
Daudnagar College, Daudnagar

Subject: English Literature

Class: B.A. Part II (Honours)

Paper: IV (Novel)

Topic: Jane Austen: A Short Biographical Sketch

Jane Austen (1775 - 1817) : A Short Biographical Sketch

Jane Austen, the younger daughter of George Austen, was born on December 16, 1775. Her father was a scholarly person whereas her mother Cassandra Austen was a keen gardener. She had seven brothers and one sister, who was also named Cassandra. Austen shared special bonding with Cassandra as she was her close companion and friend. We see the characters she came in close contact with in her novels. Her social circle included men like landowner, militia officer, two clergymen and two sailors which was enlarged later on by addition of her brothers' families. Her father's house at Steventon provided shelter to her for more than a quarter of a century. The financial condition of the family was stable which could afford carriage and horses; they had contacts in the higher society. Jane Austen and Cassandra depended on their father and brothers for education, refined atmosphere of the home and their contacts with relatives. Austen spent most of her time in reading books not only by herself but reading aloud to other members of the family for the purpose of amusement. Apart from this Jane Austen could sing, dance and play piano. She had little knowledge of French and Italian language.

She started writing at a tender age. Even before she was sixteen she completed writing three note-books entitled *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second*, *Volume the Third* containing

early drafts of short novels plays etc. By 1796 she wrote one epistolary novel *Elinor and Marianne*, modelled on Samuel Richardson's novel. Later this novel was re-cast and re-written in 1797 and became *Sense and Sensibility*. *Pride and Prejudice*, arguably the best work of Jane Austen came in the 1796-97. In the next year she penned down *Northanger Abbey*. In 1801 the Austen family moved to Bath which Jane Austen didn't like very much. We get an idea of her dislike in the autobiographical passages of *Persuasion* where Anne Eliot: "...disliked Bath and did not think it agreed with her and Bath was to be her home" (Chapter II). Her family went on expedition to many places . Lyme Regis is one such place which provides part of the background to *Persuasion* . There she agreed to marry rashly only to decline the proposal the next day. She was of the opinion that marriage cannot sustain for long if it is solely based on social custom and not on true love. Her father died in 1804. Her stay at Bath was hardly productive from the literary point of view.

Her family shifted to Chawtown, near Winchester in 1809. At Chawtown she started publishing her works. Unfortunately her life as a publishing author was short-lived, only six years. Until 1816 Austen showed no signs of illness or physical discomfort. She wrote jovial letters to her relatives in the early 1817 but her activity was getting reduced alarmingly. In May 1817, she and Cassandra went to Winchester to get medical aid but she was incurably sick. She became seriously ill and died on July 18, 1817, in the arms of her sister. She was buried on the 24th July 1817, in the cathedral church of Winchester.

The Novels in the order of Publication:

1. Sense and Sensibility (1811)
2. Pride and Prejudice (1813)
3. Mansfield Park (1814)
4. Emma (1815)

5. Northanger Abbey (1817)
6. Persuasion (1817)