

Chapter : 3

Jane Austen : Pride and Prejudice

Introduction to Jane Austen and the social background of her novels

Jane Austen was born in Hampshire in 1775. Her father was a clergyman and she was the last but one of a family of eight children. Accompanied by Cassandra, her sister and life-long friend, she went to school first at Oxford and then at Reading, but her education was completed at home under the supervision of her father. She lived quietly, a happy and uneventful life. She began writing at an early age, but her first novel, Sense and Sensibility, was published in 1811, followed by Pride and Prejudice in 1813, Mansfield Park in 1814, Emma in 1815, and Northanger Abbey and Persuasion in 1817. She fell ill and died in 1817.

England was undergoing a rapid change in Jane Austen's lifetime. The economy was changing from an agricultural to an industrial one and the aristocratic world of the 18th century was giving way to a new one. Yet Jane Austen's novels hardly mirror all this. This was because she lived a sheltered life in southern England, which remained agricultural. The England of her novels was still that of 18th century elegance and easy living. Thus Jane Austen's world was a closed world in which a very small proportion of the total population participated, and this is the world her novels reflect. Class distinctions were very rigid and were divided thus: the land-owning aristocracy and the settled gentry; the new prosperous industrialists; the workers and the labourers. Pride and Prejudice is set exclusively in the context of the upper classes (eg. The Bingleys, the Darcys, Lady Catherine de Bourgh). None of the major characters works, for these moneyed classes lived entirely on their income from rents and inheritances, and they looked down on traders like Mr. Gardiner, who earn their money in business. Within the upper classes, there were further petty distinctions arising from the amount of wealth possessed by its members, e.g. The Bingley sisters look down upon the Bennets,

because they are not as wealthy as they are, while they have enormous respect for Mr. Darcy because of his income of ten thousand pounds per annum. The occupations of this class were largely social: dinner-parties, balls, and a daily round of trivialities - visits to friends, a few household tasks which were considered good enough for them, etc. One should note that Jane Austen had very little material to work from. That she should have been able to construct a worth-while novel from such trivia is in itself no mean achievement.

Summary of *Pride and Prejudice*

*Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a social comedy set in the provincial society of Hertfordshire, England, around the 18th century. Austen begins with the maxim that "a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". Marriage is a constant pursuit in Austen's comic world. Local balls are a source of continuous gossip and speculation. The key stumbling block to marriage, as the title suggests, is a disparity in social class. When the novel opens, Mrs. Bennet is excited by the news that a rich, eligible young bachelor is moving into the neighbourhood. With five unmarried daughters, her mind is preoccupied with finding husbands for them, and Mr. Bingley would clearly be an excellent catch. The Bennets discuss the expected arrival of Mr. Bingley and Mrs. Bennet wants her husband to make his acquaintance before her neighbours. Mr. Bennet is ironic and pretends not to understand. He does visit Mr. Bingley but does not tell his wife, and later, matter-of-factly reveals the news of his visit. Mr. Bingley repays Mr. Bennet's call and then goes to fetch a group for the ball. Mr. Bingley arrives with a party from London, which consist of two sisters, a brother-in-law, and his friend Mr. Darcy. Bingley is immediately said to be good looking and gentlemanlike, while Darcy, who dances only with the Bingley sisters and remains aloof, is regarded as a most disagreeable man. Elizabeth feels insulted when she overhears Bingley trying to persuade Darcy to dance with her. He refuses and says that she is only tolerable. The next morning the two eldest sisters discuss the ball. Jane admits that she admires Bingley, who has paid particular attention to her. Bingley and Darcy also do the same, but while Bingley is generous with his praise, Darcy finds little to applaud. The excitement also necessitates visits around town, where Mrs. Bennet triumphs over Jane's success. As*

their socializing continues, Darcy finds himself increasingly impressed with Elizabeth's wit and beauty. At a dinner party, a pompous Sir Lucas tries to persuade him to dance with Elizabeth, but while he is willing, she refuses. Mr. Bennet's property is entailed and will not be inherited by any of his daughters. He and his wife disagree over the intelligence of Lydia and Kitty, who are always running after the officers in the militia. They take after their mother who once liked soldiers herself and encourages her daughters in their behaviour. Miss Bingley invites Jane to dinner in her brother's absence; and Mrs. Bennet sends her on horseback, thinking it will rain so that Jane must then stay overnight. News comes next morning that Jane has caught cold. Elizabeth anxiously walks the three miles to Netherfield, causing great surprise when she arrives at breakfast time.

Elizabeth sees how hypocritical the regard of the Bingley sisters for Jane is. They soon forget her illness despite their assurances of sympathy. Mr. Hurst lives only lives to eat and play cards. Miss Bingley criticises Elizabeth severely when she is out of the room. Bingley defends Jane and Elizabeth against her criticism of their relatives. Although Darcy is further attracted to Elizabeth by her walk, he accepts that the inferiority of their relatives in social standing will hinder Jane and Elizabeth making good marriages.

The next morning Jane is no worse, but Elizabeth sends a note to her mother asking her come to Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet and her two youngest arrive soon after breakfast and she and the doctor decide that Jane cannot return home. Mrs. Bennet thank Mr. Bingley and his sisters for their kindness to Jane, and in doing so makes an utter fool of herself. They return home and Elizabeth goes back to Jane. Jane is a little by evening and, after dinner, Elizabeth joins the party in the drawing-room. Darcy is writing a letter but Miss Bingley is sitting nearby trying to distract his attention. Darcy finishes his letter and asks Miss Bingley for some music. Darcy's eyes are frequently fixed on her, but Elizabeth thinks it is only because he disapproves of her appearance - she has no idea that he now admires her. Jane comes down to the drawing-room after dinner. Mr. Bingley is delighted to see her and sits down by her side, hardly talking to anyone else. Next morning Elizabeth writes to her mother to ask for the carriage to come and fetch them home. The match-making Mrs. Bennet, however, is anxious that the visit should be for the prolonged and sends a message

that the carriage will not be available before Tuesday. But Elizabeth is determined to leave and borrows Mr. Bingley's carriage to take them home the following day. Darcy avoids them, Mr. Bennet is glad to see them, but Mrs. Bennet is disappointed, and does not welcome them home. The next morning Mr. Bennet informs his wife that they are to have a guest to dinner. He has received a letter from his cousin, Mr. Collins, who, after Mr. Bennet's death, will inherit the Longbourn estate. Mr. Collins has obtained his parish through the patronage of Lady Catherine, a wealthy widow with an only daughter. He is always eloquent in his praise of this lady. Mr. Collins, having a good house and a sufficient income, intends to marry and has visited Longbourn with the intention of choosing one of the Bennet daughters. He likes Jane but Mrs. Bennet makes it clear that her affections are engaged and he turns his attention to Elizabeth. One morning, the sisters walk into Meryton, accompanied by Mr. Collins. They meet two young men Denny and Wickham, and later Bingley and Darcy. Both Darcy and Wickham seem upset at the sight of each other. The Bennet sisters, with Collins, dine with their aunt and uncle and Wickham is one of the officers who join the party. Elizabeth is delighted when he sits near her and begins to talk about Darcy. He tells her that Darcy has treated him unfairly. He says that Lady Catherine is a fitting aunt for Darcy, because she is arrogant and proud. Elizabeth tells Jane what she has heard about Darcy's unkindness to Wickham. But Jane does not believe her. Bingley and his sisters invite the Bennets to a ball at Netherfield. On the night of the ball, Elizabeth is disappointed that Wickham is not present and realises that he has done so to avoid Darcy. Later in the evening she dances with Darcy and though she is still unimpressed by him there are signs that he is attracted by her. During supper Elizabeth is embarrassed to hear her mother speaking openly to Lady Lucas of her expectation that Jane will marry Bingley. After supper she is further mortified by her younger sister Mary's efforts to sing because her voice is weak and manner affected. Mr. Collins gives a pompous speech and later comes to her side where he remains for the rest of the evening.

The following day Mr. Collins asks permission to speak to Elizabeth alone. He informs her that he has chosen her to be his wife. When Elizabeth declines the proposal he replies that it is usual for young ladies first to reject the man they secretly mean to accept. Elizabeth

denies this but Collins persists in his beliefs that she really intends to marry him so she decides to tell her father to deal with this suitor. Soon after Elizabeth has left the room, Mrs. Bennet enters and congratulates Collins. He returns the congratulations with pleasure and tells her of Elizabeth's modesty. Her mother cannot believe him but assures him that she is headstrong and foolish and will be brought to reason. She tells Mr. Bennet to tell Elizabeth to accept him. Mr. Bennet tells Elizabeth that her mother will never see her again if she does not marry Collins but that her father will never see her again if she does. Mrs. Bennet tries to coax Elizabeth to accept Collins but her daughter is firm in her refusal.

Mr. Collins then turns his attention to Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas and proposes to her. She accepts and her family is delighted. When she tells Elizabeth about it, she is horrified but Charlotte tells she prefers marriage with Mr. Collins to the lonely future which she risks if she does not accept his proposal. Mrs. Bennet is very upset by this news and cannot forgive Elizabeth or Charlotte. The wedding of Charlotte and Mr. Collins takes place and Charlotte extracts a promise from Elizabeth that she will visit them. In March Elizabeth accompanies Sir Lucas and his daughter Maria to stay with Charlotte. Charlotte seems contented with marriage and bears her husband's irritating behaviour with composure. They visit Lady Catherine who lives nearby. She is a large woman with strong features and an authoritative way of speaking. She advises how to manage her home, her cows and her poultry and takes great pleasure in dictating to others. She asks Elizabeth many impertinent questions about her family and is astonished when Elizabeth stands up to her.

Mr. Darcy arrives at Lady Catherine's house with his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is about thirty years old and, though not good-looking has pleasing manners. That evening when they visit Lady Catherine Fitzwilliam is attracted by Elizabeth while Darcy keeps looking towards them. The following morning Elizabeth is sitting alone writing to Jane when to her surprise Darcy enters the room and talks to her for a little while. After this Darcy comes often and Elizabeth notices that he looks at her a great deal but speaks little. One day, Mr. Darcy unexpectedly calls, and with unusual agitation, abruptly declares his love to an astonished Elizabeth. He explains that he has struggled in vain against an attachment that would link him to

an inferior family. Elizabeth angrily refuses him. Darcy is shocked because he expected a favourable answer, but Elizabeth censures him for his ungentlemanly behaviour and accuses him of having ruined his sister's happiness and having destroyed the career of the noble Mr. Wickham. Darcy leaves in anger. The next morning Elizabeth is passing the park gates when Darcy hands her a letter and walks away. Elizabeth reads the letter, in which Darcy explains that he persuaded Bingley to give up any thoughts of Jane because he thought that Jane did not return Bingley's affection. Darcy now realises that he may be mistaken. He goes on to say that Mrs. Bennet and the younger daughters often show a lack of propriety which is unfitting in a family into which Bingley should marry. This fact influenced him to part Jane and his friend. Darcy adds that Elizabeth and Jane were always extremely well behaved. He informs Elizabeth that Wickham was the son of his father's estate manager to whom Darcy's father was always kind and helped in school and college, intending to provide for him in the church if he made it his profession. After the father's death, Wickham wrote to Darcy, saying that he did not intend to become a clergyman and asked for the money instead. He accepted the three thousand pounds that Darcy gave him instead of the church career. When the money had been gambled away, Wickham tried to improve his finances by eloping with Darcy's fifteen-year-old sister. Darcy had discovered the plot in time to save his sister in disgrace and had broken all ties with him. Elizabeth finds Darcy's story difficult to believe, but as she reconsiders Wickham's behaviour she begins to see the truth. In a painful moment of self-recognition, she realises that her vanity and wounded pride have lead her to make wrong judgements. When, after hours of wandering, she returns to the house, she finds that Darcy and his cousin have already left for London.

Elizabeth departs after another week's stay. She leaves still occupied with thoughts of Darcy. In London, Jane joins her and they meet the two youngest sisters. Elizabeth is ashamed of their silliness and poor manners. At home, Elizabeth tells Jane of Darcy's proposal and Wickham's past which they decide to keep a secret. The younger Bennet sisters are disappointed because the militia is scheduled to depart. Lydia is invited by one of the officer's wives to visit them in Brighton, the new station. Elizabeth secretly advises her father against Lydia's trip, but he lets her go. Elizabeth plans to visit the

home of Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, but at the last moment her uncle's plans change and they go only as far as Derbyshire, which is where Darcy has his estate. Mrs. Gardiner takes Elizabeth to see the estate which is named Pemberly. The housekeeper is sincere in her praise of Darcy as master and brother. As she is walking in the garden, she sees Darcy who has just arrived from London. She is surprised and embarrassed but also astonished at his solicitous manners. Although her uncle is only a businessman, he asks for an introduction and acts as a gracious host. The next morning Darcy brings his sister to call on Elizabeth. Miss Darcy is a reserved girl of sixteen who struggles against her shyness. Her feelings towards him have changed from dislike to respect and gratitude. Then a letter from Jane announces a terrible calamity: Lydia has eloped with Mr. Wickham, and Mr. Bennet has gone to London to look further. Just as Elizabeth finishes the letter, Darcy enters, and overcome with distress she tells him the news. He is shocked and soon departs. Elizabeth, her aunt and uncle return home.

They find Mrs. Bennet very upset and full of self-pity. No news has arrived from London. It is discovered that Wickham owes money to almost every local tradesman as well as a thousand pounds in gambling debts in Brighton. A letter of condolence arrives from Mr. Collins who observes that the death of their daughter would have been a lesson in comparison to this and congratulates himself at not having married into the family. Mr. Bennet returns disheartened from London, and admits to Elizabeth that he has been too lenient in Lydia's upbringing. News finally comes from Mr. Gardiner. He has found the couple, they are to be married, and Mr. is to pay a small yearly allowance in return. Mrs. Bennet instantly recovers in anticipation of the marriage. Elizabeth realises but all hope of marrying Darcy has been destroyed by her family's new connection to Wickham. Lydia comes to Longbourn on the day of her marriage oblivious to the suffering she has caused. Several days later Lydia describes her wedding to Elizabeth and mentions that Darcy had been present. Elizabeth asks her aunt and comes to know that had brought the marriage, by offering Wickham a large sum of money and convincing him that he should marry Lydia.

Bingley comes to call Jane and Darcy accompanies him. They all meet again at a dinner party where Bingley continues to admire Jane and everyone begins to wonder about their engagement. Darcy leaves

for London and Bingley begins to call on the Bennets daily. He proposes to Jane and she consents to marry him. In the midst of their happiness, Lady Catherine arrives and demands an audience with Elizabeth. Elizabeth is astonished by her visit and even more surprised when she accuses her of a secret engagement to Darcy. Elizabeth refuses to be bullied by her guest's questions, and Lady Catherine's irritation grows and she insists that Darcy will marry her daughter. Elizabeth refuses to promise not to accept Darcy and Lady Catherine leaves, seriously displeased. Several days later, Darcy returns and calls on them with Bingley. Elizabeth can no longer refrain from thanking him for what he has done for Lydia, and he tells her he has acted only out of concern for her. He then reveals his unaltered affections, and Elizabeth explains her own change of heart. Both lovers then admit their faults. Elizabeth had been rash and thoughtless while Darcy had been haughty and proud. The next evening Darcy asks Mrs. Bennet for Elizabeth's hand. Her father calls her to the library, troubled by this unexpected news, but is reassured of her feelings. Bemused at the rapid series of betrothals, he tells Elizabeth that if any young men came for Mary or Kitty, they should be sent in to him. Mrs. Bennet is astonished to learn that the disagreeable Darcy is to be her son-in-law and is happy because of his ten-thousand-income. Thus the two courtships end happily and Jane and Elizabeth are safely married.

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3.0 Objectives

Friends, after reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- a) Analyze the novel as a reflection of the life of the upper class in the 18th century society
- b) Analyze the characters in the novel.
- c) Analyze the structure of Pride and Prejudice.
- d) Discuss the themes in the novel in detail

3.1 Introduction

In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen tells us about the Bennet

family, particularly about the two elder daughters Jane and Elizabeth, who have to face various problems before winning the love of their respective suitors. While doing so, she presents a vivid picture of provincial England of the 18th century, with touches of humour and irony that add charm to the story.

3.2 Characterization in Pride and Prejudice

3.2.1 Elizabeth Bennet

Pride and Prejudice is brought vividly to life by a gallery of different and contrasting characters. Not all of these are complex for eg. Jane and Bingley are simpler and, less intricate than Darcy and Elizabeth because psychologically they have no great. They suffer setbacks at the hands of other more complex characters, while those complex characters create their own problems, to the confusion of themselves and others. Less beautiful than her sister Jane, whom she loves without jealousy, Elizabeth is much more spirited and independent than a twenty-year old lady of her times would be. She is impatient with pretensions and conventions, but at the same time, she understands the value of propriety and good taste. She is her father's favourite, having inherited his wit and intelligence. Her lively playful nature makes her attractive, well-liked by women (eg. Her aunt and Charlotte Lucas), and much admired by men. Her judgment is not as correct as she imagines, and once her pride is hurt, as it is by Darcy cutting remarks at the ball, it is badly clouded by prejudice in which she stubbornly persists, in the belief that she is being clever. For all her intelligence and perception she makes bad mistakes of judgment. She lets Wickham's manners and appearance bias her against Darcy. She allows her own pride to prejudice her against him. She sees the bad breeding of her younger sisters and the folly of her mother. Her advice to her father against Lydia going to Brighton is mature and realistic. When she falls in love with Darcy, she does so having first felt respect and gratitude towards him. Although not anxious by nature, she is upset over Jane's unhappiness and her own uncertainty over Darcy. From the time she receives Darcy's letter, her eyes are opened, and she acknowledges that she never knew herself. Her intellectual acknowledgement of her own pride and prejudice comes much earlier than her understanding of her emotions, which shift gradually from

hatred of Darcy to love of him. Despite her youth, she refuses to defer to Lady Catherine and is not brow-beaten by her. She has enough sharp wit to out-argue Lady Catherine and the moral courage to defy her. She has faults, but they are faults of impulsive generosity, not meanness of spirit. With typical fair-mindedness, she admits her errors and struggles towards a mature self-knowledge. Elizabeth has originality, especially in her liveliness, which makes her an interesting character. In doing the unexpected but at the same time remaining sensible, she is a more life-like heroine than the conventional heroine of sentimental novels.

3.2.2 Fitzwilliam Darcy

Fitzwilliam Darcy, when seen from the outside appears to be pompous and solemn, in keeping with his great pride. He contrasts sharply with Elizabeth by lacking all lightness of touch. An aristocrat with ten thousand pounds a year, he quickly attracts criticism at the ball because of the aloof contempt he shows to the company at large, and earns Elizabeth's resentment by deliberately insulting her. His rudeness and haughtiness are defensive: that contrary to appearances, he is basically shy, too serious by nature for the frivolities of society, too sincere in his feelings to be able to make the charming display of them that comes naturally to a hypocrite like Wickham. Initially we see Darcy as Elizabeth sees him (and she is very biased), but we are subsequently given more and more evidence of his true nature, culminating in the testimony of Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper at Pemberley, who speaks of him as an ideal master and landlord, an excellent brother, a model of good nature and generosity. Meanwhile, the natural good taste of Pemberley itself is a powerful witness to the kind of man Darcy really is. In the end, Elizabeth has to acknowledge not only that he has been fairer to Wickham than he deserves, but also that his part in bringing about a separation between Bingley and Jane was not malicious, but done out of a concern for his friend in the excusable belief that Jane was not in love.

Darcy resolves the disgrace of Lydia's elopement by a practical marriage-settlement, and does so secretly, though once the secret is exposed, it confirms the deep sincerity and constancy of his love for Elizabeth. He has come a long way in self-knowledge since he offended Elizabeth by his patronising proposal. His pride, but not his

self-respect, has been humbled. He, like Elizabeth has come to realise they are equals, as people; that his family, like hers, is not exempt from vulgarity (Lady Catherine and Mrs. Bennet are very similar by nature). Both of them see through silly formalities and conventions; both take pride in their discernment; both dislike vulgarity and, most importantly of all, both of them come to see through appearances and to share the same moral perspective. There is some truth in Elizabeth's claim that her attraction for Darcy resulted from his being 'sick of civility, of defence, of officious attention' from women like Caroline Bingley; he comes most alive in dialogue when challenged by Elizabeth's wit, but is rather rigid and wooden as a character. Like Elizabeth, we have hopes that, in return for the 'judgment, information and knowledge of the world' he brings in marriage, she will succeed in her effort to get him to relax and laugh more at himself.

3.2.3 Jane Bennet

Jane Bennet is so beautiful, physically and by nature, that she is beyond the criticism of even Darcy and Caroline Bingley. Her 'sweetness and disinterestedness' may be 'really angelic,' but this often makes her naïve in her judgements. She is too good-natured in herself to discover harm or bad nature in others. She has genuine modesty and humility and this prevents her from giving enough positive encouragement to Bingley, as the shrewd Charlotte Lucas is quick to see; indeed, her character lacks forcefulness of any kind, and her sufferings and delights are passive, never the result of any action on her part. In sharp contrast with Elizabeth, Jane has the simplest of natures. She is far less conscious of the vulgarity and shortcomings of her family than Elizabeth, who agonises over them, and she is painfully slow in forcing to recognise what Elizabeth sees at a glance: that Caroline Bingley is two-faced and no real friend. Her courtship and marriage belonged to the tradition of the sentimental novel. Hers is love at first sight, as is Bingley's. External difficulties prevent it from running its smooth course, but in itself it is an unclouded romantic love. It has something child-like about it, but Jane herself is in many ways child-like.

3.2.4 Charles Bingley

Charles Bingley is a perfect match for Jane. Since he shares her good nature, is modest, passive and acted upon, without ever acting himself. When Elizabeth makes a distinction between characters who can be perfectly understood because of their simplicity and straightforwardness and those who are complex and intricate, she is mentally contrasting him with Darcy. He stands in contrast to Darcy in the same way as Jane does to Elizabeth, and therefore is an extrovert, not snobbish easily pleased, and not critical of others. Just as Elizabeth watches protectively over Jane, so Darcy protects Bingley and orders his life for him.

3.2.5 Mr. Bennet

Mr. Bennet is an intelligent man, attractive and amusing. But having made an unwise marriage with a woman of low intelligence, he does not take care to conceal from his children the contempt he feels for his vulgar and stupid wife. He thinks that his daughters are silly and ignorant like most girls. He is disillusioned and diverts himself with books and by ridiculing everyone. But his sarcasm does not excuse the neglect of his daughters. He feels to discipline and allows their mother to encourage their ignorance and vanity. Far from giving his children the support they badly need, he withdraws himself physically and psychologically for all parental responsibility. Elizabeth and her father are seen in reverse roles when she pleads with him not to give permission to Lydia to go to Brighton, while he jokes about Elizabeth's seriousness. Later, he is very disturbed by Lydia's elopement which shakes him into action and he realizes that a more disciplined upbringing could have prevented her thoughtless behavior.

3.2.6 Mrs. Bennet

Mrs. Bennet is more of a caricature and her only interest in life is to get her daughters married, go visiting and keep in touch with all the gossip in the neighbourhood. She is jealous of her neighbours except when she can triumph over them. Her obsession with her daughters is really a selfish one because having been beautiful herself, she wants to relive her vanity through them, especially Jane and Lydia. She criticises others freely when they are not present and wishes always

to have her own way. Her schemes to marry off her daughters are very indiscreet and tactless. Mrs. Bennet becomes irritable when things go wrong eg. when Lydia elopes with Wickham. She recovers immediately at the news of Lydia's arranged marriage to Wickham and now regards it as a triumph, boasting about it to the neighbours. But her biggest change of face comes with Darcy, when she at first calls him disagreeable and hateful, and later calls him charming and gentlemanly. Lacking in moral awareness, she is childish, self-centered and uncharitable to everyone outside her family.

3.2.7 Mr. Collins

Mr. Collins is a source of humour through his pompous and affected behaviour which he carries to the point of ridiculousness. His courtship of Elizabeth ending in the proposal of marriage is humorous because he is completely unaware of anyone's feelings except his own. His style, in his conversation and letters, exposes as a pretentious, hypocritical fool, who does not have much education or refinement but who is egoistic and a sycophant.

3.2.8 Other minor characters

Lydia is the only other Bennet daughter to play an important role in the novel. She shows herself to be a silly unprincipled girl whose only interest in life is to attract men. She is the youngest and resembles the mother more than any of them. Mrs. Bennet relives her youth through Lydia whom she encourages when she badly needs to be disciplined. She is not well-read, bold, vulgar and very immature. She never shows the least moral awareness and her brash behaviour when she comes as a bride is a testimony to her stupidity and bad taste. Lady Catherine is an egoist and a fitting patron for Mr. Collins. An aristocrat she is, conscious of her own self-importance and wants to be respected by everyone. She always gives her opinion and does not expect to be contradictory. She is a caricature of all that is worst in rank and privilege - the aristocratic class at its most materialistic and ill-bred. Her proud assertion of good breeding exposes her lack of it, and Darcy realizes that his aunt and Mrs. Bennet closely resemble each other. Charlotte Lucas is Elizabeth's best friend, sensible and intelligent, but plain in appearance. She is twenty-seven and realizes

that her chances of a good marriage are not great. So she accepts Collins being of the opinion that happiness in marriage is completely a matter of chance. George Wickham has a fine countenance, a good figure and a pleasing manner - outward advantages that he uses well to deceive everyone. He is the exact opposite of Darcy and usually makes a good impression in society. He is totally selfish, unscrupulous and lacking in morals. His seduction of Lydia is loveless, calculating and carried out in a ruthless manner.

3.2 Check Your Progress.

Match the following :

- | | |
|----------------|-----------|
| 1. Elizabeth | pompous |
| 2. Darcy | passive |
| 3. Jane | lively |
| 4. Mr. Collins | sarcastic |
| 5. Mr. Bennet | proud |

3.3 The Structure of Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice is a well-constructed novel in which the events follow logically, there are no digressions, the sub-plots are related closely to the main plot, and the characters and action complement and supplement each other. The first six chapters introduce the Bennets, Lucases, Darcy and the Bingleys, and also give the reader hints about the development of the plot. After Jane returns from Netherfield, Wickham and Collins are introduced, and this leads to first high point in the story - the Netherfield ball. The next few chapters deal with Mr. Collins, his marriage to Charlotte, Elizabeth's contact with Darcy which leads to the climax of the first half of the novel - Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth and her rejection. Elizabeth also stops at the Gardiners, giving the reader an opportunity to get to know these characters and preparing him for their role in their latter part of the story where they help to bring about a reunion of Elizabeth and Darcy. Meanwhile, many hints have prepared for the elopement of Lydia and Wickham, which, ironically acts as a catalyst to bring Darcy and Elizabeth together. Into the main theme are woven the developing love affairs of Jane and Lydia which act as a commentary on the central story. Austen uses what is called the "Kaleidoscopic" presentation of

the main characters, i.e., the reader is shown a first one aspect of character, then the emphasis shifts, and a new aspect is shown. This process continues until all aspects of the character have been revealed. The plot of the novel is thus symmetrical, the characterisation psychological, and nothing and no character is unnatural or unnecessary. Jane Austen's technique and her characterisation are so skillful that they cannot be considered apart.

3.3 Check Your Progress.

Answer in one sentence:

1. What is kaleidoscopic presentation of character ?

3.4 Some important themes in the novel

3.4.1 Marriage

The opening lines of the novel ("It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.") indicate the main theme of *Pride and Prejudice*, which, as in all of Jane Austen's novels, is marriage. It is mainly about the difficulties a couple has to overcome before they can marry. Elizabeth and Darcy have to first overcome the obstacles within their own selves viz. of pride (in Darcy) and prejudice (in Elizabeth) before they can become suitable marriage partners. Elizabeth is attractive and intelligent, Darcy is rich and handsome. But both have to gain self-knowledge. This is because Darcy is proud and will not humble himself while Elizabeth is hasty in her judgement and angered at Darcy's haughty exterior. Darcy's upbringing makes him hesitate in proposing to Elizabeth because of her lower social status but he does so in spite of himself, because he is attracted by her lively mind, affectionate nature and attractive appearance. He believes that Elizabeth will accept him because he is so superior. But she feels insulted by his patronising behaviour and rejects him. Darcy is seen only through the eyes of Elizabeth and other people in society - it is at the end that we learn of his generosity to Wickham and of his good reputation among his employees. It is also at the end that we learn of

his feelings at crucial points in the story. The events which occur towards the end eventually help Darcy and Elizabeth to resolve their mistakes and accept each other for what they are. Thus their marriage is founded on affection and understanding and not on blind impulse. Austen contrasts other marriages against the story of Elizabeth and Darcy. Charlotte's marriage to Collins is a compromise she makes because she is twenty-seven, plain, and has no prospects of making a good marriage. So she marries Collins who is inferior in intelligence, only for the position he offers. Lydia and Wickham have married on the basis of momentary attraction on her part and mercenary aim on his. There appears to be little attachment between them and the future does not seem to be a very happy one for them. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet obviously have an incompatible marriage. They have nothing in common because Mrs. Bennet is a selfish, vain, and unprincipled woman who attracted Mr. Bennet because of her good looks. He married her though she was inferior to him in intelligence, and now regards her with contempt which he does not try to hide. The only other marriage which is likely to be a happy one is that of Jane and Bingley because they are both essentially good-natured and have genuine affection for each other. But they are both too passive and gentle and lack the liveliness that is seen in the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy.

3.4.2 Parental responsibility

A further theme in the novel is that of parental responsibility, though it is explored in negative, rather than positive terms. Mr. Bennet has made the grave mistake of marrying a woman who had nothing to commend her except a pretty face. Instead of accepting his mistake and making the best of it by giving their children the support they need, he has withdrawn himself physically and psychologically from wife and family alike. He is lazy and takes the easy way out of his difficulties by refusing to face them. His sharp wit is used as a defence against any demand made on him. One instance of his neglect of his parental duties is when he does not heed Elizabeth's warning that Lydia should not be sent to Brighton. Elizabeth also suggests that her younger sisters' impudent behaviour reflects badly on herself and Jane. But Mr. Bennet childishly abandons all responsibility and treats her warnings lightly with self-indulgent amusement. When Lydia

elopes, he tells Elizabeth that he deserves to suffer for his irresponsibility, but when the matter is resolved, he is glad because it will save him a world of trouble. Apart from his dismay at the elopement, the only other occasion when he shows a father's concern is when Elizabeth tells him of her intention to marry Darcy. Speaking sincerely for once, out of the misery of his own experience, he then begs her not to repeat his own mistake by making an incompatible marriage. But there is no indication to show that either he or his wife is aware that their children are victims of a disastrous marriage. The only positive example of parental responsibility comes from her aunt and uncle, whose sympathy, tact and good sense are a contrast to that of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet.

3.4.3 Appearance and reality

The theme of appearance and reality is integrated into the total moral perspective of the novel, and people are often far from being what they appear to be. Outwardly, Mr. Collins is a Christian clergyman, but he is by nature a sycophant and a hypocrite; Mr. Hurst is outwardly a gentleman but actually a greedy mercenary; the fashionable Bingley sisters can hardly wait for the door to close on Elizabeth before criticizing her; and above all, Darcy and Wickham, one who is actually good and one who only appears to be good. A failure in self-knowledge also belongs to the theme of appearance and reality. Both Darcy and Elizabeth have to discover their own genuine selves, and this discovery comes along with their discovery of one another. They learn to rid themselves of the illusions and misunderstandings created by their pride and prejudice.

3.4 Check Your Progress.

Complete the table by choosing the correct answers from the following :

Elizabeth - Darcy, Jane - Bingley, Mr. Bennet - Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins - Charlotte.

Marriage based on love

Marriage not based on love

3.5 Conclusion

Pride and Prejudice presents us with a world that is selective and extremely restricted. But there is strength in this. The deliberately chosen limitations allow the author perfect control of her materials. She sets out to write a comedy of manners with total economy and brilliantly succeeds because her narrow range is made to serve artistic ends. The novel is very nearly perfect and has hardly a superfluous incident, action, character or word. It is a novel of realistic social satire, with complex human beings; set in everyday reality without melodrama, and claims to be one of the earliest truly modern novels.

3.6 Summary

In the preceding chapters, we have seen that Jane Austen presents us with the Bennet family and the progress of the daughters in courtship and marriage. Their new neighbour, Mr. Bingley, is a prospective match for Jane, and fortunately gets on well with her. His seemingly proud and haughty friend, Mr. Darcy, is attracted to Elizabeth. When Jane visits the Bingleys, she is taken ill. Elizabeth goes to nurse her, and finds herself in the company of Darcy, who finds himself falling in love with her. The sisters meet Mr. Wickham, who tells Elizabeth of how he suffered at the hands of Darcy. This confirms her prejudice against him. Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth and, being turned down, quickly switches to her friend Charlotte Lucas, who accepts him. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth in a condescending manner, and she rejects him. He gives her a letter, in which he puts his side of the Wickham story. Lydia elopes with Wickham. Elizabeth later learns that Darcy did a great deal for her family by helping the couple. Misunderstandings between Elizabeth and Darcy are cleared, and they marry, as do Jane and Bingley.

Check Your Progress - Answers

3.2

1. Elizabeth lively
2. Darcy proud

- 3. Jane passive
- 4. Mr. Collins pompous
- 5. Mr. Bennet sarcastic

3.3

Kaleidoscopic presentation of character is when the reader is shown first one aspect of a character, and then a new aspect of that character by shifting the emphasis.

3.4

Marriage based on love

Elizabeth - Darcy

Jane - Bingley

Marriage not based on love

Mr. Bennet - Mrs. Bennet

Mr. Collins - Charlotte

Field work

Read the novel Emma, written by Jane Austen.



