



## GENDER HOSTILITY IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

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ABSTRACT

*Pride and Prejudice* deals with the aspect of male-female relationship to show the concept of Gender Hostility. The basic plot of *Pride and Prejudice* revolves around hostility which is softened by degrees. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen delicately handles the problem of love and money in marriage where, in spite of many hurdles, eventually love triumphs over 'pride' and 'prejudice'.

### KEYWORDS

'*Pride and Prejudice*' shows the element of Gender Hostility in human relationships better than any other novel by Jane Austen. This novel excels in the depiction of the hostile feelings one sex can harbour against the other without a proper understanding of each other. As is clear from the title of the novel, the plot of the novel deals with victory over too much pride of the hero counter-balanced by a blind prejudice on the part of the heroine. Darcy and Elizabeth, two strong willed persons of independent natures, have gradually to move out of "Pride" and "Prejudice" respectively towards a better understanding of, and love and respect for each other. Tony Tanner rightly says: *Pride and Prejudice* is about "pre-judging and re-judging. It is drama of recognition-recognition, that act by which the mind can look again at a thing and if necessary make revisions and amendments until it sees the thing as it really is"<sup>1</sup>. "Pre-judging" creates hostility which is subdued by degrees when one is given chances to "re-judge" the person concerned under better circumstances. With better understanding and proper enlightenment the early hostile feelings are transformed into love and affection.

"The course of true love never did run smooth", says Shakespeare. Generally the obstacles in the path of lovers are created by others. In the case of Darcy and Elizabeth, the situation is different. The obstacles in their way are created chiefly by themselves. No outside agency plays any significant part in it. Without knowing the reality they both form a poor opinion of each other in their very first meeting. Since this mutual prejudice will be hard to overcome, the novel becomes a study in the great artistic skill with which Jane Austen resolves the matter. The novel takes up a detailed treatment of the barriers created in the way of the lovers, to be removed gradually so that it is possible for her characters to achieve a happy and satisfying relationship.

The first encounter between Darcy and Elizabeth takes place at a ball. Here Darcy refuses to be introduced to Elizabeth saying: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" (59). Jane Austen so arranges the situation that Elizabeth overhears all these words. She is left with "no cordial feelings towards him" (59). It is his disclaimer which makes her exert herself against him. When Charlotte Lucas tries to defend Darcy's pride, Elizabeth's spontaneous reply is "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine" (67). Darcy's slight hurts Elizabeth's vanity and gives birth to the prejudice she starts nourishing against him. From here the interest of the novel begins. Antagonism rears its head between the two major characters to make the story interesting and to make it go.

Though her character delineation Jane Austen seems to sug-

gest that human nature is too complex to be judged easily. Even most intelligent people can make wrong and hasty judgments. Elizabeth claims to be a "studier of characters" but fails to study the real character either of Darcy or Wickham. It would seem as if a better knowledge of human nature is possible only after some initial misunderstandings. These misunderstandings often lead to hostile feelings which have to be overcome before a proper relationship can be achieved. Thus, hostility has been used by Jane Austen as a strategy to arrive at a proper knowledge of human nature and human relationships. Jane Austen will not be properly appreciated if readers do not understand this strategy, so successfully employed by her.

Elizabeth is even more deeply hostile towards Darcy for the role he plays in separating his friend Bingley and her elder sister Jane who love each other sincerely. Darcy persuades Bingley to think that Jane is not in love with him. He also points out the social inferiority of the Bennets. Depending on his friend's judgments, Bingley quits Netherfield not to return the whole winter. This sort of interference by Darcy in her sister's affair is quite offensive to Elizabeth. The more she finds her sister suffer after Bingley's departure, the more hostile she gets towards Darcy.

The disparity between their social statuses is also used as an important factor which creates hostile feelings between Darcy and Elizabeth. Darcy belongs to an aristocratic family and is proud of the fact. He thinks that Meryton Society that is the middle class society to which Elizabeth belongs is vulgar. He arrogantly refuses to recognize that any person belonging to this class can claim any respect from him. The behavior of Mrs. Bennet at Netherfield and of Collins and Lucases at Rosings strengthens his contempt for the middle class people. Elizabeth, on the other hand, takes the view that because of his pride the aristocrat is inevitable offensive in his dealing with those whom he considers to be inferior. Her adverse opinion of rich people is confirmed by the ill-manners of Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Such fixed views lead to their misjudging each other.

Jane Austen deals with the story at two levels. She keeps the balance of relationship by showing continued hatred on the one hand, and by creating affection on the other. While Elizabeth has been moving from dislike to hatred in her feelings towards Darcy, he finds his original indifference to her beauty changing to admiration. As Jane Austen writes: "When they next met, he looked at her only to criticize. But no sooner has he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expres-

sion of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some other equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness" (70).

Thus, though the relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy begins in the haughty aloofness on his side and a readiness to oppose him on her, yet her constant challenging him fosters and holds his interest. In her account of Darcy's growing attachment to Elizabeth, Jane Austen is scrupulously fair in providing the reader all the clues. At the Lucases' Sir William invites Darcy to dance with Elizabeth but she looks "archly" and turns away. At this point Darcy disappoints the indefatigable Miss Bingley by saying that he was not silently passing "strictures" and the assembled company, but instead was "meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (73).

While the readers are gradually prepared to form a new estimate of Darcy's character by the slow revelation of his changing attitude to Elizabeth, she still nourishes her hostile feelings towards him. When she first sees Anne De Bourgh, the future bride for Darcy, her reaction shows her hatred for Darcy: "I like her appearance... She looks sickly and cross. Yes, she will do for him very well she will make him a very proper wife" (194). And her hatred for Darcy reaches its peak when her doubts about Darcy's action towards her sister's affair are confirmed. Colonel Fitzwilliam, Darcy's cousin and friend, tactlessly reveals to Elizabeth that Darcy prides himself on having saved Bingley from an imprudent-marriage, obviously the marriage with Jane. She becomes hostile towards Darcy more than ever. Her nervous distress results in "agitation and tears". She sits at home alone, exasperating her feelings further by a re-perusal of Jane's letters. It is at this point that Darcy pays her a visit to make her a proposal and is refused by her with petulance and acrimony.

Darcy's proposal and Elizabeth's refusal provide the climax towards which their "pride" and "prejudice" have been leading them. Commenting on the ill-fated proposal, Jack Dalglish says: "At this point, relationship appears to be at an end. However, although Elizabeth deeply resents Darcy's criticism of her family, she is compelled to acknowledge its justice. And Darcy is shaken by Elizabeth's accusation that he has not behaved as a young man should do. So at this juncture, the impulse to reconsider themselves is awakened in both"<sup>3</sup>. From this scene on to the end of her story, Jane Austen is at her best. By easy gradations, and through a process of disillusionment, Elizabeth's prejudice vanishes, and with its gradual vanishing goes the almost pitiable humiliation of Darcy.

Jane Austen gives one more chance to Darcy to prove that he has taken Elizabeth's strictures to heart and that he is a changed character. This chance is provided by Lydia's elopement with Wickham. Elizabeth is afraid that this event will redouble his disgust at her family. But Darcy, instead of drawing away from her, plays the central role in getting Wickham and Lydia married. He also helps Wickham with money and buys a post for him in army. Besides it, he also brings Bingley back to Jane Bennet. These actions can be attributed to genuineness of love. Andrew H. Wright rightly says that Darcy does these things not "out of admiration for the eloped couple but out of love for Elizabeth" (198). Darcy himself says so when Elizabeth expresses her family's gratitude to him. He replies: "If you will thank me, 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 no attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe, I thought only of you". And Elizabeth is proud of him, "proud that in a cause of compassion and however, he had been able to get the better of himself".

So far the problem of gender hostility has been studied through Darcy-Elizabeth affair as they are the central characters around whom the plot of the novel revolves. However, hostility can be seen in a different form in some other pairs also. Too much of modesty can also create misunderstanding and tension in human relationships. This is shown by the love affair of Bingley and Jane. Jane Bennet, the eldest of the five sisters, is a beautiful, serene and sweet-tempered girl. She has good feeling and a large share of good sense. In addition, she has a cheerful disposition and possesses elegance of manners. Mr. Bingley is dazzled by her beauty. They fall in love with each other at the very first meeting but they are made to undergo many ups and downs because both are modest about themselves and do not open out their hearts to each other. They are easily manipulated by others of course they love each other truly, but they are unable to express it. The result is that they have to suffer pangs of delay and unavoidable separation. Bingley leaves Netherfield thinking that Jane is not in love with him. Darcy plays an active part in putting this idea in Bingley's mind that his love for Jane is a one-sided affair. Because Jane's love is not demonstrative, her nature seems to Darcy to lack the warmth or response. So with the best of intentions he persuades Bingley to leave Netherfield. Bingley accepts Darcy's view of Jane's indifference rather than ask her himself for fear of refusal. And Jane is too simple to guess what has really happened.

Though Bingley and Jane are the foils to Darcy and Elizabeth their goodwill overcomes their intelligence. They possess personal attractiveness and dignity, social graces and a measure of good sense, but they lack insight, strength and self-confidence. And these very weaknesses lead to their estrangement. Though Bingley's removal from Netherfield is not intended to deceive Jane, yet as Elizabeth says, "without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution will do the business" (178). Thus through the portrayal of Jane-Bingley affair Jane Austen wants to point out that one should not be too weak and withdrawing in one's character nor should one have too credulous a temperament which almost makes one gullible. The misunderstanding between Jane and Bingley is removed only when Darcy feels attracted towards Elizabeth and atones for his mistake about Jane's affection for Bingley. He brings Bingley back to Netherfield, so that his marriage with Jane becomes possible. Thus Jane Austen shows that hostility can result even from too much modesty, and that too much dependence on others which almost amounts to lack of self-confidence.

## REFERENCES

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