

Marriage as Financial Contract in Jane Austen's Pride and prejudice

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Abstract - Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel which depicts the status of 19th century women's position and how marriage is considered a chance as well as a monetary affair in the upper class society. Money is given priority rather than love, security rather than compatibility, where marriage ends up disastrous. The novel tries to label love as an amalgamation of affluence and charisma which is a common feature in all eras. The autonomy of woman is also defined in terms of excessive individuality to fulfill her aspirations.

Key words: women position, 19th century, Money, love, attractiveness, aspirations

I. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and Prejudice is Jane Austen's observation of 19th century women's position, how marriage is considered an obligation for their subjugation.. This point is made crystal clear from the go. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"(1).

The true instigation of marriage is clearly evident in the words of Lady Catherine that the happiness in marriage is strictly a matter of chance. Money matters most rather than love, security rather than compatibility. The novel revolves around the feeling of affection for the sake of riches and beauty. Grab Ginger in his article "Money & Marriage" states: "In the world of this novel, marriage is a market, and the young women are its merchandise" (1).

The mutual benefit is concerned for both man and woman in choosing their spouse. An attractive woman can attract a wealthy suitor with her beauty and a wealthy suitor should be careful, and conscious of his large fortune that he can actively pursue a woman of his own choice, and no woman can turn down his proposal. Jane's heroine Elizabeth was totally different from this socio stereotype thinking. Here we can see how least the role of love and character plays. Jane Austin depicts this through the character of Darcy. The first proposal of Darcy to Elizabeth is a clear case in point that the proposal was very much lacking the love element. Darcy enters the hall pondering that an affluent class person like him should never enter into wedlock with a mediocre person like Elizabeth. He is totally convinced that no woman would turn down a wedding with an intolerable person like him. Nevertheless, it is the turn of Darcy to be shell-shocked when Elizabeth turns down his proposal. He then realizes that money is not the be all and end all of all human

relations, especially when it comes to wedding. Grab Ginger in his article "Money & Marriage" states "Pompous, shallow, ignorant, boring and self-satisfied, Mr. Collins, in terms of his financial position and Elizabeth's prospects, is a good catch"(1). Due to this reason he finds himself blindly in love with Elizabeth. Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke in his article "Jane Austen Illusion and Reality" states: " Jane was, indeed, exceptionally discreet about her heroines' family lives after marriage. Jane Eyre's depiction of a person's life and the passions and instincts that go with can be instantaneously verified alongside the knowhow- and Jane knew it. She was intelligent enough to produce the false impression of pragmatism by the remarkably delicate use of individual occurrence and Jane's characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are echoes of 19th century women" (12).

II. CHARACTERIZATION

Mrs. Bennett's marriage is built on one foundation that is financial gain. In the guise of love, she entices Mr. Bennett by pretending to keep her mouth shut and wore a smiling face. She was in love with the riches that go with him not his true self. She wants her daughters to follow her in any given condition. She wants to see her daughters get wed with a man of large fortune. She is very much upset when Elizabeth turned down the offer of Collins for the reason that if she marries him the entire estate would be in her family's possession. It is her sheer importance than Elizabeth's feelings and emotions. Laski in his article "Jane Austen and her World" asserts : "She found Darcy rather unpleasant, but would have been furious if Elizabeth had told her that she had turned Darcy's marriage proposal down. Every action taken by her in the novel is directly intended to undermine her daughter's marriages, guiding them toward financial gain" (68).

Charlotte Lucas represents the group of women adjusts with conditions always. They always underestimate their wit. Their whole and sole ambition is to survive themselves, only option left for them is to keep harmonize their attitude with others attitude, and should not use more intelligence than in need to study their life partner. She has neither extreme beauty nor wealth. We can see the way of their thinking in the words of Charlotte Lucas that she could not win the heart of her husband with the sense of humor that Elizabeth is gifted with.

In the course of her talk with Elizabeth, Charlotte opines that it is not going to help in trying to understand a person from close quarters as the person she would marry would be known to her in the course of their marriage.

Charlotte even goes as far as to say that, "...it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life"(21). Elizabeth is surprised as Charlotte accepts Mr. Collin's wedding offer as she could not comprehend Charlotte's dilemma, "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 is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state," (95). She can't aspire for a handsome and a well to do husband like Elizabeth, but Jane can, as she doesn't possess assets. On the other hand she can hope for a secure and a comfortable life.

Elizabeth is not a passionate and love filled woman unlike Charlotte. Elizabeth has a clear idea of a model marriage and that she had made up her mind to marry for the sake of love, not for other reasons. Jane Austen portrays the character of Elizabeth as she tries to express her inherent opinions through the main character, and contrasts the character of Charlotte as immoral. The writer is also of the opinion that hasty decisions taken at the time of marriage bearing in mind the monetary aspects are bound to result in despondency.

To wrap up Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the underlying fact about a wedding that takes place on the commercial angle will end up unsuccessfully. She was also of the opinion that a wedding which is built around love and passion alone would not end up on a successful note. Hence, a balance of the two must be met, a balance between money and love and affection will lead to happiness and security.

III. DELIMITS

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen takes reader back to the eighteenth century. This is a time and place in which women are only wives. A wife exists for a good reputation and for the husband. Before a woman is married, they are not complete. It brings shame to the family if a daughter of a certain age is not married. The Bennett's daughters felt this pressure to marry throughout the entire novel. They are

constantly judged by their actions; whether they are well mannered, educated and how they present themselves. *Pride and Prejudice* makes a social comment of the mindless and shallow role of women in society. Austen uses characterization, diction and juxtaposition to depict the roles of different eighteenth century women.

Marriage: Escape of social responsibility

As was the norm of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was wise on the part of the women folk to take a look at the financial background of the groom into consideration, before entering into wedlock. Marriage should bring about a positive change in the lives of women to lead a life free of financial worries. This is why marriage is so important in the lives of women especially the economically underprivileged, though they love their life partner. She gives insight to the wrongful treatment and upbringing of women in this time. Austen argues that women should make an effort to begin living for them and for love.

Marry to be Happy vs. Happy to marry

Austen makes many social criticisms in her novel about marriage. In the time period, many women have the idea that one must marry to be happy. However, Elizabeth Bennet proves that it is exactly the other way around. One must be happy to marry. She refuses Mr. Collins after his multiple proposals because she knows she is not in love with him. The character Charlotte Lucas is used to explain the stereotypical thoughts on marriage of an eighteenth century woman. "I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, 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" (22.3).

IV. THE THEME OF CLASS:

The theme of class is clearly demarcated and the lines are clearly drawn between the haves and the have not's. Bennett's are said to be the middle class people who would like to mingle with the upper classes Bingley's and Darcy's. Jane Austen criticizes the class distinction through Mr. Collins, who is shown as idling away his time flattering the upper classes. Austen depicts other characters similar to Mr. Collins who crave for the company of the have's like Mr. Darcy, Miss. Bingley, Wickham, who was willing to do anything for the sake of money.

The views expressed through the character Mr. Collins are life's experiences and henceforth they are directed at the society at large. Jane Austen tries to drive home the point that the power of love and affection can alone overcome all other hollow prejudices through the marriages of Darcy-Elizabeth and Bingley- Jane. Austen was criticised for being a classist herself, and critics were of the opinion that the

working classes like the servants were happy with their life. Though, Austen is known for her criticism of the class divide, she was on the upper class side.

V. CONCLUSION

Austen makes it pretty obvious in who “wins out” in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth ends the novel happily married, for love, while those who wanted to marry for the wrong reasons or that were judgmental, Lydia and Miss Bingley, ended up alone. Love is the ultimate prize in the realm of Jane Austen. It sends the clear message that those live with their own convictions and are driven by love will earn happiness in life.

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