
Daudnagar College, Daudnagar

Subject: English Literature

Class: B.A. Part II (Honours)

Paper: IV (Novel)

Topic: Jane Austen: An Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*

An Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*

Composition & Publication: Jane Austen's first novel was *Sense and Sensibility* which was written in 1792, but published several years later, in 1811. *Pride and Prejudice* was her second novel. It was written in 1796-97 and again published several years later, in 1813. The original title of this novel was *First Impressions*. Subsequently, the novel was revised and renamed. The theme of *Pride and Prejudice* is very much the same as that of her other novels. The theme here also is love and marriage.

Its Popularity: *Pride and Prejudice* is Jane Austen's most popular novel. Anybody who knows Jane Austen as a novelist is familiar with the title of this novel also. It has a very interesting plot. The portrayal of characters in it is, on the whole, very realistic and convincing. The portrayals of the hero, Mr. Darcy, and the heroine Elizabeth, are especially noteworthy. The novel gains in value because of its realistic pictures of domestic and social life, and of social scenes and manners. The novel has a compact structure which shows a high degree of craftsmanship. There are several passages of psychological analysis in the novel to lend depth to it. Above all, the novel is rich in comedy, with irony as a most striking ingredient of it.

The Comic Elements: Perhaps the most outstanding feature of *Pride and Prejudice* is its rich comedy. Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins are among the famous comic characters in English fiction. Mrs. Bennet amuses us greatly by her obsession with the marriages of her daughters, and by her vanity and airs of self-importance, combined with her constant endeavour to please those who can contribute in any way to the success of her plans regarding the marriages of her daughters. She amuses us also by her garrulity, and her incapacity to judge when to talk and when to keep silent. Mr. Collins amuses us by his sycophancy, his pompousness, his self conceit, his flexibility so far as the choice of a wife is concerned, and his reasons for wanting to get married. Sir William Lucas and Lady Catherine de Bourgh also contribute to the comedy in the novel, the former by his preoccupation with his own knighthood and by his empty-headedness; and the latter by her air of superiority and her tendency to bully those beneath her in social status. Mr. Bennet is another character who makes a substantial contribution to the comedy. But he amuses us not so much by any absurdity in him as by his sarcastic wit and humour. He is ever ready with a sarcastic remark; and he especially makes use of his talent in this respect by poking fun at his wife whenever he gets an opportunity. The use of irony by the novelist is also an ingredient in the comedy of the novel. There are several ironic reversals of situation in the course of the development of the various stories; and, of course, there is an abundance of ironical remarks made by various characters, especially by Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth.

The Story in Outline, The Main Plot: The main plot in this novel pertains to Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. Mr. Darcy is a very proud man who, at his very first appearance at a social gathering, offends Elizabeth by making an adverse comment upon her. She begins to dislike him on this account; and her dislike deepens into hatred when Mr. Wickham falsely tells her that Mr. Darcy is a very callous and unjust man, in addition to being very proud. She becomes so prejudiced against Mr. Darcy that she rejects his proposal of marriage which, in

normal or ordinary circumstances, she would have gladly accepted because Mr. Darcy is a very wealthy man, while Elizabeth belongs to a family which can hardly afford any dowry for her. Mr. Darcy is astonished by Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal. However, afterwards Mr. Darcy begins to realize that he is too proud and haughty a man to be accepted by a self-respecting girl like Elizabeth. Elizabeth on her part comes to know, chiefly from a letter handed over to her by Mr. Darcy, that he is, after all, not a bad man as depicted by Mr. Wickham and as imagined by her. The attitude of each now undergoes a change towards the other, and eventually, when Mr. Darcy proposes marriage to her for the second time, she accepts the proposal. This happens when Mr. Darcy has been cured of his pride and arrogance, and Elizabeth's prejudice against him has completely melted away. Certain happenings, such as Mr. Darcy's intervention in the Lydia-Wickham affair, and Lady Catherine's interview with Elizabeth at Longbourn, help to bring about the marriage of these two persons who have discovered that they can be very happy together.

The Love-Affair of Jane and Mr. Bingley: Interwoven with the above main plot is a subplot pertaining to Jane Bennet and Mr. Charles Bingley. Jane is the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, while Mr. Bingley is a close friend of Mr. Darcy. Jane and Mr. Bingley fall in love with each other at their very first meeting at an assembly. In a few weeks only, the attachment between them grows to such an extent that Mr. Bingley is expected to propose marriage to Jane any day. Mrs. Bennet feels certain that the proposal would be made soon, and Elizabeth shares this certainty. Jane herself is sure that a proposal of marriage from Mr. Bingley would soon be forthcoming. However this love affair receives a setback. An obstruction in the way of Mr. Bingley's proposal of marriage to Jane is caused by Mr. Darcy who honestly believes that Jane would not prove to be a suitable wife for Mr. Bingley. Jane feels greatly puzzled as to why Mr. Bingley has not made a proposal of marriage to her. Mrs.

Bennet and Elizabeth also cannot understand the reason for this indefinite delay. Eventually, however, Mr. Bingley does make a proposal of marriage to Jane, and she accepts it gladly.

The Sub-Plot Pertaining to Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas: Another sub-plot in the novel pertains to Mr. Collins and Miss Charlotte Lucas. Mr. Collins is the man to whom the entire property of Mr. Bennet is entailed because Mr. Bennet has no male issue and Mr. Collins is his nearest relative. Mr. Collins is a rector at Hunsford. He would like to get married to one of the Bennet sisters. He proposes marriage to Elizabeth who rejects him because in many ways he is an absurd fellow. Then he proposes marriage to Miss Charlotte Lucas who gladly accepts his proposal because she is already twenty seven years of age and if she were to miss this chance, she would live only to be a spinster. After marrying Mr. Collins, Charlotte leaves her parents' home and settles down at Hunsford as Mr. Collins's wife. Contrary to Elizabeth's expectations, Charlotte feels quite happy as the wife of Mr. Collins. Elizabeth pays a visit to Charlotte at Hunsford, and it is during this visit that Mr. Darcy also goes to Hunsford on a visit to his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh who is a rich widow and who lives there. And it is at Hunsford that Mr. Darcy makes his first proposal of marriage to Elizabeth who rejects it.

The Lydia- Wickham Affair: There is yet another sub-plot which, however develops only in the last one-third of the novel. It concerns Mr. Wickham and Lydia Bennet (the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet). Mr. Wickham and Lydia appear in the novel quite early, but the love affair between them begins quite late. Actually it is only Lydia who is in love with Mr. Wickham, while Mr. Wickham is a fortune hunter and a seducer. Lydia cannot boast of any dowry; and Mr. Wickham elopes with her only with the object of seducing her and then forsaking her. However, at Mr. Darcy's intervention in the whole affair, Mr. Wickham feels compelled to marry Lydia, though the marriage does not prove to be a happy one

because Mr. Wickham ceases to love Lydia soon afterwards, and because Lydia's love for Mr. Wickham lasts only a little longer than Mr. Wickham's for her.

The time span of the novel is just one year. The novel begins in autumn and it ends in the next autumn. All the events and incidents of the novel take place during this period between one autumn and the next.