

# Ladies Come First: Strong Female Voice in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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## Abstract

This research paper aims to investigate the critical feministic issues reflected by Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*. The story widely reflects the English society of the Regency period. Specifically, this article sheds light on Austen's writing which comes in response to the Georgian Era. Accordingly, the position of woman has been terribly marginalized, including inequality, scarcity of women schools, class distinction, and prohibition of legacy that were noticeably questioned. These unjust practices where woman regressively faced, have been analysed on the light of the

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feminist literary theory which is considered as a social, political, and economic movement to achieve equality of mankind regardless of gender. It further seeks woman's independence and individuality. Austen's heroine, Elizabeth Bennet is the author's mouth piece who represents feminist voice in the novel has been the focus of the current study. The research findings have reflected how Elizabeth advocates the woman's rights against woman discrimination as well as the dominance of masculinity on women in the eighteenth century. It is highly expected that the findings of this study will significantly contribute in establishing a landmark for future studies in the field of woman rights, the cornerstone of the interdisciplinary of feminism.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Feminist criticism, Jane Austen, Pride and prejudice

## Introduction

Jane Austen is no doubt considered as one of the greatest fiction writers and one of the first pioneers of the feminist movement in the history of English literature. Her novels are noticeably among fewer famous ones that addressed feministic issues of her time. Significantly, these issues in Austen's works can only be inferred by someone who reads her works profoundly. In this context, Brown (1973) found Jane Austen's themes "comparable with the eighteenth-century feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft" because they question "certain masculine assumptions in society" (p.324). It is clear that Brown reads feminism in Austen's writing. Austen critically reflects issues of class, gender, freedom and equality. Even today, her works have been invoked in public debates not only in Britain, but also in the West. Her reputation has remarkably raised after publishing her wonderful novels (Burgess,1974).

In addition, she is praised by Virginia Woolf as "the most perfect artist among women" (Woolf, 1984, p. 149). Many critics have praised her style as extraordinary. Austen's writing is rich, she was a great writer and also an extraordinary observer. Austen works effectively describes women of the upper-middle class between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth

centuries in England. She is talented in writing stories with very interesting style and high skills. She had started writing when she was very young. In spite of her young age, she is considered as one of the first pioneers of novels in English literature (Cano, 2022).

Austen's writing is clearly influenced not only by her family, but also by the social, political and cultural events in the Georgian period. Though her novels mostly focus on courtship and marriage, she discusses critical issues of her era. In each case, readers can notice the society's negative side—one that had narrow and rigid expectations for women through the eyes and perceptive of a young heroine. Filled with wit and sense of humor, Austen's novels provide a realistic picture of the masculine dominance over women. As a female writer, she intentionally questions the issues affecting women in England during that period. She particularly focuses on women's main problems in society such as marriage, property, education and position.

According to Wollstonecraft (2014), Austen clearly plants the first seeds of feminism in her works and this contribution to women's rights, however, grades her as an Enlightenment Feminist writer. Austen has been touched by Mary Wollstonecraft's views of feminism. Both writers believed that education is the best way to make woman take her position in the society as men. Accordingly, Austen's works largely portrait women's position in the English society where woman's image is seen as weaker and inferior than men. Hence, Austen began to write consistently to question some social and financial problems. As a feminist writer, she reflects the feminine issues in an interesting way using literary techniques such as wit, irony and satire to criticise her society. Thus, she uniquely engraves her name among the feminist writers.

On the level of novelistic characterisation, Austen portrays dynamic female characters who have the ability of acting against the patriarchal system independently. In other words, she gives her heroine a direct reaction against different feminist issues, particularly in the middle-class society. Therefore, her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet is shown in different places in the novel to advocate women's social rights. In this regard, Deborah Kaplan talks about

Austen's independent female representations against the patriarchal images of the society. She states that in *Pride and Prejudice*, Miss Austen creates Elizabeth Bennet as a reflection of active feminine in response to the power of patriarchal ideologies. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth is found to be quite confident in her conversation and independent in her attitudes. Kaplan here asserts, "to convey awareness of sexual inequality and subtle and overt expression of its unfairness, the heroine speaks with a female voice" (Kaplan, 1994, p.189).

In her novel, Austen presents a liberal feminist character which serves a particular role and expresses free thoughts and feelings. Besides, Austen's construction of her characters and their interaction reveal that she is aware of the social and moral values of her time. Her heroine, Elizabeth in this case, not only protests against the secondary position of women, but also struggles to prove her independence and individuality.

In short, Austen occupies a curious position between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their awareness of the conditions of their society, Austen's heroines shout loudly for change so as to get their own rights – to have property, free education, job opportunities and achieve their own aspirations.

### **The Concept of Feminism**

The term 'feminism' has been derived from the Latin word 'femina,' which means 'woman' and was first used with regard to the issues of equality and women's Rights Movement. According to Abrams (1999), Feminist Criticism is "a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, lie two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles, achievements, social and political rights" (p.88).

This definition, however, stresses on women rights that are equal to men in the same society. In addition, the term 'feminism' is used to describe a cultural, political or economic movement which tends to establish equal rights for both women and men. Nonetheless, the terms 'feminism' and

'feminist' did not gain widespread official use until the 1970s when they started to be used in the public speech, social meetings, literary seminars, symposiums, and scientific conferences. Moreover, feminist literary criticism helps critics and researchers look at literature from different perspectives. It applies various lenses of feminist theories to the works of literature.

In our case of study, we apply feminist theory by closely examining the portrayal of certain female characters, the attitude of the author, and the relationship between the characters. So, our study centres around the main character Elizabeth Bennet, as a typical female voice. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen ironically criticises various social problems and raises some questions about the values of English society. As a female writer, Austen pays much attention for women's social position and rights so as to seek their value in the society. Accordingly, our discussion primarily emphasises such questions and issues through the character of Elizabeth Bennet who represents the author's female voice in the novel.

Apparently, through her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen wants to convey what she believes is true and how the society perceives it. She gives her characters paradoxical emotions and creates different personalities to express what she reasonably thinks and profoundly feels. For instance, Darcy is quite proud of himself. He does not trust others but rather tries to find their shortcomings. Similarly, Elizabeth always puts her prejudice on those whom she teases. They argue, blame, criticise and even slander each other. To complicate the story's plot, Austen lets them attract each other in such a way that is humourous and witty. Her focus on certain characters (Darcy vs. Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet vs. Mrs. Bennet, Collins vs. Elizabeth, Wickham vs. Darcy, and Lady Catherine vs. Elizabeth). She probably creates internal and external conflict among these characters in order to serve her thematic structure. Towards the end of the novel, these characters strive to deeply realise and understand each other. They break those traditional norms, social status and solve all the misunderstandings together. It is significant to mention here that the most important issue potentially

highlighted in the novel is Elizabethan feminism for which the following detailed discussion has been devoted.

### **Discussion of Feministic Issues in *Pride and Prejudice***

As a feminist critic and writer, Austen realises her real task not only to entertain, but also to criticise the wrong social norms of her society. That is to say, she functions as a critical judge of her own society. She creates a real Austen through the character of Elizabeth Bennet who speaks on behalf of her. She does not only stand with her, but also supports her point of view. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth represents all women of her time who are eager for change and getting their legal rights. In the story, the writer is found to emphasise the reflection of the female character as a strong equivalent to men. She has a strong belief that the best way of expressing female self-awareness is through literature. Thus, the female voice is loudly heard to insist on their rights and strive against the patriarchal system.

Based on the literary theory of feminism, there are some significant key terms that can be inferred in the novel such as social equality, patriarchy, spouse choice, education and inheritance. These issues can be related to each other, but they can be studied individually. In *Pride and Prejudice* (hereinafter will be cited as PP), for instance, Austen commences her novel by concentrating on the importance of marriage as a legal social right for both sexes. She says:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters (PP, p.1).

According to some religions, marriage is a kind of commitment between woman and man, as husband and wife which is strongly connected with love, support, tolerance and harmony. In other words, creating a family

means a new phase of social life where marriage builds a new stage of relationships between males and females, which is a cornerstone in the society (Nordvik, 2022). Apparently, Austen wants to stress rights of ladies to choose the right man and secure their life socially and financially. In this consideration, Sarah Gamble is in total agreement when she maintains in *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Post-feminism* that marriage remains an “enduring institution...a form of compulsory heterosexuality, and the means by which the oppression of women is perpetuated sexually, economically, and socially” (Gamble, 1999, p.269).

Similarly, a man of good fortune must look for a good wife. In fact, finding a husband was the greatest task of women, especially the middle class during the eighteenth century. For women, they did not have such rights, so they saw marriage as their means of social stability and independence. They had no personal possession or property that can be acquired. Therefore, Austen’s novel tells us about women and marriage so as to understand the legacy of women who want to get married and secure their lives. However, some critics support Austen’s views about marriage. For example, Nancy Armstrong sees Austen’s novels “bring to culmination a tradition of ladies fiction that concentrated on the finer points of conduct necessary to secure a good marriage” (Armstrong, 1987, p.134). It seems clear for us that Austen’s work shows an awareness of the necessity for women to marry which is a legal right that every woman must seek. She expresses her personal attitude towards the social and economic pressure on women to marry in her time.

When it comes to marriage, the first thing that one may think about is a long-lasting relationship, because marriage is one of the most important decisions in everybody’s life. When people decide to get married, they think and dream of having a lovely family and happy life. Austen has an insightful view about marriage which is completely different from the traditional one. According to her, in case of being unmarried, everything was their father’s property which was to be inherited only by male heirs after his death. As a result, the only way to become socially accomplished was to marry a rich man. Likewise, a rich man could not be deemed socially accomplished if he

remained a bachelor. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the issue of marriage resonates the plot of the novel. Austen depicts four marriages (Bingley and Jane; Elizabeth and Darcy; Collins and Charlotte; Wickham and Lydia) and these ones are all different from each other. It is obvious that Jane Austen's view of marriage is not based on pure economic considerations. That is to say, true marriage should be based on true feelings, mutual love and respect.

For Charlotte Lucas, marriage is a matter of chance. In her case to find security, she connects herself with Collins who is not an 'eligible' bachelor. In fact, what Charlotte only asks for is a comfortable house, a higher social position and a good fortune. That is all she needs as an old single lady. She explains to Elizabeth: "*I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state*" (PP, p. 123).

Based on the above quotation, one can infer that Charlotte justifies her acceptance for Mr. Collins despite his stupidity. On the social level, she is a woman of small fortune and lower status. That is why she seeks to secure her future. In addition, she marries Collins because she is twenty-seven years old and the chance for a lady of poor family and lower status is very rare. Collins' eligibility probably lies in his being under the patronage of Lady Catherine in Hunsford, where he has a very good house and sufficient income.

From Elizabeth's feminist point of view, Charlotte is not happy with her marriage to Collins because Charlotte knows well that Mr. Collins is not a good match. She connects with him only to secure her life. On the contrary, Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins's proposal though he is the legal heir of their estate. In spite of her parental pressure and uncertainty of her future, Elizabeth refuses this traditional way of marriage. As a liberal feminist character, she does not accept the conventional idea that one should marry for wealth and social status.



As a traditionalist character, Mr. Collins finds this idea absurd, because he wants to have complete control over his wife so as to prove his manhood. In her view, Elizabeth sees him as a silly man whom she neither loves nor respects. His personality is revealed through his long letters as well as in his actual behaviour. The letter that he has sent to Mr. Bennet in order to inform him that he is coming to visit Longbourn, is real evidence of his stupidity and pompousness. Besides, his long-winded formal speech is another trait of his ridiculousness.

Austen here creates a strong female character who loudly speaks and boldly expresses her opinion. Based on her biography, the young Jane Austen was once engaged to two young wealthy men, but she broke the engagements for some reasons. She thinks that true love must be based on true feelings and not social status or wealth. Her philosophy in life is that a woman should have the right to accept or refuse one's proposal. In the case of Collins, as a foolish man, who does not know what love really means in life and, as a clergy man, he thinks that love is only to connect to someone and that is all. When he first proposes to Elizabeth, her mother is quite happy, but it annoys her father. It is not because of her father's disagreement; she firmly rejects him. Her refusal, however, is almost rational and liberal. Mr. Collins shifts to Elizabeth's best friend, Charlotte Lucas, who is quite traditional. Thus, Austen creates two different characters that represent different slices of society.

In fact, Elizabeth's liberal feminist view is seen when she is proposed twice by Mr. Darcy. She rejects him despite his ten thousand pounds a year and high social status. A Georgian woman dreams to have this kind of man during the time of Austen. For Elizabeth, money has no real value if it is connected with honour and dignity. In spite of his insistence to catch her hand, Elizabeth does not accept his proposal until he justifies his actions and proves himself as a gentleman.

Indeed, love for Austen is something that is very important and sacred. She was deprived from love, because she did not accept any proposal. Probably she found a higher status and fortune, but she did not find real love. This is

why she gives her heroine the chance to love. Hence, Elizabeth has to seek the true person who deserves her. At the beginning, Elizabeth refused to accept Darcy's proposal because he was perceived in Elizabeth's mind as extremely proud of his fortune and high social status. He intentionally insulted her dignity and emotions when he refused to dance with her: "*She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me*" (PP, p.9).

Unlike Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth Bennet is not an old or subordinate girl who may accept someone's proposal easily. She is described as a young lady of high spirit and intelligence. Because of her charm, intelligence, and wit, Darcy begins to admire her in spite of her prejudice against him. Besides, it is her strong feminine character, sharp eyes and polite expression that captivate his attention. It seems that Austen advocates marriage of equal minds based on respect, mutual love and understanding. She thinks that true love is essential for marriage in order to last so long. It is well-known that Austen has read the works of William Shakespeare. Seemingly, she wants to apply the philosophy of Shakespeare in his sonnet 116: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds." In this sonnet, Shakespeare says that there is no barrier to the uniting of two minds in love. He stresses true and pure love in its ideal form which is constant, everlasting and unchanged by time and circumstance.

On the other hand, marriage is connected to inheritance law, which did not give women the right of inheritance in Austen's time. According to English institution, inheritance system stipulated that once a girl married, her property legally becomes her husband's. In fact, a marriage settlement was dealt with as a legal document. After marriage, the bride would have a certain fortune. In this situation, Mr. Collins intended to marry one of the Bennet's daughters in order to inherit their estate. When he was rejected by Jane, he shifted his attention to Elizabeth who she also rejected him.

In fact, if the husband was very wealthy, he would support her and secure her life. That is why Mrs. Bennet asked Mr. Bennet to visit Mr. Bingley who hired Netherfield and invited him for dinner. Mrs. Bennet thinks that he might admire one of their daughters. She says: "*My dear Mr. Bennet, said*

*his lady to him one day, have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?' Mr. Bennet replied that he had not. ... What is his name? Bingley. Is he married or single? 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!" (PP, p.1).*

Indeed, the Bennets girls had no brother to inherit the family estate. So, their only legal male heir is Mr. Collins who is Mr. Bennet's cousin. In this case, the Bennets family estate in Longbourn is entailed to him after their father's death. In this situation, Mr. Collins speaks to Miss. Bennet:

But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honored father (who, however, may live many years longer,) I could not satisfy myself without resolving to chase a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place—which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years (PP, p.104).

According to the British system of inheritance during the eighteenth century, women had no rights that could be given after their father's death. This is probably because of the legal heir who organizes the family wealth which will be passed to sons or brothers. In the case of Mr. Bennet, he has no son or brother who can take his property after his death. He only has five daughters who will marry and, therefore, his estate will be legally transferred to their husbands. Mr. Collins, who is a foolish clergyman, will inherit the Bennet's property for entail. That is why he arrives at Longbourn and proposes to Jane and Elizabeth respectively, but they reject him with their father's approval.

On the other hand, in the case of elopement, if a girl eloped and got married without a marriage settlement, any money that had been legally hers at the time of the marriage became the property of her husband without any conditions on how he used it. A question arises: what might happen if the man runs away the next day?! The answer is simply that he leaves the girl penniless. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen reflects the issue of elopement.

George Wickham once eloped with Georgiana Darcy, but she was saved by Mr. Darcy. Similarly, George Wickham eloped with Lydia Bennet who was also saved by Mr. Darcy.

Morally speaking, elopement, as a critical issue is not only a moral lapse, but also a social scandal. According to social and moral code of conduct in that time, a man who eloped with a girl was not a gentleman. Because by eloping with her, he would socially ruin her reputation and financially exploit her money. Austen presents this issue to discuss its bad consequences. She introduces the character of George Wickham as an example of the mercenary and greedy man who is interested only in single girls with money.

During the Regency period, the social classes were largely divided by wealth, land, and royalty. A social class usually refers to a hierarchy in a society where people are grouped on the basis of their wealth and social status. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is acknowledged for its keen commentary on these aspects of the society. The influence of social class and the greed to climb up the social hierarchy is largely reflected in Austen's novels.

In her works, Austen always focuses on the preoccupations of the middle class and the upper class. This focus, however, is certainly to reflect the true suffering of the middle-class women. In fact, there were several differentiations in Regency England such as money and low standards. They acquired wealth through property, marriage, and inheritance.

Class struggle is an important issue which is revealed by Jane Austen. A social class refers to the position a person gains in relation to others in the society. It is well-known fact that a middle-class lady cannot marry to a higher-class member. This class discrimination is the centre of the conversation between Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Elizabeth Bennet. Lady Catherine advises her to change her mind. She wants to convince her that she does not suit her nephew who is a high-class rich gentleman. She says: "*Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the*

*presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?"* (PP, p.343).

As a result, Austen satirizes Lady Catherine who used to degrade people of a modest class. She likes people who only obey her orders and praises her kindness and generosity. When Elizabeth objects to marry Darcy because she fears that it would indirectly affect her own social connection, Elizabeth in return, replies that she would marry whomever she wishes for her own happiness. She states: "*In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal. True. You are a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not image me ignorant of their condition*" (PP, p. 344).

In this humiliating situation, Elizabeth immediately reflects her sense of social dignity of her family. "*Whatever my connections may be, said Elizabeth, if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you*" (PP, p. 344). Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine that she does not care about her marriage conditions. She states that she does not have to take anyone else's feelings into account when making personal decisions. This simple statement is actually quite radical. Since Lady Catherine is Elizabeth's social superior, it would have been considered shocking for Elizabeth to openly state that she does not respect her opinion. The above quotation, however, reveals Elizabeth's commitment to do what she believes is right.

To some extent, *Pride and Prejudice* shows that class is determined by a character's social status, but it doesn't signify anything about their behavior. For example, Lady Catherine behaved arrogantly when she met Elizabeth at her house. However, the marriage that took place between Elizabeth and Darcy seems to break down this patriarchal belief revealing that even though class restrictions are rigid, it does not consider one's class. In other words, love is blind and it has the power to overcome all material obstacles of class or money. Hence, respect and true love have no far limits or social classes.

By the course of time, Austen makes it clear that the closeness between Mr. Bingley and Jane, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, is an attempt to fill the gap

between social classes in the English society. In other words, as a female writer, she hardly strives against class distinction. She deliberately brings the theme of love and marriage to set a strong ground of equality. In both marriages: Bingley-Jane; and Darcy-Elizabeth, Austen proves her triumph over class distinction.

Patriarchy is another issue depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the eighteenth-century, English women were oppressed due to the prevailing patriarchal ideology that regarded them as an inferior sex to men. In fact, equality and right for women had been the subject of several debates and seminars among women for decades. Women were excluded from power for a long time. Therefore, women's public voices were suppressed by patriarchal society.

Hence, patriarchy is an important issue and one of the key terms of feminist literary criticism. Feminists consider it as a social system which gives men the principal authority in the household. Historically speaking, patriarchy dominates political, social, economic and legal organization in different cultures and societies. For many decades, it referred to male dominance and female subordination.

Accordingly, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* sheds much light on this issue through the male characters. For example, Mr. Bennet has the upper hand over his household though he is sometimes careless and helpless. Nevertheless, he gives orders and decides what is good for the family. He is the man of his family, the father of his five daughters (Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia) and Mrs. Bennet's husband. His character is described as witty, funny, and serious. Though he is an unhappy man in his marriage because of his foolish and vulgar wife, he has much hope of finding happiness for his marriageable daughters. When he heard that Netherfield Park had been rented at last by Mr. Bingley, his wife suggested a visit to him but he reacted passively.

As a patriarch of his family, Mr. Bennet has to take decision towards what he sees right or wrong. Mrs. Bennet's frequent speech to get her daughters married makes him behave carelessly and passively. It seems that his dry

wit and sarcasm in the face of his wife's hysteria make him a sympathetic figure for the readers, but he usually proves his power over her foolishness and vulgarity. It could be noted that in her novel, Austen describes her heroine making her description meets the roles assigned for her to play in *Pride and Prejudice*. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet is the most intelligent and quick-witted lady. Her admirable qualities are numerous—she is lovely, clever, and feminist liberal. In the novel, she is defined by her high voice and soft dialogue. She converses with anyone brilliantly. In addition, her honesty, virtue, and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and bad behavior. Though she is not very beautiful as her elder sister, Jane, she is clever, witty, and bold, a trait which makes her speak exactly what is on her mind. She is further brave, energetic and full of enthusiasm.

In other words, Elizabeth is found to be clever enough and aware of Mr. Collins relationship with her family. As a cousin of her father, one sees it reasonable to marry him because Mr. Collins is to inherit Mr. Bennet's estate and this would also secure a home for her sisters. But Elizabeth realizes the bad consequences of marrying him. If she accepted Mr. Collins proposal, she would be happy socially and financially, but not rationally. She does not care about money or social stability as there is no affectionate love for Mr. Collins. Austen knows well of the importance of love between couple. Once she was engaged with two young wealthy men, but she did not accept the traditional way of marriage. She did not accept their proposals for money or social status. That is why she did not marry in her life. She creates the independent character of Elizabeth who freely expresses her choice in choosing a good match. This is a good reason to refuse Mr. Collins's proposal.

On the other hand, Elizabeth refuses Mr. Darcy's first proposal. Fitzwilliam Darcy, the son of a wealthy family and the master of the great estate of Pemberley, is regarded as Elizabeth's male counterpart. By the course of events, the reader realizes that Darcy is her ideal match. Like Elizabeth, Darcy has a sharp view to judge others hastily and harshly. His high birth and wealthy family make him overtly proud of his social status. He proposes to Elizabeth by saying: *"In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings*

*will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you. 'Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression" (PP, p. 183).*

In fact, Darcy's proposal of marriage to Elizabeth demonstrates how his feelings toward her transformed since his earlier refusal to dance with her at the ball. Instead, he dances with Bingley's sister so as to tease her. Likewise, Elizabeth has a negative reaction because she thinks of Darcy's arrogance when he refuses to dance with her at Mr. Lucas's house. In addition, Darcy's attempts to interfere in Bingley and Jane's courtship, as well as his mistreatment with Wickham constitute significant indicators of his arrogant behaviour. This conflict, however, increases Elizabeth's prejudice against him. At this moment, she is convinced that Darcy is really aloof and superior in his behavior toward other people of low status. Apparently, her judgment of Darcy probably stems from her initial prejudice against his snobbishness and his pride about his high social status. Elizabeth's reply, in turn, is clear enough to reject him:

From the very beginning— from the first moment, I may almost say— of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry (PP, p.187).

Elizabeth directs these sharp words to Mr. Darcy after he proposes to her. As he considers Elizabeth's lower financial status, it is quite fair for her to refuse Mr. Darcy's offer. It's also fair to say that Bennet's critique against Mr. Darcy's character forces him to seriously examine his prideful manners. She concludes that his pride makes him selfish and dishonest. In this situation, Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Darcy's marriage proposal is often read by many critics as a feminist triumph. This behavior, however, really



explains her strong feminist character. She has the ability to judge people fast and properly. She studies Darcy's behavior well. She wonders why he treats Wickham unfairly. In addition, Elizabeth's anger, however, increased strongly when she heard the story from Fitzwilliam stating that Mr. Darcy intentionally tried to break up the relationship between Jane and Mr. Bingley.

Again, Darcy proposes to her, but this time he tries to apologize politely and justifies his reactions. He states: *"If you will thank me," he replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of you"* (PP, p.354).

In fact, both proposals are completely different: the first proposal occurred in the Hunsford Parsonage while he was visiting his aunt at Rosings Park, but the second one occurred on a lane near Longbourn as he was walking with Elizabeth. It seems that the place and time play an important role in the progress of their tense relationship. The first one is triggered by sharp hostility from both sides, whereas the second one is crafted with much more sincerity and confession. He declares his true feelings by saying *"...My affections and wishes are unchanged; but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever"* (PP, p.354).

Obviously, Darcy extremely realized his over pride and evil actions against Elizabeth's family. Additionally, Elizabeth's rejection of his first proposal forced him to recognize the truth that she was proud of her identity, dignity and family status. She proved herself as an equal partner. On the other hand, when he proposed for the second time, Darcy really revealed his true character: *"You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once"* (PP, p.354).

Indeed, the conflict which rises between them when he later proposes, begins to fall down. When he first proposes to her, for instance, he does not know her charms, dignity, and accomplishment. Towards the end of the novel, Austen brings the two characters closer to each other so as to clear

the ice between them and bridge the gap in her society. The ladder of the social class should change and people should be equally treated. In the case of Darcy, he clearly sacrifices his social status to marry Elizabeth. On the other hand, Elizabeth proves her liberal feminist character to marry whom she deserves, breaking her society norms or family dictations.

Education is another feminist issue which has been reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen is quite aware of the importance of education for women. Historically speaking, in the eighteenth century, female education was a contested issue. According to Gregory and Jones (1990), only a few numbers of the young bourgeois women received some type of formal education (p. 98). Seemingly, this prohibition of education comes from claiming that women were in possession of a weaker mind than men, which made them rather unfit to learn. Based on the society's culture, women view that they have only a minor role in the house. That is, they need to manage their families and unconditionally obey their husband. This expression means that female education was mainly formed at home.

On the other hand, the education of genteel women comprised a wide range of "accomplishments," such art, music, dancing, religion, household management, languages, history, and literature. In most households, the education of daughters was mainly granted to their mothers and governesses, though some went to private schools to learn certain subjects and accomplishments. According to Miss Bingley, a truly accomplished woman "must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages." She should also possess "a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved" (PP, p. 36).

One must keep in mind that educational practices are determined by family, rank, and income. While some families placed value on book learning for their daughters, most families put greater emphasis on the ornamental accomplishments. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the Bingley sisters were educated well in one of the first private schools in town, where they most likely focused on ornamental accomplishments. Similarly, Mr.

Darcy's sister, Georgiana, was highly educated and had a governess who is called Mrs. Younge.

In contrast, Bennets daughters seem rather deficient in their education. In this context, Lady Catherine asks Elizabeth if she plays the piano or sings:

Do you play and sing, Miss Bennet? A little. Oh! then – sometime or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to – You shall try it someday. –Do your sisters play and sing? One of them does. Why did not you learn? – You ought all to have learned" (PP, p.159).

Lady Catherine intentionally humiliates Elizabeth's family as she goes further and asks: "*Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters*". (PP, p. 160). Elizabeth innocently answers: "*My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London.*" Then she boastfully asks: "*Has your governess left you? We never had any governess. No governess! How is that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! –I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education*" (PP, p. 160).

In fact, Elizabeth's conversation with Lady Catherine provides this account of female education in the Bennet's home. Elizabeth states: "*Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might*" (PP, p.160).

For Mr. Darcy, education does not mean only to have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, playing the piano, and speaking modern languages, but also accomplished woman must "*improve her mind by extensive reading*" (PP, p.36).

As far as education is concerned, Jane Austen and Cassandra had no chance to study further. So, they depended largely on their father and brothers

support. In addition, the cultured atmosphere of their home as well as the social and literary contact with relatives helped them to learn many things in their lives. Hence, reading occupied much time of Austen. Reading was not only for herself, but also for family entertainment. In Austen's biography, we are told that her father had a library in his home where his daughters could read many books as a self-study, because their father couldn't afford the school's tuitions. Moreover, Jane Austen could sing, dance and play the piano. Furthermore, she had knowledge of little French and Italy as well.

Though the family was rather poor, her parents highly valued education and religious principles. She broadened her mind and prepared herself to be a writer by reading lots of works of William Shakespeare, John Milton, Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson and others. In *Pride and Prejudice*, this is clearly reflected through the character of Elizabeth who represents the author herself.

Due to financial considerations, the chief goal in a woman's life at that time was to find a husband who could provide her with a home. The main concern for women, as assigned by the norms of the society, was how to be an object of male desire (Gregory & Jones, 1990, p.14). To achieve this objective, it eventually became customary for most young women to receive some sort of education (p.99). As noted before, even Austen herself had no official education because of financial reasons. That is why she stresses the importance of education.

According to Austen's view, she sees it as an urgent necessity, especially for females to learn and educate themselves. It is considered as a feminist right for women to build an integrated family based on rights and duties. However, learning was very restricted only to upper class while poor young women were only taught what was regarded as attractive female talents. In practice, this means training in various ornamental accomplishments. These accomplishments include reading, dancing, music, drawing and French (Chapone, 2018).

In this regard, Lady Catherine shows herself as an example of highly educated lady who represents the aristocratic family. She thinks that Elizabeth's qualifications are imperfect because of her insufficient education. As a result, Elizabeth gets annoyed by Lady Catherine's humiliating questions. But she quietly retains and informs her that she and her sisters received a liberal education, which encouraged them to acquire the knowledge they desired from reading books. Apparently, Elizabeth wants to show Lady Catherine that moral values do not come primitively when a man is born to a higher status. Instead, they can be noticed through people's behavior. This debate, however, puts Elizabeth in a winning situation. This argument really makes Elizabeth's character as a perfect lady. She does not give Lady Catherine a chance to further despise her family's status.

In short, this comprehensive analysis of the heroine in *Pride and Prejudice* proves Elizabeth as a strong female voice. For example, Elizabeth's wit and her unconventional and liberal talks indicate that she represents the female identity in all situations. Elizabeth's views on marriage, on society, and her own position in society reflect her independent spirit and her critical intelligence. She is given all feminine merits to express the female voice in the novel.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Jane Austen has proved herself as a great feminist writer. Like other novelists, Austen has written her novel to express her views and reflect what she really experienced as social norms or traditions. In her novel "*Pride and Prejudice*", Austen really reflects her own time as she deeply dives into the depth of the English society to reveal critical feminist issues. She discusses social and economic issues such as marriage, social equality, legacy, class distinction, education, personal freedom and the dominance of masculinity over femininity. These critical issues have been analysed from the feministic point of view.

Women in the 18th century did not have such choices when it came to their rights. They could either get married, become house maid or governess if

they were educated enough. Their life was shaped mostly by their families to seek a husband who would support them. In Austen's time, women were regarded as emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive. As a social and human activist, Austen adopts a strong female voice to boldly express her feminine needs and rights. She depicts her heroine Elizabeth as a strong liberal feminist who freely expresses her own views, feelings, and decisions. This female voice really represents all women of Austen's society.

The examination of Elizabeth's independence, to certain extent, reflects Austen's feminist identity as a prominent writer. Her feminist beliefs through the character of Elizabeth, represents the female voice in the English society. Therefore, Austen can be regarded as a remarkable woman in the domain of critical literary criticism. Her contribution to the literature is partly to a special writing style and partly establishes a new status for women. She uses her special perspective of female voice to show that women are independent, strong and liberal in her society.

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