



# MARXIST NUANCES IN JANE AUSTEN'S EMMA

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## ABSTRACT:

The work considers Jane Austen's Emma and studies various perspectives in which Marxism is represented in the work. Austen uses several Marxist elements in her works. Emma is also such a work wherein, Jane invokes the spirit of Marxism in her novel. She uses marriage as a social institution that would enable men to have a shift in their social class and standards. The study would also look into the way in which class struggle is portrayed and how men would continuously strive to reach the top of the social standards. Jane Austen's undaunted spirit to call for a society that is equal and classless could be appreciated with the study of the text from the Marxist lens. The role of marriage in keeping the class conflict under check and the way in which it could bring about class mobility among the lower strata of the society could be analyzed. The possession of wealth, the power that is derived from such a possession and the influence and impact that the so gained power could exert could be understood from the study. The class division of the characters would also be looked into and the rationale behind such a schism would be understood. Finally the study would look into the way in which class conflict is brought into existence and its possible remedy. The work would profoundly bring out the spirit of Capitalism, and its depictions in the novel. The focus would holistically remain to understand the idea of Marxism and its artistic depictions in literature. The influence of Jane Austen's experiences in shaping the novel should be accentuated.

**Keywords:** Jane Austen, Marxism, Capitalism, Class Struggle, Marriage, Materialism.

## INTRODUCTION:

Romantic literature would be incomplete without the mention of Jane Austen, who could be considered the greatest of the romantic novelists. Jane Austen is often charged with portraying themes like match making and husband hunting through her novels. But many scholars considered Jane to be a Marxist even before Karl Marx. She dexterously portrays the elements of Marxism in her novels. Her characters depict the typical Marxist features through their actions. A thorough understanding of her novels would make us understand the tilt that she had towards Marxism and the way in which her works were instrumental in bringing out social change [10]. Jane Austen's life served as a source of inspiration for most of her novels. Her father being a Rector had continuous visitors to his house and Jane's observation of the visitors gave her a lot of insights which she included in her novels. All her experiences were incorporated into her works which added an eccentric domestic feature to her novels. Jane was also able to show the way in which her characters are continuously in a state of anxiety and the struggle to stand at the top of the social ladder. The accumulation of wealth in a few hands of the society, the way the people in possession of power would make use of it, and the concept of social mobility and transformation are the key issues she would be dwelling upon in her works. Jane Austen also establishes Marriage as a potential instrument to bring in social transformation. She uses marriage as a potential vehicle to enable class mobility [10]. She often designs her characters in such a way that normally marriages take place between the two people who normally hail from the same category. Nevertheless wed-locks are also between people who normally are from different classes, and the struggle that they take to get married, because of social reasons are also seen in her works. The present paper would focus on all the possible Marxist issues like class conflict, the role of people with wealth in the society, the concept of materialism and the role it plays in a Marxist society [4]. The study would make use of Jane Austen's Emma (1815) to understand and analyze Marxist perspectives in it. Jane Austen's other works include, Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), Northanger Abbey (1818) and Persuasion (1818), wherein the last two works were published posthumously.

Marxism as such is an ideology that is based primarily of the work Communist Manifesto, a treatise by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The philosophy believes that the society is split into two categories based on the economic power that is gained by controlling the factors of production [2]. The group in possession of all the factors of production like land, labor, wealth and other means is called the Bourgeois and the labor that is employed by the Capitalists is called the Proletariat [4]. There is a lot of exploitation that is found in this setup, wherein the capitalists grow in terms of profit at the cost of exploiting the lower middle class people. The belief of Marx and Engels is that there would definitely come a time, where the exploitation would grow rampant and the working class having suffered enough would raise their voices and lift arms against them in protest for their ill and under treatment [8]. This rebellion is termed as the Class Conflict [5]. This would definitely bring in a remarkable social change in the society and would

turn the social tables upside down. This conflict may also get intensified and utterly violent as has happened in the case of French revolution, which even saw the downfall of Monarchy. This social reformation would bring in a classless society and establish an economically equal society. The materialistic order in the society would perish and an equal society where everyone would have an equal say in all the affairs would be created [5]. These class conflicts in the novel, the attempts to see that the order of the social standards changed and increase in secular social standards and social consciousness would be thoroughly analyzed and understood from the novel of Jane Austen [10].

Jane Austen's *Emma* was published in the year 1815. *Emma* is a novel set in a fictional town called Highbury and the surroundings estates of Hartfield, Randalls and Donwell Abbey. Emma Woodhouse, the protagonist of the novel, hails from a very affluent community and her father Mr. Woodhouse owns an estate called Hartfield. Emma is a very intelligent girl and has a high respect in the society for the wealth that she possesses. She is peculiar and doesn't want to marry anyone because she is afraid that she has to share her wealth with the person whom she would possibly marry. Wealth and its possession play a key role in determining the social standards of the people in the society. Emma shows a typical capitalist attitude in making her own gains with the wealth she has and mentally exploits the under-privileged and makes them work for her. The wealth she has enables her to do things that the normal could not even envisage. All the decisions she takes, that not only concerns her own life but also the life of others, is abided by others because of the financial strength she has and the influence she could have over others using his financial potential. A typical capitalist always tries to get everything done to his own behest because of the extreme possession of wealth and the power to dominate which grows from it. The key Marxist principle of gender equality could be seen in the novel. Though Emma being a woman, who hardly had anything to do with finances and accounting, exercises her will freely and unabated because of the wealth that she has accumulated. The share of women in ancestral property is denied at by Jane in the novel. Emma and Isabella are the only daughters of Mr. Woodhouse, who would probably inherit the wealth of their father. A woman inheriting the property of their fathers was still a matter of contention during the age. The marriage of Ms. Taylor, Emma's governess, to Mr. Weston in the beginning is of greater significance, because the marriage altogether changes the social life of Ms. Taylor. She grows up in the society because of the marriage to a capitalist in the society. The role of marriage to bring in significant social change is reiterated in the beginning of the novel itself. The capitalist attitude of Emma continues throughout the novel. She adopts an Orphan named Harriet Smith, whom Emma believes to have a capitalist lineage, and replaces her with Ms. Weston, her governess. Emma takes every decision concerning the life of Harriet Smith. Emma makes use of the she has due to the wealth she has advises Harriet in virtually all the possible aspects. She warns her against Robert Martin, who pays attention towards Harriet, because of the place that he has in the society. Emma presumes that Martin is a farmer and since she believes that Harriet is from a financially high class family she doesn't encourage this match. She time and again makes use of the financial power to

influence others intrude into their personal affairs. She also deems Mr. Elton, the Vicar, to be the right match to Harriet and tells Harriet to marry him so that her social status could be regained. This decision of Emma also proves to be fallacious when she gets a proposal from Elton. She feels despised when this happens to her, because she believes that Elton being a vicar, is not a proper match for her, given his social standards. Emma is persistently discouraged by Mr. George Knightley, who is the sole authority to do so because of his social status, asking her to desist from making matches. The equals had to courage to talk and deliberate on any issue, but the working class had no privilege to voice their concerns to their masters. Frank Churchill's arrival is awaited by Emma, who believes him to be his possible suitor, because of the wealth and power he possesses. Frank also loathes Emma for her works and is already engaged to Jane Fairfax. The two hail from different social backgrounds and so have to struggle a lot to get married. Jane Fairfax is another potential contender of Emma because of her beauty and talent. Emma has an aversion for her because of her poor social status. She doesn't want her to excel in life, because Emma feels that she would grow socially, if she does so. Fairfax is the granddaughter of Mrs. Bates, an impoverished widow of the former vicar, and the niece of Miss Bates. Emma also creates a suspicion in the mind of Frank about Jane, by stating that she has an affair with Mr. Dixon, without mindful of the fact that the two are already engaged. The possession of wealth leads Emma to do whatever she wants, even to such an extent wherein she thinks of ruining the relations, for her own personal gains. Finally after all these attempts Emma finds a possible suitor in Mr. George Knightley, who is in every way a perfect match to her, in terms of financial strengths and societal value. Frank is married to Jane, where the two had to struggle to get married because of their contrasting social standards. Harriet disillusioned marries Mr. Martin, whom Emma kept rejecting from the very beginning. The influence of Emma on the life of Harriet Smith is evident and is done only because Emma hails from the Capitalist group of the society, who own wealth and possess power. Nobody in the novel has the courage to stop Emma or simply correct her except for Mr. Knightley because he belongs to the capitalist group and is socially equal to the status of Emma.

The capitalist group had the power to dictate terms to the Proletariat who are bound by the decisions of the upper Bourgeois class. The persistent involvement into the lives of the working class is only because of the power that they get through the wealth that they possess [5]. Wealth possession is of supreme importance because it not only enables them with all the material comforts but also provides them the required status in the society and political power that they make use of to command the working class. The power possessed by the family of Emma because of the wealth has enabled them to get into others affairs and control them.[4] The family of George Knightley being equal in terms of social standards to the Emma's family is the sole authority to control and tell her if she goes wrong. This power of Emma has empowered her to chide Miss Bates, when they go on a trip to Box Hill. The social status of Miss Bates has resisted her from showing her anguish against Emma. But this was taken seriously by Mr. Knightly, who reminds Emma of her act of chiding and demands her to apologize to Miss Bates. Emma's

reluctance to seek an apology is only because of the status that she holds in the society. Economic factors play a key role in the novels of Jane Austen and the Social Changes that these factors bring in. Martin was not considered as a potential suitor to Harriet Smith only because, Emma believes that he is not economically capable of holding Harriet's hand. Here capitalist Emma has the capacity to dictate terms to which Harriet as well as Martin has to abide. Marriage is also made profoundly materialistic that Martin, being a farmer, has no liberty to love whom he wishes. Expression of emotions is also a matter of privilege that only the class in possession of wealth has. The socially subalterns are devoid of expressing themselves. When Mr. Elton marries Augusta Hawkins, a pompous lady, the social status of Mr. Elton changes. This change enables him to assault Harriet Smith at various instances. He also becomes capable of attacking Emma for her poor decision making. This social mobility is time and again accentuated by Jane Austen in her novels, especially in Emma.

## CONCLUSION:

Jane Austen's novels are not just pieces of superior love and romance, but of greater social relevance and significance. They mirror the society as it is and portray all the prevailing standards of the society. The paper dealt upon how Jane Austen conceived and imagined the society and thought of bringing in changes to liberate it from the clutches of class distinction. She uses her characters and existing social institutions to drive and prophesize her ideas [10] The analysis of Marriage as an institution and its role in bringing changes that would enable social mobility is also analyzed in the work. This would make us understand the possible interests of marriage. This also gives us insights into the share of ancestral property. Jane's views on women having equal rights in the share of ancestral property could be understood. The works of Jane questions the existing social order and speaks about the existence of a classless society where everything could not be gauged in terms of materialism. This emotional appeal backed by the vision of an egalitarian society would have perhaps made scholars and critics commend and extol her as a predecessor to Marx. She has spoken about the class conflict that would erupt soon after rampant exploitation. Jane also mentions about the upward social mobility in most of her works that delineates wealth as a key parameter to drive them towards their mobility. She envisions a classless Marxist society and hopes for a uniform secular society, where capitalism has no role to play. Jane's ideas reaffirm faith in the words of P.B. Shelley, 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind.'

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