

Gender Hostility in '*Pride and Prejudice*' And '*Sense and Sensibility*'- A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study is humble attempt to understand the concept of Gender Hostility in Jane Austen's novels. The intention is to find out the connotations, the deeper and the implied significance of the force of opposition which is so absolutely necessary if things have to work smoothly and in any meaningful way. Hostility, in a negative sense, is a self-destroying activity resulting in the breakdown of every function. In a positive sense, it is a principle of meaningful, co-operative activity without which nothing will work in nature. In this sense, hostility in Austen's work is to be seen as a positive rather than negative concept.

David Diaches has rightly observed: "The English novel, from its beginning in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century to its great popular flowering in the nineteenth, had been essentially what might be called a 'public instrument', basing its view of what was significant in human affairs on a generally agreed standard." (1). Thus, every artist has his or her own method of presenting various aspects of human relationships. Jane Austen was one of the greatest women novelists during the nineteenth century whose reactions to life were singularly fresh and interesting. She identified herself with the middle class people and it is their various involvements, their clashes and adjustments that constitute the main interest of her novels. She presents the prejudices, vanity, follies and foibles of human beings and she does so by employing the device of hostility. Hostility is used as a successful artistic device to show the complexity of human relationships, especially relationships between man and woman.

Jane Austen presents gender hostility as essentially an interaction between two contraries which makes their relationship all the more interesting and meaningful. This hostility is progressive in nature for it ensures a further communication, a love hate relationship between man and woman along with a need to understand each other in the right perspective. This is what we have seen in the novels discussed earlier. In *Sense and Sensibility* hostility between Marianne Colonel Brandon arises because of Marianne's wrong romantic notions and her misunderstanding of Brandon's disposition. But this very attitude makes her realize the true virtues and love of Brandon as compared to the worldly attitude of Willoughby. Braced with this knowledge she is able to settle down with Colonel Brandon as a happy wife. Similarly in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth gets hostile feelings towards Darcy because of his pride which he shows during their very first meeting. Elizabeth though open in her feelings but at the same time very observant and conscious of her surroundings. Her honest opinions were never meant to offend anyone. Similarly, Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* emerges as the most pragmatic character. She exhibits the same qualities except that she was not open about her feelings. She hid her emotions even when Edward's former relationship was unveiled and suffered within.

Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* and Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* are of the same type. Both of them want to raise their status in society.

The family unit is pretty similar in the two novels. Upbringing of daughters and the influence a mother exerts in this task is seen throughout the two novels. Similarly the limited role a father plays in these stories is evident. He merely plays the role of a bread winner and stays more or less indifferent towards the ongoing affairs of the family.

There is a basic similarity between the characterization of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Female protagonist is the main power character. She not only exerts immense power through her love but also facilitates the transformation of her hero. Male and female protagonists are separated by a wide social chasm, hero lying on the upper rung of the socio economic ladder and heroine on the lower. But as this initial hostility ultimately leads to their self-knowledge and understanding of each other, it ends in a happy union which is based on understanding, respect and esteem for each other. Thus, in all of Jane Austen's novels we see that hostility is used to give a proper and sound basis to man-woman relationship and to cement it firmly.

As was said above, initial hostility between the main characters of Jane Austen helps in providing a firm foundation to their relationship. It so happens because Jane Austen insists on the necessity to know one's mate properly before marriage is entered into so that no complication in their relationship arises afterwards. In other words, Jane Austen values intellectual love more in comparison to mere sentimental love. Her ideal was to present a relationship achieved with a great of understanding and refined sensibility which are acquired at no small cost. She insists on striking a balance between reason and emotion to overcome the immaturity of purely emotional love. Simpson aptly comments that "Her favourite ideal was to exhibit this intelligent love in its germ, to eclipse it for a season by the blaze of a great passion, to quench this glare and to exhibit the gentle light of the first love reviving and waxing greater till it perfects itself in marriage" (63-64). Thus in Jane Austen's world, as we notice in all her novels, man-woman relationship is a slow, long-drawn unfolding affair achieved after overcoming various barriers which temporarily create hostility between them but are resolved gradually to the good of both the partners.

Through the device of hostility Jane Austen not only shows the complexity of human relationships and the way it can lead to achieving a successful relationship, it is also used as a structural device to show the roundness of her character. The character of the central figures develops in her novels and they appear at the end as wiser persons than they were in the beginning. At the start every character, whether he is the hero or the heroine lives in the world of ignorance, wrongly judges, and misinterprets outer character, and nourishes undue hostile feelings. Vanity, jealousy, family pride etc. overpower him or her like ordinary people are affected by them in this world. But finally these characters shed their hypocrisy and vanity and move to a better knowledge and understanding of self and of each other. With a varying degree of pain they discover that they have been making mistakes both about themselves, about others and about the world in which they live. This realization accompanied with disillusionment or awakening is an important point in their relationships. They come out of their limited world, get rid of their errors and grow properly in a better manner. And the important thing to note about it is that characters in Jane Austen's world are improved and educated by no outside

agency but by each other – their very hostility helping them arrive at a better understanding. Marianne’s disillusionment and Brandon’s constant and sincere love brings about a desirable change in the purely romantic and emotional Marianne and she learns to check her feelings and learns to behave sensibly. Darcy is also Elizabeth’s tutor to some extent. It is only through his letter that she is able to see him and herself more clearly. She is helped to see the real character of Wickham. Similarly, it is only his love for her that compels him to react properly and to give up his pride. We can say that Darcy and Elizabeth are each other’s tutors. Their relationship turns out to be mutually instructive. They gain far more from this aspect of their connection, that is, from their hostile attitude towards each other than mere love relationship would teach them. They now achieve the relationship of reciprocal giving and receiving leading to a loving, caring marriage which is vital to happiness. Richard Simpson comments: “Miss. Austen seems to be saturated with the platonic idea that giving and receiving of knowledge, the active formation of another’s character or the more passive growth under another’s guidance, is the truest and strongest foundation of love” (63). So it is clear that while the problem of gender hostility is successfully used as a structural device to make the story go, it also shows that her character do not remain static but grow considerably within the limitations within which they are placed.

References

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