



A Study of Family Related Issues Through Anti-Feminist Lens

Sandeep Agrahari¹ & Dr. Khushboo Agrawal²

¹Research Scholar & ²Assistant Professor

Department of English, C.M.P Degree College,

University of Allahabad (A Central University), Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

*As a reflection of the few alternatives open to women, Austen presents marriage as a practical arrangement. Though this suggests a more progressive perspective of love and partnership, her characters frequently seek true affection and harmony. More in line with feminist beliefs, her heroes frequently oppose social norms and promote individual freedom of choice. In several of her works, Jane Austen presents marriage as a way for women to achieve financial security. Arranged marriages for financial gain have been one of the popular motives in society to ensure the well-being of the new family. Austen reveals various marriage realities in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Many of Austen's characters follow conventional norms about marriage and family. It's possible to argue that the focus on getting married properly and preserving social status perpetuates conventional gender norms suggesting that women's value is primarily determined by their ability to find a good spouse. Grounded in social conventions many of the extrovert characters don't show any growth. For instance, in *Emma*, Harriet Smith's capacity to advance socially is reliant on her ability to find a fulfilling marriage, illustrating the restrictions imposed on women's liberty.*

Keywords: *Love, Matrimony, Property, Family, Security*

Discussion

The opposing school of thinking and behaviour against feminism is known as antifeminism. Its conceptual scope is as broad as the areas in which feminism intervenes, and it has developed throughout time to challenge the rights that women have progressively gained. A periodisation that logically follows the history of feminism, whose "first wave" swept throughout Europe from the late nineteenth century to the early 1960s, is necessary due to the subject's breadth.

When "feminism" became widely used in the late nineteenth century, the term "antifeminism" was coined. Although it also drew in other schools of thought, antifeminism was politically well-integrated into the framework of European rights. For instance, the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), known as the "father of anarchism," came out as a defender of male dominance, antifeminist, and sexist in the middle of the 1800s. The Italian futurists of the early twentieth century sought to "glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism,

patriotism [...] and contempt for women” (Manifesto of Futurism, 1912). Therefore, antifeminism, while generally justified in the defence of tradition, was also adaptable enough to become a feature of modernity.

In order to study women against men or men against women the most appropriate platform that comes to mind is marriage. It is here that we find two genders coming across and in parallel with society to lead their life as a unit called family. Friedrich Engels, a Marxist critic, argued that marriage's origins were not rooted in love but rather in private property rights. Monogamous marriage became an institution to establish the family unit and secure a system for handling private property and its inheritance. Their showcases that marriages were like a bond followed by unsaid terms and conditions. Engels's words also clarify that monogamous marriage worked as institution to cater society a system of uniformity, stability and reliability regarding private property and its inheritance. Living under defined roles makes both genders stereotype like women as housewives and men as family providers. This has been criticized by Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex* posits that marriage is an oppressive institution that can lead to alienation for both men and women. According to her, men may become trapped in their roles as family providers, while women may become reliant on their husbands. Additionally, children may become the target of their parents' frustrations when the stresses of marriage become too much to bear. She argues that any institution that forces people to remain in a relationship against their will is inherently flawed.

Love is commonly perceived as an emotion, characterized by feelings rather than reasons, and is thought to reside in the heart rather than the head. Consequently, love is commonly regarded as a passion, an experience in which individuals are passive, falling into it rather than actively pursuing it. Whereas marriages fail to provide such types of space and experience. It's a common belief love is beyond human control, non-voluntary, and even a mystery or force that exceeds human comprehension. Still, it is also shared by many philosophers like Laurence Thomas said that love cannot be described as rational or irrational whereas Plato believed that love can cause feelings like attraction and pleasure, but that these feelings are less important than the relationships that form as a result. Furthermore, love is often considered particularly powerful, with the ability to influence thought, feeling, and decision-making significantly. This potent emotion is described as a kind of irrational excess that is imposed upon an individual.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is commonly recognized as a work that critiques the societal norms of the early 19th century while exploring the limitations faced by women. Although the novel is not typically considered antifeminist, we interpret certain aspects of the story as reflecting antifeminist ideas when viewed through a modern feminist lens. In a scene, Darcy's assistant proclaims what various antifeminists proclaimed after the 1960's:

“A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved” (Austen, 1813, p. 40).

It is important to distinguish between the portrayal of marriage in the novel and any potential antifeminist elements. While the novel explores societal pressures and expectations related to marriage, it does so in a nuanced way that commentates on the limitations faced by women. Marriage is a fundamental social institution in the society depicted in the novel, and it is not only about love but also about economic security, social status, and the prospects of the characters. The emphasis on marriage in the novel reflects the realities of the time. *Pride and Prejudice* can be read as a critique of the societal expectations surrounding marriage. The novel satirizes characters like Mrs Bennet, who are primarily concerned with marrying their daughters off to wealthy suitors, highlighting the superficiality and materialism often associated with marital expectations. In other way we can say that after all the fuss related to

struggle for liberties at the end old ladies search for securities for their daughters. They are never ready for experiments in life.

Pride and Prejudice incorporates satire and irony in portraying characters who marry for practical reasons or social standing rather than romantic love. Such weddings include, for example, Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas's practical union with him. According to social and practical conventions, represented in this scenario, Mr. Bennet supports arranging Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Collins to provide her with financial stability. The novel portrays complex female characters who are relatively more advanced than the older generation women reason being Jane Austen is a feminist writer and it was the age of feminism. The ladies were growing becoming conscious about their rights. Their intelligence, wit, and sense of independence which is a hurdle in the antifeminist perspective of arranged marriage. These characters, like Elizabeth and Jane, challenge their society's traditional roles and expectations, demonstrating that women can possess depth and agency beyond mere marriage prospects. Although the novel does depict marriage as a social reality of its time, with societal pressure and economic considerations playing a significant role, it promotes anti-feminist ideals.

Marriage in Austen's day was frequently more about establishing family ties, social prestige, and financial security than it was about passionate love. Women relied heavily on marriage to secure their financial future, especially those without family backing or independent fortune. The Dashwood sisters, Marianne and Elinor, in *Sense and Sensibility*, personally see the precariousness of their circumstances following the death of their father, which leaves them penniless and dependent on securing favourable marriages. The gender standards of Austen's time define marriage, which is essential to the social order portrayed in the book. Men's roles in society were more flexible, but women in particular were expected to marry well—that is, to secure both love and financial stability. One may argue that this assumption adds to the novel's criticism of gender inequity. The novel examines the various types of marriages that are feasible under these societal restrictions in addition to the pressures women endure to get married. While some characters, like Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, marry for convenience, others, like Elinor and Edward Ferrars, marry for love in spite of adversity. Austen criticises the expectations, conflicting objectives, and injustices that frequently rule marriage rather than merely endorsing the institution as it was practised. Through the sisters Elinor and Marianne, Austen examines two different perspectives on marriage and women in *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne is the embodiment of "sensitivity" (passion, impetuosity, and emotional intensity), whereas Elinor is the embodiment of "sense" (rationality, caution, and restraint). Both characters go through heartbreak and disappointment in their search for love and marriage, but by the book's end, Marianne—whose sensitivity frequently causes her to act without thinking through the repercussions—finds a satisfying relationship with Colonel Brandon, while Elinor's logical approach results in a stable marriage. (find out some antifeminist approach of colonel Brandon)

The aspect of family life in Jane Austen's works that baffles many of her critics is the unusually high rate of inharmonious couples, which extends beyond the death of either the father or mother. *The Bible* often reinforces the subordinate role of women in the home and marriage. Women are socialized to enter into marriage, have children, and perform domestic duties. While some critics have noted the absence of depictions of happy, stable marriages or functioning parents in her novels, Austen's biographer Jane Aiken Hodges asserts that there is no evidence to suggest that her parents were not content with each other. *The Bible* teaches that females are obligated to practice chastity. Because of a divine curse, she must bear children. *The Bible* also teaches that a woman's chastity obligations do not end with marriage. Nonetheless, the actions in Austen's novels are often driven by the dynamics of the main parental couple, who are either alive but ill-suited to each other or have been separated by death after experiencing varying degrees of temperamental incompatibility. For all of man's

leadership and conquest skills, he still needs women as helpmates, which is why women are ordered to become helpmates to their spouses in the Bible. A man can't effectively lead without an able assistant. The quality of a man's leadership may hinge on the quality of his assistant. Women have a significant impact on men, which might have societal repercussions. The Hebrew word for "help" has two meanings: to save or rescue, and to be powerful. Wifely devotion does not equate to servitude, though. The wife is an equal partner in the gospel ministry, even if she has a secondary role. The antifeminist perspective thus helps to balance the role of male and female in making a family. Antifeminism revives what Bible preaches. Coordination and cooperation is needed between both the genders in maintaining families in the society. Any of the one's liberty will spoil the balance in long run.

It is worth noting that only two of Austen's six novels depict a central family with two loving parents. R. W. Chapman also made this observation in his work *Jane Austen, Facts and Problems*. The second thing to think about is that, except for *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen's love partners vary greatly in terms of morality, intelligence, or both. According to Chapman, Austen could have purposefully favoured herself by either dying one parent before the other's character is revealed or by giving characters parents who aren't compatible. Fathers, together with their wives, are the primary educators in their children's lives. Christian parents have a moral obligation to train their children alongside them. *The Bible* makes it clear that parents are the children's first and most influential teachers (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6; Psalm 78:3-8; Proverbs 1:8; Ephesians 6:4).

Traditional gender norms may be defended by antifeminists as necessary for healthy families. They typically agree with the traditional gender roles of a male earner providing for the family monetarily and a female homemaker caring for children and the elderly. Many people who identify as antifeminist believe that men and women are fundamentally different and should occupy distinct social roles. In each of the six novels and even in the early novella *Lady Susan*, the characters' parents are depicted as follows: In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood have a loving mother and a deceased father. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the two main protagonists in *Sense and Sensibility*, both have a devoted mother named Mrs. Dashwood, but their father, Mr. Henry Dashwood, is no longer with them. This scenario is significant since inheritance rules pose financial troubles for the Dashwood family after his death. Mr Dashwood's estate transfers to his son from his previous marriage, John Dashwood, under the severely gendered inheritance rules of the time, leaving his second wife, Mrs Dashwood, and her children with very little financial stability. Because it highlights the little social and economic influence women had at the time, this lack of inheritance is an important part of the plot. Given that women of their social class have limited choices for independent riches, the Dashwood sisters—Elinor, who is pragmatic and calm, and Marianne, who is more emotional and impulsive—must traverse a culture that heavily emphasises marriage as the way to financial stability.

Their father's absence emphasises how vulnerable women were in the early 19th century, particularly when their main source of income (marriage or inheritance) was constrained. The novel's examination of subjects like love, marriage, societal expectations, and the divergent personalities of Elinor and Marianne as they attempt to navigate this society is set against this backdrop.

At the same time, Edward Ferrars also has a loving mother and a deceased father. Like Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, Edward has a father who has passed away and a devoted mother named Mrs Ferrars. His predicament is difficult since, despite her fondness, his mother has a big impact on his life, particularly when it comes to marriage. Due to financial considerations, his mother encourages Edward's initial engagement with Lucy Steele. In the sense that it limits women's agency and flexibility in selecting mates, the social expectation that women marry for security (and that their families may pressure them towards beneficial marriages) can be viewed

as anti-feminist. Although Edward's predicament illustrates how both men and women were bound by family expectations, the novel's deeper criticism is on how women like Lucy are forced into marriages that are driven more by money than by love or affection.

Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* has two loving parents who play a relatively minor role in the story. Although they are very minor characters in the book, Catherine Morland has two devoted parents. Despite being helpful, they don't have a major story point. Like many of Austen's heroines, Catherine is a young lady whose initial innocence and lack of life experience make her vulnerable to romantic delusions (particularly because of her love of gothic books). Although Catherine is not subjected to strict limitations by her family, the book challenges traditional standards around women's marital expectations and how these marriages frequently impact women's social standing. Although Catherine's story is more centred on personal development and the criticisms of the "gothic" genre than on social issues like marriage and inheritance, which frequently impacted the lives of Austen's other heroines, the lack of major family conflict in her case does not necessarily lessen the possibility of antifeminist ideas.

Henry Tilney, the hero, has a loving mother and a deceased father. Catherine's love interest, Henry Tilney, too has a father who passed away and a loving mother. His father's passing gives him greater independence and social status (since his family is well-established and affluent), and it is evident that his mother loves him. Although Henry's circumstances don't specifically address antifeminist issues, the expectations of the time regarding gender roles are reflected in his relationship with Catherine and the societal conventions around marriage and propriety. Since his family's riches and prestige enable him to be more autonomous than many of the women in the novel, whose fortunes frequently depend on obtaining a successful marriage, Henry is in many ways a result of these expectations. The novel's social critique focuses more on the restricted agency of women like Catherine, whose decisions are influenced by social constraints and romantic aspirations than it does on Henry's position.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet has two loving parents, while Fitzwilliam Darcy has two deceased parents. The second oldest of the five Bennet sisters, Elizabeth comes from a very poor home. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, are devoted, nevertheless. Her mother is more focused on finding her daughters favourable marriages (especially to wealthy men) than her father, who is kind and encouraging. Because it centres women's value on their capacity to form successful marriages rather than their brains, independence, or moral worth, Mrs Bennet's fixation on marriage as the main objective for her daughters, regardless of their happiness, indicates an antifeminist mindset. However, Elizabeth defies these gender norms by turning down marriage proposals from men she doesn't love, particularly Mr. Collins, who stands for a more conventional and pragmatic marital philosophy. In contrast to the dominant societal standards of her era, which required women to put marriage above all else, she insisted on being married for love and refused to do so out of convenience or financial security. In a society where women's value was frequently determined by their marital status, Elizabeth's quest is one of regaining her autonomy and self-respect.

Because both of his parents have passed away, Mr. Darcy has a sizable estate, a position of authority and influence, and some social liberty. Darcy's life exhibits a degree of relative independence about gender roles. He is not subject to the same social restrictions that women like Elizabeth are, and he is expected to inherit, run, and safeguard his inheritance. The disparity between Darcy's relative freedom and Elizabeth's lack of financial independence—her family's future depends on favourable marriages—highlights the novel's gender-based injustices.

Darcy, as a male, is able to make his own choices without the same pressures that women face regarding marriage and financial security. While Darcy's wealth and social position allow him more independence, Elizabeth's struggle to assert her autonomy in a society where women are

often treated as dependent or second-class citizens showcases some of the **antifeminist** elements Austen critiques in her works.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price has two biological parents who are still alive, as well as two adoptive parents, Bertram, and their biological son, Edmund, who is the hero of the story. After being taken from her impoverished family at a young age, Fanny Price is raised by her aunt and uncle, the Bertrams. The fact that Fanny has both biological parents—her mother, Lady Bertram, and her father, who is mostly absent from her life because of his financial irresponsibility—as well as adoptive parents—the Bertrams—who are well-off and have a big impact on her life makes her circumstances more complicated. In many respects, Fanny is at the mercy of the Bertrams, who adopt her more out of duty than love. Despite coming from a richer family, Fanny has no official claim to the estate and must rely on her actions to gain acceptance, making her social standing unstable. One of the main themes of the book is Fanny's lack of autonomy. She is frequently contrasted with Edmund Bertram, her adopted cousin, who serves as the story's ideal male protagonist. As part of her character development, Fanny is frequently shown as shy and meek, but this also illustrates how women like her were limited by the expectations of their social status. Fanny's poverty and reliance on the Bertrams, particularly her aunt, highlight the antifeminist constraints that women in her culture faced.

An intriguing lens through which to analyse the possible antifeminism in Jane Austen's books is Richard Simpson's interpretation of her writings, in which he emphasises the concept of a "ordered society of families" with parents who have been married for a long time. Simpson contends that the stability and prosperity of the family, in which the parents—particularly the father—play crucial roles in determining the characters' fates, form the basis of Austen's stories. Simpson's theory revolves around the premise that the family is not just a major institution but also a patriarchal, orderly one in Austen's books. In many respects, the long-married moms and dads in Austen's universe represent the stability of society. Their parental position frequently influences the protagonists' fortunes, which in turn mirror the idealised roles of the young heirs or heroines entering maturity. For instance:

Despite its flaws, Elizabeth Bennet's family in *Pride and Prejudice* follows the fundamental framework of a two-parent household (although Mr. Bennet is frequently shown as incompetent and Mrs. Bennet is controlling).

Since the girls' futures depend on the family's ability to find favourable marriages, the Dashwood family—which includes both a mother and a father, albeit after the father's death—is also essential to the storyline of *Sense and Sensibility*.

In *Emma*, the titular heroine is brought up by her father, Mr. Woodhouse, in a very stable, although slightly strange, environment, and Emma serves as both a daughter and a benefactor in her family. According to Simpson's perspective, the concept of a "well-ordered" family reflects moral and social stability, with parents finding fulfilment in raising and leading their kids, especially towards happy marriages. In other words, when the correct matches are made and the hero or heroine finds a mate who fits socially, ethically, and financially, the social order is maintained. The happy endings of the novel frequently depend on this fulfilment being accomplished.

Because it highlights the patriarchal systems of the era, where women's primary roles and futures were defined by their relationship with men—either as wives or daughters—Richard Simpson's interpretation of Jane Austen's work, which emphasises the "ordered society of families" with long-married fathers and mothers, can in fact be linked to antifeminism. Marriage becomes the primary issue for the heroines' futures in Austen's works because the family is not just an emotional unit but also a societal unit that imposes restrictions on women's agency. Even though Austen criticises many elements of this system, particularly the strict expectations that are put on women, her novels nevertheless depict a society in which a

woman's worth is primarily based on her family status and her capacity for successful marriage. In this way, Austen's depiction of how the family structure restricts women's responsibilities, possibilities, and social mobility—regardless of their brilliance, wit, or character—is what constitutes antifeminist components in her writing. Even Austen's "successful" heroines derive their sense of fulfilment and social standing from marriage, which serves to further the societal structure that fundamentally limits women's freedom and self-determination.

References

- Beauvoir, S. D. (1953). *The Second Sex*. Trans. and ed. H.M Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape. Print.
- Daiches, D. (1982). *A Critical History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers. Pvt. Ltd. Print.
- “Antifeminist” (1989). Def. A. The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. (Print)
- Bilger, Audrey. “Antifeminism.” *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. Ed.
- Elizabeth, K. W. (2009). New York: Routledge. Pp. 27-28. (Print)
- Feminist Dictionary [A]. (1985). Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler. Boston: Pandora P. (Print).
- Austen, J. (2003). *Northanger Abbey*. Delhi: Rohan Book Company. Print.
- Carver, K., Joyner, K. & Udry, J. R. (2003). National estimates of adolescent romantic relationships In: Florsheim P, editor. *Adolescent Romantic Relations and Sexual Behavior: Theory, Research, and Practical Implications* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. p. 23–56
- Fisher, H. E., Aronm, A., Mashek, D., Li, H., & Brown, L.L. (2002). Defining the brain systems of lust, romantic attraction, and attachment *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 31:413–9.
- Kim, H. K., McKenry, P. C. (2002). The relationship between marriage and psychological well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*. 23:885–911.
- Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: T. Egerton.
- Johnson, C. (2010). *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Haggerty, G. (2018). *Pride and Prejudice: An Overview*. In *Bloom's Literature*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Austen, J. (2014). *Sense and Sensibility*. Vintage Classics.
- Austen, J. (1983). *Pride and Prejudice*. Bantam Classics.
- Austen, J. (2018). *Emma*. Yunan People’s Publishing House.
- Austen, J. (2007). *Northanger Abbey*. Vintage Classics.
- Austen, J. (2014). *Persuasion*. Vintage Publishing, 2014.
- Austen, J. (2007). *Mansfield Park*. Vintage Classics.
- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press.
- Waldron, M. (2001). *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time*. Cambridge University Press.
- Madsen, Deborah, L. (2006). *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Chaudhari, A. & Austen, J. (2021). *Novels: A Case Study from Feminist Perspective*.
- Copeland, E. & McMaster, J. (1997). "The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen." Cambridge University Press.
- Deresiewicz, W. (2004). "Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets." Columbia University Press.
- Ferguson, F. (2004). "Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action." University of Chicago Press.
- Galperin, W. H. (2003). "The Historical Austen." University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Johnson, C. L. *Jane Austen: Women, politics, and the novel*. University of Chicago Press.

- Johnson, Claudia, L. (2011). "The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen, 2nd edition." Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, V. (1990). *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*. Routledge.
- Kaplan, D. (1992). "Jane Austen Among Women." Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kelly, G. (1993). "Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827." Clarendon Press.
- Le Faye, D. (1995). "Jane Austen's Letters." Oxford University Press.
- Moler, K. L. (1990). *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion*. University of Delaware Press.
- Poplawski, P. (1998). *A Jane Austen Encyclopedia*. Greenwood Press.
- Rendall, J. (1985). *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the United States, 1780-1860*. Macmillan.
- Ross, J. (2003). *Jane Austen: A Companion*. Oxford University Press.
- Southam, B. (2005). *Jane Austen and the Navy*. Hambledon Continuum.
- Todd, J. (2005). "Jane Austen in Context." Cambridge University Press.
- Tuite, C. (2002). *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wiltshire, J. (1992). *Jane Austen and the Body: The Picture of Health*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jamoussi, Z. (2022). *Individual, Family and Society in Jane Austen's Works*. Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, Ne6 2PA, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Online Sources

- <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://historylizzie.co.uk/2019/04/25/review-only-a-novel-the-double-life-of-jane-austen-by-jane-aiken-hodge/&ved=2ahUKEwighL6i2JmJAxVlSmwGHR-OwsQFnoECBQQAQ&usg=AOvVaw318U9w9BScQ1Quc4IfOHcY>
- <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=http://sreekumarenglishliterature.blogspot.com/2016/12/regulated-hatred-aspect-of-work-of-jane.html&ved=2ahUKEwj05aWY2ZmJAxWY4zgGHZSAKrEQFnoECBIQAQ&usg=AOvVaw1qXb2iqLRpuJLSMjEY0Ciz>