

PSYCHO-SOCIAL STUDY OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIP OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

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Marriage is frequently regarded as the most important event in the family cycle both for the families of the bride and groom and for the new family formed by the union itself. Marriage is the conspicuous theme of Austen's novels. It enjoys a special place in both personal and social relations of her characters. It is the ritual of marriage which plays the most important part in the lives of her heroines. Robert Hudson and Edwin Arnold opine, "The most urgent preoccupation of her young, well-bred heroines is courtship and finally marriage in the world dominated by men" (Hudson 4). As a creative artist Austen deserves our kudos because of her remarkable treatment of marriage on different basis-on the basis of physical attraction, emotional compatibility, intellectual understanding, mercenary motives and selfish motives. Marriages of five major couples are central to the novel. This research paper concentrates on the psycho-social study of the marriages of younger couples - Mrs. and Mr. Wickham, Mrs. and Mr. Collins, Mrs. and Mr. Bingley and Elizabeth and Darcy.

The marriage of Mrs. and Mr. Wickham is founded on the foundation of external charms, money that is dowry or ransom and to top it all unequal love. And the novelist seems to point out that both outer beauty and dowry are short lived. Consequently marriage based upon these factors lacks long-term warmth and happiness. Moreover, inequality of love also makes the relationship vapid and comparatively short-termed. It will not be out of context to bring Donne's concept of love. Donne has presented an ideal picture of love which in Lydia-Wickham's relationship does not fit. To quote Donne's words from his poem:

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do, slacken, none can die. (Donne 205)

The failure of their married life is hinted through this expression of Jane, "So imprudent a match on both sides" (PAP240). Due to unequal proportion of love and Wickham's selfishness, his love for Lydia soon sinks into indifference, her lasts a little longer.

Walter Allen writes, "Jane Austen was a moralist — an eighteenth century moralist" (Allen 110). This statement seems nowhere more applicable than in Austen's handling of Wickham-Lydia episode. Lives of the people of a community determine as well as reflect a particular society. The novelist critically gives an emphatic statement that Lydia's personal decision of elopement is grave violation of the norms of society. It has adversely affected the reputation of the Bennets. As a result of it almost all the family members are grievously afflicted. At the news of Lydia's elopement Mrs. and Mr. Bennet become miserably ill. Austen vividly

presents their reaction through these words of Jane to Elizabeth. "I never saw any one so shocked. He could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My mother was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion" (PAP 257-258)! Austen is critical of Lydia's misadventure as it brings affliction not only to the family members but also to the strangers like Mr. Darcy, a person of higher status. Darcy listening the news of elopement cries, "I am grieved indeed"(PAP 244). Elizabeth becomes fearful of an unpleasing possibility. She feels that Lydia's elopement may prevent Mr. Darcy from marrying her. Lydia threatens the institution of family and distorts the social order. And such characters as Lydia and Wickham are rejected at once in Austen's fictional world.

Indeed, Miss Austen's presentation of Lydia-Wickham episode is satirical in tone. Lydia's elopement is satirized by using the phrases such as "dreadful new", "scheme of infamy" etc. Lydia's un-loyalty towards does and don'ts of the society is the target of bitter criticism. Her irresponsibility has brought disgrace for the family. Austen intelligently expresses her rejection for Lydia through Mr. Collins. He advises her father, "The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this"(PAP 262). Mr. Walter Allen's these words about Austen's irony would not be irrelevant, "Miss Austen is never angry with her characters, but contempt for the silly and affected and stupid is constant in her work..."(Allen 110).The words like "heinous offence" for Lydia's shameful act expresses Austen's hatred for the former. The novelist's aversion for Lydia is again put into the mouth of Mr. Collins. He writes to her father, "Let me advise you then, my dear Sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence"(PAP 262). It is clear from these words of Mr. Collins that Lydia's act of imprudence and irresponsibility towards society dismisses her right to get affection from parents. The novelist is not at all tolerant of Lydia's serious violation of social code. When Lydia assures her mother of finding husbands for her sisters, Elizabeth, the novelist in garb reacts bluntly: "I thank you for my share of the favor...I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands"(PAP 280). The novelist's resentment for Lydia's in obedience to society can be summed up through these comments of G. Ernest. Baker, "In drawing the hare-brained, vulgar, incontinent Lydia, Jane seems at times to be trembling on the verge of some personal resentment. Regarded less indulgently, Lydia would be a terrible example of moral and mental recklessness"(Baker 92). Through Lydia-Wickham relationship Miss Austen seems to suggest that happiness comes from internal harmony and harmony with the rest of the world. Man is the part of society and to keep harmony between personal and social life, he/she must follow the rules of society. Social order must be maintained. Violation of this order brings misfortune both for the breaker of order and for society. Lydia betrays the social order and its consequences can be beautifully expressed through these comments of David Daiches, "The lot of the "fallen woman" in this kind of society is indeed hopeless, and reckless or stupid playing of one's cards might, as it almost did with Lydia, lead one to that final degradation" (Daiches 753). So what Austen seems to instruct is to use the words of David Monaghan: "Society is kept going by its members continually compromising between the individual impression and desire on the one hand and public tradition and duty on the other. And the basis of such a view, which underlines all Jane Austen's novels, is a clearly apprehended moral vision."(Monaghan 68)

The treatment of marriage in the case of Mrs. and Mr. Collins seems to be totally different from the other cases. Neither the inner beauty as in Jane-Bingley and Elizabeth-Darcy relationship nor the external charm as is found in Mrs. and Mr. Bennet's relationship plays any

role. Both Mrs. and Mr. Collins are practical persons. Mr. Collins needs a wife and Miss Lucas needs a husband and to fulfill their needs they got married. Miss Charlotte is of twenty seven and she is in dire need of a husband so that she can die as a married lady. She marries Mr. Collins not because of love but because of need. Miss Austen critically observes: "Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible, nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband"(PAP110). Their marriage is founded neither on Mr. Collins's sensibility nor on their attachment.

Marriage, based on no definite and solid basis like temperamental affinity or love or mutual understanding cannot be expected to be successful for a long time. So, Elizabeth, the spokesperson of Austen seems to satirize the union of Mrs. and Mr. Collins which is based on mercenary motives. Charlotte does not seem to arrive at suitable marriage with the man whose character and affection she cannot be sure of and who does not seem to be able to offer her a satisfying life of shared interests and mutual love. Such marriages are a threat to the society because marriage by its very nature takes life and breathe from mutual love and understanding. And Mrs. and Mr. Collins's relationship is devoid of these natural blessings.

Jane and Bingley's marriage brings a varied concept of marriage where marriage is treated as an institution based on emotional compatibility. Undoubtedly, inner qualities provide depth to their relation, but they are brought closer to each other by their outer charms also. The relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Bingley is presented in positive light. The personal and social are beautifully united in their relationship. The union of these 'angelic' persons brings pleasure for them as well as for their families. Mrs. and Mr. Bennet are overjoyed. Emotional depth and similarity of nature will make their relationship long lasting. So it can be hoped that they will live happily and peacefully. They along with Elizabeth and Darcy contribute a lot in bringing the middle class and aristocracy closer to each other. So their influence on society is highly admirable, acceptable and beneficial as they bring unity and fraternity.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are considered the most complicated characters in the novel. Their married life seems to be founded not only on the emotional compatibility but on intellectual understanding also. It is the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy which conveys the much favored, much desired and much liked concept of the author. The novelist with the help of dramatic irony beautifully narrates the queer aspect of their relationship. In the beginning they seem at logger heads but in the end no other couple in the novel is gifted with so much harmony as they are. Their love is not Shakespearean love, i.e. love at first sight.

As the novel progresses, mutual understanding grows between Elizabeth and Darcy. Darcy realizes that Elizabeth does not like his pride and arrogance. And to win her, he has to get rid of his pride. He changes his nature as is evident from Elizabeth's astonishment when she exclaims, "Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for me; it cannot be for my sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hansford could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that he should still love me"(PAP 225). This observation is pregnant with irony. Elizabeth speaks that this change cannot be for her but if one reads in between the lines one finds that it is Elizabeth for whom Darcy has changed so much.

Indeed, Elizabeth's visit at Pemberley proves a turning point. Her attitude gets changed. The narration of Mrs. Reynolds, Mr. Darcy's servant changes Elizabeth's attitude towards Mr. Darcy. And Elizabeth utters: "What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant"(PAP 220)? Mrs. Reynolds's praise of Mr. Darcy brings dramatic change in her attitude. Her visit at Pemberley brings the desired effect of the novelist. She becomes mature and starts

understanding the beauties of aristocracy. David Monaghan is reported to have said, "By comparing her impression of Rosings and Pemberley Elizabeth is finally able to achieve a proper understanding of the aristocracy. Darcy's perspective on the middle class is similarly broadened by his meetings with Mr. Collins and Sir William Lucas at Rosings and the Gardiners at Pemberley. Consequently the pattern of approach and reflection which was continued at Rosings is broken at Pemberley when Elizabeth accepts several invitations in rapid succession" (Monaghan 64). Her prejudices about Mr. Darcy are about to leave her. Her visit at Pemberley makes her feel that the tastes and choices of the owner of the house are pleasing and appealing. To quote Austen's observation: "...Elizabeth saw with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance than the furniture of Rosings"(PAP 216).

Elizabeth is Austen's alter-ego and whatever she does is put at the highest pedestal in the novel. Elizabeth and Darcy are united only after their relationship has faced many ups and downs. Now the pride and prejudice on the both sides have left the place and love based on emotional harmony, intellectual engagement and maturity has taken the place. David Monaghan observes, "In Jane Austen's novels difficulties between hero and heroine are usually created and their final union delayed by the immaturity that one or both of them bring into their relationship."(Monaghan 64)

The married life of the hero and the heroine can be expected more stable as it is based not only on the outer charms but also on the inner merits. Outer charms belong to body and so are short lived, but merits belong to soul and so are eternal. And to buttress this, Pope's message in "The Rape of the Lock" can be quoted here. The message is presented by Clarissa. She speaks, "Charms strike the sight but merit wins the soul."(Pope 421)

The social and the personal are so closely bound together in the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy that the larger implications of the marriage into which they finally enter are very evident. Their union contributes a lot to the union of aristocracy and middle class. This union of aristocracy and middle class is not achieved easily; but it is possible, Jane Austen claims, because despite their different social roles, the two groups are united by a shared ideal of concern for others. As Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine: "In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."(PAP 316)

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