



FEMININE SENSIBILITY AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AS PORTRAYED BY JANE AUSTIN IN HER FICTION: AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at bringing out the literary forte of Jane Austin in her description of characters, manners, attitude, human sentiments, relationship, feminine sensibility, marital relationship in terms of married life love relationship and family ties.

Keywords: marriage, human sentiment, love, family, art, relationship.

INTRODUCTION

In the history of English novel, these eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were considered to be the golden period for the realistic novel came into existence. Henry Fielding was the father of the realistic novel and his depiction covers a true drama of human life in *Tom Jones*. Novelists like Tobias Smolett, Fielding and Richardson, their writings based on manners and ideas on different vein to produce events, characters, and dialogues but even if Jane Austen's novels are the pulse of her age, above all people fond of reading her novels and portrayed the real societal life in her works.

Jane Austen's artistic skills combined the qualities of realism of the world through the characters were mannered in her works which brought that to perfection. She followed Richardson and Fielding for exactness of structure, symmetry of form and picturization, art of characterization. Her characters are dynamic, real, vigorous, vital and living which proves her fidelity to the facts and imaginative vision. Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, Emma Woodhouse are the characters whom even be compared to the Shakespearean characters.

N. KAUSHI REDDY

1 Page



Jane Austin's fictional world presented the complexities of self-love, forms of different vanities and shades of selflessness and her creative range is confined to humanity in its social and familial relationships. In the novels of Jane Austin, she does not present man in relation to God, Religion, Ethics, State or Society in its wider sense. The central situation in all her novels is almost the same that young women in search of husbands and the scenes of everyday life – picnics, dinner parties, dances, walks in the countryside short journeys, budding romance and jilted love. Limitation is an outstanding characteristic of her fictional art. She defined her own boundaries and never beyond those limitations. These limitations were self-imposed, and she always remained within the range of her imaginative inspiration and personal experience.

Certain aspects of the novelist's experiences are determined through their personalities which helps to generate their imagination. Dickens and Hardy presented the life of the lower middle-class farmers and farm-laborer of Wessex. A novelist may present their works by which they have not only observed but also lived but the same things falls on Jane Austen's writings, as a woman writer, she writes about women themes and much importance to woman. Her picturization of the masculine mind is confined to that of picturing men as they appear to women and not in the view of men. Austen's range was limited and narrow, she attained a marvelous success in her art. She is one of the sincerest examples in English literature of art for art's sake. Paying her a tribute, George Saintsbury writes:

*"If her knowledge was not very extended,
She knew two things which only genius knows.
The one was humanity and the other was art" (P 5).*

In the words of F.R. Leavis, "The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Jane Austen is one of the truly great writers. She not only makes tradition for those coming after, she creates the tradition we see leading down to her" (P 11). Jane Austen displays an acute group on her characters and of the human mind and motives. In the late eighteenth century, she has referred to her novels as 'two inches of ivory', in her novels we have a perfect picture of provincial life. In her intense concentration on the thoughts and feelings of a limited number of characters, she creates as profound an understanding and as precise a vision of the potentialities of the human spirit as the art of fiction has ever achieved.

The early writings of Jane Austen are nothing but "indirect records of the impact on her reading and of her growing experience and judgement of her personal relationships" (Gillie 23). Her works are *Frederic and Elfrida Jack and Alice, The Beautiful Cassandra Love and Friendship, The History of England, A Collection of Letters Lesley Castle, The*

Three Sisters, Evelyn and Catherine, Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park, Emma, Persuasion. Jane Austen carries her exquisite style, *Love and Friendship*, a novel in a series of letters, written in June 1990, dedicated to her cousin Elza Madama La Camtesse de Feuillide' and the most elaborate, high spirited, amusing of the literary burlesques and caricatures the follies of the sentimental fiction of the 18th century. To quote Douglas Bush, *Love and Friendship* is a precocious display of critical observation, comic and satirical invention and moral criteria which do not lose their force in a farcical setting" (P 49).

Jane Austen's family had a strong sense of principle, cultured, religious and she had been influenced by her family, society, predecessors and successors following their ways and presented through all her novels reveal how far she had been respecting them and explain her readers about discriminated view of life and also the importance of "a static society and her views on topics like love, marriage, married life, moral values etc. All the novels are in a way a record of the strong family lies the Austen's maintained within their family circle". (Geonaratne 11). The influence exerted by her family members is clearly visible in the selection of themes like love, marriage, married life, ordination, adoption, fraternal love. In this connection, Margaret Kenney observes:

"She had a great affection for Edward wife Elizabeth, and seems to have been fond of all the people at Godmersham. Her visits to Kent widened her knowledge of the world and it is possible that she picked up there a polish which was looking at Stevenson. And there are indications that Godmersham may have furnished raw material for Mansfield Park" (Kenney 2324)

Jane Austen lived in English country society of neither the lowest nor the highest stratum provided her with the opportunity of learning the world of social pretension and ambitions. Her works presents the world through dedication and highly finished art, she turned this world in its habits, tastes and appearance into a microcosm of life in its social aspect. "She describes the last generation of Englishmen and women who could face life with cheerfulness, decorum, determination, grace, elegance and enjoyment. "This is neither romanticism no sentimentality, but shows a remarkable insight into the relation between social convention and individual temperament" (Daiches 744).

Walter Allen makes an important observation in this context thus:
"Perfection, however, which is what the pure novelist is after, demands the recognition of severe limits.



The art of Jane Austen is made possible precisely by the recognition of limits. Miss Austen was a highly sophisticated artist.

The scope of her art is not in fact lessened by her ignoring of the Major events in the history of her time. The reality of her world would not have been in any way intensified had she dragged in references to The Napoleonic wars or to the Industrial Revolution” (Allen 104).

Jane Austen, like her predecessors, Fanny Burney, Maria Edge Worth and other women novelists of the period, exemplifies the feminine point of view in fiction. Among the novelists, Richardson alone had gained the reputation of interpreting the feminine mind with tolerable success. With the advent of the women novelists, the world was presented woman images through fiction and men novelists are fails to erect themselves was no longer as the central figure of the story round which the other characters revolved. On the other hand, the heroines of the novels became the centers around which the man revolved. The most important aspect of a man’s character is whether he promised to do well as a husband. While the novels in the past had not only been written by men but were also written for men, the novels of Frances Burney and her followers were written primarily for the women. Frances Burney, Maria Edge worth and Jane Austen all created for the novel a wholesome moral atmosphere, she was able to rise to the position of the universally acclaimed mistress of the novel of manners. She was able to attain this distinction by being content, to do meddle with passions, theories and styles of writing. Her state of mind was described thus:

“A rational woman, exceptional in intellect, unique in wit, found herself in circumstance which were always meager and at times irrational; and endowed with fastidiousness on the one hand and enjoyment on the other, she employed her experience creatively in the service of comedy. The novels are a vent” (11)

Jane Austen occupies a unique position in English literature being neither a Romantic nor a classic writer, and being a novelist, her work lies in the novelist’s knowledge of the materials which she could handle with certainty of success and her taking care of not to exceed the boundaries she had set for herself. All the critics of Jane Austen’s novels would agree that within her chosen field, she remains unrivalled. Though all her readers see in Jane Austen a deliberate limitation and narrowness of range in her choice of subject matter, her admirers find her scope quiteadequate for the exposition of important themes. Narrative and portraiture, talk and style, had reached perfection and interpenetrated in the pure service of art in Jane Austen’s works so that she has been called by Oliver Elton ‘as the mistress of the novel of

manners". She truly remains superior to all other women-writers and all but a few men-writers in English, as a creator and an artist.

In fact, Jane Austen's interest in young people and in their loves and courtships never got exhausted or diminished. All her novels, the story of love and marriage of the most important theme of the story, with the stories of the other lovers serving to complete the interest of character and plot. It is evident from the novels that Jane Austen had certain deep convictions about love, courtship and marriage. With the mind of eighteenth century, she exhorted the values of severity, maintained a sober and balanced view of life and always insisted on the importance of stability in society. She considered marriage to be a social institution, not an exclusively personal affair. Love and marriage being the common fundamental problem of all individuals in society. Jane Austen chose them as the central theme of her novels and provided her with ample scope to express her own personal views on love and marriage. In her novels, she presents the lives of quite a large number of lovers and married couples and convinced the readers of her own faith in her principles. Jane Austen considered mutual love and respect to be the most important aspects of marriage and married life.

In an age of romanticism, Jane Austen stressed the fact that mature sober love controlled by reason was essential for a happy marriage. As Gilbert Phelps points out, in all her novels, Jane Austen insists the true love is the only possible basis for marriage" (P 167). Along with mutual love and respect, Jane Austen considered self-knowledge and mutual understanding as essential ingredients of a happy married life. In her novels, one finds how the various pairs of lovers brought into contact with each other again and again; they all are forced to have a radical reassessment of their individual characters, to mould each other their mutual fulfillment. She believed in the necessity of a harmonious relationship between husband and wife and also in the sanctity of married life. In a nutshell, being a true disciple of Dr. Johnson, Jane Austen was a strong supporter of the rigorous code of her age.

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