

M.A (English)

Semester - III

C.C - 9

Shailesh Rajan  
Asst. Professor  
Dept. of English  
Maharaja college, Am

### Character analysis of Emma Woodhouse

Like Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse is also one of the favourite character of Jane Austen. Jane Austen occupies a high rank among English novelists. David Daiches writes about her, "The greatest of all the novelists of manners, and one who raised the whole genre to a new level of art, was Jane Austen." She is a realist who draws her materials from actual life as she sees it. Her stories are perfectly credible and convincing.

Emma Woodhouse is the main character of the novel 'Emma'. She comes before us in the very opening sentence of the novel as handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition. She is the younger daughter of Mr. Woodhouse and her mother had died when she was a child. She had been looked after for many years by a governess, Miss Taylor, who has just got married. Regarding Emma Woodhouse, Jane Austen herself writes - "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." This is how, Jane Austen, according to her nephew's Memoirs, defined Emma Woodhouse. Emma is an attractive and intelligent young woman of good social and economic position, accustomed to being praised

and doing everything in her own way, with a lot of free time and few obligations. In the very first chapter, we find her claiming that she has brought about the matrimonial alliance between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston. This claim is refuted in blunt terms by Mrs. Knightley who says that Emma had not brought about this match but she had merely made a lucky guess that Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston would get married. Emma suffers from several illusions and misconceptions all of which are successively shattered in course of time. Her second illusion is that she can find a suitable wife for the vicar, Mr. Elton. She takes a liking to a girl, Harriet Smith, whose parentage is not known, but who strikes Emma as a nice person whom Emma can take under her wing and improve by taking some pains over her. She does not think Mr. Robert Martin to be a suitable husband for Harriet because he is a mere farmer and Emma thinks Harriet to be a fit wife for a man belonging to a much higher rank in society - Mr. Elton, for instance. Emma here conveniently ignores the fact of Harriet's being an illegitimate child, hoping that time will show that the girl comes of a highly respectable family.

Emma's snobbery is also seen in her attitude towards Coles. She thinks it beneath her dignity to mix with them because they have risen to wealth from a much lower position. However she does respond to their invitation when they give a dinner party, and she does so because everybody else has accepted the invitation. Emma's indifferent treatment of Miss Bates in the past has also been the result of her snobbery.

Her Charitable Nature :- Jane Austen has portrayed Emma

as a kind hearted woman who feels sympathy for those who are in distress or in need. On one occasion, for instance, she is described as being on a visit to the poorer quarters of the villages to relieve the distress of a certain family which is in dire need of help. Her relation with Harriet also shows her kind heart. She takes proper care of Harriet and searches for a good match for her irrespective of the fact that she does not belong to a prestigious background.

Her relation with Mr. Knightley - Mr. Knightley is the elder brother of Isabella's husband. He always visits Emma's house. He is the only person who strictly expresses his views before her. In the opening chapters, we do not find any trace of love between Emma and Mr. Knightley. He is to her a guardian figure who supports her in need. He advises Emma that Mr. Elton will not marry Harriet due to her low status. He saves Harriet from a humiliating situation by offering to dance with her. Emma discovers her love for him when Harriet confesses her love for Mr. Knightley before her. At this time the thought comes to her mind that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself. Emma disagrees with Mr. Knightley on various matters and he proves to be right in all such cases. They differ about Harriet and Mr. Martin, they differ about Mr. Elton, they differ about Frank and Frank-Jane relationship. In all these cases Emma ultimately realizes her wrong assessment of persons and situations. Fortunately, everything ends well for Emma when Mr. Knightley declares his love

for her and eventually marries her.

Her relation with Harriet :- Harriet is another important character of the novel. She is the illegitimate daughter of an unknown man who ultimately is found to be a trader by profession. When the story opens, Harriet is a scholar at Mrs. Goddard's school, and she is introduced to Emma by Mrs. Goddard herself. She feels glad when Emma becomes her patron. Emma too feels very happy in the companionship of Harriet, and Emma's father also recognizes Harriet's value to Emma as Emma's companion. Emma tries to search a good person for Harriet. Due to her advice, she does not accept Mr. Martin's proposal of marriage. Later she tries to make her relation with Mr. Elton but it again fails. Thus, Emma always thinks about the proper care of Harriet and her betterment. She is her real well-wisher.

Thus, inspite of many shortcomings, Emma is the most favourite character of Jane Austen. She is kind, social, intelligent woman. Her likes and dislikes are strong and quickly made. She is a match-maker who tries to connect people in marital relationships.