

Q: Describe in your words the plot of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice".

(B.A.Eng.Hons.Part-2, Paper-4th)

Ans:Pride and Prejudice published in 1830 had originally been titled "First Impressions". The original title seems apt enough as the whole novel deals with the unreliability of first impressions. The new title however, focuses attention on the main theme of the novel which traces how 'pride' and 'prejudice' as two human traits guide relationships and this is brought out with respect to the relationship between two central figures of the novel – Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. It is believed that these two characters are studies in pride and prejudice respectively. On a superficial level this view holds true but it would certainly be over-simplifying matters to say that this alone brings out the full significance of the title.

Pride certainly is the pre-dominant characteristic of Mr. Darcy. On his very first appearance he makes himself highly unpopular, for he is discovered to be excruciatingly arrogant and above being pleased. His pride that stems of out of his superiority of intellect, his noble ancestry and enormous wealth prejudices him strongly against Elizabeth's family and her low

connections. Darcy's is actually a social prejudice – a variant of the conventional snobbery of the aristocratic class. Although “he had never been bewitched by any woman as he was by her”, Darcy feels it beneath his dignity to admit to his love for her. Even when he can repress his feelings no longer and does propose to Elizabeth ‘he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than on pride.’ In fact his customary arrogance deepens into what amounts to insolence during the proposal in which he explains to her the various family obstacles he has had to overcome and the degradation this marriage will be for him. He is considerably humbled when he is rejected without ceremony and Elizabeth's words “had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner” and her criticism of his conceit and ‘selfish disdain of the feelings of others’ affect him deeply. Elizabeth's refusal initiates a process of introspection and self-criticism and he emerges as a man whose pride has been humbled. This is revealed in the way he welcomes the Gardiners at his estate and also by his long explanatory speech to Elizabeth towards the end of the novel. The greatest proof of this development is in his remaining firm in his choice of Elizabeth even after Lydia's and Wickham's dishonorable elopement which draws from Elizabeth the acknowledgement – **“indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable.”**

In Elizabeth, the intelligent and self-assured young woman too we see the same interesting compound of Pride and Prejudice. Her initial prejudice against Darcy arises from injured pride. At the assembly she over-hears Darcy's remark about herself: “she

is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me". From that evening Eliza is left with no cordial feelings towards Darcy. On the other hand Elizabeth is prejudiced in favor of Wickham, charmed by his fine countenance, pleasing addresses and his flattering attentions and when he provides slanderous information against Darcy, the possibility of doubting Wickham does not occur to Elizabeth and her prejudice against Darcy takes the shape of moral indignation. It is only when she reads Darcy's letter that her eyes are opened to the true character of both. In fact, Darcy's letter induces in Elizabeth the same self-criticism that Darcy too undergoes. She begins reading it "with a strong prejudice against everything" that he might have to say" but on reflection she realizes how blind, partial, prejudiced and absurd she had been. She was flattered and pleased by his attentions to her and her uncle and aunt at Pemberley and when she learns Darcy's role in buying Lydia a marriage to Wickham she greaves over every 'ungracious sensation that she has ever encouraged' towards him. For herself 'she was humbled, but she was proud of him'.

The traits of Pride and Prejudice do not dominate merely the main figures and the significance of this title is worked out perfectly through the minor characters as well. Pride in some of the minor characters takes the form of pompous and comic self-importance in Mr. Collins. Social prejudice finds embodiment in Bingley's sisters, Lady Catherine and her daughter and renders them quite contemptible. Thus we see that the appropriateness of the title of Pride and Prejudice is

indeed unquestionable and it bears immense significance to the plot, thematic concerns and the characterization in the novel.

Pride and Prejudice : Plot Overview

The news that a wealthy young gentleman named Charles Bingley has rented the manor of Netherfield Park causes a great stir in the nearby village of Longbourn, especially in the Bennet household. The Bennets have five unmarried daughters—from oldest to youngest, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia—and Mrs. Bennet is desperate to see them all married. After Mr. Bennet pays a social visit to Mr. Bingley, the Bennets attend a ball at which Mr. Bingley is present. He is taken with Jane and spends much of the evening dancing with her. His close friend, Mr. Darcy, is less pleased with the evening and haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth, which makes everyone view him as arrogant and obnoxious.

At social functions over subsequent weeks, however, Mr. Darcy finds himself increasingly attracted to Elizabeth's charm and intelligence. Jane's friendship with Mr. Bingley also continues to burgeon, and Jane pays a visit to the Bingley mansion. On her journey to the house she is caught in a downpour and catches ill, forcing her to stay at Netherfield for several days. In order to tend to Jane, Elizabeth hikes through muddy fields and arrives with a spattered dress, much to the disdain of the snobbish Miss Bingley, Charles Bingley's sister. Miss Bingley's spite only increases when she notices that Darcy, whom she is pursuing, pays quite a bit of attention to Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth and Jane return home, they find Mr. Collins visiting their household. Mr. Collins is a young clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet's property, which has been "entailed," meaning that it can only be passed down to male heirs. Mr. Collins is a pompous fool, though he is quite enthralled by the Bennet girls. Shortly after his arrival, he makes a proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. She turns him down, wounding his pride. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls have become friendly with militia officers stationed in a nearby town. Among them is Wickham, a handsome young soldier who is friendly toward Elizabeth and tells her how Darcy cruelly cheated him out of an inheritance.

At the beginning of winter, the Bingleys and Darcy leave Netherfield and return to London, much to Jane's dismay. A further shock arrives with the news that Mr. Collins has become engaged to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend and the poor daughter of a local knight. Charlotte explains to Elizabeth that she is getting older and needs the match for financial reasons. Charlotte and Mr. Collins get married and Elizabeth promises to visit them at their new home. As winter progresses, Jane visits the city to see friends (hoping also that she might see Mr. Bingley). However, Miss Bingley visits her and behaves rudely, while Mr. Bingley fails to visit her at all. The marriage prospects for the Bennet girls appear bleak.

That spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte, who now lives near the home of Mr. Collins's patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is

also Darcy's aunt. Darcy calls on Lady Catherine and encounters Elizabeth, whose presence leads him to make a number of visits to the Collins's home, where she is staying. One day, he makes a shocking proposal of marriage, which Elizabeth quickly refuses. She tells Darcy that she considers him arrogant and unpleasant, then scolds him for steering Bingley away from Jane and disinheriting Wickham. Darcy leaves her but shortly thereafter delivers a letter to her. In this letter, he admits that he urged Bingley to distance himself from Jane, but claims he did so only because he thought their romance was not serious. As for Wickham, he informs Elizabeth that the young officer is a liar and that the real cause of their disagreement was Wickham's attempt to elope with his young sister, Georgiana Darcy.

This letter causes Elizabeth to re-evaluate her feelings about Darcy. She returns home and acts coldly toward Wickham. The militia is leaving town, which makes the younger, rather man-crazy Bennet girls distraught. Lydia manages to obtain permission from her father to spend the summer with an old colonel in Brighton, where Wickham's regiment will be stationed. With the arrival of June, Elizabeth goes on another journey, this time with the Gardiners, who are relatives of the Bennets. The trip takes her to the North and eventually to the neighbourhood of Pemberley, Darcy's estate. She visits Pemberley, after making sure that Darcy is away, and delights in the building and grounds, while hearing from Darcy's servants that he is a wonderful, generous master. Suddenly,

Darcy arrives and behaves cordially toward her. Making no mention of his proposal, he entertains the Gardiners and invites Elizabeth to meet his sister.

Shortly thereafter, however, a letter arrives from home, telling Elizabeth that Lydia has eloped with Wickham and that the couple is nowhere to be found, which suggests that they may be living together out of wedlock. Fearful of the disgrace such a situation would bring on her entire family, Elizabeth hastens home. Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Bennet go off to search for Lydia, but Mr. Bennet eventually returns home empty-handed. Just when all hope seems lost, a letter comes from Mr. Gardiner saying that the couple has been found and that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia in exchange for an annual income. The Bennets are convinced that Mr. Gardiner has paid off Wickham, but Elizabeth learns that the source of the money, and of her family's salvation, was none other than Darcy.

Now married, Wickham and Lydia return to Longbourn briefly, where Mr. Bennet treats them coldly. They then depart for Wickham's new assignment in the North of England. Shortly thereafter, Bingley returns to Netherfield and resumes his courtship of Jane. Darcy goes to stay with him and pays visits to the Bennets but makes no mention of his desire to marry Elizabeth. Bingley, on the other hand, presses his suit and proposes to Jane, to the delight of everyone but Bingley's haughty sister. While the family celebrates, Lady Catherine de Bourgh pays a visit to Longbourn. She corners Elizabeth and

says that she has heard that Darcy, her nephew, is planning to marry her. Since she considers a Bennet an unsuitable match for a Darcy, Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth promise to refuse him. Elizabeth spiritedly refuses, saying she is not engaged to Darcy, but she will not promise anything against her own happiness. A little later, Elizabeth and Darcy go out walking together and he tells her that his feelings have not altered since the spring. She tenderly accepts his proposal, and both Jane and Elizabeth are married. sogengmnak

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