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**Daudnagar College, Daudnagar**

**Subject:** English Literature

**Class:** B.A. Part II (Honours)

**Paper:** IV (Novel)

**Topic:** Striking Characteristics of Jane Austen's Novels

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### **Striking Characteristics of Jane Austen's Novels**

Jane Austen occupies a high rank among English novelists, though she is certainly not one of the greatest of them. Her chief characteristics as a novelist are as follows:

**A Realist:** she is a realist who draws her materials from actual life as she sees it. Her stories are perfectly credible and convincing. There is nothing fantastic, fanciful, or far-fetched in them. She depicts the social life of her time and is thus a practitioner of the domestic novel or the novel of manners. Realism is the keynote of her novels whether they are considered from the point of view of story, characters or setting.

**Matrimony, Her Principal Theme:** The principal theme of her novels is matrimony. She is preoccupied with the business of making matches for her heroines. Generally, the heroine, after a few false starts, meets the right man, and a series of misunderstandings and frustrations occur to delay but never to prevent their union. Morning calls, dinner parties, dances, shopping expeditions, weddings etc., are the principal ingredients of her stories.

**Her Humour and Irony:** Jane Austen is a humorist whose favourite weapon is irony. Irony is her forte and most of the humour proceeds from her use of it. Her novels are all

comedies in which she exposes the absurdities and failings of her characters. She has a comedian's attitude to life, and her vision is ironical and satirical. However, her humour is not of the boisterous type; it is a mild and subdued kind of humour. It may be noted also that there is little malice in her attitude, though a note of bitterness occasionally creeps into it. Her humour has been compared to that of Shakespeare, but that is an exaggeration.

**Character Portrayal:** She gives us an abundance of character portraits. She shows an acute grasp of the human mind and human motives, and reveals these with great skill. She is not only concerned with the externals of the character, but also with a psychological portrayal of it. Her studies of woman are more successful than those of men. Another noteworthy feature about these novels is that there are neither any perfect or idealized characters nor any thorough villains in them.

**Few Dramatic or Melodramatic Incidents:** there are few dramatic or melodramatic incidents in her stories. Her exquisite touch renders commonplace things and characters interesting by virtue of the truth of description and the truth of sentiment. She is not interested in paraphernalia of the "romantic" novel. Nor does she show any capacity to depict "passion". There are no fiery outbursts in her stories, and no dwelling upon the passion of love. Nor do we have many tragic or heart rending or deeply poignant situations to grieve us. She deals principally with the comic side of life, not its painful side.

**Her Detachment:** Her narration shows a remarkable detachment or objectivity on her part. She does not interrupt her stories with her personal comments (as Thackeray and George Eliot often do). She does not obtrude herself on the reader's attention and her novels are free

from any such intrusion. Nor is there any moralising in her stories. A moral purpose is certainly there, but the reader is allowed to reach it by his own effort.

**Her Limited Range:** As her stories are based on her personal experience and an observation of the life around her, her range is extremely limited. She deals with a narrow mode of existence, and does not even show much interest in external nature. She excludes much of human life from her novels, because she does not have imagination enough to carry her beyond her own observation. But within her narrow range she is supreme. Her characters are true to life, and all her work has the perfection of a miniature painting.