrictive legal framework and rights that govern the right of women in the early 19th century, especially through marriage and property laws. Women like Elisabeth Bennet are forced to secure their finances through advantageous marriages, due to the fact that they lack the legal autonomy and right to inherit properties or to manage their finances independently. Elisabeth's refusal of Mr. Collin's advances portrays her defiance against societal norms and expectations that hold as priority economic security over personal happiness.

Elisabeth thus challenges the notion that marriage is a woman's only means to stability. Elisabeth's refusal to marry solely for security portrays a burgeoning desire for personal agency, reflecting desire for personal fulfilment, thus a shift in women's rights as they began to seek intellectual and emotional fulfilment beyond traditional norms and expectations. Contrarily to this, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* portrays a changing landscape to women's rights in the early 20th century, in which her characters like Lily

Briscoe navigate the tensions that exist between domestic roles and artistic ambition. Lily's ambition of being a great painter portrays a broader cultural shifts which allow women to pursue their creative aspirations, indicating a move towards greater self-determination. She thus embodies the struggle for creative freedom in a society that often marginalize women's contributions. *To the Lighthouse* explores the tension between personal ambition and societal expectations which suggest that women's rights extend beyond legal frameworks to encompass and gain the right to self-expression and autonomy. Woolf through Lily Briscoe's artistic journey and aspirations portrays a cultural shifts that permit women to claim their voices and identities which thus reveal the on-going changes and evolution of women's rights in both legal and social realms. In both texts, legal rights are interconnected to personal freedom and social status. Thus, characters strive for greater autonomy which to an extent reflects historical progression of women's rights from the 19th to the early 20th century.

In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*, education and employment serve as critical lenses through which the gradual progression of women's right is examined, exposing the societal constraints that tie down women's opportunities and their slow quest for self-expression and autonomy. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* portrays the limited educational opportunities available to women of the early 19th century. Austen illustrates how these constraints have great impact on women's social mobility and independence. Elisabeth Bennet embodies a progressive attitude towards education as she strives to acquire knowledge and intellectual fulfillment rather than embracing societal expectations and accomplishments like music and needlework. Through Elizabeth's intelligence and critical thinking, Austen criticizes the educational system that prioritizes marriageability over intellectual development.

More to this, the lack of employment options for women further compounds their dependence on marriage for financial security. On the other side, characters like Charlotte Lucas portray the sad reality faced by women, lacking access to meaningful work, see marriage as the only means to ensure their future. This portrayal shows the evolving discourse around women's rights, hereby suggesting that education and professional opportunities are important for achieving true independence. In the same light, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* reflects the shifting landscape of women's rights in terms of education and employment in the early 20th century. Through her presentation of characters like Lily Briscoe, who aspires to be an artist in a world where women's creative contributions are marginalized. Lily's artistic drive is a bold step to women's evolution in terms of their professional paths. Woolf hereby criticizes the traditional roles assigned to women,

emphasizing on the importance of education not just for intellectual growth but as a means of self-actualization. *To the Lighthouse* portrays how the domestic sphere often confine women, limiting their potential and reinforcing their dependency. Nevertheless, Lily's determination to pursue her art signifies a gradual shift towards recognizing women's rights to education and professional fulfilment. Through these characters, Virginia Woolf portrays the complexities of women's evolving roles advocating a future where education and employment are intrinsic to their freedom and identity. Thus, Austen and Woolf address the significance of education and employment in the context patterning to women's rights, illustrating the historical progression from the constraints of the past to the emerging aspirations of the future.

The illustration of women's social roles and experiences in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* reflects the gradual progression of women's rights and the societal barriers they faced in asserting their individual identities. Austen in her novel criticizes the rigid society of the early 19th century, where marriage is a primary goal associated with domestic duties. Characters like the Bennet sisters are expected to cultivate skills and accomplishments that will make them suitable for attractive marriage proposals, rather than pursuing their own intellectual or professional skills. The character of Elisabeth Bennet challenges these expectations through her intelligence, wit and refusal to adapt and align to conform to societal pressures. While many women such as Charlotte Lucas view marriage as a necessity for social and economic stability, Elizabeth seeks a partnership based on genuine love and respect, thus showing a shift in women's desires and aspirations. The novel criticizes the limited options available to women, as they are often forced to adapt to a system that values that marriageability over their personal autonomy. Austen hereby uses Elisabeth's journey to highlight the limitations imposed by social norms, suggesting that true fulfilment lies beyond traditional roles. Austen also uses Elisabeth to defy these societal norms and assert their right to make independent choices, foreshadowing the gradual evolution of women's rights. In contrast, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* explores the complexities of women's social roles and expectations in the early 20th century. Woolf also explores the evolving social roles of women during this century, showcasing characters who navigate the complexities of domesticity and personal ambition. Woolf's choice of characters like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe reflects the on-going tensions between traditional domestic responsibilities and the desire for self-expression and fulfilment.

Mrs. Ramsay embodies the traditional expectations of womanhood, serving as a caretaker and social host, yet her internal struggles reveal a desire for more than her prescribed role. In contrast, Lily Briscoe, an aspiring artist, represents a new generation of women who challenge these conventions. Woolf hereby shows the tensions between the demand of motherhood and the yearning for creative expression, highlighting the societal barriers that still confine women. Through Lily's determination to pursue her artistic vision disregarding societal disapproval, Woolf advocates for women's rights to define their identities beyond traditional roles. The novel hence captures the gradual shift towards recognizing women's autonomy and the importance of self-fulfilment, marking a significant step in the evolution of women's rights. Altogether, *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* portray the gradual shift in societal perceptions of women's roles and corresponding evolution of women's rights. While Austen's novel reflects the limited options available to women in the 19th century, Woolf's works suggest a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of female identity and the on-going struggle for self-determination. The contrast between these two works portrays the great progress made in challenging the restrictive social expectations that have restrained women's aspirations for long, Herby paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

To lay more emphasis, the portrayal of women and the evolution of their rights in the 19th and early 20th centuries in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* reflects important cultural shifts in the representation and societal status of women during these periods. The cultural representation of women's rights revealing how societal norms shape female identities and aspirations. Jane Austen in her *Pride and Prejudice* employs cultural representations to criticize the societal expectations that confine women to narrow roles centered on marriage and domesticity. The Bennet sisters, especially the intelligent and independent-minded Elisabeth strives against the limited options available to them as unmarried women who are fully dependent on making advantageous marriages. Lydia's frivolous pursuit of social status through marriage portrays the limited options available to unmarried girls of the time. Elisabeth represents a more progressive version of unmarried women, who values personal integrity and intellectual compatibility over economic necessity. Austen through her portrayal of social gatherings like balls and visits, serves to highlight the pressures women face to conform to societal expectations. The novel criticizes the societal pressures and double standards that women faced, while also depicting Elisabeth's gradual

growth in self-awareness and rejection of superficial marriage proposals in favour of a partnership based on mutual respect.

Through Elisabeth Bennet's journey, Austen advocates for a redefinition of women's desires for autonomy, education and self-expression, thereby attributing to the early discourse on women's rights. Throwing more light to this cultural representation, Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* illustrates the cultural representation of women as a reflection of the complexities of their identities, in the early 20th century, showing a shift towards greater recognition of women's intellectual and artistic contributions. The character of Mrs. Ramsay embodies traditional femininity, fulfilling the role of nurturer and social orchestrator, yet her internal struggles reveal a desire for more than cultural expectations. However, Woolf also presents the artistic intellectual Lily Briscoe as a counterpoint, who symbolizes a raw cultural paradigm, striving to assert her identity as an artist in a male dominated society. Woolf criticizes the limited representation of women in her time, emphasizing the need for diverse narratives that reflect women's ambitions and creative aspirations. Through Lily's artistic journey, Woolf advocates for a broader cultural representation that upholds and acknowledges women's rights to define their paths, ultimately, contributing to the evolving understanding of gender roles. Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* explore the cultural representation of women and how these depictions influence the evolving discourse on women's rights. Austen's criticisms of societal norms and Woolf's advocacy for artistic expression illustrate the significant shifts in the perception of women, highlighting the importance of cultural narratives in shaping the journey towards gender equality.

Still in this light of cultural representation, marriage is illustrated as a crucial social contract that reflects the limitations faced by women in the early 19th century England. Many characters especially the Bennet sisters believe that marriage is not merely a romantic affair but a necessity for securing social status and financial stability. Charlotte Lucas portrays this pragmatic approach and perspective by accepting Mr. Collins's proposal despite his lack of affection viewing marriage as a means to ensure her future. This perspective underscores the cultural norms that prioritize a woman's ability to attract a suitable husband over her personal happiness or intellectual pursuits. Contrarily to this, Elisabeth challenges these societal expectations through her refusal of Mr. Collins and her insistence on marrying for love and mutual respect. Her outstanding character highlights the emerging discourse on women's rights and the importance of personal fulfilment, suggesting that true happiness cannot be achieved through a mere transactional view of marriage. In this same light, Virginia Woolf's

To the Lighthouse examines the institution of marriage and its implications for women's social status in the early 20th century. The character of Mrs. Ramsay represents the traditional role of Victorian woman serving as the emotional anchor of the Bennet family and fulfilling societal expectations of motherhood and domesticity. Her marriage is seen as both source of security and a constraint, as she often feels the weight of her responsibilities over-shadowing her personal ambition. In contrast, characters like Lily challenges these conventional view of marriage. As an aspiring artist, Briscoe represents a new generation of women who seek fulfilment beyond the confined of domesticity. The novel criticizes the societal pressures that force women to prioritize marriage and family over their personal aspirations, highlighting evolving discourse surrounding women's rights and the pursuit of individuality.

More to cultural representation is the aspect of gender roles and expectations which Austen explores in details. Women are often primarily valued for their domestic skills such as needle work and music, which are very essential for making them attractive to potential suitors. This emphasis on domesticity reflects a societal belief that a woman's worth is intrinsically linked to her ability to fulfil traditional roles as wife and mother. However, Elisabeth's character subverts these norms; her wit, intelligence and desire for self-improvement signal a growing recognition of women's intellectual capacities. Elisabeth pursuit of knowledge and her refusal to be confined to domestic sphere portrays the changing attitude towards women's roles, advocating for a broader understanding of women's rights that includes the right to intellectual engagement and personal agency. On the other bridge, Woolf's exploration of gender roles in *To the Lighthouse* reveals the complexities and contradictions faced by women in a rapidly changing society. The novel juxtaposes traditional expectations with the emerging desires for self-expression and autonomy. Mrs. Ramsay, the caregiver archetype yearns for intellectual engagement and creative fulfilment that is often tired down by her domestic duties. In contrast, Lily Briscoe's character challenges these conventional roles; she strives to assert her identity as an artist in a male dominated world. Woolf's illustration of these characters portrays the tension between societal expectations and individual aspirations, suggesting that the fight for women's rights is not merely about finding the very essence of womanhood and the roles of women can inhabit.

Class and social mobility has greatly contributed to women's rights and societal expectations. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* vividly illustrates the rigid class structure of Regency England, where social mobility is constrained and predetermined by birth. Characters like Mr. Darcy and Lady Catherine de Bourgh embody the privileges of the

aristocracy often looking down upon the lower social standing. Elisabeth represents the gentry and navigates these class distinctions with both resilience and grace, challenging social norms that dictate her worth based on her family's financial status. Austen hereby criticizes the snobbery associated with class through characters like Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whose entitlement and condescension contrast sharply with Elisabeth's authenticity and moral integrity. By showing the tensions between different classes, Austen does not only highlights the absurdity of social hierarchies but also advocates for the idea that true worth is determined by character rather than wealth. Still in this line, the class dynamics in *To the Lighthouse* serves as a backdrop for the exploration of women's rights and societal expectations. The Ramsay family social status grants them a certain privilege, yet this privilege comes with its own set of constraints.

Mrs. Ramsay's role as hostess reflects the expectations of upper-class women to maintain social connections and uphold family reputation. However, her character also reveals the limitations placed on women within these social structures, as her identity is often defined by her relationships with men and her role within the family. Lily Briscoe, as an artist of somewhat lower social standing, navigates these class distinctions differently. Her determination to pursue her art despite societal pressures portrays the potential for women to challenge class and gender barriers, representing a shift towards greater recognition of women's contributions beyond traditional roles.

The dynamic female relationships alongside their solidarity and competition characterizes women's lives in a patriarchal society. Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* explores the relationship existing between the Bennet sisters. Elisabeth and Jane share a strong bond based on mutual respect and shared values, while Elisabeth's contrasting views with Lydia's, reveals the negative consequences of societal pressures. Lydia's impulsive behaviour and pursuit of flirtation ultimately jeopardize the family's reputation, showing the dangers of prioritizing social approval over personal integrity. Through these relationships, Austen underscores the importance of sisterhood while also criticizing the competitive nature fostered by societal expectations, illustrating how women navigate their limited options in pursuit of security and acceptance. Woolf in this regard, delves deeply into the intricacies of female relationships in *To the Lighthouse* emphasizing both bonds of sisterhood and the conflicts that arise from societal expectations. The relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and her daughters show the complexities of maternal influence and the pressures to conform to traditional gender roles. While Mrs. Ramsay's nurturing instincts drive her to guide her children toward

societal acceptance, her own unfulfilled aspirations create tension that resonates throughout the narrative. Conversely, Lily's relationships with Mrs. Ramsay reflect a dynamic of admiration and frustration; Lily seeks to carve out her identity as an artist while struggling with the weight of societal expectations, surrounding femininity. Austen and Woolf's portrayal of these relationships underscores the importance of female solidarity while addressing the challenges women face in supporting one another within a patriarchal framework.

Pride and Prejudice and *To the Lighthouse* criticize patriarchal authority through the representation of male characters who fail to provide meaningful support to the women in their lives. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins, a clergyman and heir of the Longbourn estate, represents the absurdities of male authority, particularly in his obsequious attitude towards Lady Catherine de Bourgh. His proposal to Elisabeth with a lack of genuine affection reflects the transactional nature of marriage in the period. Mr. Bennet's indifference towards his daughters' futures show the ineffectiveness of paternal figures in fostering true agency. Elisabeth's refusal to conform to societal expectations and her assertiveness in choosing her own path represents a challenge to patriarchal norms, advocating for women's rights to agency and self-determination. Austen's portrayal of these male figures serves to criticize the limitations of patriarchal authority, suggesting that true support for women's rights must come from mutual respect and understanding. Woolf throws more light to this criticism of patriarchal structures particularly through the lens of female experiences and aspirations. The male characters like Mr. Ramsay, represent traditional notions of authority and intellectual fulfilment, often overshadowing the contributions and insights of the women in their lives. Mr. Ramsay's need for validation and his emotional unavailability highlights the limitations of male authority in true understanding and supporting women's desires. In contrast, Lily Briscoe represents a challenge to patriarchal norms. Her artistic journey symbolizes women's struggle to assert and make their voices heard in a male dominated world. By criticizing patriarchy, Woolf advocates for a broader understanding of women's rights that encompasses social and economic independence as well as the right to self-actualization and creative expression.

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* addresses the issue of economic independence, illustrating the limited career options available to women in her time. The dependence on marriage for financial security is a recurring motif, as characters like Charlotte Lucas view marriage as the only possible means achieving stability. This dependency on men for

economic support underscores the systematic barriers that restrict women's autonomy. However, Elisabeth's eventual marriage to Mr. Darcy symbolizes a shift towards greater economic independence, as their union is based on mutual respect and love rather than financial necessity. Through Elisabeth's character, Austen advocates for a broader vision of women's rights that encompasses not only personal fulfilment but also the importance of financial independence, suggesting that women should have the agency to define their own paths in life. Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* also highlights certain facts concerning the importance of economic independence in achieving personal fulfilment. While Mrs. Ramsay's dependence on her husband for financial security reinforces traditional gender roles, Lily's pursuit of her art represents a gift toward greater self-sufficiency. Despite societal pressures, Lily's determination to establish herself as an artist illustrates the potential for women to redefine their identities beyond domestic sphere. Austen and Woolf's exploration of economic independence serves as a powerful commentary on the necessity for women to attain financial agency, suggesting that true liberation is intertwined with the ability to support oneself and pursue one's passion, hence a push of women's rights.

Austen and Virginia Woolf explore political activism in regards to the evolution of women's rights. To begin with, the notion of gender roles and marriage transcends romantic notions, portraying it as a political institution that significantly impacts women's rights and social standing. Austen portrays her female characters struggling to assert advantageous marriages except Elisabeth Bennet who wants a genuine relationship. Woolf on this note portrays Lily Briscoe as a character who cares less about societal expectations in regards to marriage and rather strives for her artistic fulfillment.

Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* explore the stagnant nature of property rights patterning to the evolution of women's the. In *Pride and Prejudice*, property rights are intricately tied to the notion of gender inequality and social expectations regarding marriage. The novel developed the bitter realities of the Bennet family's situation in regards to inheritance, as the Long our estate is to be inherited by Mr. Collin's, a male cousin to the family, due to lack of a male heir in the Bennet family. The Bennet women will have no right to own the properties after the death of Mr. Bennet. Thus, the Bennet women will remain hopeless and financially unsecured. This shows the limited inheritance rights of women during the 19th century. Women during era, just like the Bennet sisters, have to depend on their marriageability in order to secure financial stability and property. This is enough reason why Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins. Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins is an awareness

of such discrimination and she fights for her autonomy. But ends up marrying Mr. Darcy but still have no ownership of Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's estate. Marriage was thus the only means to secure property and financial stability. The entailment serves as a critique of the legal structures that prioritize male inheritance and underscores the vulnerability of women who are reliant on advantageous marriages for their economic security. This notion of property rights illustrates the broader societal norms of the 19th century, where women had no right to ownership and autonomy.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* addresses property rights through the lens of gender inequality, particularly as it relates to inheritance. The Ramsay family's wealth and social standing are primarily associated with Mr. Ramsay, whose intellectual authority often overshadows the contributions of his wife, Mrs. Ramsay, and their daughters. The law governing inheritance during this period typically favored male heirs, leaving women with limited property rights and financial independence. This is evident in that Mrs. Ramsay, despite her pivotal role in the family, has no right over the estate. The Ramsay family summer house in Scotland is owned by Mr. Ramsay which shows that men still own properties while women like Mrs. Ramsay managed the house. Mrs. Ramsay does not legally own or control any property. The Ramsay family house symbolizes the patriarchal control and Mrs. Ramsay's attachment to the house represents the limited options available to women. As the women's rights movement gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, calls for reform in inheritance laws became crucial, advocating for equal proper rights that would allow women to inherit and manage their wealth independently, thus challenging the patriarchal structures that had long dominated.

Laying more emphasis on the notion of property rights, marriage is viewed as Economic strategy for women. Given their lack of access to inheritance, the Bennet sisters must navigate the matrimonial market to secure their futures. Charlotte Lucas is an epitome of this strategy as she married Mr. Collins for financial security rather than romantic feelings, thus recognizing marriage as the best means of securing her future. This transactional view of marriage hereby highlights the pressure women face to conform societal expectations, where securing financial stability is a priority over personal happiness. Austen criticizes this system, suggesting that women are indirectly reinforcing traditional gender roles. As the women's rights movement evolved, it began to challenge the idea that marriage should be a woman's primary means of securing financial stability, advocating instead for women's economic independence through access to education and professional opportunities. This shift in

perspective has boasted the generation of women to stand up and fight for their financial security through their own means and fulfilment. Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* also portrays marriage as an economic strategy for women, particularly in the context of societal expectations. The characters of Mrs. Ramsay exemplify how marriage can function as a means of securing financial stability. Her identity as a nurturer, wife and mother portray societal pressures that prioritize domesticity over personal ambitions. In contrast, Lily Briscoe represents a new generation of women who strive for their independence. Her struggle to assert herself as an artist, despite societal norms dictating that women should prioritize marriage and family, illustrates the tension between personal desire and economic necessity. Woolf criticizes the institution of marriage as a vehicle for economic security, suggesting that such attachment to marriages only limits their agency. As the women's rights movement evolved, it began to challenge traditional views on marriage, advocating for economic independence and the right for women to pursue their aspirations outside of domestic roles, thereby allowing for more equitable partnerships.

To add more emphasis on this property rights, the role of dowries and social mobility play an important role in the evolution of women's rights. The concept of dowries further complicates the discussion of property rights in *Pride and Prejudice*. The dowries of the Bennet sisters will determine their desirability in the marriage market. Elizabeth's eventual marriage to Mr. Darcy who is wealthy and influential, shows the significance of economic status in securing social mobility and stability. However, Elizabeth's character also challenges the notion that financial security should dictate a woman's choices; her insistence on marrying for love rather than economic necessity signifies a rejection of the constraints imposed by societal norms. Through the character of Mr. Darcy, the aspect of social mobility is clearly illustrated. His wealth and property grant him significant social status, which he must go through as he pursues a relationship with Elizabeth Bennet, who comes from a lower class. Mr. Darcy's initial proposal, grounded in his concern for social propriety, highlights the complexities of class and property in romantic relationships. This dynamic illustrates Austen's critique of a society where property rights and social class often dictate personal worth, advocating instead for a re-evaluation of values that prioritize character and mutual respect over financial status. The evolving women's rights movement, which sought to dismantle class barriers and promote social mobility, resonates with Elizabeth's desire for partnership based on equality.

This shift towards valuing personal integrity over economic status reflects the growing recognition that social structures should be reformed to allow for greater equality and opportunity for all. The tension between economic necessity and personal desire parallels the evolving discourse on women's rights, where advocacy for economic independence gained traction. The push for women to possess their own income and property rights became an important aspect of the feminist movement, allowing women to seek partnerships based on mutual feelings rather than financial dependency. Still in this light, the role of dowries in *To the Lighthouse* further complicates the discussion of property rights and economic independence. Although Woolf does not directly mention dowries, the financial condition of the women of the novel portray their financial struggles as they are economically dependent. The Ramsay daughters, like many women of their time, must go through the societal expectations regarding marriage in order to secure their futures.

The limited financial resources available to women create pressure to marry for security rather than love, underscoring the transactional nature of many relationships. Lily's quest for artistic recognition stands as rejection of these constraints, as she wants to define her identity beyond traditional expectations. Also, the influence of social mobility in *To the Lighthouse* particularly through the character of Mr. Ramsay. His wealth and property afford him a significant status, which complicates his relationships, especially with Lily. Mr. Ramsay's intellectual authority and social standing create a barrier for women seeking recognition as equals. This dynamic is further complicated by Lily's struggles for validation in a society that values male achievement over female contributions. Austen and Woolf hereby criticize the societal structures that prioritize property and status determinants of worth, advocating instead for a re-evaluation of values that emphasize character and creativity. The evolving women's right movement sought to dismantle these class barriers and promote social mobility, resonating with Lily's desire for recognition as an artist. This shift toward valuing personal merits over economic status reflects a growing understanding that social structures should be reformed in order to allow for greater equality and opportunity for all, regardless of gender. Thus, Advocating for women's rights to their own income and property became an important aspect of feminist discourse, encouraging women to pursue opportunities that allow them to achieve financial stability and personal agency.

The importance of social networks and alliances between women gives a growing stairs to the evolution of women's rights. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen navigates the complexities of women's relationships within a male dominated society. The interaction

between characters like Elisabeth and Jane show how women can leave in communion in order to overcome societal pressures and expectations. Same goes with Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* as they mutually support themselves for autonomy and self-expression. Mrs. Ramsay's nurturing instincts drive her to guide Lily, yet their relationship also reveals the tensions that arise from societal expectations. While Mrs. Ramsay embodies traditional femininity, Lily represents a new wave of women seeking independence. Woolf suggests that female alliances are essential for navigating societal pressures and advocating for greater rights and recognition. By emphasizing the importance of community among women, Woolf lays the groundwork for future feminist movements that sought to empower women through collaboration and mutual support. The relationships depicted in both novels highlight the potential for women to challenge societal norms collectively, illustrating the power of solidarity in the fight for equality.

This notion of property rights has a great impact on economic factors on female agency and autonomy. The lack of inheritance rights and financial independence for women places them in a precarious position, compelling them to seek security through marriage. This is illustrated through the character of Mrs. Bennet as she embodies this urgency in *Pride and Prejudice*. Her single minded pursuit of advantageous marriages for her daughters reflects the societal pressures and limitations imposed on women. Unlike her daughters, who display varying degrees of independence and agency, Mrs. Bennet is constrained by her lack of property rights, highlighting the broader implications of economic dependency. Austen criticizes this dynamic by showing the struggles women face in a patriarchal society where their worth is often tied to their marital prospects. As the women's rights movement gained traction, it increasingly focused on the need of property rights and economic autonomy, advocating for legal reforms that would allow women to own property and engage in commerce independently. Woolf on this note addresses the impact of economic factors on women's lives in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly in the context of marriage and social mobility. The Ramsay family's financial security affords them certain privileges, yet it also reinforces traditional gender roles that confine women to domestic responsibilities. Mrs. Ramsay's identity is deeply tied to her role as a caregiver, reflecting the economic realities that dictate women's choices. In contrast, Lily Briscoe's independence as an artist highlights the potential for women to break free from these constraints. Her struggle for recognition in a male dominated art world symbolizes the fight for economic independence and creative autonomy. Woolf criticizes the economic barriers that limit women's opportunities,

advocating for a society where women can achieve financial autonomy and pursue their ambitions. This exploration of economic factors resonates with the feminist movements of the early 20th century, which sought to empower women through access to education and professional opportunities. By illustrating the limitations placed on women due to lack of property rights, Austen and Woolf aligns her narrative with the calls for a more equitable society where women can achieve autonomy and financial independence, allowing them to pursue their aspirations without being beholden to marriage as their only means of securing.

As a result of societal expectations, Austen and Woolf through their write-ups have adopted the subversion of expectations in order to make an increasing landscape in women's rights. Austen in her novel employs wit and irony to subvert societal expectations in *Pride and Prejudice* particularly through Elisabeth's character. Her refusal to conform to traditional roles serves as a bold statement against the norms dictating women's behavior. Elisabeth's assertiveness in rejecting Mr. Collins, despite societal pressures to accept a secure match but unfulfilled match, illustrates her commitment to personal happiness and authenticity. This subversion of expectations promotes a narrative of empowerment that aligns with early feminist ideals, advocating for the notion that women can and should demand more from life than what society prescribed.

By presenting Elizabeth as a strong, principled character who prioritizes her own happiness and values, Austen encourages readers to question limiting definitions of femininity and to consider the possibility of redefining women's roles in society. Woolf lays more emphasis on the subversion of expectations in *To the Lighthouse*, especially through the character of Lily Briscoe, who challenges traditional notions of femininity and an artistic expression. Lily's struggle to assert herself as an artist in a male dominated environment embodies the resistance against societal constraints that dictate women's roles. Her determination to create art, despite the pressures to conform to domestic ideals, reflects a broader desire among women to redefine their identities beyond traditional expectations. Woolf's use of the stream of consciousness technique invites readers to engage deeply with Lily's inner thoughts and struggles, emphasizing the complexity of her character as she seeks to carve out her own path. In this same path, Mrs. Ramsay aspires holding some noble position in her society. At this time, such positions are generally not occupied by women. Her desire for this post is so that she may be able to help the poor. It is worth noting that she has joined her girls in seeking emancipation for the woman. They have all moved a step ahead from the traditional expectations of the role of Mrs. Ramsay's shift in position is not much felt

because she has been too entrained with the system in place. Were it not for her tyrant of a husband, she may speak out her mind on the issue. This subversion aligns with early feminist ideals that advocate for women's rights to assert their voices and pursue their passion. Austen and Woolf hereby strive hard in order to redefine women's rights by portraying this subversion of expectations.

In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*, the institution of marriage serves as a crucial lens through which to examine reproductive rights and women's autonomy. The societal expectations that women marry for security rather than love severely limits their reproductive choices and autonomy. Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is intensely focused on securing advantageous marriages for her daughters reflects the pressure women faced to prioritize economic stability over personal desires. The urgency with which she seeks suitors for her daughters underscores the belief that women's primary purpose is to marry and produce heirs, reinforcing traditional gender roles. This dynamic illustrates how reproductive rights were often relocated under the institution of marriage, where women's bodies were seen as vessels of procreation rather than autonomous entities with individual rights. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the institution of marriage serves as crucial lens through which women's reproductive rights are being examined. Mrs. Ramsay's character represents the societal expectation that women marry and fulfill traditional roles as mothers and wives, often at the expense of their own desired and aspirations. Her focus on securing marriages for her children reflects a broader societal belief that a woman's worth is found in her ability to produce heirs and maintain the household.

This pressure limits women's reproductive choices, as their main role is often defined by their relationships with men rather than their individual identities. The struggles faced by women in the novel underscores the urgent need for discussions around reproduction. Woolf's characters like Charlotte Lucas exemplifies the limited reproductive choices available to women in a patriarchal society. Charlotte's drastic decision to marry Mr. Collins for financial security rather than romantic love portrays the harsh reality that many women faced the need to secure their future, often at the expense of their personal desires. This marriage serves as a commentary on the lack of reproductive autonomy, as Charlotte is forced to accept societal norms that dictate her choices. The consequences of limited reproductive choices are evident in the lives of women who, just like Charlotte Lucas find themselves trapped in arrangements that prioritize economic survival over personal fulfilment. The early feminist movements that transcended during and after Austen's of began to advocate for women's rights to make

decisions about their own bodies and reproductive health, emphasizing the importance of choice in marriage and motherhood. This struggle of reproductive rights as portrayed by Austen and Woolf would later become a central tenet of the broader women's rights movement, as women sought to reclaim agency over their own lives. As women began to advocate for reproductive rights in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the discussions surrounding choice and agency in matters of marriage and childbearing gained ground, challenging the societal norms that governed women's roles.

The societal expectations surrounding marriage and motherhood in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* reflect a broader conversation about reproductive rights and women's autonomy. The pressure on women to conform to traditional roles as wives and mothers often overshadowed their desires for personal fulfilment and independence. Elisabeth's character challenges these norms by prioritizing her own happiness and values over societal expectations. Her rejection of Mr. Collins and her eventual acceptance of Mr. Darcy based on mutual respect rather than economic necessity signify a shift toward a more empowered view of marriage. This resistance to conforming to societal norms can be seen as a precursor to the feminist movements that would later advocate for reproductive rights, emphasizing the importance of women's autonomy in choosing when and whether to have children. Elisabeth's insistence on marrying for love rather than obligation reflects a growing awareness of personal agency, which became a foundational aspects of the fight for women's rights in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

The weight of this societal norms often compel women to conform to traditional roles, which can overshadow their personal aspirations. Mrs. Ramsay's identity in *To the Lighthouse* is largely defined by her responsibilities as housewife and mother, and her efforts to create a nurturing environment for her family often came at the expense of her own desires. In contrast, Lily Briscoe embodies a more modern perspective, as she seeks to define herself beyond societal expectations. Her pursuit of artistic recognition symbolizes a challenge to the traditional view that women should prioritize their family over their personal fulfilment. This tension between societal expectations and personal agency foreshadows the evolving discourse on women's rights, where the fight for reproductive autonomy becomes increasingly significant. As women began to assert their rights to make choices about marriage and motherhood, Austen and Woolf's write-ups resonate with the growing recognition of the importance of individual agency.

The expectations surrounding motherhood further complicates the discussion of reproductive rights in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*. The societal pressure on women to produce heirs reinforces the notion that their value is tied to their ability to bear children. Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is obsessed with marrying her daughters which reflects the belief that a woman's worth is defined by her success in motherhood and domesticity. This expectation creates a narrow framework within which women must navigate their desires and ambitions. The limited agency women have over their reproductive choices is visible in the way their identities are often subsumed under the roles of wife and mother. Mrs. Ramsay's obsessive focus on her children and their future reflects societal beliefs that women should derive their identities from motherhood. This creates a narrow framework within which women must navigate their desires and ambitions. As the women's rights movement began to advocate for the reproductive rights, the dialogue surrounding motherhood shifted to emphasize the importance of choice and self-determination. This challenge to traditional maternal expectations laid the groundwork for future discussions about women's rights to control their own bodies and make informed decisions about childbearing and family planning.

The exploration of reproductive rights in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* serve as a microcosm of the broader evolution of women's rights during the 19th and 20th centuries. As characters grapple with societal expectations and personal desires, their experiences portray the limitations placed on women's autonomy. Elisabeth's journey towards self-realization and her refusal to align to the traditional expectations in *Pride and Prejudice* symbolizes a great awareness of women's rights that would gain momentum in the upcoming decades. Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* also portrays this notion through Mrs. Ramsay's dedication to her family and her role as a mother symbolizes the traditional view of femininity that were being challenged during Woolf's period. Conversely, Lily Briscoe's pursuits of her artistic vision represents a growing awareness of women's rights to seek fulfilment beyond domestic realm. The early feminist movement began to emphasize reproductive rights, advocating for women's rights to make choices about their bodies and futures. This shift in this perspective is rooted in the recognition that true equality cannot be achieved without acknowledging women's rights to reproductive health and autonomy. By illustrating the constraints of marriage and motherhood in their narratives, Austen and Woolf contribute to the ongoing discourse on women's rights, foreshadowing the struggles and advancement that would follow the fight for reproductive freedom.

Key Milestones in the women's rights movement during the 19th and 20th centuries

19th Century

The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 marked an important moment in the women's rights movement in the United States. Organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, this convention gathered over 300 attendees who discussed the social, civil, and religious rights of women. The Declaration of Sentiments, document modelled after the Declaration of Independence, was adopted, outlining grievances and demands for equality, including the right to vote. This event is often considered the starting point of the organized women's rights movement in America.

In the mid-1800s, the formation of various women's suffrage organizations played a crucial role in advancing the cause. One of the most significant was the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), founded in 1869 by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The NWSA sought to secure voting rights for women through a constitutional amendment, while other groups like the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) focused on state-level campaigns. This division highlighted differing strategies within the movement, but both aimed to achieve the same ultimate goal of suffrage.

The passage of Women's Property Acts across various states from the 1830s to the 1880s represented a significant legal progression for women. These laws allowed married women to own and control property independently, challenging the legal doctrine of coverture, which held that a woman's legal identity was subsumed by her husband's. This shift not only provided women with greater economic independence but also laid the groundwork for later demands for broader rights and recognition.

The establishment of Mount Holyoke College in 1837 as the first women's college was another achievement, emphasizing the importance of education in the fight for women's rights. This institution paved the way for higher education opportunities for women, showcasing their capabilities and potential in fields traditionally dominated by men. By promoting women's education, activists sought to empower future generations to advocate for their rights and participate fully in society.

The culmination of these efforts was the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which granted women the right to vote in the United States. This great achievement was the result of decades of activism, protests, and advocacy, symbolizing a major victory for the

suffragists. The amendment not only enfranchised women but also inspired further movements aimed at achieving gender equality in various aspects of life.

20th Century

The early 20th century saw the emergence of influential figures such as Alice Paul, who co-founded the National Women's Party (NWP) in 1916. Unlike earlier suffrage movements that employed more traditional methods, Paul and the NWP adopted a militant approach, organizing protests, parades, and hunger strikes to demand women's suffrage. Their efforts highlighted the urgency of the cause and brought national attention to the struggle for women's rights, culminating in the eventual passage of the 19th Amendment.

The global women's suffrage movement gained momentum during this period, with several countries granting Women the right to vote. New Zealand led the way in 1893, followed by Australia in 1902. These victories provided inspiration and a model for activists in other nations, reinforcing the idea that women's suffrage was not just a local issue but a global movement for equality.

All in all, the evolution of women's rights from the 19th to the 20th century is viewed in the contrasting yet complementary portrayals found in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. These works not only illustrate individual struggles against societal constraints but also mirrors the broader historical shifts that marked the fight for gender equality. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen writes during a time when women's identities were predominantly defined by their relationships to men and their roles within the domestic sphere. The pressure to marry well show the economic realities that govern women's choices; notwithstanding, through her protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, Austen challenges these conventions. Elizabeth's wit, intelligence, and refusal to conform to societal expectations symbolize a greater awareness of women's potential beyond marriage. Her journey towards self-realization and her eventual commitment to a partnership based on mutual respect and love reflect the early roots of feminist thought. As we move into the 20th century, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* portrays a more complex understanding of women's identities in a Post- Victorian world. Woolf's characters struggle with the tension between traditional roles and the quest for personal autonomy. Through the use of stream-of-consciousness narrative, Woolf reveals the inner lives and thoughts of her female characters, showing their desires, frustrations, and aspirations.

Mrs. Ramsay symbolizes the nurturing ideal of femininity, yet her internal struggles reflect a deep yearning for recognition beyond her domestic responsibilities. Meanwhile, her daughter represents the next generation, ready to seek self-fulfilment and challenge the boundaries that constrained women or the past. Woolf's exploration of time and memory further highlights the evolution of Women's rights, illustrating how the societal changes of the early 20th century impact personal identity. The post-war context. Marked by the fast growing feminist movements provided greater opportunities for women in education and the workforce, is visible in her narrative. By blending together the personal and the political, Woolf underlines the importance of women's voices and the necessity of self-expression in reviewing their roles in society. To cut it short, the literary trajectories highlighted by Austen and Woolf portray the significant changes made in the struggle for women's rights from the 19th to the 20th century. Austen's criticism of social norms in *Pride and Prejudice* provides the groundwork for the feminist discourse that Woolf further develops in *To the Lighthouse*. Together, these works demonstrate the complexities of women's experiences, revealing a shift from the quest for economic security through marriage to the pursuit of individual identity and creative independence.

This evolution does not only reflects changing societal attitudes but also serves as a drive for on-going discourse about gender equality. The legacy of these literary figures remains an important part of understanding the historical and cultural contexts that have shaped women's rights, encouraging and inspiring future generations to continue fighting for equity and empowerment. Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* explore the intricate relationship between reproductive rights, property rights and women's autonomy within the societal frameworks of their time. Through their characters, they criticize the limitations imposed by marriage, inheritance laws and societal expectations that often confine women to traditional roles as wives and mothers. Both female authors emphasize on the urgent need for reform and the recognition of women's rights to autonomy whether in terms of economic independence, personal fulfilment and reproductive rights. As the early feminist movements began to challenge these societal norms, the narratives in these works not only reflect the struggles women faced but also advocate for a future where women can assert their individuality and agency. Ultimately, both authors contribute to the on-going discourse of women's rights, emphasizing the importance of equality and self-determination in the pursuit of a more just and equitable.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the condition of women as depicted in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, revealing the critiques both authors offer regarding societal norms and gender roles in their respective periods that portray the constraints of traditional gender roles. In doing so, they contribute to the on-going discourse on women's rights, offering insights that continue to inspire and inform the quest for equality in our modern world. The details of all the chapters will be explored in the subsequent lines.

Chapter One, entitled —Theoretical framework and Literature Review —focused on the theoretical framework chosen for this dissertation; New Historicism and Feminism. Through the theory of new Historicism, the broader analysis of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf's periods have been greatly understood which facilitates the understanding of women's rights. Also, through feminism that have been analysed in this chapter, we have experienced and understood the condition of women and their ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the second part of this chapter, we have reviewed critical works that are relevant to the novels under study.

Chapter two of this dissertation has illuminated the complex condition of women in *Pride and Prejudice*, illustrated the societal expectations that confine them to traditional roles as wives and mothers. Jane Austen intricately weaves a narrative that reflects the limited agency afforded to women in the early 19th century. The lives of the Bennet sisters illustrate the harsh realities of a society where marriage is not merely a romantic union but a financial necessity. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet's refusal to accept Mr. Collins's proposal serves as a powerful declaration of her desire for personal autonomy and happiness, challenging the notion that a woman's worth is defined solely by her marital status. In contrast, characters like Charlotte Lucas embody the pragmatic approach many women had to adopt, viewing marriage as a means of securing financial stability rather than as an avenue for emotional fulfilment. Through these contrasting portrayals, Austen highlights the societal pressures that shape women's lives and the varying degrees of resistance they exhibit.

Austen's exploration of marriage reveals it to be a double-edged sword, one that offers financial security but often at the cost of personal freedom. The entailed estate of Longbourn exemplifies the economic vulnerabilities faced by the Bennet sisters, emphasizing the precariousness of their situation. Without a male heir, the family's house and fortune are

destined for Mr. Collins, leaving the sisters with limited options for future security. This economic dependency is a recurring theme that underscores the urgency with which women must navigate the marriage market, often prioritizing stability over personal desire. Austen critiques this societal structure by using irony and wit, presenting the absurdities of a system that values women primarily for their ability to secure advantageous marriages. Through this lens, she invites readers to reflect on the implications of such norms, questioning the morality of a society that restricts women's choices

More so, Austen's narrative extends beyond individual characters, reflecting broader historical contexts regarding women's rights. The constraints faced by Elizabeth and her sisters resonate with the early feminist movements that began to emerge during Austen's lifetime. By advocating for a woman's right to choose her path-whether in love, marriage, or personal ambition-Austen's work serves as a precursor to the discussions surrounding gender equality that would follow in subsequent decades. The notions of autonomy and female empowerment embedded in her narrative continue to resonate with contemporary readers, reminding us of the on-going struggle for rights and recognition in a patriarchal society.

As we transitioned to Chapter three, we explored how Virginia Woolf continued this conversation in *To the Lighthouse*, further analyzing the nuanced experiences of women as they navigate societal pressures in a different era. Woolf's portrayal of characters like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe provide a rich contrast to Austen's insights, revealing the evolving nature of women's roles and the persistent quest for autonomy. The exploration of these texts deepen our understanding of the historical and cultural factors that shape women's identities, portraying that while the settings may differ, the struggle for self-determination and equality remains a timeless concern.

Chapter three of this dissertation has explored the complex condition of women in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, revealing a nuanced portrayal of female identity amidst the constraints of early 20th-century societal expectations. Woolf's depiction of characters such as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe highlights the multifaceted roles women occupy, differing traditional expectations of motherhood and the emerging desire for personal autonomy and creative expression. Mrs. Ramsay embodies the ideal of maternal femininity, her life centered on nurturing her family and fulfilling societal expectations. Yet, this role comes with significant sacrifices, as her own ambitions and desires are often suppressed in favour of her family's needs. Woolf poignantly illustrates the internal conflict faced by

women like Mrs. Ramsay, who, while finding fulfilment in their roles, also experience a profound sense of loss in their personal identities.

In contrast, Lily Briscoe represents a new generation of women who strive for independence and self-definition. Her struggle to assert herself as an artist amidst societal pressures reflects the on-going tension between traditional femininity and the burgeoning feminist ideals of the time. Woolf uses Lily's artistic pursuits to highlight the challenges women face in seeking recognition and autonomy in a male-dominated society. The contrast between Mrs. Ramsay's domesticity and Lily's aspirations serves to underscore the broader theme of women's evolving roles during this period. Woolf's narrative invites readers to consider the limitations imposed on women, as well as the potential for transformation and empowerment through self-exploration and creative expression.

Moreover, Woolf's narrative structure, with its stream-of-consciousness style, allows a deeper exploration of the inner lives of her female characters, exposing the complexities of their thoughts and emotions. This technique not only humanizes the characters but also emphasizes the importance of personal agency and self-reflection. Through their journeys, Woolf criticizes the societal norms that dictate women's roles, advocating for a recognition of their individuality and aspirations. The tensions between duty and desire, between societal expectation and personal ambition, reflect the broader struggles for women's rights that were gaining momentum during Woolf's time.

As we moved to Chapter Four, the discussion was shifted to the evolution of women's rights as depicted in both texts. By examining how Austen and Woolf address the condition of women, we have gained insight into the historical context of gender equality and the on-going quest for autonomy. The challenges faced by Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe resonate with the contemporary fight for women's rights, illustrating that while the settings may differ, the underlying themes of self-determination and empowerment remain deeply relevant today. Through this analysis, we discovered the ways in which both authors contribute to the discourse on women's rights, highlighting their lasting impact on the literary landscape and the feminist movements that followed. In doing so, this chapter not only enriches our understanding of *To the Lighthouse* but also lays the groundwork for a broader exploration of the evolution of women's rights in literature.

To continue with the synopsis of these chapters, Chapter four has traced the evolution of women's rights from the 19th to the 20th century through the lens of Jane Austen's *Pride*

and Prejudice and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. This analysis reveals a trajectory of increasing awareness and advocacy for female autonomy, portraying the ways in which both authors engage with the societal expectations imposed on women in their respective eras. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen criticizes the rigid social structures that dictate women's lives, especially through the institution of marriage. The limited options available to women during the Regency era where financial security often hinges on marrying well reflect the broader societal norms that prioritize women's roles as wives and mothers. Elizabeth Bennet's defiance of these norms serves as a precursor to the feminist ideals that would gain momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, illustrating the beginning of a shift toward greater personal agency and self-determination.

As we embark into the early 20th century with *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf captures the evolving discourse surrounding women's rights and identities. While Mrs. Ramsay embodies the traditional expectations of motherhood, her character also reflects the internal struggles many women faced as they navigated the demands of domesticity and personal ambition. In contrast, Lily Briscoe symbolizes the burgeoning feminist movement, as she seeks to assert her identity as an artist in society that often marginalizes women's contributions. Woolf's narrative not only reflects the limitations imposed on women but also celebrates their potential for self-realization and independence. The contrast between the two texts underscores the gradual yet significant changes in perceptions of women's roles, from the constraints of the 19th century to the more complex exploration of identity and autonomy in the 20th century.

The characters' journeys and struggles in both novels reveal the broader societal shifts occurring during these transformative periods. Austen's exploration of marriage as a means of economic security contrasts sharply with Woolf's depiction of women striving for personal fulfillment beyond traditional roles. The early feminist movements that emerged in the late 19th century laid the groundwork for the conversations Woolf engages with in her work, illustrating how literature serves as a reflection and catalyst for social change. The advocacy for women's rights, including suffrage and access to education, echoes through the narratives, providing a historical context that enriches our understanding of both authors' critiques.

Also, this chapter highlights the importance of literary representation in the evolution of women's rights. By giving voice to the struggles and aspirations of their female characters, Austen and Woolf contribute to a growing awareness of gender inequality. The themes of autonomy, choice, and self-determination become central to their narratives, reflecting the ongoing fight for equality that continues to resonate today. As both authors challenge the

societal norms of their times, they inspire future generations to advocate for women's rights, emphasizing that the quest for autonomy is both a personal and collective journey.

Security largely depends on securing a prosperous marriage. The character of Elizabeth Bennet emerges as a powerful figure of resistance against these norms. Her refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal exemplifies a radical assertion of individual choice in a time when such defiance was rare. Elizabeth's journey not only challenges the expectation that women must marry for financial security but also reflects the early stirrings of feminist thought that would gain momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through Elizabeth's character, Austen lays the groundwork for a shift toward greater personal agency, suggesting that women can-and should-seek fulfilment beyond the domestic sphere.

Transitioning into the early 20th century with Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, we witness a more complex exploration of women's identities and rights. While Mrs. Ramsay embodies the traditional ideal of motherhood, her character is imbued with a sense of longing for personal fulfilment that starkly contrasts with her domestic responsibilities. Woolf skilfully illustrates the internal conflict many women faced as they navigated societal expectations. Mrs. Ramsay's nurturing role, though deeply rewarding, often suppresses her individual desires, leading to an exploration of the sacrifices inherent in traditional femininity. This portrayal serves as a poignant reminder of the emotional toll exacted by societal norms, inviting readers to empathize with the struggles of women who find their identities subsumed by their roles as caretakers. In contrast, Lily Briscoe represents a burgeoning feminist consciousness, seeking to assert her identity as an artist in a society that largely marginalizes Women's creative contributions. Woolf's portrayal of Lily's artistic struggles and her quest for recognition reflect the broader societal changes occurring during this period. As women began to demand greater access to education and professional opportunities, Lily's journey becomes emblematic of a generation striving for independence and self-definition. Woolf criticizes the barriers that women face, using Lily's creative process as a metaphor for self-discovery and empowerment. The juxtaposition of Mrs. Ramsay's domesticity and Lily's artistic ambition underscores the evolving nature of women's roles, revealing a growing desire for autonomy and self-actualization.

Additionally, Woolf's innovative narrative style, characterized by stream-of-consciousness and shifting perspectives, allows for a profound exploration of the inner lives of her female characters. This technique not only humanizes Mrs. Ramsay and Lily but also highlights the importance of personal agency and self-reflection in the quest for identity. By

providing readers with intimate access to their thoughts and emotions, Woolf emphasizes the complexities of their experiences, inviting a deeper understanding of the societal constraints that shape their lives.

The chapter also contextualized the evolution of women's rights within the broader historical framework of societal changes, including the emergence of the suffrage movement and the push for educational reforms. The early feminist movements of the late 19th century, which sought to challenge the limitations placed on women, laid the groundwork for the conversations Woolf engages with in her narrative. This connection underscores the significance of literature as both a reflection of and a catalyst for social change. Austen and Woolf, through their respective works, not only critique the societal norms of their times but also inspire future generations to advocate for women's rights, emphasizing the importance of literature in the on-going struggle for gender equality. As we move forward in this dissertation, it is essential to recognize that the evolution of women's rights is not merely a historical narrative but an on-going dialogue that continues to shape contemporary society. The insights garnered from *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* provide a lens through which we can examine the progress made and the challenges that persist. The themes of autonomy, choice, and self-determination resonate powerfully in today's discussions about gender roles and rights. By examining the past through these literary works, we gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of women's experiences and the importance of continuing the fight for equality in all its forms.

Chapter Four has laid the groundwork for understanding how literature not only reflects societal changes but also serves as a powerful medium for advocating for women's rights.

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