
Human Relationship in The Novels of Jane Austen

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ABSTRACT:

Literature is,infact, the most explicit record of the human spirit. It is the medium through which essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experiences. A creative writer must have a perception and analytic mind of a sociologist who provides a record of human life. Theme of a human relationship seems to be of particular interest in Jane Austen. The present paper focuses on the aspects of Jane Austen’s representation of the human relationship of human life as depicted in her novels. Jane Austen presents in her novels a strange mixture of human relationship in a realistic manner. The relationship between man and woman, between husband and wife, between parents and son/daughter, between lover and beloved, between one woman and another are the most evident in almost all her novels. Jane Austen’s fiction often draws on details from her life and family relationship.

One of the major themes in the works of Jane Austen is that of human relationship, especially the relationships among family members. This feature is found abundantly in almost all of her novels. The author has left no stone unturned in discussing all kinds of relationships that human beings can develop in different types of conditions. She has really felt the pulse of the people representing different strata of the way-out society. Her minute details about the lives of her characters prove her to be a real author of relationships. Jane Austen has got worldwide recognition as a writer of relationships among disparate characters. It is not just the relationships among her characters that she has focused on; she also pays equal attention to the establishment of relationships among her characters and readers.

The proposed paper, “Human Relationships in the Novels of Jane Austen”, is a study of Jane Austen’s advocacy of an ideal society through the institution of good marriage. Of the many facets of human relationships found in her novels, the present study would confine exclusively to the relationship of man and woman in relation to love and marriage. She brings to light the major preoccupations in life as being the establishment of suitable relationship between marriageable young girls and young men because marriage is something that ensures promotion of one’s all round comfort in terms of social status and economic security. How one determines one’s future would depend on how one chooses one’s partner would be deliberated on according to the practice and aspiration of her society and period.

Jane Austen came to wide public attention only late in her life but left behind many a far-reaching novel written in modernist style. One of her fanatical admirers of the greatness of Jane Austen lies in her presentation of social implications in terms of the various kinds of human relationships occurred both in family and outside the family. She conceives society as the presentation of human behaviour. She studies the family relations and various relationships on the sociological levels.

Human relationship is the most important part of human life. It is the relationship between two human beings attached to each other intimately, emotionally sentimentally and

intellectually. Jane Austen presents in her novels a strange mixture of human relationship in a realistic manner. In all her novels, is presenting a small group of British middle class people of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. The paper is to exhibit the various kinds of relationships existing in the novels of Jane Austen necessary for the ideal union reserved for happy marriages. An ideal relationship in a marriage institution is what Jane Austen advocates. As such she takes pain to portray a suitable partner for each of her heroines. In trying to portray this genuine union in a society, she brings out the essential human nature in its various aspects. Austen's ideal relationship is present in all her six novels. All her heroines are well settled at the end of the novels with deserving heroes. The novels taken up for the study are *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. The flair of Jane Austen was to choose for all her novels "love and marriage" as the theme, as such it would therefore be helpful to take a peep at her life to understand why she confined her work to this particular area of human relationships.

Jane Austen's contribution helped in promoting the new genre. In short, her novels reflect all the life style of her period with all its human intrigues and aspirations. Jane Austen's novels are a model for exquisite love and marriage. The most common human preoccupation is marriage, and she takes it up in its diverse forms as essential to all adolescent young men and women. An ideal relationship being the chief concern of Jane Austen, she brings out, the different aspects of relationships basing on one's own choice of suitable companion in marriage which would decide their destiny, an important point in the whole paper. Compatibility of partners in one's marriage is fundamental, as incompatibility leads to marital disharmony and consequential upbringing of children. To explore the different types of relationships we come across various types of marriages in relation to the parents of the protagonists and the effect of such marriages on the psyche of their children. Attention is given to this aspect of marriage when each of her novels is discussed individually. Most of the parents' marriages are based on physical attraction of beauty and youth, while those of the siblings, the protagonists, are based on love and esteem for their partners in their search for ideal and best forms of marriage. There are others who marry for convenience's sake or some ulterior motives which Jane Austen exposes as flaw in a married life. Mr and Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr and Mrs Bertram in *Mansfield Park* are victims of physical attraction. Youth and beauty of young ladies of negligible fortune captivate the hearts of young handsome gentlemen with some means of income which itself becomes a subject of criticism and unhappy marriage. With just physical attraction to build up a relationship is temporal as seen in the lives of the Bennets and the Bertrams.

Mr Bennet cannot tolerate Mrs Bennet's nagging and silly obsession with catching young eligible gentlemen for her daughters and so isolates himself in his library leaving the world of their children to his wife. They cannot see eye to eye in any matter even after twenty three years of married life. Mr Bertram too is not in accordance with Mrs Bertram in the family life. She takes no responsibility for rearing the children, and thus leaves the task to her husband and sister, Mrs Norris. In trying to compensate her role, Mr Bertram takes the rein of nurturing his daughters with such strict rules that instead of endearing himself to them, he only alienates them. They are happy in his absence and are not able to laugh in his presence. The role of both parents plays an important part in a child's mental set-up to face any situation in life. Neglect of one has its disadvantages as seen in these two novels. Mr Bennet's negligence leads to Lydia's elopement with Wickham and Mrs Bertram's to the

elopement of his daughters – the already married daughter, Maria with Henry and Julia with Yates. Had the parents done their part of proper upbringing of the children, much scandal could have been averted. Jane and Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* and Marianne and Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* are good examples who manage their relationships well. They marry after they sort out their differences but there are some who enter into this type of marriage for other ulterior reasons. They marry for the sake of what it could afford them. Maria and Rushwood of *Mansfield Park*, Mary and Charles in *Persuasion*, Fanny and John in *Sense and Sensibility* are examples of those who maintain the surface harmony of marital bliss as divorce was unthought-of in Austen's time. Maria however fails to keep up the pretence and is thus scandalised when she elopes with her lover, Henry who later deserts her.

The relationship of Jane and Bingley is a perfect blend of personalities and the most coveted of the society. They fit the traditional concept of a young pretty lady who marries a rich eligible gentleman with a large fortune. What distinguishes them from the general concept is that they fall for each other without any doubts, hesitation or consideration of social or material gain. They are attracted to each other instantly at first meeting at the ball through mutual understanding and similarity of personalities. In fact their relationship is very different from that of Elizabeth and Darcy. Both are docile and despite their love for each other, they cannot assert nor denounce their relationship and as such they are not as attractive a couple as that of the friend's or sister's, whose relation goes topsy-turvy yet stable in the long run. Their marriage is a combination of love and convenience.

Love and esteem in Austen's world are the only surviving means of a stable marriage. Each has to love, respect and understand their partners to sustain a lasting relationship. Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* is a perfect example of this mode of marriage. Elizabeth refuses to marry Collins on grounds that she cannot love nor respect him although marriage to him would settle the entail problem. She marries Darcy only after he sheds his aristocratic pride and is humbled. Similarly, Fanny in *Mansfield Park* refuses to marry Henry who can give her economic security because he has been callous with her cousins. No prospect of marriage is at hand when she refuses Henry as Edmund, whom she loves, is far from being a likely suitor as he is enchanted by Mary. However in the end she marries Edmund after his obsession with Mary wanes.

Jane Austen's novel *Emma* has as one of its major subject the nature of power in human relationships, specifically Austen means to compare to respectively the healthful and unhealthy relationship between Emma and Harriet on one hand and Emma and Knightley on the other.

Relationship between the female characters is one of the other topics analysed by the novelist Jane Austen. The female characters compete and cooperate in maintaining human relationship. One possibility that frequently occurs is the female characters compete for male attention or marriage or to conform to gender norm as the reputation of one family member reflect back upon the whole family. However, in the early novels of Jane Austen, the possibility of exclusive female friendship is not destroyed by marriage. The distinction can be seen in novel *Sense and Sensibility* which presents female friendship in most positive form while in *Mansfield Park* in its most negative way. Marianne of *Sense and Sensibility* learns to control through her sister, Elinor's guide in deed and words. They have a strong friendship at the beginning but almost diluted at the end by their marriage. The female

relationship is allowed to escape and emphasises on the growth and development towards endogamy of the partner within it. While in *Mansfield Park*, the two women Fanny Price and Mary Crawford are presumed friends but are proved enemies. The two women struggle for the same men and consequently struggle between the two set of qualities, they embodied and finally destroyed their relationship. Likewise in *Northanger Abbey*, the heroines of sensibility, Catherine Morland takes as her friend and guides artful young women Isabella Thrope. But she finds that Isabella is a false guide and moves from friendship to an adult affectionate marriage of female friendship. Again in novel *Persuasion*, Anne Eliot and Louisa Musgrove are opposed in qualities but not complementary. Though supportive loving relationship does exist between them, they end up competing with and suffering because of romantic heterosexual relationship as such in *Pride and prejudice*. Nevertheless, the plot of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* suggests that Austen was using her double heroines with awareness of their implication. And that it is important to note that there is no such thing as universal sisterhood from the study of female relationship in Literature

Jane Austen throws light on different aspects of human relationships and brings out the factors of which are responsible for change in behaviour of man towards man. The consequence of the marriage of the parents based on physical attraction has bad effects on the children. Jane Austen insists that love and respect are necessary for a happy marriage. This is true as all her novels end in marriages, after a long struggle of educating and reforming needed for the characters. The protagonists get married only after they get to love and respect each other with the approval of their parents. Parents' approval is highly recommended even if the lovers have already pledged themselves to one another. Her strong belief in the love based marriage is also reflected in her real love-life as recorded by many critics of Jane Austen like Joan Rees, Lloyd Brown, John Halperin, Juliet McMaster, Robert Miles and Robert Irvine.

Jane Austen's world of creative art is a rich panorama of human characters with varied personalities who clash, merge in their search for personal goals fulfilling social expectations of the then Age. She knew the significance of family, its expectations, and its relationship with other families, their ties, bond through news, visits, parties, dinners, gatherings – all constructing a world for the parents, their children, who are to be married off as an essential part of life, from the points of view of social security, economic reasons, and individual self-esteem. Jane Austen, who did not marry for various reasons, was not unaccustomed to the social practice, manners, and the ritual of love making, marriage, inter and intra domestic relationship. She embraced all these aspects of love, life and social and family needs to be the vitals of human existence. No wonder in the whole gamut of English literature is there ever so sure a ground as Jane Austen does in her novels, when dealing with the subject of human relationship. This paper expresses some facets of human relationships as manifested in Jane Austen's novels that provide insightful accounts of love and marriage differently. The treatment is very exciting in its diverse aspects.

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