



Pride And Prejudice: The Darling Child Of Jane Austen

Dr. Awadhesh Kumar Mishra

Asst. Professor of English

Dr. R.M.A.S.College, Malighat, Muzaffarpur

Abstract: Pride and Prejudice is the second novel by English author Jane Austen, published in 1813. A novel of manners, it follows the character development of Eligabeth Bennet, the protagonist of the book, who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgements and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness.

Mr. Bennet, owner of the Longbourn estate in Hertfordshire, has five daughters, but his property is entailed and can only be passed to a male heir. His wife also lacks an inheritance, so his family faces becoming poor upon his death. Thus, it is imperative that at least one of the daughters marries well to support the others, which is a primary motivation driving the plot.

Pride and Prejudice has consistently appeared near the top of lists of "most loved books" among literary scholars and the reading public. It has become one of the most popular novels in English literature, with over 20 million copies sold and has inspired many derivatives in modern literature.

Keywords : Protagonist, Pride, Prejudice, Perception, Impression.

Once giving his opinion about David Copperfield Dickens wrote : It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of fancy and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts favourite child and his name as "David Copper-field". Jane Austen might have repeated the some words about Pride and Prejudice. She considered Pride and Prejudice as "her own darling child" and Elizabeth Bennet "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print". Ever since the publication of the book in 1813, it has been the most popular of her novels with subsequent generations. Even today it is regarded as one of the first ten novels of the world.

The original title of Pride and Prejudice was first impressions. It ironically suggested that the first impressions were not always the last impressions. Human nature was quite flexible and it was quite flexible and it was therefore, wrong to form a firm opinion to a man at first sight. The novel makes it clear that Darcy's pride fills Elizabeth's mind with prejudice against him but we should not forget that Elizabeth's prejudice stems from a pride in her own perceptions which prove to be false later on. Therefore, to say that Daercy is proved and Elizabeth prejudiced is to fell but half the story. Ironically enough Elizabeth's first impressions of the persons, who stand in a relationship of great intimacy to her, are subject to failure. She utterly fails to understand the characters of charlotte Lucas, George Wickham and Fitzwilliam Darcy. She has to change her first impressions of these people. Her failures are with intricate people, whom she thinks

to be the most interesting. This ironical fact gives a new dimension to the book as it shows that 'intimacy blurs perceptions : intelligence fails if there is insufficient distance between mind and object :

Regarding the quality of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, Jane Austen wrote in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, that the work was rather too light and bright and sparkling and it wanted shade. But on the whole she was satisfied with it, particularly with the character of Elizabeth who was the favourite among her heroines, as she has been with countless readers. Elizabeth for her was a vivid and almost real personality, and it was not, one feels, in exaggerated preference that when a few months after the publication of her adventures, Jane Visiting an exhibition in Spring Gardens, said she had been a portrait of Mrs. Bingley "exceedingly like her", but could find none of Elizabeth Darcy "I can only imagine" she says "that Mrs. Darcy prizes any picture of her too much to like that it should be exposed to the public eye - I can imagine he would that sort of feeling - that mixture of Love, Pride and Delicacy". Jane Austen had that mixture regarding *Pride and Prejudice*.

Mrs. Kennedy remarks that *Pride and Prejudice* was produced in the first spring of Jane Austen's powers. It contains all her fresh exhilarations, vitality and high spirits. It is interesting to note that when the B.B.C. produced *Pride and Prejudice* as Sunday serial, the part of the author was spoken as though she were a mature woman. It is hard to remember that she was a girl of twenty-one. But if *Pride and Prejudice* is to be appreciated as well as enjoyed, the age of the author should be kept in mind, since it deals with a theme that is peculiarly a concern of youth : the anguish and embarrassment felt by those who realize that their parents are making fools of themselves. Mrs. Bennet is a gross fool and Mr. Bennet a fastidious one; between them, their eldest daughter nearly loses the young man who loves her and whom she loves; their youngest daughter is seduced by a rascal with sufficient good sense to be induced to marry her only by a large sum of money; and Elizabeth, the heroine, who has refused an offer of marriage practically exhorted by her personal charm from a man who cannot induce her family realises her love for him at the moment when her sister's disgrace makes it highly improbable that any of Mr. Bennet's daughters will find a respectable match. It is a story in which the sensible characters are at the mercy of the silly ones and further, at the mercy of their own sillier impulses. Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice imperil their mating quite as much as Mrs. Bennet's match-making, Lydia's headstrong vanity and Mr. Collins's couisngly contribution of fatuity. By an ingenious stroke, the most monumental fool in the book, the self important and domineering lady Catherine de Bourgh brings about the marriage by being determined to prevent it. Their in lies the irony of Jane Austen.

The plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, says David Cecil, is as logically constructed as a detective story. And yet it gives us a sense of spontaneous life. Prof. Cross has observed that *Pride and Prejudice* has not only the humour of Shakespearean comedy but also its technique. Elizabeth first meets Darcy at a village ball. She at once becomes prejudiced against him on account of his naughty behaviour in general and his remark regarding her - "Though she is tolerable, she is not handsome enough to tempt me to dance with her" - in particular. Jane Austen now displays very great skill in handling events to the deepening of Elizabeth's prejudice and to the awakening of Darcy's love inspite of his pride. When prejudice and proud love reached the proper degree of intensity, she brings Elizabeth and Darcy together at the Hunsford Parsonage. There is an arrogant and insulting proposal of marriage and an indignant refusal. From this scene onwards, till the end of the story, Jane Austen is at her very best. By easy gradation through a process of disillusioning, Elizabeth's prejudice vanishes goes on the almost pitiable humiliation of Darcy. The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is not merely a possible solution of the plot, it is as inevitable as the conclusion of a properly constructed geometrical demonstration. For a parallel to workmanship of this high order one can look only to Shakespeare to such a comedy as *Much Ado About Nothing*.

The characterisation of *Pride and Prejudice* is also sure. There are some definite comic characters - Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins and that superb snob lady Catherine de Bourgh. There is Mr. Bennet, an original and subtle study. Of Darcy, opinions may well be divided. He is not an entirely sympathetic character. He could be both stiff and arrogant and one feels that for too long his head ruled his heart. But he is more distinct, more an individual than any other of Jane Austen's heroes and wedded to the enchanting Elizabeth, one feels assured that he became not only an admirable husband but a lovable man.

Of all the novels of Jane Austen perhaps *Pride and Prejudice* makes us laugh most. Here the sources of mirth lie chiefly in the minor characters. The characters of Mr. Bennet, Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine, Mary and Lydia, all have certain humorous qualities. There are many humorous situations also. The crowning example of such a situation is Mr. Collins proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. The remarkable qualities of Jane Austen's humour throughout *Pride and Prejudice* are good nature, good sense, restraint and balance. The words used by Elizabeth - "I hope, I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I laugh at them whenever I can" - can be very well used for Jane Austen's humour. The last quality of her humour lies in the subtle use of irony which penetrates the whole structure of the novel.

The style of the book is marked by the qualities of balance, restrained, sobriety, intellectual approach. Referring to the stylistic excellence of *Pride and Prejudice*, Miss Jenkins has observed : "The depth, the perspective of impression conveyed by *Pride and Prejudice* is so intense that when one re-seeds the book one is astonished by its brevity. The people in the story are so distinctly present to one's mind that one searches in vain for actual passage of description that made so" Thus from every point of view *Pride and Prejudice* is Jane Austen's master-piece and one of the most delightful novels in English literature.

Mrs. Kennedy remarks that *Pride and Prejudice* was produced in the first spring of Jane Austen's powers. It contains all her fresh exhilaration, vitality and high spirits. They impart it a quality which makes very many of her readers to choose it as their favourite. The book lives and moves in the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Remove her and it would be reduced to dull story of fools and snobs.

To create an entirely charming girl is one of the rarest achievements in fiction. Very few novelists have been able to do it. Tolstoy, who could do everything, gave us Natasha. But how many others are there? Dozens we say, until we have really tried to count them. And then it appears that downright charmers are extremely rare. Noble girls abound and good girls, tragic, pathetic and touching girls; quite steady and constant girls - we love them to be as charming as the girls who live next door but one, or whom we occasionally catch sight when she takes her dog out for a walk. For in real life there are plenty of them; they are always fitting past us. But the lovely April of her prime is one of the hardest things for a writer to catch. It is gone so soon. That a girl of twenty one should have caught it is one of the most amazing feats of literature. The creator was herself in her April and knew no more of its evanescence than did her creature. Yet she conveys it with an air of effortless mastery which makes it seem easy, so that we accept it with far too little astonishment. Elizabeth has wit, sense honesty and a warm heart; but it is not these which capture us; it is her time of life which gives to all these attractions such a sparkling freshness (Mrs. Kennedy).

The most remarkable quality of Elizabeth's character is her wit and vivacity. She is a keen observer of men and manners. Nothing escapes her attention, "It is not along", says Prof. Dobson, "that she is personally attractive or rather that she has exceptional charm but she intellectually engaging as well. her high spirited wit, her perfect command of epigrammatic expression, her ready gift of repartee and above all her admirable faculty for taking care herself - these things would be enough to secure admiration without the good sense and good feelings which are the basis of her character."

In beauty and physical charm, Elizabeth Bennet is next only to Jane, Although her beauty does not bewitch the beholder instantaneously as does Jane's, yet her intelligence and quick witted remarks attract

everyone. Her humour, charm, and great good sense makes her one of the most engaging of Jane Austen's heroines and the most popular figure with the endless generation of the readers of pride and prejudice.

To create an entirely charming girl like Elizabeth is one of the rarest achievements in fiction. Very few novelists have been able to do it. That a girl of twenty - one should have succeeded in it is one of the most amazing feats of literature. Elizabeth has wit, sense, honesty and a warm heart; but it is not these which capture us; it is her time of life which gives to all these attractions such a sparkling freshness. When Jane Austen wrote this novel, she herself was in the bloom of youth. Her powers were fresh and vigorous. Hence, this novel contains all her vitality and high spirits and has become a favourite with many readers.

Fitzwilliam Darcy is an important character in *Pride and Prejudice* who exhibits all the good and bad qualities of the ideal English aristocrat - snobbish and arrogant, he is also completely honest and sure of himself. Darcy is not actually a titled nobleman, but he is one of the wealthiest members of the landed gentry - the same legal class that Elizabeth's much poorer family belongs to. While Darcy's sense of social superiority offends people, it also promotes some of his better traits. As Wickham notes in his sly assessment, "His pride never deserts him; but with the rich, he is liberal minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable and perhaps agreeable-allowing for fortune and figure."

It is infact, Darcy's ideal of nobility that makes him truly change in the novel. When Elizabeth flatly turns down his marriage proposal and tells him that it was ungentlemanly, Darcy is startled into realizing just how arrogant and assuming he has been. He reflects later on why he was that way. "I was spoiled by my parents, who though good themselves ... allowed, encoveraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing to think meanly of all the rest of the world" Darcy's humbling makes him more sensitive to what other people feel. In the end, he is willing to marry into a family with three silly daughters, an embarrassing mother and Wickham as a brother-in-law. It may be that he becomes more easygoing about other people's faults because he is now aware of his own.

The main reason of its enduring popularity is that it deals with the universal problem of love and marriage. The problem is an eternal one. Its roots lie deep in human mind. In every country and clime, people are interested in the problem of marital happiness. Jane Austen has tried to probe this problem very artistically and humorously. The characters, through whom she exhibits the most romantic drama of human life, are ordinary men and women like ourselves. They are not the inhabitants of some vague land of mystery and romance.

Pride and Prejudice projects theme and images of marriage in varied modes. From the frank mercenary love-making of Wickham to the simple love-relationship of Jane and Bingley, it passed on to the complex inscrutable and amazing relationship of Fitzwilliam Darcy and Miss Elizabeth Bennet. Darcy is drawn towards Elizabeth despite his inordinate pride and the habit of looking down upon others. Elizabeth is drawn towards Darcy inspite of her prejudice. *Pride and Prejudice* is, thus, a true comedy of domestic life. Miss Austen shines here as a critical observer of the family drama. Her humour is genial. She laughs with her characters rather than at them. In this respect her comic sense is Shakespearean and Dickinson. *Pride and Prejudice* has been the most popular of Miss Austen's novels. It is the creation of Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine which is responsible for the immense popularity of the novel. She continues the essential traits of Shakespeare's Rosalind, Portia and Viola. She represents the point of view of Jane Austen. To her, "intricate characters are the most amazing". Jane Austen was a comedian like Charles Dickens. Humour is the very soul of the work. George Meredith said, "comedy arouses thoughtful laughters."

The reason why *Pride and Prejudice* has not lost its enduring popularity, is that it is free from all moral philosophy thrust upon the reader's mind. Jane Austen did not seek to instruct her readers; her aim was to draw a picture that would amuse them. Within the narrow limits which she set for herself, she achieved a finished realism with the qualities of the highest wit and elegance. The pleasure that we derive

from her works is purely an aesthetic pleasure, unalloyed with any didactic feeling. All these qualities make Pride and Prejudice a work of perennial joy and everlasting mirth.

REFERENCES

- [1] The Complete Novels of Jane Austen, Rupa & Co., Calcutta, Allahabad, Bombay, Delhi, 1989.
- [2] Andrewtt Wright; The Novels of Jane Austen : A Study in Structure.
- [3] Dorothy Van Ghent : "Pride and Prejudice" in the English Novel : Form and Function, New York, 1953.
- [4] Elizabeth Jenkins : Jane Austen - "A Biography", London, 1938.
- [5] Mary Lascelly : "The Art of Jane Austen", London.
- [6] W.A. Craik : Jane Austen : "The Six Novels", London, 1965.
- [7] R.W.Chapman : Jane Austen : "Facts and Problems", Oxford, 1948.

