



## FEMININE WORLD IN JANE AUSTEN'S EMMA : ITS CLOSENESS TO INDIAN SOCIETY

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### Abstract :

*Jane Austen, the most popular 19th Century woman novelist, though confines herself in her narrow world of English country gentry, but her delineation of both major and minor characters left a mark in our mind. Emma termed as a domestic novel by many like most of her novels deals with issues like love and marriage, courtship, match-making etc. has universal appeal. This paper looks into the similarity between her world portrayed in Emma, set in West and traditionally-bound Indian society.*

**Keywords:** *Feminine World, Domestic, Gentry*

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### Introduction :

Jane Austen's world is predominantly a feminine world. As Austen was a woman herself, it was quite natural that she looked at the world and its problems from the point of view of women. She had restricted herself for specific reasons to the English Country elite. Although many critics criticised Jane Austen for her narrow world view, she was excellent in the narrow world she portrayed.

### Objective :

This paper attempts to find the similarity between two worlds- English Country gentry and Indian society.

### About Austen's Novels

Jane Austen's novels are women-centric by and large. Heroines are the main protagonists in her novels. Around each of her heroines, there is a small gathering of persons, friends or relatives, suitors who are to be taken seriously. Some of them are purely comic characters who provide humour and comic relief. Though all the characters of Jane Austen came alive and become true to life through their gestures, attitudes and conversations. Only the heroine's personality is fully revealed to the reader. In every novel there is a female character who shares in some way or the other, the conscience of the novelist. It is through the eyes of the female protagonist that every situation is viewed and unfolded.

In spite of the fact that her novels are based on 19<sup>th</sup> Century rural England, Characters, situations, events, attitudes and their conversations open before us a world which is easily recognized by readers all over the world. Anybody who likes to read a novel for pleasure and entertainment can very well turn to Jane Austen's novels. Her name has



become identical with a large and important segment of our human experience and with a profound and amusing way of perceiving it. The closely observed and ironically slanted domestic comedy set in a rural or provincial place with love and marriage as its subject-matter, which she developed has become a widely circulated theme and style of literary delineation for many novelists after her.

### **Emma and its closeness to Indian Society**

In *Emma*, which is widely acknowledged as Jane Austen's finest achievement, we can observe moments and situations when the English world did not appear so English but seem to be similar to our Indian Society. Some characters, incidents, situations portrayed in the novel seem to be very familiar to our mind and with whom we can easily identify ourselves with.

Although set in the Western world, we are equally comfortable in Emma's world because issues like love and marriage which form the core and climax of the novel are issues which are very much relevant and inseparable part of our society. The general reading public is very much acquainted with the western world through different social media, films and OTT platforms post globalization. Thus the world of Emma though foreign is not alien to us.

Jane Austen's favourite theme of love and marriage has a universal appeal and it also touches the heart of feminine world in India, in a major way. Emma, the novel named after the heroine herself, is a story of self-deception of Emma Woodhouse who fancies herself as expert in arranging love affairs among her friend. She attains maturity through a series of blunders and humiliations. It is the life journey of the heroine in the midst of all social pretensions, ambitions, balls, visits, shopping, sewing gossip and other trivial matters that is portrayed in the novels. While reading, we have a clear understanding of their hopes and desires, fears and failures, doubts and speculations about life, love and marriage.

Austen's world is a feminine world and in that world men are portrayed from the feminine world view. Jane Austen views her menfolk from a personal standpoint- as a friend, a lover, a husband, a father, a brother- standing in some relationship with women. She was not interested in knowing or peeping into men's lives outside the domestic space. Emma is young, intelligent, imaginative girl who has 'a tendency to think a little too well of herself' with whom we can easily identify with. She appears very human in her weaknesses and shortcomings. At the outset she was a little too snobbish but in the company of Mr. Knightley she grows as an admirable woman and became wise and a perfectly compatible with Mr. Knightley. Emma has a perfect match in Mr. Knightley who is a close family friend, a mature person belonging from a highly respectable family and having solid financial background- a dream husband for any girl, whether Indian or English. Moreover character like Frank Churchill is easily available in our society who is extremely fashion conscious and young girls easily fall for this type.

Emma's class consciousness brings her closer to Indian society. It takes us back to the pre-industrial, feudal class structure that we still find in India. In our country class, caste and family status plays a decisive role in fixing marriages and accepting love or relationship between two people. Family name and background and financial position of the groom are important to Emma and these are issues which play a key role when a marriage is arranged between two



families in India too. In fact these are the issues which are given utmost importance in deciding a match. The novel also shows the close family bonding as is evident in the relationship between Mr. Woodhouse and his two daughters, Emma and Elizabeth, the attachment of the Woodhouse family to the Weston's ( Mrs. Weston was Emma's ex-governess). Mr. and Mrs. Weston's feelings toward Frank, Mrs. Bates, Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax; the close and easy relationship shared by the Knightley brothers and so on. Match-making which Emma enjoys is also an interesting area for Indian women to invest time and energy and they take active part in it and for some it becomes a vocation.

### Conclusion :

In the English society, although remaining spinster for women is nothing uncommon, marriage was still seen as the most important event in a woman's life. Similarly the institution of marriage is still very much relevant in India and an unavoidable reality for majority of the women. One can easily identify with the situations, events and characters in Emma as a reader, even if he or she is not English. Emma's mother's acts and wishes, though embarrassing at times is easily found among our society. Her concern for her daughters' marriages is understandable and the irritation she felt towards her husband who lives in his own world without bothering about the issues she feels so keenly makes it universally appealing. The transformation of Emma is also heart-warming. She learnt through her mistakes in the mature company of Mr. Knightley is also highly appreciated.

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