



Feminist Interpretation in Jane Austen's Novels

By

Dr. Nisha Rani

Extension Lecturer in English

Govt. College for Women

Tosham

Abstract

This research paper focuses to analyze feminist viewpoints and to find out the issues of feminism that emanate in Jane Austen's novels. As a famous 19th Century novelist Jane Austen certified to demonstrate the realities of women in her time. One of most conceivable and credible social phenomena is gender inequality which is based on feminism thoughts. This study is premeditated to elaborate and compare how feminism thoughts and gender inequality take place in various literary works. There are several women novelists among the distinguished English novelists of the 19th century. Women novelists began to appear in English during the second half of the 18th century. But some brilliant women of the 19th century made such augmentation to the development of the English novel that they have justifiably won their places in the front ranks of the gifted realists. Jane Austen is one of these exceptional women novelists. The prevailing theme in all Austen's works consists of the marriages of young women and the general social class structure of England in the 19th Century. Jane Austen was a distinguished female novelist who wrote under her own name which can be seen as an important feminist quality. She accomplished six novels in which she created women as centered in the thoughts, desires and behaviors. Besides new contraption in the 19th Century literature have also been specified in this study. Many writers use novel to share their ideas on something. An English novelist Austen shares her ideas about feminism in her novel entitled *Pride and Prejudice* which is first published in 1813. The story features the problems of treatment toward women in the society. Jane Austen says that women are contemplated differently in society and they face gender difference, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression.

INTRODUCTION

The 19th Century has delivered new orientation to literature and is the most important period in many countries as well as England's literary history. Although Feminism attained popularity in the second half of the 20th Century, it is easy to say that the famous 19th Century woman novelist Jane Austen was also a feminist. Feminism is a philosophy in which women and their augmentations are appreciated. It is based on social, political and economic equality for women. Feminists can be anyone in the population, men, women, girls or boys. Feminism can also be purported as a movement or a revolution that incorporates women and men who wish the world to be equal without perimeter. These perimeter or horizon are better known as discrimination and inclination against gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status and economic status. Everyone considers the world with his or her own sense of gender and equality. Feminists consider the world as being unequal. They desire to see the gender gap and the idea that men are superior to women depreciated.

The main objective of this research paper is to find out the issues of feminism which happen in the novels of Jane Austen and the effects of feminism faced by the main character of *Pride and Prejudice*. Men and women are established in the society not only differently but also unequally. Especially women get less substantial resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-realization than men and share their social position based on their class, race, occupation, identity, religion, education, nationality or other any social significant factors. The issues of feminism in the novel were because of gender inequality that could be seen in the system of embroilment and the lack of opportunity of self-realization. The system of embroilment in *Pride and Prejudice* was the future constraint of ownership of family estate to particular consanguinity. It was limited to male heirs. Mr. Bennet's his estate was given to Mr. Collins as Mr. Bennet does not have a son. Woman gains less opportunity for doing self realization as a woman experienced the issue of matchmaking to secure family's economy so woman cannot freely choose her partner and is always dependent on the family choice. The effect of feminism in system of embroilment was the claim of individualism in expressing the right to choose and determine her own life though she experienced quarrel with her mother. The effect of feminism in self-realization was the claim of individualism as she can develop her individuality by speaking frankly about her feelings and she also expresses her freedom in expressing herself as woman who has moral and right to speak and do what she has to do to develop herself as a human being. In Jane Austen's novel, *Sense and Sensibility* she portrays feminism through the challenges women may face in marriage. Austen's portrayal of her characters Elinor and Marianne purport the struggles and pressures women face. These challenges can be seen through inheritance, Elinor and Marianne's approach to love and marriage and a man's ability to ruin or help women. The family succession of resources typically went to the first-born son or the next male heir. In the case of John Dashwood, he inherited Norland estate after the death of his father leaving his half-sisters and stepmother "to quit the neighborhood Norland" and move to a small cottage in Devonshire. The succession of "Norland estate was not so really important as to his sisters; for their fortune, independent of what might arise to them from their father's inheriting that property, could be but small" (Austen 6).

Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* takes place in a world where there are limited roles and opportunities for women in society. Austen's female characters do not inherit property and cannot have careers. Their futures and fortunes depend almost exclusively on the men they marry and they are expected to be dutiful upstanding ladies of society. But Austen depicts her female characters as thoughtful, clever, ambitious and sometimes scheming women. Even while living within a male-dominated world, characters like Lucy, Fanny, and Mrs. Ferrars are able to exert some power and agency. Lucy persistently chases after what she wants, even speaking of "conquests" of men and eventually does find herself with a suitably wealthy husband in Robert Ferrars. Meanwhile Fanny practically controls her husband persuading him not to give any money to his half-sisters at the beginning of the novel and not to invite them to stay with them in London. And Mrs. Ferrars holds power insofar as she determines whether her sons inherit their family fortune and tries to determine their courses of action. These are not the novel's most admirable characters but they do illustrate how women can find some power and agency even within a sexist society that boxes women into limited gender roles. Other female characters like Mrs. Jennings also find ways of attaining some power through orchestrating important social interactions like dances, dinners and parties.

But despite these examples women of the novel are often at the mercy of the male-dominated society in which they live. Eliza and her daughter who is named Eliza and who is abandoned by Willoughby exemplify this. Without husbands they are left in desperate situations. Elinor and Marianne are constantly confronting the threat of this kind of fate should they be unable to find a husband. As Elinor tells Marianne she should be thankful that her time with Willoughby did not leave her like Eliza. Only by marrying eligible men can both sisters get a guarantee of a stable and comfortable life. Austen's novel thus presents the dangers and limited possibilities for women in a rigidly patriarchal society while also showing how some women in such a society can still find ways of exercising certain forms of power and influence.

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a great example of her works that looks at the role of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Austen shows us the gender roles inflicted on women during this time period and how they are anticipated. We see the strict gender roles that women were sewed to and the struggle for identity as a woman. The main central of this novel is the susceptibility of women and the prospects surrounding gender manipulate everything and produce define results. Gender definitely determines and structures the world in which these characters live.

Emma is a story about the everyday life of Emma Woodhouse and her circle of family, friends and acquaintances where nothing ever really seems to happen. The story takes place in a time when many things were happening in the world such as the French Revolution and the industrial revolution. None of the important happenings in the world appear in the story of *Emma*. On the surface it seems to be just a story about everyday life in the village of Highbury. However if one takes a look beneath the surface at the history of writing and writers, in this case, Jane Austen, one would see that Austen is trying to do much more than write a beautiful story

about Emma and her friends. In *Emma* Jane Austen addresses many issues important to women making her a feminist of her time.

Bibliography

1. Austen, Jane. 1984. *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. Great Britain: T.J Press (Padstow) ltd Constitutional Right Foundation Bill of Right in Action.2009.
3. John Stuart Mill and Individual Liberty volume 24.No. 4 Available at <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-right-in-action/bria-24-4-johnstuart-mill-and-individual-liberty.html>
4. Dewi, Dian Purnama Ni Putu. 2010.
5. The Feminism of Virginia Woolf in “Mrs. Dalloway”(thesis). Denpasar: Udayana University Hornby, A S. 1995.
6. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English.
7. New York: Oxford University Press Isherwood, Damon. 2013.
8. What is Feminism? Available at <http://www.worldtransformation.com/what-is-feminism> Lakoff, Robin. 1975.
9. Language and Woman’s Place. United States of America: Perennial Library Megasari, Mira Ni Wayan. 2010.
10. Feminism Reflected in Mary Boleyn in Gregory’s “ The Other Boleyn Girl (thesis). Denpasar: Udayana University Megayanti, Kristina Ni Kadek. 2008.
11. Feminist Character in Trading Up Novel (thesis). Denpasar: Udayana University Ritzer, George.And Goodman, Douglas J.2004.
12. Teori Sosiologi Modern. Jakarta: Kencana Sandbach, Lauren. 2008.
13. Feminism at Work in *Pride and Prejudice*. Available at <http://wmst2010.blogspot.com/2008/04/lauren-sandbach-k.html> TheBestNotes.com Staff.2008.
14. The Best Notes on *Pride and Prejudice*. Available at http://thebestnotes.com/booknotes/Pride_And_Prejudice_Austen/Pride
15. Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. South End Press.
16. Mackie, A. (1999). Possibilities for feminism in ESL education and research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 566-573.
17. Ronald Blythe. (1977). "Introduction" in *Emma* (Penguin Books, Middlesex), Pp.14.
18. Shannon, Edgar F. (1968). ‘Emma: Character and Construction’, *Jane Austen: Emma*, (130-147) London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd.