

Brothers, Sisters and Cousins: A Case Study of Some of Austen's Novels

Dr. Sneh Singh

Lecturer in English, R L Saharia Govt P.G College, Kaladera, India

ABSTRACT: The novels of Jane Austen abound in loving sisters and brothers. We have sisters like Jane and Elizabeth, Elinor and Marianne, who are not only most affectionate but also a source of comfort to each other. We also have the Bingley sisters, who though not the pleasant companions Jane Bennet makes them sound, are quite amiable to each other. We shall through a thorough reading endeavor to find out more about the relationships between brothers, sisters and cousins in a natural world where each loves or detests the other.

KEYWORDS: Abound, affectionate, comfort, companions, amiable, relationships.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novels of Jane Austen abound in loving sisters and brothers. We have sisters like Jane and Elizabeth, Elinor and Marianne, who are not only most affectionate but also a source of comfort to each other. We also have the Bingley sisters, who though not the pleasant companions Jane Bennet makes them sound, are quite amiable to each other.

In *Mansfield Park* Fanny deeply loves her brother William. In the very beginning of the novel Jane Austen tells us that Fanny's heart was divided between Edmund and her brother. Then there is Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, who is a very affectionate and considerate Georgiana. Edward and Robert Ferrars are not on very friendly terms with each other, but that is because of the difference in their nature. Tom and Edmund Bertram are also quite different from each other. The Bertram sisters too seem to have no affection for each other, nor do they appear to care for their brothers.

Let's first take up the sisters. In *Sense and Sensibility* there are three sisters, the eldest of whom, Elinor, is the main prop of the family and the fountain of sense, Marianne, the sweet and generous victim of sensibility, Margaret, who is only thirteen when the story opens and who having little part in the action, might as well have been left out altogether. Elinor's character is carefully drawn by the author but with less tender interest than that of Marianne. She is in some degree a model for Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Elinor resembles Anne in gently disposition, upright principles, constancy of feeling and in patient endurance of suffering. The ungracious task of repressing sensibility is thrown upon her, and her dispositional contrast with the impulsiveness of her mother and sister gives her advice sometimes too much of a monitorial character; it is only the love of each member of the family to the others that gives warmth and colour to a disposition inclined to be too moderate, rational and critical.

Elinor is devoted to the temperamentally uneven but delightful Marianne. Jane Austen could not have brought out Marianne's sensibility so deliciously if she had not had a sympathetic understanding of it and if there had not been a share of it in the make-up of her own personality. Marianne cannot be satisfied with Edward Ferrars as a brother-in-law: he read Cowper in so tame and spiritless a manner that she felt for her sister most severely.

"It would have broke my heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility."¹

She requires a lot in a man: "He must have all Edward's virtues, and his person and manners must ornament his goodness with every possible charm."²

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2016

Marianne's lack of reserve, which exposed her to all the troubles that came upon her afterwards, is an essential part of her character. A sense of reserve seemed to her a disgraceful subjection of reason to commonplace and mistaken notions. With strong affections self-command was impossible; with placid emotions it could have no merit. And so, we see her fall in love with Willoughby and break all conventions. Marianne even allowed him to cut off a lock of her hair; she drove alone with him to Allenhams, a house he was one day to inherit, and spent an hour walking about there, exposing herself to the unguarded remarks of her younger sister, Margaret, and to the impertinent curiosity of Mrs. Jennings:

I hope you like your house, Miss Marianne. It is a very large one, I know, and when I come to see you, I hope you will have furnished it, for it wanted to very much when I was there six year ago, says Mr. Jennings.³

Marianne is a Juliet who has mistaken her Romeo. She is separated from Willoughby, a worthless character, spendthrift, and a libertine. But now she decides to suffer; she has been dealt with a severe blow in love. Poor Elinor, whose love might not be shown since Edward had not openly declared his own, could only disapprove of Marianne's want of reticence and be thought could not cautiously by the people who knew her best.

It must seem strange to a modern reader that when Elinor is supposed to be engaged to Edward and Marianne not to be engaged to Willoughby, neither sister takes the other into full confidence and that the point of honour prevents any questions being asked by sister or mother. Nowadays, the secret would have been revealed at least to the nearest ones even if it was meant to be a closely guarded one.

But, no matter what, there was great love between the two sisters. When Marianne comes to know of Edward's engagement to Lucy, her first thought and word was for her sister.

"How long has this been known to you, Elinor?"

Has he written to you?"

"I have known it these four months. When Lucy

first came to Barton Park last November, she told me in confidence of her engagement. At these words, Marianne's eyes expressed the astonishment which her lips could not utter. After a pause of wonder, she exclaimed—"Four months! Have you known of this four months?" Elinor confirmed it.

"What! while attending attending me in all my misery, has this been on your heart- and I have reaproached you for being happy."⁴

But she does not at first feel how much Elinor had suffered, how she had sacrificed herself in order to keep her promise to Lucy. To suffer and be silent is inconceivable to her, but when she does, all her warmth of affection comes out. Marianne was quite subdued, "O Elinor! she cried, 'you have made me hate myself for ever. How barbarous have I been to you?'"⁵

Expressions such as this reveal the bent of Marianne's disposition, obscured generally as it is by her absurd behavior. A sudden change of circumstances or a revelation of what had passed unnoticed often brings out the genuine nature of Jane Austen's characters.

Now let's examine the two loving sisters in pride and prejudice: Jane, pronounced by Darcy at the Meryton ball to be 'the only handsome girl in the room' and Elizabeth, for whom Jane Austen writes, "I must confess (she writes to Cassandra) that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print."⁶

No one was surprised at Darcy's preference of Jane to all the pretty girls in the room. Nobody was jealous of Jane, for Jane could think ill of nobody. Not so Elizabeth, who not only had a quick perception of what was ridiculous, mean, or pretentious but also a courageous temper and a ready tongue.

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2016

Jane Bennet, who had formed a friendship with Bingley's sister Caroline, fell ill at Netherfield and had to be nursed there by the Bingleys.⁷ Elizabeth went to her and was thus thrown into naercy's company, which both attracted and repelled her. A kind of hostile intimacy springs up between them tantalizing and stimulating to Darcy, who is ready to fall in love with her if she would give him the slightest encouragement.

.....there was a mixture of sweetness and arches in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger.⁸

Meanwhile Bingley was falling in love with Jane Bennet and she with him, and Elizabeth was showing inclinations towards wickham. Miss Bingley reserves Darcy for herself and tries to detch her brother form Jane; according to her plan she was to marry Darch, and her brother Darc's sister Georgina. Her plan, however, was not destined to succeed.

Jane, though the elder, leans heavily on Elizabeth's wise understanding and Judgement. There is great love between the two sisters. We find them confiding in each other all the time. When Jane falls in love with Bingley, Elizabeth is the first to know. These two are in a way like the loving sisters of today who sit up late in the night, exchanging confidences and impressions of the young man they meet. No such obstacle as honour, as in the case of Marianne and Flinor, Prevents Jane and Elizabeth from sharing each other's joys and agonies.

Elizabeth loves Jane but she too is a bit ex-asperated at times by her goodness. Jane has that rare temperament because of which she simply cannot think ill of anybody. The Bingley sisters are made out to be very pleasant though we all know otherwise. Elizabeth thought they were supercilious, but Jane was extremely good-natured and trustful. She accepted Bingley's protracted absence with such resignation that Elizabeth could describe her sweetness and disinterestedness as really angelic. It was her composure that led Darch to believe that her heart was not engaged to Bingley.

It was not in Jane's nature to find fault or criticize. She Believed that there must have been extenuating circumstances to explain Darcy's treatment of wickham and she did not think the worse of wickham when he eloped with Lydia. Her serenity is disteurbed when she hears of Bingley's return to Netherfield and she confides in Elizabeth about her apprehension of another sequel of meetings with the Bingleys.

She is hardly an 'intricate character. The difference in temperament between her and Elizabeth may be seen in the latter's remarks on their respective engagements: 'I am happier even than Jane; she only similes, I laugh.'⁹ Jane's removal from Nether field after her marriage was occasioned by her desire to be near her favorite sister, Elizabeth.

When we see Elizabeth an individual we find her a headstrong girl, a little too quick in forming opinions. Her first impressions of wickham were just as overtly favourable as her impressions of Darcy were adverse. She could not take Mr. Collin's marriage-proposal seriously and was shocked that charlotte luces could sacrifice all personal feelings for the sake of material security by accepting him.

Bingley's neglect of sister filled Elizabeth with indignation, and she thought him weak-willed. She could tell Darcy the root of his social weakness and refuse to be impressed or browbeaten by lady cathrine de Bought.

When Elizabeth rejected Darcy, it was because of a sense of the wrong she believed he had done to wickham and the suffering he had indirectly caused Jane and also because of the pride which made her resent his honest avowal of the conflict of heart and reason arising in him from the inferiority of her family connections. It is hard to find to find a better example of sisterly affection than Elizabeth. She refused the man she loved because he had been the cause of suffering to her beloved sister Jane. She is unable to forget that Darcy took Bindley away from Jane and boldly accuses him of breaking up the lovers.

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2016

But in spite of all her follies Elizabeth rates high in our esteem because she has the ability to see a wrong done by herself and also has the sincere honesty to acknowledge it. She soon discovers that the discernment of which she had been proud with reference to Wickham was only ignorant prejudice. The good reports she heard of Darcy at Pemberley, his gentleness and evident forgiveness of her acrimony and accusations, his readiness to meet her relatives and introduce his sister to her worked much in his favour. She wished she had not told him about Lydia's elopement. How could he wish to be Wickham's brother-in-law? Humbled and grown wiser, she now consciously acted for his esteem. When she discovered to what lengths he had gone to arrange a settlement for Wickham and Lydia, 'she was proud of him, proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself.'

The Elizabeth Bennet who marries Darcy is not the person we see at the beginning; she has learned her lessons. Looking at her synoptically and philosophically, both the author and the reader find her quite amusing indeed, her relationship with Darcy is one great comic irony, distressing though it is at times.

There is another sister-Lydia Bennet. She was the youngest, but proud of being the tallest of the Bennet girls. It was her ambition to be married before her sisters and chaperon them to balls. She has been portrayed as a selfish girl, uncaring about the family and its honour. She elopes with Wickham to cause a lot of suffering at home.

And then Mary Bennet is yet another sister, who deserves only a passing mention. Her vanity made her more eager than her sister Elizabeth to play the piano and sing although she had neither genius nor taste.

If we move on to examine the relations between brothers and sisters we cannot overlook Darcy and Georgina in pride and prejudice. Darcy is an excellent brother. He cares a lot for his sister and is like a father to her. When she gets into trouble he gets out of it. She too is a good sister, obedient and respectful towards her elder brother. Even when Wickham persuades her to run away with him she considers it her duty to let her brother know about her whole affair and seek his forgiveness rather than give in to the strong urgings of her childhood love. She realizes her folly in time and thus saves her family from disgrace.

Darcy is very understanding in the matter and settles everything without allowing his kind sister's feelings to be hurt. He at once recognizes the lust for wealth behind Wickham's plan and ensures that he never ever come near Georgina in future.

Later in the novel, we witness how beautifully Darcy gets Georgina's room redecorated so that it would give his sister pleasure to be at Pemberley. Elizabeth, who is prejudiced against Darcy, is also forced to accept the fact that 'he is certainly a good brother.'

Darcy wishes his sister to make good friends and keep intelligent company. He knows Elizabeth will have a positive influence over Georgina and arranges for the two to meet. He already knows about Elizabeth's prejudice against him, but that does not come in his way when he is thinking of letting his sister benefit from her influence, and this speaks volumes for his love and care for his sister.

Earlier in the novel we notice how regularly he communicates with Georgina, keeps track of her achievements and praises her often. We hear him speak of his sister with pride in the company of others and Miss Bingley, too, is often seen lavishing her praise over Georgina's accomplishments.

On the whole, we witness an elder brother who adores his little sister, tries to guide her on the right path and who is always there to see her through tight spots. Georgina, on the other hand, is in awe of her elder brother, she loves him in her own timid way but also fears him and is always looking for his approval in all that she does. She has full faith that if she ever goes wrong, her brother will certainly come to her rescue and will show her the right path.

Another pair of a loving brother and sister can be seen in Mansfield Park. Fanny and William Price come from a very large but little esteemed family. Fanny is adopted by her rich relatives, the Bertrams, and Misses her brother William the most of all. In the very beginning of the novel, we are told that Fanny's heart was divided between

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2016

Edmund and her own brother. Edmund is her cousin at Mansfield park, who is the only one to take any trouble to be kind to her.

We witness Fanny always talking of her brother William, who joined the Navy, and she sounds really proud of him. She worries about him and is very happy to have him at Mansfield for a visit. Though short. She is very kind hearted and loving and feels beholden for any kindness shown to her brother by their rich relatives and friends.

Henry Crawford is very calculating and is quick to learn that Fanny loved her brother dearly. When he has a mind to impress Fanny, he uses this knowledge to his advantage. He attacked her on her weak side which was her affection for her brother William, and soon obliged her enough to be disliked by her less than before. William, who had lately returned from sea, was staying at Mansfield. Crawford lent William one of his houndes, took him to London in his own chaise and got him made a Lieutenant. But still he failed to win Fanny's hand in marriage.

Henry Crawford and Mary Crawford too are portrayed as loving and caring brother and sister. We find them sharing little secrets and confiding in each other. Henry Crawford, having begun love marking for amusement, went on in earnest. He felt really in love with Fanny and determined to win her and marry her. He sought his sister Mary's help in supporting his suit and she does everything in her power to promote the match. She makes friends with Fanny, praises her brother and tries to gain him a better and higher place in Fanny's thoughts.

The Crawford brother and sister resemble each other in good looks, manners, and sufficient fortune. They are welcome wherever they go, not only for their external graces but also for their benevolence, not very deep though. It was Henry Crawford, who during dinner at Southerton, took particular pains to restore general good humour when the fatigue and mistakes of the long day had ruffled more than one temper. His kindness to William Price was not all meant for Fanny; it gave him pleasure to be thoughtful and generous. His amiable character won the heart of Sir Thomas Bertram, who was at first disposed to keep him at a distance.

The kindness of the Crawfords wins them goodwill not their virtues, for though they are without vicious inclinations, they have no standard of right and wrong, noble and ignoble. They prefer the easy path and wrong, noble and ignoble. They prefer the easy path in everything, and make it easier still for those who would go with them. The precise, clergymanly Edmund, against his principles and inclinations, takes a part in lovers' vows because Mary wishes it. She is the only person who understands the difficulty of Fanny's position at Mansfield, that of a half-adopted daughter, half-companion, and who speaks a soothing word when Fanny is pestered by her cousins to take part in the theatricals and insulated by Mrs. Norris for not yielding. Mary is not 'nice' in her wishes and ambitions, too ready to marry any young man with enough fortune and position, but though a schemer, she has too much honesty or incautiousness to keep her schemes to herself. All her good feeling comes out in discussing Fanny with her brother the mutual confidence and sincerity of brother and sister is indeed most admirable. This relationship was always tenderly regarded by Jane Austen.

And then, Fanny and Edmund are an example of loving cousins. Edmund always guides Fanny and later when they become friends, she is his confidant. Fanny falls in love with the kind Edmund but never makes it known to him. She is pained to see Edmund fall in love with Mary Crawford and is further pained to have Edmund beseech her to accept Henry.

Unconscious of the pain he was causing to Fanny, Edmund continued to regard her as his confidant. He would have liked Henry Crawford to be connected with his family both for his personal regard for him and also for the advantage of coming nearer to Mary through this connection. It was hard for Fanny to have to listen to the man she loved, pressing the claims of another. Edmund could know only half of Fanny's reasons for refusing Crawford, since he had not the wit to guess the other half, so carefully hidden within her heart.

Edmund himself was long in coming to the point, and it is not quite clear what he was waiting for. The situation, as he saw it is described by him in a letter written to Fanny at Portsmouth from Mansfield park.¹⁰ He had

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2016

gauged it when he had been staying in London for three weeks and seeing Mary often. She was unwilling to marry a clergyman who meant to live as a clergyman.

Exception may be taken to the circumstances that no one ever suspected Fanny's love for Edmund. It is difficult to believe that no word or look or gesture or change of colour betrayed her heart. Was there ever a love secret that no other woman guessed.

But this puzzle of love is ultimately solved with Edmund proposing to Fanny, "..... exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did care to care about Miss Crawford, and become anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire."¹¹

So, we can now safely conclude that Jane Austen's novels abound in loving relationships between brothers, sisters and cousins. It is a natural world where each loves or detects the other.

REFERENCES

1. Austen, Jane: *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811, William Collins and Co., Ltd., London, pp. 30
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 30
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 74
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 242
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 244
6. Jane writes to Cassandra in Jan. 29, 1813, included in *Memoir*, pp. 98
7. This is a common substitute for incident in Jane Austen's works: Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* falls ill at Mrs. Jennings's house.
8. Austen, Jane: *Pride and Prejudice*, The Penguin Complete Novels of Jane Austen, 1983, Great Britain, pp. 257
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 442
10. Austen, Jane: *Mansfield Park*, (1975): The Zodiac Press: London, pp. 315
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 354