

An Analysis of Gender Discrimination and Social Roles in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract: In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen criticizes society's general attitude towards marriage and questions the traditional stereotypical authority exercised by men over women. They are only needed as house makers and the sad reality is that apart from one or two opposite voices majority of them have become a part of this social order. Through the characters like Bennetts, the Collins and the Wickhams she portrays how marriage could affect negatively based on long-established understanding of the roles of both male and female with respect to the society. They fall short of an ideal marriage. On the other side, in bringing the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy and through the strong independent heroine who goes against the rigid rules of the society, she brings a new model that is built on understanding, love, equality and mutual respect.

Keywords: marriage; society; class; traditional; gender; stereotypes; social

1. Introduction

In each and every part of our society we could see some kind of discrimination happening against women, here in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* the character Elizabeth Bennet symbolizes a lady who really want to get out of this mess caused by the people and the society. The main problem is that women are not allowed to acquire the property of their father's, they are to be married and the property goes to the husband.

This custom continuously pressurize women to find rich men to marry irrespective of their character. In the novel *Pride and Prejudice* the author explains the society's taboo with a novel understanding. It's also a great novel that describes feminism and the rights of women. Structural technique is used for analyzing this novel.

The main observations from this study is that; firstly, women are being discriminated in terms of inheritance of property, they are considered weak with respect to their counterpart, they are only meant for doing the household activities and make their husbands happy, they were also not allowed to educate themselves but were favored to learn music and dance in order to entertain their husbands; secondly, the strength of women is picturized through the character of Elizabeth Bennet, she is wise and firm in all her decisions, the struggles of women was carried out by Elizabeth Bennet in

finding her true love while going against all the social anarchies prevalent at that time, she married on the basis of love and not for money, she had so many obstacles to face both outside and from herself but eventually she came out victorious.

2. Discussion

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* deals the life of the daughters of the Bennet family. It concentrates on the most important character Elizabeth Bennet and her life. The family of Mr. Bennet belongs to the middle class. Mr. Bennet lacks a male heir. No one had any reason to comprehend the importance of a home's being entailed it is, or was, a lawful arrangement whereby the property could descend only to a male heir. If there was no male heir, as in the Bennets' case, then the closest male collateral relative who had initially made the entail would inherit the property. According to (Teachman 68), the common law of England required that in cases where a will was not made and an entailment was not in force, "an estate was to be inherited automatically by the eldest son of a family". However, if there is no son to inherit the property, as in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the right to inherit the property would descend to the eldest nephew or male cousin in the next generation of the family.

Here in this situation, Mr Bennet's distant cousin Mr. Collins is the one who is going to be the inheritor. Expecting that her daughters are going to be left with nothing after their father's passing and that they're going to depend upon good will of his cousin, Mr. Collins., Mrs. Bennet, dedicates her life to find spouses for her daughter's. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; and her motto was visiting and finding news.

Mrs. Bennet is an adoring mother who wishes only the best for her daughters and subsequently she forces Mr. Bennet to acquaint their daughters with Mr. Bingley, an unmarried young fellow with a decent income who has recently moved within the neighborhood: "If I can but see one among my daughters happily settled at Netherfield (a place where Mr. Bingley lives) and every one the others equally well married, I shall don't have anything to wish for" says Mrs. Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice* 12). However, there are times when her motherly love precedes

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her aspiration concerning her daughters. For example, she makes Jane proceed horseback to Nether field she knows that it'll rain and that Jane should stay there. When Jane becomes ill, Mrs. Bennet isn't much stressed.

Marriage was seen as the only option a young woman had in order to secure a comfortable future. In her study of Georgette Heyer's Regency World, Jennifer Kloester (2005) says that "A woman of the Regency period had no other occupation than to find a husband".

Actually, she is so much delighted and satisfied due to this chance that her daughter has got to be there for longer and to be closer to Mr. Bingley. Additionally, Mrs. Bingley could be a lady who enjoys gossip and inappropriate social behavior. She is depicted as not being a really smart person. She was a lady of low understanding; little knowledge and unsure temper. When she was not satisfied she fancied herself nervous.

Mrs. Bennet is one who expresses her findings even when it is an inappropriate situation. On the other side we could see Mr. Bennet not as nervous as Mrs. Bennet. He takes everything lightly but turns out to be a responsible father. He "shares his wife's concern to find husbands for their daughters, since the girls are without fortune or security, and marriage is the only hope for their future" (Wilson, 1985: 53).

One day Mrs. Bennet was in a room filled with people; she converses with Lady Lucas that her daughter Jane would be soon married to Mr. Bingley. It was an animating subject and Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while explaining the advantages of the match". Mrs. Bennet does not comprehend that her behaviour impacts her daughter's destiny and that as a result of this discussion with Lady Lucas Mr. Bingley will be parted from Jane. Mr. Bingley's friend, Mr. Darcy, and his sisters express that with such parents, and such low connections, the Bennet daughters have no chance of marrying higher class. Thereupon, it is evident how high social associations and a family's interactions decide a woman's life and her future, a future which can be only secured through marriage.

Mary Astell "In Some Reflections Upon Marriage" says how men consider women as an objects for entertainment "Suppose a man does not marry for money, though for one that does not, perhaps there are thousands that do; suppose he marries for love, an heroic action, which makes a mighty noise in the world, partly because of its rarity, and partly in regard of its extravagancy, what does his marrying for love amount to? There's no great odds between his marrying for the love of money, or for the love of beauty; the man does not act according to reason in either case, but is governed by irregular appetites. But he loves her wit perhaps, and this, you'll say, is more spiritual, more refined: not at all, if you examine it to the bottom."

Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bennet shortly known as Elizabeth is the second daughter of the Bennets. She is twenty years of age and is described as having a lively positioning which delighted in anything which is absurd. As a result of her observations and intelligence, she stands out amongst the other most renowned literary characters ever: And it's for the first time ever in English literature, outside Shakespeare, we meet heroines who are

valiant, with minds, with the ability to think for themselves, with ambition and wit. She is Mr. Bennet's most loved daughter. Depicting his daughters, Mr. Bennet says that they are all silly and careless like any other girls in the society; but Lizzy is wise. Interestingly, she is not dearest to her mother as she is not so fair as Jane, nor half good humored as Lydia. However, Elizabeth goes ahead of her family members in her manners and realization of life. Due to the behavior of her family members at specific occasions, she blushed with shame and vexation helplessly. Additionally, Elizabeth expresses her feeling directly with a sharp tongue, it always shocks those who trust that women can't be permitted such freedom.

During her conversation with Lady Catherine, who is an effective lady, she answers quite a lot of questions with some scruple and declares her opinion on the social standards. One such statement of Elizabeth is that transparently challenges social standards with respect to female behavior; she says that the property inherited from the father equally belongs to his children whether male or female, elder or younger. Lady Catherine is puzzled by such an answer. When Lady Catherine finds out that the five daughters of Mr. Bennet have been raised without a governess, she is shocked as it cannot be even thought of at that particular time, that young ladies have not been shown required aptitudes, for example, drawing and playing an instrument.

Elizabeth thinks that it's irrelevant and says, compared with some families we were grown individually and were always pushed to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle could act so. In other words, according to Elizabeth perusing is the thing that feeds the brain and other skills that women are forced to learn are waste and unnecessary. Elizabeth's conclusion is the product of common sense and brilliance not of social traditions. Elizabeth, believed herself to be the first being who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence, thus proving herself to be an exact example of modern woman who does not care about class and rank.

Likewise, even the mental temperament of Elizabeth towards marriage is distinctive. She wants to marry out of pure love and affection, not simply with the goal that she would be financially secured. Her romantic aspirations is entirely different from the other people in the society. Mr. Collins, one who is going to acquire the property of Mr. Bennet after his death, proposes to Elizabeth but she rejects his proposal and this incident prove as of how excellent Elizabeth is. He trusts that she pretends to be unwinnable and that is when Elizabeth expresses her thoughts that she is not one of those young women who are so daring as to risk their joy on the chance of being asked a second time. And she is perfectly serious in her refusal. She says Mr. Collins will not be able to make her happy. Elizabeth also believes that she is the last woman in the world who would think like this.

Elizabeth explains the true purpose of marriage, something that neither her mother nor her sisters do. When she rejects Mr. Collins, her mother is angry because the society recommends that all women accept the marriage proposal they receive without any frustration. Elizabeth even rejects Mr. Darcy's first proposal as she believes him to be evil and unethical person. He

is more rich and wealthier than Mr. Bingley, however it makes no difference to her since Elizabeth sees that a loss of her self-esteem in the name of security is worse than being a money less spinster. Her state of mind on wedding is visible from the way she talks with Charlotte, her dearest friend, when she hears that Charlotte has accepted Mr. Collins' proposal. Mary Astell similar to Elizabeth Bennet says that when a woman is married she put 'herself entirely into her husband's power, and if the matrimonial yoke be grievous, neither law nor custom affords her that redress which a man obtains' (p. 27).

Elizabeth now assumes Charlotte, the would be of Mr. Collins, as the most humiliating picture! She feels sorry about her companion since she know that she and her future spouse will never love each other. Charlotte is willing to marry Mr. Collins, knowing well that he does not love her and she could never love him.

Besides, Elizabeth herself feels whether her judgments are unreasonable and blinded by her pride, she is willing and admits that she isn't right. As she realises that Wickham has tricked her and cheated her about Darcy's nature, but infact Darcy was a reasonable man, she grows absolutely ashamed of herself.

She tries to be logical towards everybody and that is the reason she feels that she has done wrong to Darcy. Later on, when Lady Catherine defies her as she believes that Elizabeth and Darcy will get married, Elizabeth is not afraid of her. Lady Catherine expresses that their marriage would be the most unsuccessful match; yet, Elizabeth does not share that opinion she says there's no problem in marrying Darcy. He is a gentleman and she is a gentleman's daughter; therefore they are equal. In other words, Elizabeth does not think about wealth and does not consider Mr. Darcy as her superior; she believes them to be of equivalent worth.

When Lady Catherine asks that she should reject Darcy, Elizabeth expels her request. Elizabeth is not a lady whom someone could easily frighten and she strongly fights for what she needs and has confidence in herself and that is Mr. Darcy and her affection for him. Again, Elizabeth proves to be independent and brave woman who does not think about the opinion of others; she does what was supposed to be the best for her. According to Jennifer Kloester "In Georgette Heyer's Regency World" Lady Catherine stays an exact example of the authority of higher class people over the lower class, Class was defined primarily by birth, title, wealth, property and occupation, and there were many distinctions—some subtle, others obvious—within each level of society.

Jane Bennet is the eldest daughter of Mrs and Mr. Bennet. She is 23 and knows that she has reached the age necessary, for her to marry. She is the prettiest young lady in the area; even Mr. Bingley states that. When people ask him who he thoughts to be the prettiest lady around, he replies as the eldest Miss Bennet without a doubt. She is pretty and always thinks the best of other people, which makes her noble in specific cases.

For instance, there's a point where she finds out about Wickham's true nature. In addition, she has the best opinion of Mr. Bingley's sisters and trusts them to affirm of her. But the sisters of Bingley don't consider her to be a suitable match to their brother, so they forcefully take him away from the

Netherfield. When they leave, Jane is broken, however she doesn't grieve for this loss.

Jane ends up being a strong lady who decides to hide her sorrow. She is not at all interested on Mr. Bingley's fortune; she truly adores him: Jane loves and admires Mr. Bingley not for his yearly income, but for his person and character. Therefore, Jane Austen shows that the eldest Bennet sister is impressed by social status alone. Those emotions don't fade as the time passes by: She still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Jane is same to that of Elizabeth with regards to love; she lean more towards adoration over financial security and, unlike her mother and other women, she does not think about money.

Charlotte Lucas is to be mentioned as she represents traditional women who don't seem to be interested on marrying out of adoration. She does not find herself to be recommended and infact had fewer options on the marriage front. She is 27 years of age and is assumed to be a spinster. She accepts Mr. Collins' proposal without any reconsideration. Clearly she doesn't care for his character however she believes that she can't do better than him. She only thinks about the position that she is going to gain once she is becoming a married woman. She explains to Elizabeth her decision to marry stating:

"I am not romantic, you know, I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collin's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (Pride and Prejudice, 115).

Charlotte doesn't understand that her economic ambitions deny her of a chance to be happily married and emotionally attached to her husband. At last, she pays the worth for her decision as she turns into a worthless shallow person as he's. Accordingly, Austen's novel makes it clear that, in line with the social standards of the time; dependent women have no chance of living a satisfied and a happy life.

Lydia and Kitty are the two youngest sisters in the family of Bennet. Kitty is seventeen and Lydia is fifteen years of age. They are not at all wise and behave like most of the teenagers. Mr. Bennet depicts them as being two silly girls in the country. Their life centres on balls and also the military. They behave abruptly and aren't interested on anything apart from the soldiers. Lydia is far more terrible than Kitty, as her free spirits prompts the most disgraceful act of all. She flees with Mr. Wickham, and imperil the position of her sisters on the marriage market since nobody would marry them if the news of her escape came to light. However, Lydia doesn't pay any interest in that matter; she is glad to be a married woman.

Her reckless conduct demonstrates how social standards with regard to marriage make young women do foolish things and enter a marriage they'll someday surely regret.

3. Conclusion

Jane Austen condemns society's construct of marriage and she questions the negative stereotypical gender discrimination through the characters Bennetts, the Collins and the Wickhams. The society considered women as objects and beautiful beings having no rights. She describes how traditional models of marriage were established and how it failed to protect the

dignity of each gender and help them cope up with the social needs. The society really don't know what an ideal marriage is? Through the marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth, Austen portrays an opposite picture of the established norms and draws a new model that is built on understanding, love and respect irrespective of money and property. She shows us how love can win even if it goes through many strange, hard and difficult situations. It's not the rules and prejudices of society that keeps the world moving but it's the love for one another and the respect for other person's rights which makes our life worth living.

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