

EXPLORING SOCIAL ISSUES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND KAPUR'S *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS*

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Abstract

*"The relationship between literature and society cannot be separated, because literature presents a picture of life over social reality" (Manugeren et al., 2020, p. 151). This research presents a comparative study of social issues in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, examining how both novels portray the intersection of gender, marriage, and societal expectations. While *Pride and Prejudice* deals with the impact of social class, financial stability, and personal choice on marriage, *Difficult Daughters* focuses on the complexities faced by women in post-colonial India, highlighting the tension between tradition and personal autonomy. Through their respective portrayals of female protagonists, the novels critique patriarchal structures, offering insights into how women navigate societal norms and assert their agency within restrictive frameworks. This study further examines the role of marriage as a social institution, highlighting its varied significance across different historical and cultural contexts, and the ways in which both authors challenge traditional gender roles and advocate for emotional and intellectual autonomy. The findings demonstrate that both novelists, Austen and Kapur, negotiate social issues such as gender, marriage, and societal expectations, with Austen focusing on the constraints of marriage and inheritance in 19th-century England, while Kapur explores gender oppression and resistance in 20th-century India. Both highlight women's struggles for autonomy, with education serving as a transformative agent in their lives. Despite differing cultural contexts, both authors emphasize generational tensions, societal expectations, and women's persistent quest for identity and agency.*

Keywords: Social issues, gender roles, marriage, patriarchy, agency, identity, cultural norms, financial stability, personal autonomy, comparative “.

Introduction

Apart from being an entertainment medium, literature has also an important role in exposing social problems, as basically literature is born and is intended for the community. Through the disclosure of social problems, the role of literature is increasingly developing, among others, as a medium of teaching, reference, reflection, character building and also criticism. (Manugeren et al., 2020, p. 150)

Literature serves as a mirror to society, reflecting both its flaws and virtues. Through its representational function, it raises awareness of societal issues and highlights positive values for emulation. As a creative expression of human behavior, literature encapsulates the prevailing thoughts and actions within a community (Duhan, 2015). This reflective role forms the basis of the sociology of literature, which studies the relationship between literary works and the social structures in which they are created. It highlights how social conditions shape the creation and existence of literary texts (Arisky, 2019).

Comparative is a concept that derives from the verb —to compare (the etymology is Latin comparer, derivation of par = equal, with prefix com-, it is a systematic comparison). Comparative studies are investigations to analyze and evaluate, with quantitative and qualitative

methods, a phenomenon and/or facts among different areas, subjects, and/or objects to detect similarities and/or differences. (Afzal, et al., 2024 p. 770)

Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field that studies literature across different languages, cultures, time periods, and genres, as well as its connections to other art forms like music, painting, dance, and film (Ramish, 2022). It has evolved into ‘comparative cultural studies,’ which combines theories and methods from both comparative literature and cultural studies to deepen the understanding of artistic and cultural interconnections. As Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998) notes, ‘comparative cultural studies’ examines literature within a broader cultural context, using interdisciplinary approaches to explore the interconnectedness of cultural expressions. Sahin (2016) highlights the field’s expansion beyond national boundaries, encompassing literatures, languages, and cultures on a global scale. This approach enhances literary studies, translation, area studies, and global studies by examining how local and national literatures interact with other cultures, enriching global literary traditions and emphasizing cross-cultural influences across time and place.

This study adopts a comparative approach to examine Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, focusing on social issues such as marriage, class, patriarchy, and gender roles. These social issues, while deeply personal in the context of the characters’ lives, also reflect broader societal tensions. By analyzing these two novels set in distinct historical and cultural contexts—early 19th-century England and post-colonial India—the study highlights how women’s agency is shaped and constrained by the social orders they inhabit. Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters* offer critiques of the societal structures that govern women’s lives. Austen (1813) examines the influence of marriage on a woman’s social standing, intertwining themes of love, class, and financial security. On the contrary, Kapur (1998) portrays the struggles of women navigating societal expectations in a post-colonial Indian context, where political and cultural changes affect personal identities.

Both Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) critique patriarchal systems that restrict women’s autonomy, exploring how their female protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Virmati, navigate these constraints. Austen (1813) examines the societal expectations of marriage, portraying it as both a personal choice and a social necessity, critiquing the limited options available to women regarding financial independence and social mobility. Through Elizabeth, Austen (1813) highlights the tension between individual desires and societal norms. Similarly, in *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur (1998) focuses on Virmati’s struggle with familial duty, traditional values, and her aspirations for education and personal fulfillment in post-colonial India. Kapur (1998) critiques how marriage dominates women’s roles and subordinates their ambitions, depicting women as passive figures constrained by patriarchal expectations. Both novels reveal how societal pressures shape women’s identities, offering insights into universal and culturally specific challenges across different historical contexts.

Literature Review

Ritika (2023) argues that in *Pride and Prejudice*, marriage is a key factor in determining a woman’s social status and happiness, often prioritizing economic concerns over love and personal agency. Women are depicted as shaping their identities to appeal to potential husbands, relying on male figures for validation and security. The novel also highlights the societal pressure on unmarried women, who are viewed as burdens, emphasizing the need to marry strategically for financial stability. “The patriarchal civilization has always dominated the female

counterparts through their authoritative voices... In the novel, there is not a single self-made woman. All women are tied to societal constraints” (Ritika, 2023, p. 122). *Pride and Prejudice* offers a “representation of gender identity, social standing and power dynamics within the characters serves as a critique of the patriarchal structures that dictate women’s roles (p. 80). Prashanthi & Behera (2024) note that in *Difficult Daughters*, female characters use politeness strategies and indirect speech to conform to societal norms, while male characters employ direct and assertive language to assert dominance and reinforce patriarchal authority. Lee (2024) argues that while socioeconomic factors are important, Austen emphasizes that empathy and mutual understanding are crucial for a successful marriage, challenging the notion that financial stability is the sole determinant of a woman’s future and advocating for emotional connections in lasting relationships. “*Pride and Prejudice* makes clear that empathy should be a driving force for marriage, as it is the force that can most effectively overcome adversity in any relationship” (Lee, 2024, p. 6).

Difficult Daughters critiques patriarchal structures that confine women to submissive roles, emphasizing their limited agency and the challenges they face in asserting autonomy (Vijayashanthi et al., 2023). Virmati’s journey reflects a broader struggle for identity and self-determination within rigid societal norms, illustrating the duality of women’s experiences as they navigate societal restrictions while striving for personal autonomy and fulfillment. It highlights “the dualities faced by the characters that are simultaneously constrained by ingrained gender norms and driven by their desire, for personal fulfillment” (Pandey & Kaur, 2023, p. 44). *Difficult Daughters* explores the complexities of gender dynamics, highlighting the challenges women face in balancing societal expectations with the pursuit of personal autonomy. Virmati, the protagonist, embodies the tension between tradition and individual desires, reflecting the pressures faced by women in mid-20th century India, where marriage and obedience are prioritized (Kumar, 2024). Kapur’s female characters challenge conventional norms by advocating for education and self-sufficiency, promoting a redefined sense of autonomy and resisting traditional societal limitations. “Kapur invites us to reflect on the intricate interplay of societal constructs and feminine agency” (Sanap, 2024, p. 178). Virmati’s relationship with Professor Harish Chandra highlights the emotional turmoil women experience when navigating love in defiance of societal expectations (Mohan & Kasyap, 2024).

While existing literature predominantly analyzes each novel within its own cultural and historical context, there is a lack of focused comparative analysis that explores how both authors engage with and critique the social frameworks that shape their characters’ lives. A comprehensive study examining these works together would offer valuable insights into the ways in which social norms, especially gender roles, are contested and negotiated across different time periods and cultural settings.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study uses comparative literary analysis to explore how gender, marriage, and women’s agency are portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*. It examines these issues within the socio-cultural contexts of 19th-century England and mid-20th-century post-colonial India, highlighting how each author critiques societal norms. Through textual analysis and historical and cultural perspectives, the study highlights the shared and distinct ways societal expectations shape the characters’ identities and struggles in both works.

Social problems are conditions deemed undesirable by a significant portion of society (Manis, 2014) and arise when collective perceptions define certain conditions as problematic

(Lauer, 2016). Literature reflects both societal virtues and flaws, serving as a tool for introspection and reform by highlighting shortcomings while celebrating positive behaviors. According to Duhan (2015) and Dubey (2013), literature imitates human actions and captures societal realities, making it a powerful means to critique and influence social norms, ultimately addressing social issues. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, literature reflects social problems, including gender, which is shaped by cultural, economic, and political factors (Manugeran et al., 2020). Gender relations, as defined by Ottesen et al. (2010), describe how societies assign roles, rights, and identities to men and women, with Harel-Shalev et al. (2019) noting that these relations can reinforce or challenge societal norms. Historically, women have been marginalized due to patriarchal structures, and as Baden (2000) points out, their limited bargaining power perpetuates systemic inequalities, a theme explored in both Austen's and Kapur's works.

Patriarchy continues to restrict women's autonomy and opportunities, as highlighted by Beauvoir (1949), who argues that women can only achieve true emancipation through economic and social equality. This view is reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*, where societal constraints limit women's personal agency. Beauvoir (1949), contends that women have gained only what men are willing to grant them, rather than asserting their own rights. Both novels illustrate how patriarchal structures deny women opportunities for independent work or creative fulfillment, revealing the challenges they face in asserting their autonomy and agency.

Class conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by struggles between different social classes, often rooted in competition for resources, power, and ideological dominance. It manifests in various forms, including both violent and nonviolent actions, and can be observed across historical and geographical contexts. "Class conflict refers to a broad set of social actions that are manifested in direct and indirect, violent and nonviolent, noninstitutionalized and institutionalized struggles between social classes" (Lee, 2024, p. 1). "Class conflicts are mostly based on competing ideologies embraced by different segments of a community. These values may be religious, economic, political, social, etc. in nature" (Al Areqi, 2022, p. 566).

This comparative study uses sociology of literature, gender theory, and class conflict to analyze gender, marriage, and women's agency in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*. It explores how both novels critique societal norms, focusing on gender relations influenced by cultural, economic, and political factors, as well as the impact of social class on women's lives. The study emphasizes the challenges women face in negotiating their identity and autonomy within patriarchal structures.

Textual Analysis

This comparative study analyzes how *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (1813) and *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur (1998) address gender, marriage, and women's agency in different cultural contexts. Austen (1813) critiques the social structures of 19th-century England, while Kapur (1998) explores the challenges faced by women in post-colonial India. Using sociology of literature, gender theory, and class conflict, the study reveals how societal expectations shape women's identities and struggles, highlighting both shared and divergent critiques of patriarchal systems.

a). Social Issues in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Austen (1813) critiques societal norms within England's landed gentry and middle class, focusing on themes of romance, marriage, class, and patriarchy. She challenges marriages of convenience and emphasizes the importance of love-based unions. Through her heroines, Austen

(1813) critiques the view of women as weak and dependent on men, advocating for genuine companionship and challenging patriarchal structures. This thought can be viewed in one of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet, who was portrayed as someone with a “weak understanding and illiberal mind” (Austen, 1813, p. 3). On the other hand, her husband, Mr. Bennet has been characterized as a powerful and mordant man who felt great fun in laughing at her; it happened many times without her knowing.

Marriage is a significant social issue in the society of that time, which Austen (1813) examines in her novel. “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (Austen, 1813, p. 1). The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* sets the novel’s central theme with a comically ironic statement, suggesting that wealthy unmarried men are inevitably pursued by women seeking husbands. This highlights a significant social issue of the era—love and marriage—around which the novel’s events revolve. “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance” (Austen, 1813, p. 19). Elizabeth, the protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice*, is one of the best example of woman’ substandard. She is taken aback of what she feels about the qualities of a woman during a conversation with Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley. The definition of an accomplished woman according to them was “...a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, all the modern languages...” (Austen, 1813, p. 36). Though Elizabeth did not personally appropriate in the structure of exemplary Regency woman, she was intelligent and clearheaded, she could not support them and think that a woman was unable to fit that accomplished view of Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley. “All this she must possess, added Darcy, and to all this she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading” (Austen, 1813, p. 36). Mr. Darcy reveals the awkward ‘accomplishments’ that a woman must possess. A woman should also improve her mind through extensive reading.

Mr. Bennet is an old-fashioned gentleman, while Mrs. Bennet is focused on securing marriages for her five daughters, each with unique personalities. In their society, marriage is viewed primarily as a means of financial security and stability, rather than love, as women needed to avoid financial dependence and societal shame. The arrival of the wealthy Charles Bingley excites the Bennet family, who first inquire about his income: “Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune: four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!” (Austen, 1813, p. 1). Mrs. Bennet aims to marry off her daughters, particularly hoping for a match between Jane and the wealthy Charles Bingley. The ball serves as the setting for their growing romance. In contrast, Lady Catherine marries for wealth and status, driven by pride, while Mr. Collins admires her position. Charlotte Lucas, fearing the stigma of being an “old maid,” marries Mr. Collins to avoid burdening her family.

By the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, the hero and heroine, Darcy and Elizabeth, along with other couples, have found their marital matches. However, the tension in their love story, compounded by their differing social statuses, shapes much of the novel’s plot. The Meryton Ball, a crucial social event, serves as the setting for their first meeting, where introductions lead to future connections. Austen’s (1813) treatment of marriage reveals its significance as a social issue in her time, emphasizing the consequences of being single. Regarding Mrs. Bennet, Austen (1813) writes: “She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and an uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news” (Austen, 1813, p. 3). Austen (1813) bluntly reveals that Charlotte, “without thinking highly of either men or of matrimony,” viewed

marriage as the only path to a respectable position for well-educated women from middle-class families. While it may not guarantee happiness, it provides financial security and protection from want, as women had no other opportunities in commerce, business, or education. *Pride and Prejudice* reflects the financial inequality of women, showing how many were forced to marry for security. The novel presents seven marriages, three of which—Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Charlotte and Collins, and Lydia and Wickham—demonstrate bad marriages, highlighting the importance of good decisions and genuine affection for future happiness. Mr. Bennet, captivated by youth and beauty, lacks the fraternal respect that is essential for a successful marriage.

Austen (1813) emphasizes that emotions alone, as seen in Charlotte's case, or avoiding emotions entirely, as Lydia does, are not sufficient for a successful marriage. Elizabeth warns her father about Lydia's reckless behavior, recognizing that thoughtless passion leads to disgrace. A good marriage, as exemplified by Darcy and Elizabeth, requires respect, understanding, and mutual affection. Austen (1813) suggests that good judgment, not flattery or external opinions, is key to making the right marital decision. Elizabeth, initially blinded by prejudice, learns to judge Darcy correctly, showing that self-awareness and mutual understanding are crucial. Austen (1813) critiques marriages based solely on economic security, like Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins, which sacrifices personal happiness for financial stability:

Without thinking highly either of man or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (Austen, 1813, p. 120)

Austen (1813) critiques marriages based on superficial qualities, like the elopement of Lydia and Wickham, driven by physical attraction and enthusiasm, which lead to a marriage marked by mutual endurance rather than affection. Similarly, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage, once fueled by attraction, has deteriorated into mutual tolerance, with Mr. Bennet retreating into isolation and Mrs. Bennet remaining disorganized. In contrast, Jane and Elizabeth's marriages are based on mutual love, respect, and understanding. Austen (1813) emphasizes that marriage must align with societal norms and be a social act, affecting not just the individuals but their families and society. The elopement of Lydia and Wickham highlights the consequences of selfish actions, while the unions of Darcy and Elizabeth, as well as Jane and Bingley, bring happiness to their families and society, showing that family considerations are paramount in Austen's (1813) world.

When Darcy seeks Mr. Bennet's approval for Elizabeth's hand in marriage, Mr. Bennet expresses his concern for Elizabeth's happiness, stating, "My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life" (Austen, 1813, p. 365). Elizabeth's appreciation for Darcy's efforts convinces Mr. Bennet of the union's merit. The novel illustrates the impact of parental influence on character development, with Elizabeth and Jane flourishing despite their parents' indifference. Mr. Bennet's neglect of his younger daughters, especially Lydia and Kitty, and his detachment from family issues lead to consequences, as seen in Lydia's foolish behavior. Elizabeth defends her family's upbringing when Lady Catherine criticizes it, asserting, "Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were necessary. Those who choose to be idle certainly might" (Austen, 1813, p. 101).

Elizabeth and Jane's reputations suffer due to their younger sisters' actions, particularly Lydia's trip to Brighton, which disrupts Mr. Bennet's selfish peace (Austen, 1813, p. 365). Austen critiques Mr. Collins, noting his lack of sense and education, shaped by his miserly and illiterate father (Austen, 1813, p. 65). In the early nineteenth century, women's education focused more on social accomplishments than individual career development, preparing them to be suitable wives rather than independent individuals. Women were expected to excel in music, languages, and manners to be considered accomplished (Austen, 1813, p. 36). Austen (1813) herself benefitted from a learned father, but most women's status and education were dictated by their father's wealth or, later, their husband's (Austen, 1813). Women could inherit titles but not property, with few exceptions like Lady de Bourgh or Mrs. Ferrars (Austen, 1813).

Austen (1813) highlights the social status of married women, who were regarded more highly than unmarried women, often gaining privileges such as escorting younger, unmarried ladies. Lydia, the youngest of the Bennet sisters, prides herself on her married status and assumes superiority over her older sisters (Austen, 1813, p. 365). Austen (1813) portrays a clear class distinction between the upper and middle classes, each governed by its own values and expectations. The middle and upper classes were judged by their manners, social conduct, and courtship. This class divide is exemplified when Darcy refuses to dance with any woman at the ball, claiming Jane is the only beautiful woman, while others are merely tolerable (Austen, 1813, p. 17). Marry Bennet remarks, "Pride relates more to our opinion of us, vanity to what we would have others think of us," to which young Lucas replies, "If I was as rich as Mr. Darcy... I should not care how proud I was" (Austen, 1813, p. 17).

Although Darcy's pride may seem ill-mannered, his acquaintances approve of it because of his wealth and social status. They believe that anyone in his position would display the same pride. Austen (1813) clearly illustrates that rigid class differences are often perceived as reasonable, yet seldom without absurdity. Mr. Collins' comic formality and his relationship with Lady Catherine serve as an ironic commentary on class and social values. While Austen (1813) acknowledges the existence of class hierarchy, she also critiques how it can corrupt society. Darcy's wealth of ten thousand a year elevates his status upon his first appearance. Darcy represents old money, inherited through his family, while Bingley possesses new money, earned through his father's business. Bingley is a gentleman from the upper class who easily fits into his position, whereas Darcy exemplifies a high-class gentleman of society. The novel highlights the distinction between the rich and the less fortunate, particularly showing the pressures on women to marry wealthy men. In Austen's (1813) society, marriage is intrinsically linked to money. Austen's (1813) personal views on money and marriage are evident through her heroines, particularly Elinor Dashwood. The varying attitudes of her characters reflect human nature and the societal norms of the time. Marriage is portrayed as a social contract, carrying significant responsibilities. In an age without social services, insurance, or pensions, a man who marries commits to supporting his family, and the woman commits to following him for life. The necessity of a justified income is central to this social contract, making the wealth of a suitor a key concern.

In the societal context of Austen's (1813) time, a woman's primary role was within the family, with marriage being her ultimate destiny. Family life encompassed relationships with various relatives, not just her spouse. Austen (1813) explores these dynamics, briefly touching on the husband-wife relationship, where the man was expected to provide financial security and social status. Families eagerly sought ideal matches for their daughters, ensuring their care and

love after their passing. Marriage was also a means to forge alliances with other families, securing social standing and financial stability. This tradition was crucial for a daughter's happiness and her family's well-being. "When a woman has five grown up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty" (Austen, 1813, p. 2).

In Regency society, people often looked down on single women, calling them "old maids" and finding amusement in their unmarried state. Some people would sympathize with them, but also make jokes about their single status. Many women felt pressure to get married, as it was seen as the key to freedom and financial stability. They wanted to escape their dependence on their parents and find a husband to support them. In family life, men were in charge, giving orders, while women were expected to obey them. "It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come since you will not visit them." (Austen, 1813, p. 3) Mrs. Bennet represented the typical woman of her time, following her husband's commands and unable to make decisions without him. She adhered to societal norms, seeking her husband's approval before visiting Mr. Bingley's house. This highlights the lack of respect for women without their husbands' support. When Mr. Bennet showed disinterest in Mr. Bingley's meeting with Jane, Mrs. Bennet avoided the topic and changed the subject, demonstrating her submissive nature. Women were generally considered inferior, while men were expected to take on household and family responsibilities, providing wealth and material comfort to their families. When Mrs. Bennet first time came to know about Mr. Bingley, she was fascinating because she perceived that he was "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year" (Austen, 1813, p. 1). With this man she was expecting to form an alliance of one of her five daughters since they possessed qualities which were most essential in a wife in that society.

Women who had chance to work outside were not needed to do, but the men sometimes wanted it. Men were also expected to participate in domestic work though ladies were not going outside for working. In the age of Austen these were prominent obligations that men could not ignore. Elizabeth greatly respected her father, Mr. Bennet. When her mother insists her to marry Mr. Collins, and proclaims to her father to persuade Lizzy to prepare for marrying Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet tells to Elizabeth, "An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do" (Austen, 1813, p. 109). If Mr. Bennet had ordered Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, she would have had no other option except marrying to Mr. Collins for whom she has a strong aversion.

Among the familial responsibilities during the era, motherhood was the most important part of a woman's life. Besides this they ran the house systematically, took care of their children, instructed the house servants, looked after the unwell and older members, and did other domestic works. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet managed the house work. She took care that the servants did what was required for home, arranged banquets as is shown during the visit of Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy in Longbourn, and stimulated her daughters for early marriages. When Jane was to go to Mr. Bingley's house on an invitation given to her, Mrs. Bennet suggests "...you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain, and then you must stay all night" (Austen, 1813, p. 27). Her mother was not being harsh to Jane; rather, Mrs. Bennet wanted Jane to halt at Mr. Bingley's residence for some extra period of time so that he would develop love in her. Yet it was a dangerous thought to send Jane outside during a bad weather. This act displays how devoted Mrs. Bennet was for the marriage of daughters. She was even ready to take risk of her daughter's life in order to accomplish her motherly duty to supervise and

get them married one by one. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst also discussed about the adjustment of women with societal roles. Besides the truth that they belonged to upper class, they were tending to Jane when she fell ill thus taking her responsibility. “All women are likely, at some period of their lives, to be called to perform duties of a sicknurse...” (Austen, 1813, p. 38). Undoubtedly a woman had to get married to sustain in such a society. In Elizabeth Bennet’s case the situation is dreadful because Mr. Collins fate is to be entailed to Mr. Bennet because Mr. Bennet had no son and Collins was the likely inheritor for his estate. In that society a woman could only be either tutor or a governess, which was also not an honored profession, marriage in a rich family was only the place considered respectable for a woman. Elizabeth does not bow down in front of her situations and resists performing her mother’s will, having for a rich husband. As Mrs. Bennet said, “Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane’s disposition as you do”. “But if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out” ... (Austen, 1813, p. 19).

Darcy’s initial disdain for the Bennet family stems from Mrs. Bennet’s uncouth behavior and her relentless pursuit of securing marriages for her daughters. However, her actions are driven by financial desperation, as the family’s fortune is to be inherited by Mr. Bennet’s heir. Elizabeth, a feminist of her time, rejects the notion of marriage for financial security, spurning both Mr. Collins and Darcy’s proposals in favor of love and genuine affection. Over time, Darcy’s pride and Elizabeth’s prejudice dissolve, as Elizabeth sees beyond Darcy’s arrogance, recognizing his true character, and Darcy admires Elizabeth’s independence and defiance. He finally discovers in her, his match in prudence so what if not in social class. As Elizabeth tells him at the time of his proposal:

My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners_ my behaviour to you was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence. You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused and interested you, I was so unlike them. (Austen, 1813, p. 368)

Austen (1813) critiques the rigid class structure of 18th-century England, challenging the notion that class distinctions should influence marriage. Elizabeth, though from an inferior class to Darcy, proves intellectually equal to him, demonstrating that class does not determine worth. Darcy, initially blinded by class snobbery, realizes his prejudice is unjustified, particularly after Elizabeth defends her family’s honor. The novel can be seen as a critique of an era where women’s worth was tied to marriage for survival, with clear gender and class distinctions. Austen (1813) emerges as a feminist and Marxist figure, recognizing the flaws in these societal constructs. Elizabeth Bennet, through her wit, intelligence, and independence, asserts her equality with Darcy, transcending both class and gender barriers, earning his respect and admiration.

Austen (1813) critiques the patriarchal structures of 18th-century England, where women were expected to secure their social stability through marriage due to limited opportunities for independence. The principle of entailment, which restricted property inheritance to male heirs, further reinforced this inequality. Elizabeth Bennet is portrayed as an exception, as her intelligence and independence set her apart, though her potential marriage to Darcy could have led to subjugation. Austen (1813) also critiques marriages driven by societal pressures, such as

Mr. Bennet's regretful marriage to Mrs. Bennet and Charlotte Lucas's loveless marriage to Mr. Collins. These unions highlight how societal expectations trap individuals, especially women, into emotionally unfulfilling marriages. Through these portrayals, Austen critiques the class-driven marriage system, illustrating how women were often forced into marriages for security and survival, sacrificing personal happiness.

Mr. Darcy is also a good example of male supremacy. Miss Lucas also claims about Darcy, "One cannot wonder that so fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud" (Austen, 1813, p. 17). Darcy is prosperous, successful, smart, and dignified but he is also class-conscious and arrogant. He is unlike Elizabeth who is outspoken and finally through her humaneness manages to mend his thoughts towards middle and lower classes. Thus Darcy realizes that character cannot be defined by the class. Belonging to a high class family does not surely make one intelligent in character or more ethical, as he detects the nonsensical attitude of Miss Bingleys who keep chasing him. So Austen's happy ending is not totally a compromise but a description of what it meant to be successful as a woman in those days. To win for a woman in Austen's age was her marriage in a well to do family. Women had to lose their independence and powers to self-assessment to marry an upper class man who would take responsibility of them for the rest of their lives. *Pride and Prejudice* also presents gender issues of the boorish economic realities. Marriages became business proposals, as Mr. Collins' offers to marry Elizabeth, thus displays his business proposal. He reveals her financial condition to her and explains how the decision of marrying him would reduce her financial hazards, without considering whether she has any feelings for him. The various marriages can be described as forms of fortune hunting, with the females marrying as usual into wealth and security.

b). Social Issues in Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*

In Indian society, marriage is viewed as a ritual where a woman's value is tied to her marriage and ability to bear children, especially a male child. Women face societal pressure and blame for not conceiving, often being marginalized. Despite progress, women remain confined to domestic roles, with their desires overlooked. The man-woman relationship, though rooted in biological and emotional bonds, faces societal challenges. Marriages provide stability but often focus on fulfilling sexual and household duties, while love and understanding, crucial for a successful relationship, are hindered by societal norms that prevent love before marriage.

Kapur (1998) addresses a wide range of social and political issues, including communalism, dowry, education, sexual abuse, partition, and women's sexuality in *Difficult Daughters*. Her protagonists, like Virmati and Astha, grapple with the tension between tradition and modernity, seeking love, freedom, and personal fulfillment. She portrays three generations of women—Kasturi, Virmati, and Ida—focusing on Virmati's struggle to define her identity in a patriarchal society. Narrated by Ida, the novel uncovers Virmati's past through family accounts, highlighting the strained relationships between mothers and daughters. It examines traditional gender roles, where women are expected to prioritize childbearing, and the challenges of constructing female identity and independence within these constraints. *Difficult Daughters* opens with an assertion by Ida that reveals the image of her mother she holds in her mind: "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (Kapur, 1998, p. 1). The novel begins with Ida's rejection of her mother, marking the commencement of Virmati's death and cremation. After this separation, Ida experiences a profound sense of loss and emptiness. Psychoanalytically, she reflects on her emotions, sharing them as a way to release herself from

her internal conflict with her mother. She writes in an attempt to cease being haunted by her mother, pleading, “This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore” (Kapur, 1998, p. 280). As Ida delves into her mother’s past, she learns more about her life through the accounts of her aunt and uncle, who describe their large joint family of 11 children, with Virmati as the eldest. Kasturi’s life is dominated by the relentless pressure to bear children, leading to both physical and mental exhaustion. Despite her in-laws’ view that she is blessed with many offspring, Kasturi feels overwhelmed and helpless, eventually suffering severe illness. Her eleventh pregnancy pushes her body and mind to their breaking points, and she fears that childbirth might be the death of her.

Ida’s relationship with her mother, Virmati, is fraught with tension, as reflected in Ida’s declaration that she never wanted to be like her mother (Kapur, 1998, p. 1). Born to Virmati and her professor husband Harish on the eve of Independence, Ida’s name symbolized a “clean slate,” and she seeks to understand her mother’s history after her death to find her own identity (Kapur, 1998, p. 4). Despite growing up under the weight of her father’s expectations and her mother’s influence, Ida gradually learns to question and assert herself. After her mother’s death, she feels the need to uncover her mother’s story, acknowledging, “Without her, I am lost” (Kapur, 1998, p. 4). This statement highlights the unconscious bond between them. As a modern, powerful woman, Ida’s termination of pregnancy leads to the breakdown of her marriage, symbolizing her liberation from male dominance and traditional societal constraints (Kapur, 1998, p. 280).

Swarna Lata, Virmati’s friend, represents a confident and independent woman who resists societal pressures to marry, focusing on establishing her individuality. She later balances her ideals of independence with family responsibilities and actively participates in national movements, symbolizing the rise of the “new woman.” In contrast, Ida uncovers her mother Virmati’s past, revealing the struggles of her grandmother Kasturi, who bore 11 children. Kasturi’s life was marked by physical and mental exhaustion from constant childbirth, and she viewed her eleventh pregnancy as a curse, feeling it might lead to her death. When she tells her bua about this: “I am going to die, Maji, this time [eleventh pregnancy]. I know it. “Dont talk rubbish, beti, retorted the older woman sharply. God has favoured you” (Kapur, 1998, p. 8).

As the eldest daughter, Virmati assumes her mother Kasturi’s responsibilities, becoming a second mother to her siblings. Kasturi’s constant childbearing leaves her weak, forcing Virmati to take on caregiving duties and sacrifice her childhood. She never receives the care and attention she deserves from her parents, especially her mother, who treats her coldly. Virmati experiences silent female oppression in her conservative family, expected to follow in her mother’s footsteps. She faces major obstacles in pursuing education, as her mother constantly pressures her to care for her siblings. Unable to express her feelings, Virmati finds inspiration in her cousin, Shakuntala, whose education and independence motivate her. Education becomes Virmati’s means to carve out an identity. “I want to be like you, Pehnji, blurred Virmati” (Kapur, 1998, p. 17). She explains to her eager-eyed cousin Virmati “how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else” (Kapur, 1998, p. 17). For the first time, Virmati realizes that being something other than a wife is possible and decides to pursue her studies, seeing higher education as a means to individuality. This decision contrasts with Kasturi’s views on education: “Hai re beti! What is the need to do a job? A woman’s shaan is in

her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shadi here Kasturi's eyes glistened with emotion. After you get married, Viru can follow" (Kapur, 1998, p. 17). When Virmati had her FA exams she had not been able to "well due to her responsibilities towards her siblings. They were all dependent on her as a second mother more than their real mother Kasturi. She got irritated and complained to her mother, but again Kasturi did not understand her emotions and blasts of her: "Leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad tempered with your family...What good are Shaku's degrees when she is not settled? Will they look after her when she is old? (Kapur, 1998, p. 22).

Marriage plays a central role in Virmati's life, as her family arranges a match with a canal engineer, giving her limited time to finish her FA exams. Her further education is dismissed in favor of her younger sister Indumati's upcoming marriage. However, when the wedding is delayed due to the groom's father's death, Virmati requests permission to pursue a BA at Arya Sabha College. During this time, she falls in love with her married neighbor, Professor Harish Chandra, who is captivated by her intellect and charm. His wife, Ganga, a simple and devoted homemaker, contrasts sharply with Virmati's ambitions:

[Ganga] was going defenceless into union with a man so unlike the others she knew, who didn't seem to care about household skills at all? Yet he was impatient and angry when the food was badly cooked, and the house carelessly managed." (Kapur, 1998, p. 40)

The novel highlights patriarchy as a dominant social issue, embodied by Lala Diwan Chand, who controls family decisions and expects conformity. His sister, Lajwanti, is the only one to challenge him, proposing separate homes on Lepel Griffin Road. Meanwhile, Kasturi, Virmati's mother, respects her father-in-law and urges compliance with his authority. Virmati to appreciate the opportunities provided by him and her father: "They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you" (Kapur, 1998, p. 54). Lala Diwan Chand assumes control over family matters, planning Virmati's future with caution: "I have been approached, and when the time is right, I will pick a boy from our samaj, educated and homely" (Kapur, 1998, p. 23).

Lala Diwan Chand, the patriarch, ignores Virmati's suicide attempt and her reasons for rejecting an arranged marriage with a canal engineer in favor of an already married professor, highlighting the rigid patriarchy within the family. The professor's mother opposes their relationship but is powerless to influence her son, though she dominates her daughter-in-law, Ganga. Virmati is ostracized for rejecting the marriage, with no efforts made to understand her actions. Lacking parental affection, she is drawn to the professor for emotional support. Despite living in a patriarchal environment, Virmati's family fails to protect or guide her, blaming her education for her rebellion. Kasturi, constrained by societal norms, focuses on teaching her daughters to please their future in-laws rather than nurturing their individuality. She dismisses Virmati's emotions, reinforcing societal expectations that a woman's happiness lies solely in marriage: "In her time going to school had been privilege, not to be abused by going against one's parents. How had girls changed so much in just a generation (Kapur, 1998, p. 60)?

Swarna, a politically active woman involved in India's freedom movement, influences Virmati by asserting her independence in relationships, politics, and personal aspirations. Unlike Virmati, who struggles with societal expectations, Swarna embodies the "new woman" ideal. Virmati admires Swarna, her roommate, who is "doing MA in Lahore while actively advocating for women's rights through political engagement, including slogan shouting and speechmaking. Swarna's confidence and activism inspire Virmati's growing awareness and desire for autonomy. She values freedom above societal norms, urging Virmati to wake up: "Marriage is not the only

thing in life, Viru. The war _ the satyagraha movement... women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail, wake up from your stale dream” (Kapur, 1998, p. 151). Virmati gradually recognizes the futility of romantic myths, realizing that love and union with one man do not guarantee happiness or fulfillment. She reflects on her lack of agency, wondering, “How could she explain her own actions” (Kapur, 1998, p. 151)? She starts to doubt her own freedom: “Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organising, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love” (Kapur, 1998, p. 142).

Virmati’s involvement in a second marriage with Harish, a married professor, highlights the societal challenges and humiliation women face in such unions. Virmati is drawn to Harish due to his dissatisfaction with his uneducated wife and her own pursuit of love and knowledge. Despite facing immense pressure from the patriarchal structure, she seeks social acceptance by pursuing formal marriage, even as a second wife. However, she continues to experience oppressive dynamics at the Professor’s house, mirroring her struggles in her own family. Torn between her emotions and family values, Virmati ultimately follows her desires. During a period when the Professor is away, she undergoes physical and psychological trauma from an abortion, with Swarna supporting her through the procedure. Virmati’s only strengthens her relation with the Professor: “She was his for life, whether he ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice” (Kapur, 1998, p. 177). After becoming the Professor’s second wife, Virmati faces rejection from both her family and his. Her mother expels her, accusing her of dishonoring the family, while Harish’s family treats her as an intruder. Despite her hopes for a happy marriage, Virmati quickly regrets her decision, feeling trapped in a life of shame and unmet expectations. However, she hesitates to support her roommate, Swarna Lata, in her efforts to seek comfort, embrace change, and contribute to a broader transformation. Virmati starts remembering the words of demonstration:

Men don’t want family wealth to be divided among women. Say their sisters get dowry, that’s their share, and the family structure will be threatened, because sisters and wives will be seen as rivals, instead of dependents who have to be nurtured and protected. As a result women will lose their moral position in society! Imagine! (Kapur, 1998, p. 252)

The dynamics of a joint family reflect common issues in Indian society, such as financial disagreements and shared responsibilities in *Difficult Daughters*. Lala Diwan Chand, the patriarch, controls family decisions, including those of his sons, Suraj Prakash and Chandra Prakash. Suraj, married to Kasturi and with 11 children, incurs higher expenses than Chandra, who has only two. This financial disparity causes resentment in Chandra’s wife, Lajwanti, who advocates for separation. However, Lala Diwan Chand opposes the idea, emphasizing familial unity: “Separation is impossible! Your brother’s children are like your own. One blood flows in them. Baoji, they are eleven, and we are two. How will everything be equal-equal?” (Kapur, 1998, p. 28). Gradually Chandra Prakash started paying less attention towards their family business due to which finally Lala Diwan Chand had to divide the family business.

Knowing that the pattern of their communal life was going to change soon, the three woman took care to preserve the norms of peace that had existed in early days of their joint family household. The great aunt was saddest to leave the house Lala Diwan Chand’s only stipulation to his younger son had been that his sister stay with him, where she would receive the dignity and respect that was her due. (Kapur, 1998, p. 30)

c). Comparative Study of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*

The above-given textual analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters* reveals a shared critique of patriarchy and its impact on women's autonomy, particularly through the issues of inheritance and societal expectations surrounding marriage. "In patriarchal societies, men maintain control on multiple aspects of life, resulting in the marginalization, exploitation, suppression, and othering of women" (Qasim & Afzal, 2024, p. 171). Both authors Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) address how patriarchal structures shape women's roles, identities, and agency, reinforcing the notion that gender relations are socially constructed and influenced by cultural, economic, and political factors. In both novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*, women's dependence on patriarchal systems is highlighted by the societal pressure to marry for financial security, often at the cost of personal fulfillment. In *Pride and Prejudice*, characters like Charlotte Lucas face the harsh reality of marriage as a necessity for survival in a male-dominated society, where inheritance laws prioritize men and leave women financially vulnerable. Similarly, in *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur (1998) critiques the patriarchal structures in post-colonial India, where women are subjected to not only emotional and physical abuse but also the systemic violence that enforces traditional gender roles.

Both Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) use their narratives to reflect on the generational impact of these norms. Austen's (1813) exploration of women's dependence on marriage for social security echoes Kapur's (1998) portrayal of women like Virmati, who struggle with societal expectations that stifle their autonomy. Kapur's (1998) characters, such as Virmati, seek to reclaim their identity through education and defiance of traditional roles, signaling a shift toward individual agency despite societal condemnation. The transformation through education, as seen in Shakuntala's influence on Virmati, becomes a symbol of resistance against patriarchal oppression, aligning with Austen's (1813) critique of the limitations placed on women's agency. Both authors highlight the enduring tension between tradition and change, showing that while societal norms constrain women, education and self-awareness can serve as agents of empowerment and resistance.

Another shared theme between the two authors Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) is the role of mothers in shaping the lives of their daughters. In Kapur's (1998) selected novel, mothers are depicted as deeply invested in ensuring their daughters conform to traditional gender roles, particularly in relation to domestic tasks like cooking and managing household responsibilities, which are considered integral parts of an Indian woman's daily life. This emphasis on food and domesticity contrasts with Austen's (1813) portrayal of women's roles, but both writers reflect on the societal pressures faced by women in their respective cultures.

Both Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) engage deeply with the realities of women's lives, examining the ways in which societal expectations shape their identities and choices. Austen's (1813) portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet as an intelligent, rational, and independent heroine highlights her critique of the limited roles available to women in 19th-century England. Elizabeth's wit, strength, and rationality stand as a counterpoint to the restricted options for women of her time, where marriage is the primary means of achieving social and financial stability. In Austen's (1813) world, romance and reason intertwine, yet the societal structures leave women with little control over their destinies, especially regarding marriage and inheritance. On the contrary, Kapur's (1998) heroines, Virmati and Astha, are not afforded the same ease or romantic idealism. Their struggles, set within the more modern context of post-colonial India, are far more fraught with conflict, as they fight against deeply ingrained patriarchy and societal taboos. While Austen (1813) uses wit and sarcasm to critique her society

and give her female characters' strength, Kapur's (1998) feminist approach is more pointed and direct. She focuses on the systemic oppression women face, highlighting their mental, emotional, and physical subjugation. Kapur's (1998) women, such as Virmati, seek empowerment through education and self-awareness, fighting back against the rigid patriarchal expectations that shape their lives.

The struggle for resources, power, and ideological dominance, central to class conflict, intersects with the gender dynamics in the selected works. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Difficult Daughters*, class serves as a boundary that further limits women's options for independence, mobility, and self-expression. Class conflict, often rooted in competing ideologies, exacerbates the challenges women face as they navigate their roles within a rigid, hierarchical social structure. Thus, the intersection of gender and class in the selected novels reveals how societal norms restrict both women's agency and social mobility, offering a profound critique of the structures that continue to shape individuals' lives.

Despite their cultural and historical differences, both Austen (1813) and Kapur (1998) contribute meaningfully to feminist discourse by portraying women who navigate, resist, and challenge the constraints imposed upon them. Austen's (1813) portrayal of marriage as an economic necessity reveals how women in her time had limited agency, while Kapur's (1998) depiction of women in a more modern society underscores the ongoing battle for autonomy and identity. Both authors highlight the intersection of personal desires and societal expectations, though in differing contexts, showcasing the universal struggle for women's agency and equality.

Conclusion

Jane Austen's (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* negotiate social issues such as marriage, patriarchy and class difference within distinct socio-cultural frameworks. Austen (1813), writing in early 19th-century England, subtly critiques societal expectations through the lens of marriage, class, and inheritance, focusing on personal growth and autonomy within the constraints of her time. In contrast, Kapur's (1998) late 20th-century Indian setting broadens the thematic scope to include complex issues like Partition, communal violence, dowry, and women's sexuality, portraying female agency as both a personal and political struggle. While marriage and relationships serve as central themes in both works, Austen (1813) portrays them as avenues for stability and self-discovery, whereas Kapur (1998) examines their potential for oppression and defiance. Both authors emphasize generational tensions, with maternal figures embodying societal expectations that their daughters challenge. Education emerges as a pivotal theme, facilitating self-awareness and liberation in both contexts. Stylistically, Austen (1813) employs irony and restraint, while Kapur's (1998) narrative is direct and confrontational, reflecting the urgency of her themes. Together, these texts highlight women's persistent quest for identity and agency, illustrating how gender issues, though shaped by distinct cultural contexts, remain universally relevant across time and geography.

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