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**WOMEN NO MORE DOMINATED, RATHER GAINED AGENCY TO
ASSERT INDEPENDENCE: AN EVALUATION WITH REFERENCE TO
JANE AUSTEN**

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ABSTRACT

Representation of women, in postmodern context, are represented as independent beings instead of being dominated. Instead, they are represented as independent beings, who are capable of asserting agency and independence. This agency and independence is evaluated with reference to Jane Austen who portrays women like Elizabeth Bennet in novels like *Pride and Prejudice*. Characters like her are an exemplar of how women should be, while entering into relationships for marriage. Women like Emma are also needed for inspiring others not to marry until and unless they achieve self-respect and have asserted their self-worth. Women like these characters are needed more so that an inspiration can be created for other women to unleash their potential.

Key words: Women, domination, agency, independence, Jane Austen

1. INTRODUCTION

Early nineteenth-century England was male-dominated. This domination functioned under social framework which was applicable in the late eighteenth. Women, at this time, was sketched through marriage, inheritance, and dependence. Jane Austen, chose to write within this context, which reflected a nuanced portrayal of women not as mere passive victims of patriarchal dominance but possessing capability to assert moral, emotional, and intellectual independence (Lints, 2024). Female protagonists are Austen's mouthpiece for exploring gradual shifts from subordinate position to gaining personal agency. This transition revealed negotiation of social constraints to make autonomous choices. An evaluation of her novels reflects binding for women by societal limitations. These limitations increasingly assert independence, challenging traditional stereotypical notions to dominate females, redefining their position amidst other social constructs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen's novels are placed in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These novels are set within a rigid patriarchal society, where women confront legal, social, and economic constraints. However, portrayal of women as entirely dominated is not the actual scenario. Rather, Austen favors female characters as they actively negotiate these limitations, asserting their independence. This is through the attributes of intelligence, moral judgment, and personal choice. Thus, Karabulut, (2025) argues that Austen's work comes up clear as a transitional phase for which women unleash their agency. This is applicable even especially for women who are amidst restrictive social structures. At first glance, women in Austen's world seem to be dominated by marriage markets, inheriting laws from their father, husband, brother and other male figures. The entailment of property, is an important theme taken up in *Pride and Prejudice*. This entailment makes Bennet sisters financially vulnerable. As a result of this, their mother desperately tries to marry them off, so that they gain social security. Similarly, in *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwood women are sketched as dispossessed, after their father's sudden demise. These legal realities suppress harsh realities of improper representation of women lacking formal power. Aziz, (2025) is of the view that this reinforces the idea of male dominance in property and decision-making. Yet, there is allowance in the way Austen maps her heroines amidst these constraints.

With reference to Elizabeth Bennet, Austen envisions female agency. Her refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal, despite low economic security, unleashes her right to marry. This refusal enhances her respect and affection more as compared to convenience. Rejecting both Collins and Darcy's initial proposal is a demonstration of strong individuality capable of effective judgment. Elizabeth's wit, confidence, and moral clarity opposes traditional expectations of females being submissive. In this context, Mortaza, (2024) suggested that in an environment of limitations in the social constructs, autonomy can be asserted by individuals.

2.2 Emma

If attention is turned to *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse emerges unusual as women of her age is not allowed to enjoy much degree of independence. This is because of her financial and social position. However, she does not submit to the social norms. Evidence of this lies in her decision not to marry and be the master of her own choices to lead life. This does not mean that she is perfect in her judgments. This is reflected from flaws in matchmaking, which is not all her fault, as she is misguided. Austen's portrayal of Emma is filled with independence, which is women's strength. This strength, as Yasmin, Akhtar, and Maqbool, (2024) stated, is to be enjoyed, is crafted with self-awareness, and not suppressed. This strength and self-awareness reinforce women's agency, being responsible in dealing with the present context, situations and circumstances.

2.3 Persuasion

In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot's quiet resilience is another form of independence along with Emma's self-awareness. Initial stages reflect persuasion on her to reject Captain Wentworth. However, she emerges successful in sticking to her point, from which she later asserts her emotional autonomy. Evidence of this lies in loyalty and faithfulness towards her own judgment and feelings. She believed that in situations of hopelessness, women light a ray of hope by loving longest. From this belief, Fadhil, (2025) reveals that she gains emotional strength, establishing her agency, through subtly challenging patriarchal norms of constancy and endurance.

2.4 Concluding statements

Radicalization is fully not there in Austen's critique of characters rejecting marriage proposals. Instead, reinvoation of self-worth and potential is there in portrayal of the characters, who emerge as a true heroine, representing women's predicament within the social constructs. This does not mean that Austen's heroines remain unmarried. But these heroines are exemplars of marrying only after gaining mutual respect, emotional equality, and personal growth. Based on this context, marriage becomes a choice rather than submitting to the norms prevalent within the social constructs. As per the arguments of Ali, (2024), this mentality of the heroines reflects Austen's focus on achieving balance in the relationships, which is more important than domination or total independence.

Based on the review of these aspects, it can be concluded that Austen's heroines are different, as they refuse to be dominated or suppressed by constrains of social and legal frameworks. Their independence is asserted through wit, moral integrity, and allowance for making choices and decisions. As a result of this, they create an agency of their own to assert this type of independence. This independence and agency assertion is effective if men's attitudes are changed toward women. For this, Guarino, (2025) is of the view that they are to be portrayed as active individuals who are capable of shaping their own destinies amidst social constructs being within the boundaries.

3. METHODOLOGY

Explorational research design is apt for the paper to explore unexplored realms underlying in women's approach towards gaining agency and independence rather than marrying and being suppressed under the instructions of husband, father, brother. Positivism philosophy is apt as it helps in including scientific, objective, real and epistemological facts on women's gaining agency and independence even from marriage decisions. Taking a cue from literature review, deductive approach seems to be perfect for deducing the key facts on how women gain independence and agency and are not suppressed or dominated. Relevant data are collected from secondary sources like books, journal articles, reports, and other websites. Data collected from these sources are analyzed through narrative analysis. Ethics maintained in this context are acknowledging the sources used and not referring to those sources which has been published for more than 10 years old.

4. RESULTS

The section presents well-structured narratives on women not being dominated anymore, rather gaining agency to assert independence. The perspective is that of evaluation done by Jane Austen in her writing. For these narratives, academic style is followed for enhancing clarity in explanation to enhance understanding.

4.1 Position of females in social constraints

Settings of Jane Austen's novels are patriarchal society, where women are seen as legally and economically dependent on men. Inheritance, lack of respectful employment opportunities, and social pressure to marry make women's position vulnerable within the society. Novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* reveal sketch formation of women's lives h by male through male authority and financial insecurity (Gupta, 2024). However, these constraints do not silence women but limits spaces for women to exercise choice. This mentality suggests initiation of female agency which is asserted as compared to absolute domination.

4.2 Choice in Marriage

For Austen, marriage is the primary site where women can assert independence. However, her heroines reject marriages due to economic security or social pressures. Reference can be cited of Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, who refuses proposal of Mr. Collins. Charlotte Lucas's on the other hand, accepts the proposal, which demonstrates that marriage is a conscious decision taken by the heroines with the use of personal values (Wyett, 2026). Based on these actions, Austen highlights the importance of consent, respect, and emotional compatibility needed for a marriage to be successful. These evaluations transform marriage from an instrument of female domination to creating a space to assert self-worth.

4.3 Intellectual and Moral Agency

Austen sketches her female characters as having sharp intellect and moral authority. Examples are Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse who actively observe others, revising their

judgments through self-reflection. They are effective, which is decided from their ability to critically think, admit error of judgement, and grow in terms of morality. These aspect places the women characters as autonomous beings instead of passive figures (Kenney, 2025). Austen's analysis consists of shifts in the narrative power, which is provided to the women. This is because they are privileged in terms of perspectives and inner consciousness, exercised for manipulating choices for marriage.

4.4 Emotional Strength and Constancy

With reference to *Persuasion*, Austen uses emotional resilience as a form of independence, which women assert. Anne Elliot's quiet strength, patience, and emotional constancy is an exemplar as she opposes conventional notions of dominance, which makes them privileged in terms of outward authority. Anne Elliot Her ability to be loyal to her feelings, in spite of persuasion and regret highlights internal agency, resisting social pressures (Lints, 2024). Austen's arguments validate emotional endurance as a power, which understates the form of female independence.

4.5 Redefining female fulfillment

Austen does not reject marriage or domestic life but reinvokes the circumstances which defines, supports or opposes marriage choice and decisions by the women in the novels. Fulfillment of the requirements for women is not only the products of submission but also balance and mutual respect. These aspects make the marriage effective. The narrative arc of Austen's novel is a gift for women to assert self-respect and integrity (Karabulut, 2025). From this assertion, Austen envisions women as active participants for shaping their lives as independent beings rather than beings who are dominated.

4.6 Evaluative conclusion narrative

Subtle realism and irony are the important elements for Jane Austen to construct narratives which reflect a society, which is consistently changing. Women have not fully been liberated from patriarchal structures. Their representation is like being portrayed as entirely dominated. This is not the scene in the present context, as the women are no longer dominated, but asserts self-gained agency and independence by rejecting marriage proposals. Instead, Austen's

heroines are an exemplar, as they assert independence through exercising choice, moral judgment, and emotional intelligence. Her narratives leave an important mark on literary shifts, which recognize women's agency within social constraints.

5. CONCLUSION

After reviewing all these aspects, it can be concluded that women, in postmodern context, are no longer dominated by the patriarchy. Representation of these women shows the women as independent beings instead of beings who are dominated, suppressed and marginalized. Women now are smart enough to reject marriage proposals as they intend to gain self-achievement, respect, before entering into a relationship. Examples are set by characters like Elizabeth Bennet, Charlotte Lucas, Emma, and Anne Elliot. It is a secured platform, which the women need for asserting their agency and independence.

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