

**Contextualizing the Problems of Women and Marriage in the Selected
Novels of Jane Austen: A Socialistic Study**

Kamaljot

Ph. D Researcher in English

Regd Number 2010130012.

Dr. K.N Modi University , Newai, Tonk, Rajasthan

Univ.

Supervised by:-

Dr. Jit Pal Aggarwal

Associate Professor

Lovely Professional

Abstract

This research paper titled: *Contextualizing the Problems of Women and Marriage in the Selected Novels of Jane Austen: A Socialistic Study* explores the socialistic vision of Jane Austen. She is regarded as a prominent British novelist who had a socialistic vision as all his novels are about the men and manners of her age. Matthew Arnold once observed that the real literature is always a criticism of life. He highly praised John Milton because his poetry teaches us how to live. Joseph Addison wrote essays in the *Spectator Papers* with an ambition to “enliven wit with morality and to temper wit with morality.” All good literature is a true mirror of society and Jane Austen’s socialistic vision is highly praiseworthy. Socialism as theory is concerned with the betterment of the people living in the society. Individualism gives rise to capitalism. Gyorgy Lukacs opines in his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) that there is an incessant struggle between the have and have not. The capitalists exploit and destroy the identity of the proletariat and enslave them for their profit. Marxist theory of Economic Determinism is very popular as the theory brought revolution in Russia and Europe. Marx revolutionized the European philosophical thoughts by his ideas of economic determinism.

Key Words: Socialistic, Determinism, Consciousness, Proletariat, Revolutionized, Capitalists, Philosophical, Criticism

Introduction

Karl Marx contends that the basic structure of society is structured around the means of production. Since antiquity a capitalist society has two wings of society; the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. Marx is of the firm view that the bourgeoisie are the capitalist as they are the owners of the land and means of production. Marx holds that it is unfortunate that the proletariat work hard and use all the means of production for the profit and prosperity of the capitalist generating wealth for the bourgeoisie. Marx gives a long list of the means of production that include: capital, assets, such as tools, machinery, and factories. Antonio Gramsci also holds that there exists complex relationship between the base and the superstructure which he calls hegemony” (Bressler172). Marx's theory of “alienation” belongs to his earlier philosophy; Marx wrote *Estranged Labor* (1844) and his theory of exploitation belongs to his later philosophy. Karl Marx's theory of alienation is the pillar of his socialistic ideology. He holds that there is conspicuous estrangement of people from aspects of their "species-essence" as a consequence of living in a society. Although the worker is an autonomous economic entity, this worker is directed to goals and activities that are dictated by the bourgeoisie who own the means of production. John Steinbeck took up the cause of the downtrodden to expose and ridicule the greed and avarice and degradation of the rich and the capitalist who transcended all the values of the American Dream in their lust for power and money.

In the novels of Jane Austen the rich and the capitalists dominate and the people of the lower classes suffer. Jane Austin has exposed and ridiculed the oppressive policies of the elite in her novels. The main social vices of the Victorian age that infected the rich and the

elite are hypocrisy, affectation, vanity, egoism and hatred for the poor and the downtrodden. The rich and the elite of the Victorian age always dominated the society. Jane Austen has debunked this depravity of the upper classes of the Victorians in her novels.

The age in which Jane Austen lived was an age of technology and industrialization. People scrapped the old values and had become crazy to make money. The emergence of the money culture corrupted the mind and sensibility of the rich. For example Emma is the main heroine of her novel *Emma* who loves to guide and direct the lives of other people. She is a crazy match maker and Jane Austen cuts her to size. The capitalism thrives on exploitation crushing the liberty of other people. Jane Austen has depicted the chaotic social order of her time in her novels and her socialistic approach is highly appreciated by the critics. Her socialistic journey begins with the publication of her first novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Jane Austen emerges as one of the greatest women novelists of the 18th century. The novel of Jane Austen have been recognizes as the classical works of art. Some of scenes and characters of her novels have become known and have served as an inspiration for a number of other works.

Jane Austen is a prolific novelist; she wrote half a dozen novels such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Persuasion* (1818) and *The Watsons*, which remained an unfinished novel. All her novels deal with the themes of love, marriage and money and her main focus is always the sociological. Her novels are a good example to understand the men and the manners of the 18th century and 19th century and the place of women. All her novels are “drawing room comedies”. Walter Allen observes that during her life time she didn’t enjoy name and fame as the novels of Walter Scott swept England and Europe so Jane Austen was virtually eclipsed. .Tony Tanner observes that the vision of Jane Austen is limited as she is basically concerned with the problems of women. In her novels she demonstrated many

faces of her society in which she lived and mirrored the vices of the age with a delightful satire. In the Neo –classical age of England satire became very popular with the rise of Parliamentary Democracy. There were two main parties the Whigs and the Tories who were lashing at each other. Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of Books* are fine examples of the literature of satire. The classical writers imitated Horace and Juvenal and used the weapons of wit, irony, repartee and satire to expose and ridicule the vices of the contemporary society. Jane Austen rejected the stylistic techniques and literary devices of the classical thinkers and wrote family dramas in her inimitable style. Her satire is never bitter but humorous and entertaining.

Not much is known about the biographical details of Jane Austen; the few letters are available which tell about the early life of Jane Austen. It is said that she wrote about 3000 letters during her life time but only 161 have survived. She wrote letters to her old sister Cassandra who in 1843 burnt them. Her brother Admiral Francis also burnt many letters of Jane Austen so the valuable information of this great novelist was lost. Richard Arthur Austen published Memoir of Jane Austen in 1869, and Leigh wrote biography of Jane Austen in 1913 which give valuable information about the life, vision and perception of the great novelist. It is reported that that Austen experienced periods of deep unhappiness and was "an embittered, disappointed woman trapped in a thoroughly unpleasant family. She was born in Stevenson, Hampshire on 16 December 1775. Her father George Austen served as the rector of the Anglican parishes at Stevenson. According to Honan, the atmosphere of the Austen home was an "open, amused, easy intellectual" one, where the ideas of those with whom the Austens might disagree politically or socially were considered and discussed. In 1783, Austen and her sister Cassandra were sent to Oxford to be educated by Mrs. Ann Cawley who took them with her to Southampton when she moved there later in the year. In the autumn both girls were sent home when they caught typhus and Austen nearly die.

The present research paper is focused on the main issues of love, money and marriage; the prominent issues dominating the plots of the novels of Jane Austen. In this study all the major novels of Jane Austen will be explored and investigated applying the socialistic theories of the socialistic thinkers such as Carlyle, Ruskin, J.S. Mill, Robert Owen, Claude Henri, Saint-Simon and Karl Marx. In the early nineteenth Century, women lived in hard situation characterized by inequality of rights in education and freedom, and they were expected to remain under the power of their fathers and husbands. Britain witnessed many changes in Victorian time that influenced English society in philosophy, economics, and politics. It was also a period of flourish in English Literature.

Analysis of the main novels of Jane Austen

In the early nineteenth Century, women lived in hard situation characterized by inequality of rights in education and freedom, and they were expected to remain under the power of their fathers and husbands. Britain witnessed many changes in Victorian time that influenced English society in philosophy, economics, and politics. It was also a period of flourish in English Literature. *Pride and Prejudice*, however, was the finest work of Jane Austen masterpieces. It was first published in 1813, and it was considered as a classical novel which carried a romantic theme overlapped in love and marriage. This was the topic that Jane Austen struggled with in her own life, and she presented an important reality of English women exposing the social and moral follies of her society. This presentation included social classes, values, marriage and women's status. *Pride and prejudice* presents an important theme in the late of 18th century which is marriage, and portrays life in the general rural society. In that masterpiece, the protagonist Elizabeth plays the role of an intelligent woman who rejects the social values, rules, and arts. She struggles with her own society in terms of gender inequality. Jane Austen portrays women and especially marriage in Victorian era as a representation of her own life throughout her work *Pride and Prejudice*. Thus, in the current

research, there is a stress on the position of woman and the portrayal of marriage in Victorian society to which the following questions could be raised.

In her novels Austen reflected the time and the society she lived in with its attitudes and opinions. This period of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in England is characterized by a change of human perception of the world, of a man's position in it and by a shift in the relationship towards God. The rise of the ideas of individualism, natural rights and freedom caused change in family life and personal relationships as well. In each of her six novels the theme of courtship and marriage plays the central role. To marry the man of their dreams is the ultimate goal of all Austen's heroines and her stories always end with the 'happily ever after' denouements.

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Austen's work could make the impression that the authoress' view of the world is rather naïve in this respect; that she sees the happy marriage as a universal solution of problems in life; that when her heroines eventually marry their chosen one everything will be perfect forever. We never see what could have become from the pair later in their common life. But does Austen portray only the ideal marriage with its positive and happy sides? Is a happy marriage everything a woman could want? How does Austen present marriage in her works?

And how do the societal changes which I have mentioned above reflect themselves the novels? If we look closely at her work we can see that the stories are full of examples of imperfections and problems in marital and family life.

In this research paper all important novels of Jane Austen have been investigated. *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* deal with the question of courtship, marriage and partnership and include examples of problems and failures in matrimony. The selected novels are analysed and compared with historical background and arguments from secondary sources.

Marriage of the Late 18th and Early 19th Century

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus defines marriage as “a legally accepted relationship between a woman and a man in which they live as husband and wife, or the official ceremony which results in this”. The definition says all that is necessary to understand the social role of this institution within a society which acknowledges such union. However, the definition does not cover the scope of changes that this institution has gone through in the course of the history influenced by the shifts in religious, societal, political, economic and educational factors. All these aspects have constant influence on value systems of a particular society in a particular time and together they form the cultural background which in turn influences “the ways members of the family related to each other, in terms of legal arrangements, structure, custom, power, affect and sex” (Stone 21). The marriage-parenthood circle¹ combines these aspects in itself enabling to form the institution of family as the basic unit of a community necessary for the further development through procreation.

Courtship and marriage is the central theme of all Jane Austen's novels and as Austen chose to portray the time and the society she actually lived in, the picture of marriage she presents to readers in her novels arises from the pattern specific for the depicted social classes at that particular time as well. Therefore, at this point it is necessary to specify more closely the social functions of the institution of marriage, the role it played in family strategy and in wife-husband and children-parents relationships of the late 18th and early 19th century middle- and upper-classes.

The Growth of Affective Individualism

England of Jane Austen's time had seen a century of political turmoil, religious tensions, civil wars and revolutions at home and abroad. The ideas of the Enlightenment, represented by philosophers and scientists like John Locke, Isaac Newton, Jean Jacques Rousseau and others, offered a whole new perspective on an individual within the social system and the nature, on the relation to God and the basic needs and rights of every human creature.

In this paper the necessary historical and theoretical background of eighteenth and early nineteenth century in connection to marriage with its social functions and the role it played in family relationships. It describes how the family pattern changed at that time, the specific features that developed on the British Isles and the effect it had on both wife-husband and child-parent relationships. It covers the issues of finding a suitable partner and what were the decisive factors in such choice and discusses also the means by which marriage could be dissolved. In addition, the first chapter also contains short biographical information about Jane Austen's life and her work. This brings us to the second aspect – the motivation and criteria of the choice. The rise of individualism and affective bonds enabled the preference of individual happiness within a marriage built on mutual sympathy, put before the financial and social interests and responsibilities towards the family and the kin. Therefore, the ideal match

was seen as based on “a well-balanced and calculated assessment of the chances of long-term compatibility, based on the fullest possible knowledge of the moral, intellectual and psychological qualities of the prospective spouse, tested by a lengthy period of courtship.” (Stone 182-183).

Austen’s novels were no exception - although they “increasingly viewed the companionate marriage as the ideal and conjugal happiness as a legitimate aim, yet marriages of convenience were common” and Jones includes into this state of “flux” aristocracy as well (Jones 1). However, Stone argues that “by 1660 the shift [...] in the distribution of power over decision-making had already taken place in all but the highest ranks of aristocracy [...] “(Stone 183) and the same resistance to this trend can be traced within the poor lowest class.² Apparently, where a great amount of money and high social status on one side, and a slightest chance for improving or, at least, keeping the chance for survival of the family on the other side were at stake, no experiments were welcome and the change was rather slow.

Even though the evidence for this new attitude can definitely be identified within this period, the change was neither immediate nor universal and the actual practice in mating arrangements varied across social classes and even within them. In the introduction to her book *Jane Austen and Marriage* Hazel Jones points at this situation and states that the social classes of

This paper analyses the connection between unsatisfactory marriage and bad parenting, taking as an example these two marital unions. The fourth chapter concentrates on the novel *Mansfield Park* and further develops the issues of problematic marriage, unlike characters, bad parenting and widowhood depicted in this novel. The plot focuses on the issue of adultery as a way of escape from an unhappy marriage.

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a protest against the romantic illusions and Jane Austen emerges as a classical novelist. She wrote this novel to give warning to people who indulged in romantic and passionate pleasures of life. As the title of the novel reveals *Sense and Sensibility* is an attack on violent passions, uncontrolled emotions and cheap sensibilities. The plot of *Sense and Sensibility* revolves around marriage. The novel begins with Elinor and Marianne as unmarried but eligible young women and only concludes when both of them settle into marriages. Engagements, possible matches, and marriages are the main concern of most the novel's characters and the subject of much of their conversation. Thus, love is also of central importance to the novel, as Marianne and Elinor fall in love and seeks to marry the men they love. However, marriage isn't all about love in the world of *Sense and Sensibility*. In fact, it's often more about wealth, uniting families, and gaining social standing. Moreover, it's often families and parents who attempt to decide engagements as much as any individual husband or wife. Mrs. Ferras for example, cares only about her sons marrying wealthy, upper-class women. She does not care whether Edward loves Lucy and cuts all ties with him when she learns of their engagement. For her, the decision of whom her sons will marry is as much hers as theirs, because their marriages are more about their whole family than about their own individual desires. Marriage is an important part of the functioning of the high society in which Austen's characters live. It determines who will inherit family fortunes and properties, and is of particular importance to women, whose futures depend almost entirely on the prospects of the men they marry. Nonetheless, while people in the novel often marry for reasons other than love. Elinor and Marianne ultimately do marry for love. For Marianne, though, this means redefining her notion of love and allowing herself to develop affections for Colonel Brandon even though she did not love him at first sight. The novel also shows the importance of love through a consideration of family. The bonds between Elinor, Marianne Margaret and their mother stand strong through all the difficulties they endure and at the end

of the novel they maintain a happily close relationship. Thus, while marriage may often be more a matter of economics than of love, the examples of Marianne and Elinor show that it doesn't necessarily have to be this way. And, insofar as marriage brings families together and creates new family units, it can create strong and lasting bonds of familial love.

The third novel of Jane Austen: *Mansfield Park* (1814) satirizes the fickle hearts and courtship rituals of members of England's genteel class. Jane Austen deals with the themes of love, money and marriage and courtship like other novels. *Mansfield Park* organizes itself around a marriage plot, meaning that the action of the story drives toward a wedding as the plot's culmination and fulfillment. The major characters talk about marriage obsessively, and as they do, they repeatedly articulate a view of marriage. Sir Thomas, Maria, Mr. Rushworth and Edmund and Fanny are involved in love triangles. The issues of money and marriage create problems for the characters. Those were the days when marriage was often forced on them. Each character is psychologically obsessed with the issue of marriage. Each character in the world of Jane Austen struggles for the fulfillment of marriage. Marriage, moreover, seems to be the only socially acceptable form that love is allowed to take—extramarital affairs are roundly condemned in the book. Most notably, the characters express unanimous horror after Maria and Henry disappear together to pursue their adulterous affair. Mary even suggests that Maria and Henry's affair must end in a marriage, because otherwise there would be no saving them from total social disgrace. But despite the characters' professed commitment to marital love-matches, marriage in practice throughout the book serves primarily as a means for economic or social advancement, not emotional fulfillment. For instance, Austen shows the reader the transactional nature of marriage through the Bertrams' open acknowledgement and acceptance that Maria married Mr. Rushworth for material comfort and social influence rather than love. Likewise, Fanny's family enthusiastically

encourages her to marry Henry Crawford because the match is socially and financially advantageous, despite the fact that Fanny repeatedly states that she does not love Henry. Meanwhile, Mary Crawford outright refuses to marry Edmund, despite her love for him, because she sees the marriage as being neither economically nor socially beneficial. So while Austen's characters obsessively idealize marriage as a deep intimate connection between two lovers, in practice they carry out marriage primarily as an economic transaction. The characters' insistence on financially advantageous marriages makes their veneration of marriage bitterly ironic. The characters profess to cherish marriage as an institution, but they constantly degrade it by making it merely an instrument for achieving material, as opposed to emotional, comfort. That, in turn, renders the entire novel profoundly ironic, since the novel orbits around an institution that has clearly been hollowed out of any emotional or spiritual meaning. In a further irony, despite the novel's commitment to a story that centers on marriage, and despite the characters' insistence upon marriage as the only acceptable format for love, Austen gives the reader virtually no positive portraits of married life in *Mansfield Park*. Examples of messy marriages, on the other hand, are plentiful. Despite the fact that Maria married for money, Maria's marriage to Mr. Rushworth is a disaster and, ironically, leaves her as a social outcast with a meager budget courtesy of her father.

Austen's cynicism towards marriage, palpable in her depiction of marriage as a financial transaction, paired with her many portraits of unhappy marriages and their negative effects on women, ultimately renders the book's "happy ending" somewhat sour. Even the marriages that are purportedly love-matches end poorly, like Mrs. Price's marriage to Mr. Price which produces a domestic life that is hectic, financially strained, and haunted by Mr. Price's alcoholism. Even Edmund and Fanny's marriage, supposedly a perfect match, and seemingly the desired ending to the book, is somewhat tainted. Edmund's quick change of affection from Mary Crawford towards Fanny comes across as sudden and, as a result, unfulfilling and

unconvincing. Likewise, though the narrator tells the reader that their marriage is happy, the book ends without showing any evidence of marital bliss. Both Fanny and the reader get what they are looking for, but Fanny's nuptial success seems like far less of a triumph when put in context of dark view of marriage portrayed in the rest of the book. By making Fanny victorious in winning Edmund's hand in marriage, but also showing how that accomplishment might not actually be such a happy one, Austen sardonically implies that the marriage plot, when carried out to its inevitable conclusion, is fundamentally unsatisfying because the institution of marriage itself is toxic.

Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816), is her mighty achievement dealing with love, courtship, marriage and money. Emma is the leading character belonging to the elite class expressing her passion for match making. Each page of the novel is about the complicated issues of money, love and marriage from the social perspective. Here are many examples which show the themes of love and marriage in the novel *Emma*. Emma considers herself to be a skilled matchmaker. She seeks to make those around her happy by finding them a match, and hopes these matches will lead to love and marriage. The plot of the novel begins after Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston. Miss Taylor had been Emma's governess, and had become her dear friend. Emma considers their marriage bittersweet.

To conclude, Jane Austen depicts the class conflict of the rich and the poor and the novels are about the themes of love, marriage, money and divorces. Jane Austen's *Emma* is about the relationships of men and women and the complexities of love and marriage. Emma is involved into many love affairs. She falls in love with Frank Churchill; she realizes that she does not in fact love him. She does not love Frank Churchill because she exists so well with him and without him. Still, although she does not love Frank Churchill, she enjoys all his attention. However, Emma continues to make the same mistakes. She has not learned from

the match between Mr. Elton and Harriet and fancies the idea of making a match between Frank Churchill and Harriet. Mr. Elton has found a perfect match in Augusta Hawkins: a woman as dull and socially conscious as he is. Mrs. Elton constantly offers her own superiority and treats the members of Highbury society with much less respect. As bad as Mrs. Elton's manners are, they are made worse by her position in society. Her snobbery and comparisons of Hartfield to Maple Grove are made worse by the fact that her connections in Maple Grove are wealthy but lower class. She even calls Mr. Knightly by his first name. This continues the idea found in Emma that social class determines proper manners. Mrs. Elton does not know her proper rank in society. Emma is quite crucial about whom she likes and dislikes, and once she decides that she dislikes Mrs. Elton, there is little chance that she will change her opinion. In fact her opinion of Mrs. Elton does change: it becomes worse. Once again status plays a consideration. Emma dislikes Mrs. Elton because she presumes herself to be higher in society than she actually, believes that her connections at Maple Grove make her quite respectable.

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