



**THEME OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE AND PROJECTION OF
FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS:
A BRIEF ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

The fame of Jane Austen stands unique in the literary world. She is a writer who is quite conscious of her artistic design and she can be claimed as one of the boldest women writers in English Literatures. Jane Austen is speaking about such things as inner conflict, sense of pain, disintegration and meaninglessness as common to woman. This paper throws light on her feminine sensibility, themes of love and marriage her rebellion against male dominated society and she attempts through her novels to explain the feminine consciousness.

Jane Austen occupies a place that is apart in the history of the English. Novel. There are many women writers who are said to have tried their hand at literature in its different forms. Though their achievements have been considerable they have not been able to bear comparison with their men compeers. Unlike the developments in the poetic and dramatic field, one can find a galaxy of first-rate novelists in the field of fiction, who wield their pen as well as any men has done. A host of names like the Brontes, Fanny Burney, George Eliot and Maria Edge Worth rises before the minds of readers. Even here it is true that criticism does not assign them the same rank as Thackaray's or Dicken's or Hardy's. But the solitary exception is perhaps Jane Austen. In her, one can find a novelist, whose excellence, in the words of A.C. Bradley "gives her in that sphere the position held by Shakespeare in his".

The eighteenth century, with Elizabeth Elstob and her blue stockings in the early decades, and with Clara Reeve, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Mary Wollstonecraft in the last decades, witnessed the rise of feminism in England if not a widespread social movement, at last as a generally accepted ideal. Jane Austene, who was neither a social reformer nor a political thinker, had a affiliations with contemporary Feminism; yet on a closer scrutiny, it is easy to see that her novels constitute essentially a study in woman's psychology. This



introduction of the element of feminine consciousness, however latent and implicit, emerges as a new mode of perception in her novels. one becomes conscious of a thoughtful and intelligent woman's reactions to her environments. Thus, it is natural that the disabilities of women – their subordination to men, their lack of education, their economic dependence and the resultant frustration, their pre-occupation with love and marriage and husband-hunting – become manifest in her novels.

Jane Austen's career as a novelist shows two periods of fertility. In the first period, she produced *First Impressions* (*Pride and Prejudice*), *Elinor and Marriage* (*Sense and Sensibility*) and *Susan* (*Northanger Abbey*) and in the second period, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Almost all her novels reveal how far she had been influenced by her family, by the society and her predecessors and successors for her views on topics like love, marriage, morality, marital and familial relationship etc. The general theme of almost all Jane Austen's novels is connected with love, marriage and married life. *Sense and Sensibility* does significantly present the parallel and contrasted love stories of the two pairs of lovers, Elinor-Edward and Marianna Willoughby and Colonel Bradon. Nineteen year old Elinor has no romantic illusions. Edward's entanglement with Lucy Steele and Mrs. Ferrar's financial ambitions stand as obstacles in the way of her fulfillment. Throughout the novel, she is found to be under heavy emotional strain and she succeeds in maintaining a right balance between feeling and reason. Marianne, through her romantic love affair with Johan Willoughby shows herself to be an impetuous embodiment of romantic sensibility. Her marriage with the middle aged Colonel Brandon is a proof of her attainment of 'sense'. She becomes devoted to her husband as once she had been to Willoughby.

The of quoted opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (P 9) reveals the theme of the novel. Marriage is its focal point. The plot concerns itself with a series of marriages. The characterization is developed through marriages and the core points are centred around love and marriage. When the story opens couples like the Bannets, the Philipses, the Gardiners, the Lucases – are already married. The development in the relationship between Jane – Bingley and Elizabeth – Darcy are clearly portrayed. Jane Austen presents different types of love in *Pride and Prejudice*. The love between Wickham and Lydia is typical of the foolish infatuation that might arise between thoughtless persons, leading to nothing but misery for both of them.

The love between Elizabeth and Darcy is based on the conflict between characters while the love of Jane and Bingley is one based on similar likes and dislikes and affinity of temperament. It runs an even course, though there is a delay in its successful culmination owing to forces over which neither of the lovers has any control. Theirs can be said to be a perfect match. The character of each is suited to the other. Bingley is mild, amiable and ready to please and to be pleased. Jane is the sweet tempered girl and her amiability equals

that of Bingley. Bingley has eyes for none except Jane from the time he comes into contact with her at the Meryton assembly. Jane too is disposed in his favour and the attention they pay to each other are noted by all. Their esteem for each other increases with their acquaintance and Mrs. Bennet is true that they would be engaged before long and the worthy mother begins to form plans about the wedding clothes and such other things. Even the high-browed Miss. Bingley finds n fault with Jane and visits her at her house. Luck too seems to faovur the lovers. The Lydia-Wickham love episode is a monument of folly in Pride and Prejudice. The character and actions of Lydia are a standing warning to parents who indulge their children too much, particularly when the latter do not posses native good sense and virtue. Just as Jane and Elizabeth are made happy on account of their character, Lydia meets with the fate that she deserves on account of her defects. Her marriage is a model of what should not to be. The marriage of Lydia and Wickham brings Darcy and Elizabeth closer to each other.

Mansfield Park is certainly “the book in which Jane Austen conducted her deepest explorations of the human heart and head” (Bush 134) Jane Austen makes the house a symbol of a traditional desirable stability. Even though the main theme of the novel is the evil influence of bad education, the love-affairs of Edmund-Mary Fanny, Maria Rushworth – Henry Crawford, Henry Craword – Fanny and Julie and Mr. Jates are dealt with in detail. Emma Woodho use, “handsome, clever and rich with a comfortable home and happy disposition” is the heroine of Emma. Since she has nothing to distress her, her chief interest in life is match-making and everybody close to her – Mr. Knightby, Harriet Smith, Robert Martin, Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill and she herself – experience the consequence of her eccentricity. Thus, the subject of Emma is ‘marriage’. It begins with one marriage, that of Miss. Taylor, ends with three more and considers two others by the way. Arnold Kettle observes:

“Jane Austen, like Henry James is fascinated by the complexities of personal relationship. Emma is as convincing as our own lives and has the same kind of concreteness. Marriage in Emma is thought of entirely in terms of actual and particular personal relationships we do, in fact, in reading Emma thus enrich our experience” (Kettle 88)

The theme of love and marriage is presented in the best way possible in Persuasion. Even though Anne Elliot has neither Emma’s strength of character nor Elizabeth’s brilliance, she has a sweetness and gentleness that never becomes inspid. She has charm. Moreover, she really is in love. One can feel it in every though she thinks and every word she utters. Annie Elliot and Captain Wentforth fall in love eight years before the action of the novel begins. The news of Anne’s refusal of the marriage proposal of Charles Musgrove, the passing admiration she had received from Mr.Elliot at Lyme and the resourcefulness she displays at Cobb and at Captain Harville’s house convince. Captain Wentforth of her superiority. He



understands ‘the perfect excellence’ of her mind and also its ‘perfect unrivalled hold’ on his own!

“There, he had seen everything to exalt in his estimation the woman he had lost, and there begun to deplore the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment, which had kept him from trying to regain her when thrown in his way” (P 63)

He frankly tells her:

“But I was proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you or do you justice” (Persciasion 182)

Northanger Abbey is the story of Catherine

Morland who is brought back to her senses, by a series of misadventures and disillusionment. Henry Tilney corrects Catherine of her romantic follies and bestows upon her his heart and hand. Northanger Abbey traces Catherine’s progress from immaturity and social unease to an adult ability to discriminate between the valuable and the worthless, in literature and in life” (Goonevatne 55). John Thorpe’s one sided love for Catherine and Isabella’s relationship first with James Morland and then with the wealthy. Captain Tilney are also presented rather neatly.

Being an educated, sophisticated and widely read artist of the highest rank, aware of all the political, social, economic and literary aspects of her Age, Jane Austen, could choose any topic as the theme of her novels. But she chose and marriage to be a social institution. Love and marriage being the common fundamental problem of all individuals in a society, Jane Austen chose them as the central theme of her novels and it provided her with ample scope to express her own personal views on love and marriage. In her novels, no doubt, Jane Austen has presented the lives of quite a large number of lovers and married couples. Her life as the member of a very large family of brothers, nephews and nieces of course might have helped her to form definite ideas about love and marriage. Jane Austen considered mutual love and respect to be the most important aspects of marriage and married life. In a letter to Fanny she wrote :

“Nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound without love, bound to one and preferring another. That is a punishment which you do not deserve” (Chapman 418).

In an age of romanticism, with her anti-romantic temperament, Jane Austen stressed the fact that nature sober love controlled by reason was essential for a happy marriage. In all her novels, Jane Austen insists that” true love is the only possible basis for marriage”

says Gilbert Phelps (p167). However, romantic love based on passion, emotions and sentiments is not in the least acceptable to Jane Austen. Both in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, her strong attack on romantic love is richly found. *Sense and Sensibility* contrasts the temperaments of two sisters - Elinor and Marianne. Elinor is the mouthpiece of Jane Austen, while Marianne is her foil. Elinor governs her life by sense or reasonableness while Marianne is ruled by sensibility or feeling. Elinor keeps her wits about her even when she realizes that her lover Edward Ferrars is entangled with another girl, Lucy Steele. When his mother disinherits him, Edward, now being deserted by the avaricious schemer Lucy, returns to Elinor - who has the sense to take him back. Marianne is in love with a scoundrel - Willoughby. She is always fervent in expressing herself :

*“I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not
In every point coincide with my own. He must enter into
all my feelings, the same books, the same music must charm
us both” (SS 18)*

She further tells her mother.

*Mama, the more I know of the world, the more
I am convinced that I shall never see a man
Whom I can really love. I require so much”
(SS 19).*

Jane Austen detested anything that threatened the general tranquility of the stable society and anything that questioned moral values. Gilbert Phelps stresses this aspect when writes :

*“She is firm and consistent in her
Condemnation of marriage based on a mere
Infatuation that has not stood the test of
knowledge and experience” (p167)*

Thus, Jane Austen chose love and marriage as the theme of all her novels because she had a clearly defined view of the stability of the society and she did consider love and marriage to be the fundamental problems of all human beings in the society she is the novelists of highest rank giving due importance to mutual love, respect and understanding in married life, futility of romantic love and foolishness of mercenary marriages.



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