

JANE AUSTEN AND HER CONTEMPORARIES – IN RELATION WITH INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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Abstract:

It was in the Twentieth Century when writers began to write from a feminist point of view: the focus of such writings shifted from patriarchal society to the place of a woman in this society. Not only British but even Indian women writers took up the challenge of laying bitter realities of domestic and social life through their lives of the protagonists. They tried to bring the pathetic condition of Indian women even decades after attaining independence. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bharti Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahagal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Rama Mehta, Gita Hariharan, and Kiran Desai portrayed the domestic and social life of their female characters and their desperate struggles to create their own identities in it. Jane Austen, from a similar social milieu, gives the characters a social connection more precisely than other contemporary writers the domestic comedy of middle-class manners, and a dramatic, realistic account of the quiet backwaters of everyday life. This article highlights the works of women writers of both British and Indian in a similar social milieu.

Keywords: patriarchal, domestic life, realism, social milieu.

Male writers have always could study their craft in University or Coffee houses and for guidance or patronage, collaborate or fought with their contemporaries. Jane Austen on one hand and her contemporaries Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey on the other one can compare the priorities of men over women.

The American also admired the works of Jane Austen. The influence of her genius is extensively recognized and appreciated in the American republic, even by the highest judicial authorities.

Jane Austen invented her own special mode of fiction, for the country families of Regency England from the late 1790s until 1815.

W.H. Auden's verse epistle "Letter to Lord Byron" confesses a discomfort at finding such a streak of cold realism Austen's works:

It makes me most uncomfortable to an English spinster
of the middle class describe the amorous effects of "brass", reveals so
rankly and with such sobriety the economic basis of society.

Austen's novels discuss the social status and social position in terms of "rank", "station", and "degree" and not "class" in the modern sense.

The novel Emma describes a spectrum of levels of a hierarchical society: the gentry, professionals, artisans, servants, and the undeserving poor. In a small country village, social contact between these groups is frequent, the transition between groups much less so. Scott was the earliest of the distinguished critical admirers of Jane Austen. The first critique of her work by an eminent hand was his review of Emma, into which he incorporated a survey of her other work, though omitted Mansfield Park.

But it was nothing but a kind of addition to the novels written by their male counterparts. It was in the Twentieth century when writers began to write from a feminist point of view: the focus of such writings shifted from patriarchal society to the place of a woman in this society. Not only British but even Indian women writers took up the challenge of laying bitter realities of domestic and social life through their lives of the protagonists. They tried to bring the pathetic condition of Indian women even decades after attaining independence. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bharti Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Rama Mehta, Gita Hariharan, and Kiran Desai portrayed the domestic and social life of their female characters and their desperate struggles to create their own identities in it.

There is uniqueness in Shashi Deshpande with Jane Austen. It seems appropriate in describing Deshpande's world too, for, Deshpande's novels are about the ordinary lives of women, too ordinary of middle-class Indian Society where Jane Austen also used such a concept of middle-class English society as her setting for all her novels. These are women

who live a routine existence, mainly jobless, surrounded by children, a world so common that one can see in everyday life.

Like Jane Austen, Shashi Deshpande's novels are inhabited by many characters, all of whom are related to the central character. She becomes Ashok's mistress — his "girl" — and begins her long journey of guilt in the "Country of Deceit". Her other novels like 'Dark Holds No Terror', 'Small Remedies' all are about women in a male-dominated society.

The women writers in India succeeded in giving us an astonishingly true picture of the stereotypical woman of Hindu households within the joint family system. On the one hand, we witness how even in their constricted world, which is carefully segmented from the male world, these women carry on their day-to-day living with nothing else to occupy their minds except matters like food, clothing, marriages, childbirth, and deaths. This is like the writings of Jane Austen and her English contemporaries who wrote women-oriented novels.

In treating a woman as an individual, she highlights subtleties of human behavior based on the subconscious and conscious mind rather than on high fluted resolutions to National problems.

Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists negotiate their identities within their families and societies. She depicts her protagonists in search of self-fulfillment that almost always eludes them. Her palette is openly domestic: she is the mistress of the well-rounded novel rooted in the nuances of a middle-class mindset. Therefore, the woman as represented by Shashi Deshpande is an entity in herself who is neither mystical, nor mythical, nor exotic, nor different.

It is with controversial writer Shobha Dé, that the Indian woman comes of age: While most Indian women still lack many basic freedoms, they are far more aware of their rights in the last two decades of the twentieth - century, than at any time in history. They are increasingly ready to demand them. Serious critics refuse Shobha De's novels for being racy and rude in style and content, but the numbers they sell make her one of the most widely read English novelists in India. She presents a woman's world, a new exciting feminine world revealed through a whole spectrum of women.

Shobha De's 'New Woman' is a saga of an isolated woman frustrated by male despotism, examining for some emotional refuge. She offers a vivid portrait of woman's encounter with patriarchy and a rigid social system and her psychic potential in dealing with the crippling effects of the circumstances that prevent her proper development. All her women protagonists suffer in their attempt to settle themselves in an ordered world. Shobha De sees woman especially, and life generally, as submerged in the decadent, materialistic and the intensive male world. But the protagonist, like her author, concludes that the role of man in woman's life as an exploiting force exists on several levels and she must depend on her own degree of tolerance for survival.

There has been a spurt of new women writers after Namita Gokhale, Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, and Shobha De and almost all take their indication from these role-models: Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, and the young Radhika Jha and Sagarika Ghosh etc. Thus, until about the end of the twentieth century, fiction by women represents a true renaissance in the world of letters. The feminism that now predominates is the feminism of educated, urbanized, westernized middle- class women. It is a feminism that privileges questions of gender over questions of class, race, and sexuality.

Jane Austen in contrast to the Indian woman writers has written about woman oriented novels in a male-dominated English society. Just as in India women were not given the opportunity to prove themselves, especially in the writing profession, so Jane Austen had to write her novels hiding from her own family members and she published her first novel "Sense and Sensibility" as 'By a Lady' and in 'Pride and Prejudice' she published the book as 'The Author of Sense and Sensibility.' This style continued in all her other novels as not to reveal her identity as a woman writer which was not appreciated by the male-dominated society.

Jane Austen genius knows no bounds, her freedom to feel and say, her execution takes on unparalleled sensibility. Her social adjustment of Revolutionary age, the period of transition is deepened in the artistic mastery of her novels. The Juvenilia reflects the milieu of Austen's family and her social class. through Eliza de Feuillide, she learns about the Reign of Terror in Paris, through her brothers, Francis and Charles, the naval position of England, for 'Persuasion' as from Henry, the country's attempt to build a stronger army, the burlesque of 'Northanger Abbey' alludes to violence and campaign against internal Jacobinism. 'Mansfield Park' has oblique references to the economic conditions of Antigua, allusions, and suggestion in 'Pride and Prejudice' gives scope for Jane Austen to assess the men in the sphere of sociological study.

In classifying Jane Austen's characters into three main groups one can suggest that the heroes are to be found at the second level, who deeply impress and influence the heroine. Bearing in mind that the heroine presents the central viewpoint in the novels so that her experience of the hero is essentially the reader's need to remember that a young woman's experience of men was shaped by the social circumstances in which she met them.

Jane Austen's kind of society thus made it difficult for girls to get to know men; they could meet their own sex without the presence of others. Men were necessarily something of a mystery to young women, and that the more complex, were their natures, the more mysterious they were likely to be. The heroes are presented under unusual constraint. In general, it is the role of a Jane Austen hero to provoke, balance, stimulate, and magnetize the heroine.

Conclusion:

Jane Austen's determined interest as a novelist was that of the Eighteenth-Century attitudes and social conventions. Jane Austen experienced the extensive changes in social life that marked the advent of the Regency period and the distinctive modes of thinking and lifestyle that age brought about. These changes were not just the dress, furniture, and architecture, but the social life; the change in every idea of society and the individual's relation to it. These social changes were very prominent and widely discussed that the novelist could assume knowledge of them in her readers. This is quite proved in the last novel *Persuasion* where it changes the theme of the novel, men as national security guards to Jane Austen's first novel *Sense and Sensibility*, men as romantic heroes.

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