

FEMINISM IN JANE AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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ABSTRACT

Was Jane Austen a feminist? Very often this question has been asked by many critics. But before answering this question, let's define feminism. Feminism is generally defined as a "philosophy in which women and their contributors are valued. It's based on social, political and economical equality for women." "Feminism is a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women's lives by impacting the norms and moves of a society based on male dominance and female sub-ordination." My aims for writing this paper are to show the problem of feminism is basically concerned with the education and place of women. Jane Austen was dealing with the issue of her time: women's role in society. We may examine the element of feminism in one of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, keeping in mind the position of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For this purpose, the study is divided into the following sections: First is the Introduction, devoted to acquaint the reader with the meaning of feminism and the position of English woman in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Second section deals with Jane Austen's feminism and the social milieu in which she was born and bred which affects her novels. Section three is given to irony. How Jane Austen employed, irony to address the social and political concerns of the nineteenth-century men and women. Lastly the conclusion intends to deal with the findings of the preceding sections, and also attempts to answer some of the major charges against Jane Austen's feminis.

INTRODUCTION

Was Jane Austen a Feminist?

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Feminism is generally defined as a "philosophy in which women and their contributors are valued. It's based on social, political and economical equality for women". "Feminism is a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women's lives by impacting the norms and moves of a society based on male dominance and subsequent female sub-ordination." (Carol Gilligan, *Feminism and Gender* 15/04/2009)

The rise of feminism in England began in the Eighteenth-century with Clara Reeve, Hannah Moore, Maria Edgeworth and Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary Wollstonecraft the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was the most important feminist writer of the time. She was characterized as the first feminist philosopher. The vindication sought "to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiments and refinement of taste are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness." (Mary Wollstonecraft, Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Internet

“Mary Wollstonecraft saw that it was the education and upbringing of women that created their limited expectations based on self-image dictated by male gaze.... Wollstonecraft believed that both sexes contributed to the inequalities and took it for granted that women had considerable power over men, but that both would require education to ensure the necessary changes in social attitudes.” (Miriam Brody, pp. ٤٠-٥٩)

Wollstonecraft’s radical claim that women should be judged by their virtue rather than their elegance, their intellect rather than their beauty, caused a furor when it was published. Claire Tomalin, who has written biographies of both Austen and Wollstonecraft, observes that,

“Wollstonecraft’s central argument for the better education and status of women must at the very least have caught { Austen’s } attention Her formal silence on the position of women is qualified by the way In which her books insist on the moral and intellectual parity of the sexes.” (Claire Tomalin, p. ١٣٩)

In the early nineteenth century just as Jane Austen depicted the restricted lives of women, other women authors like Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot depicted the limitations of marriage and social injustice on women of that period. Feminism became a recognized movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it didn’t effect the lives of many women until the twentieth century.

Though Jane Austen is not affiliated to contemporary feminism, yet her novels constitute essentially a study in woman's psychology. Austen does not directly speak out against the ideas of society as Wollstonecraft does, but she makes examples of characters in her works to get her point across. This feminine awareness in her novels emerges as a new mode of perception. We become conscious of a thoughtful and intelligent woman's reaction to her environment. Thus the disabilities of women, their subordination to men, their lack of education, their economic dependence and the resultant frustration, their preoccupation with marriage become manifest in her novels.

Jane Austen’s reputation rests on her realistic depiction of English society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In important respects this was a transitional period in English history. The industrial revolution had “taken off” in the late eighteenth century producing far-reaching social and demographic as well as economic changes. In the England of Jane Austen the women were always considered inferior to men, and the perception of the categorical inferiority of women by men is as old as recorded time, and in each instance of its occurrence it is described as “natural” as being in accordance with the cosmic will of things. Thus in England social discipline succeeded not so much in conquering as in suppressing. Thus in England social discipline succeeded not so much in conquering as in suppressing. Women in England, for

instance says, J. S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* they "had always been an oppressed class in matters civil, political, and religious. They were looked down upon as subordinate members of the species. Their only duty was to serve and obey." (J. S. Mill, 1973. P. 225) Women were suppressed by the habit of domination. From childhood onwards women were given special task and duties that define their place in society.

In England at Jane Austen's time early marriages were the rule, and unmarried women of thirty was an object of pity. She took her place in the family as an unsuccessful human being who had no responsibility of her own except serving others. The only aim of a young girl was to get married. "Marriage had always been her object, it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want." (Janet Dunbar, 1979, p. 17)

Marriage in those days was meant only to exchange the authority of a father for that of a husband. Women's duty was to perform the day-to-day task of preparing food, keeping up home, caring for children, and providing emotional support. The duty of a submissive wife was to love, honor, obey and amuse her lord and master, and to keep him healthy and if possible happy. This reveals that their position was subservient and supportive. We are apt to think of the women of that time as repressed and without a personality of their own. According to marriages of convenience most of the middle – class marriages were family affairs regardless of the specific choice of either the would-be-husband or the betrothed. (Martha Vicinus, 1972, pp. 103-106)

Women were excluded from owning and disposing of property, any property that a woman possessed before her marriage automatically becomes her husband's, unless it is "settled" on her, this leads to the "fortune hunter" phenomenon: that is men who marry a woman only for the sake of the woman's fortune---this means that after the marriage, the woman and her money are legally in the husband's power. We see in *Pride and Prejudice* the reason why Wickham tries to elope with Georgiana Darcy, who has 30,000 pounds, until the passing of Married Women's Property Act in 1870. Under this act, "a woman, no longer surrendered all of her property rights." A married woman was capable of acquiring, holding and disposing by will of any real or personal property as her separate property without the intervention of any trustee. Moreover, in England they had neither the parliamentary vote or membership of the universities, nor the right to sit on a borough or county council. They were deprived of the right to education and employment. (Evelyne Sullerot, 1971, p. 41)

University education for women scarcely existed. They were universally educated at boarding – schools, possessing a general knowledge of fashionable life such as drawing, music, dancing, fancy-work and languages. Family recreations were rare, except in more traditional centers or in upper-class drawing-rooms, where ladies enjoyed playing cards or tea-parties. (G. A. Sambrook, 1946, p. 72)

Women were not allowed to work, but if a woman of birth and education found herself financially distressed, and had no one to support her, she was

justified in seeking a job that would not cause her to lose her status. Thus like the Bronte she could only find a job as a governess otherwise she might be misled into vice. In spite of this the age-old inferior status of women remained. Even in an epoch of allegedly total emancipation, signs of inequality were to be found everywhere in public in education and work. This was the same social background in which Jane Austen was born and bred. It was in such an environment that she later developed her attitude towards feminism. (A. S. Forster, ١٩٧٦, p. ٢٧) Jane Austen was a close observer of her society, and one of the features that distinguished English society at the time she was writing was the structure of social cases.

FEMINISM

In the England of Jane Austen the question of education for girls was much debated, the tradition to separate men and women's roles imparted a peculiar poignant and emphasis to this question. The advocates of education were often sought to be simple and utilitarian. The problem of feminism is basically concerned with the education and place of women Jane Austen was dealing with the hottest issue of her time: 'Women's role in society.' A girl's 'proper' sphere was thought to be family affairs her education was defined to make her a good wife and an amiable companion. Subordination to the husband was considered to be a pious duty for women. The aim of every woman was marriage. To be a wife, meant to be in a state of dependence, the success of marriage would depend upon his generosity and her obedience. All wives should embody the virtues of patience and loyalty. It was essentially a man's world.

Pride and Prejudice, is principally concerned with the social atmosphere of late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century England, a patriarchal society in which men held the economic and social power, whereas women were not expected to maintain a life for themselves. They were influenced by their families to marry well in order to have a good future and be provided for. There was a strong emphasis placed on money and class, which is clearly evident in ***Pride and Prejudice***, Mrs. Bennet can be heard throughout many scenes in the novel, attempting to marry her daughters off to rich men. (Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy)

Jane Austen ironically points out faults in the system raising questions about the values of English society. During Austen's time society placed huge limitations on women, they were not given the same opportunities as men in every sphere of life especially education and occupation. She wrote about what she knew as a woman. Her feminism relates to her background. Jane Austen, was the daughter of a clergyman, after her father's death, Mrs. Austen, Cassandra and Jane were financially destroyed. They were left with an annual income of only £٦٠ pounds and no permanent residence forcing them to stay with friends and relative. A friend of family gave them a cottage as permanent residence to live in. Such as Elizabeth Bennet and her family in ***Pride and Prejudice***, they had to leave Longbourn after Mr. Bennet's death and live on the interest of ٥٠٠٠ pounds nearly ٢٠٠ pounds a year.

Jane Austen is essentially interested in her own sex only because she finds it possible to share women's problems and worries. Austen offers her readers a close look at the status of women in the early nineteenth century in particular, the role of marriage in shaping a woman's identity. The topic of marriage is introduced in the first sentence and weaves its way throughout the novel. While both male and female characters display serious interest in the subject, virtually every person is influenced by his/her own view of woman's place in English Society and the role she is expected to assume. As a result, readers soon realize that in the novel, as in real life, an individual's perspective is critical.

In the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen clearly shows her readers that women are objects at this time: "It is universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1983, ch.1.p.1. Hereafter will be refer to as P and P, page) This shows how she feels about the way women are objectified; they are considered mere property, she attacks the idea of women as objects. Jane Austen's novels are about the reality of women's lives. Women's education in those days consisted of "accomplishments." A perfect woman is honest, selfless, obliging and tender. Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, mentions many things that requires to be an "accomplished woman: "A woman must have thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, and he modern languages to deserve the word, and beside all this, she must possess a certain something in an air and manners of walking...." (P & P. p. 246)

Jane Austen was conscious of the great discrepancy between the education of the two sexes. She noticed that every care was given to the education of sons, whereas daughters were left to fend for themselves, with the help of a governess. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine de Bourgh is scandalized to learn that the five Bennet girls, who belong to the minor gentry, have not benefited from the services of a governess. Elizabeth Bennet is looked down upon by Lady Catherine, because of their lack of education as when Lady Catherine asks, Elizabeth Bennet: "Then who taught you? Who attended to you? ...You must have been neglected: To this Elizabeth replies, 'Compared to some families, I believe we were, but such as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read'(P & P, p. 318)

Jane Austen from her own experience had realized how the educational backwardness of women had stunted their personality. When Reverend James Staniers Clarke, suggested her introducing more accomplished heroes, in her novels, she replied:

"Such a man's conversation must at times be on subjects of science and philosophy, of which I know nothing; or at least occasionally abundant in quotations and allusions which a women, who like me knows only her mother tongue, and had read little in that would be totally without the power of giving... would do any justice to

your

clergyman ... and I think I may boast myself to be ... the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress."

In another letter to J. S. Clarke, on April ١, ١٨١٦ she said on her own limitations "I must keep to my own style and go on my own way, and though I may never succeed again in that I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other." (Southam, *Jane Austen*, ١٩٧٦, p. ٣٥)

From this statement we understand why Jane Austen's heroines develop interest of a limited nature .She was making a social statement of her own through her works. In addition to limited opportunities for women to become financially independent, a major force that contributed to women marrying for wealth was the Inheritance Laws. In the ١٨th and ١٩th centuries in England the "right of primogeniture " and " entail," stated the land in each generation was left to the eldest son. Entail involved restrictions, if a family had only daughters, then the law of entail ensured the state could be passed down to a male relative in the family. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen attacks the law of primogeniture which entailed away the Bennet estate at Longbourn to Mr. Collins, a relative of the family, who is the only male simply because the Bennets had five daughters and no sons. Mrs. Bennet and her daughters had to leave Longbourn after Mr. Bennet's death.

Austen continues to make references to a women's place in society." Due to the lack of opportunities available for women to make a living on their own, they were dependent on men, thus contributing to poor marriages: marrying for wealth and grandeur." (Atma Ram, ١٩٨٩, p. ٢١) In our times, women have many other choices in addition to marriage. But in Jane Austen's time it was not so. A young woman of her class depended for her happiness, her health, her life on her making a good marriage.

The necessity of making a good marriage is one of the major themes of *Pride and Prejudice*. The example of this is Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, who is ٢٧ not especially beautiful and without an especially large 'portion' is worried about being dependent on her family, and so decides to marry Mr. Collins. "from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment," and "...without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object, it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want." (*P & P*, p, ٢٩٥)

Therefore, a woman who did not marry could generally only look forward to living with her relatives as a 'dependent' (more or less Jane Austen's situation), so that marriage is pretty much the only way of ever getting out from the parental roof. And in general, becoming an "old maid," was not considered a desirable fate. So when Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins, her brothers are "relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid," and Lydia says to her sister " Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty." Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins reveals Austen's clear-sighted assessment of the economic underpinnings of marriage. Charlotte reminds the reader, happiness is a matter of chance and marriage provides a state of security. This mentality is still prevailing even to this day that marriage provides a state of security for women, the examples of this are the early

marriages prevailing these days. Girls at the age of thirteen-fourteen years are taken out from schools and married in order to give them security, thus, given the burden of household duties and child bearing.

According to Elizabeth Jenkins,

"The polite and more comfortable interpretation in supposing Charlotte's marriage to be explained solely by the impossibility of young women's earning their own living at that period ... it is shown as a considered indifference to personal relationships when they conflict with cruder advantages in the wider social world. "
(Southam, 1976, pp, 167-168)

As for Elizabeth Bennet, she had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. In addition to all these reasons why the woman herself might wish to be married, there could also be family pressure on her to be married. In *Pride and Prejudice* this issue is treated comically, since Mrs. Bennet is so silly, and so conspicuously unsupported by her husband.

In the novel there are marriages which are rushed and forced by society that fail, such as Lydia Bennet's marriage to Wickham and Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage. We can see from these marriages and the marriages between minor characters that for generations marriage has been for convenience and rarely a marriage for love is established. They are clearly incompatible, Mrs. Bennet's 'business of her life was to get her daughters married, its solace was visiting and news.' This relates to the idea that marriage at that time was the only socially accepted avenue for a woman. Men at this time thought that women had to marry and thought they were providing women with a favour, both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins are shocked by Elizabeth's refusal to their proposals.

Jane Austen also rebels against the patriarchal society of inheritance laws that oppress women, by making Elizabeth Bennet choose love over money. In *Pride and Prejudice*, in spite of great pressure from Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, (the heir of Mr. Bennet's estate by the law of primogeniture) Elizabeth refuses to marry Mr. Collins to regain family's inheritance. Here Jane Austen also makes a positive statement by having Elizabeth Bennet insist on being treated as a "rational creature," rather than as an "elegant female," when trying to make her "No" be understood as "No" to Mr. Collins. Jane Austen also describes Mr. Collins, in such a manner that one cannot help but laugh at both the man and the idea behind such a preposterous law. Such a law prevents intelligent women, such as Elizabeth, from rightfully inheriting the family estate while the man who is placed in the position to inherit is an obsequious puff: "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father..." In the typical precision and economy of this, we have Jane Austen's account of who makes of human beings the combination of natural endowments, education (in every

sense, not merely the academic), and the society in which one moves. (*P & P*, Chap ١٥, p. ٤٨)

Austen creates this plot twist to show the readers the truly nasty effects of the primogeniture law, She attacks this law most vehemently in many of her novels. Through Elizabeth Bennet who is the satirical tool of Austen, she explores class feminism and love in the country estate of rural England. Elizabeth is mentioned to have, had a “proper feminine pride.” Elizabeth turning down two marriage proposals shows that she is an independent character. She is clever and opinionated. Elizabeth steps outside the mold of most women in her society and is portrayed as a strong and sympathetic character. She didn't choose to marry for money but rather, chose love.

Austen tries to show how she is able to be happy by refusing to marry for financial purposes and only marrying a man whom she truly loves. She says “I thank you again and again for the honour that you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it.” (*P & P*, p, ٨٣) Elizabeth knows that if she were to marry Mr. Collins she would not be true to herself and her feelings. She did not want her marriage to turn out the way her parent’s marriage had.

This is seen when Elizabeth rejects Darcy’s first proposal because at the time she is repulsed at “our conceit and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others,” (*P & P*, ١٢٦) we are aware of the enormous material advantages of the proposal. An event like this proves that Elizabeth must have highly regarded Mr. Darcy since she refuses to marry him without hesitation, the first time despite his attractiveness and wealth, partly because of her prejudiced misunderstanding of him, but not least because the love he declares for her is bestowed unwillingly and against his better judgement. What he insensitively ignores is that she is a person in her own right, with an identity of her own proper pride. She, on the other hand, is so blinded by prejudice that she cannot see his genuine merits for the largely imagined wrongs she thrust on him. Elizabeth and Darcy are subjected to a long thorough process of learning about themselves and each other. Only then, they are able to enter on a marriage of true minds and hearts, with every hope for a future of ‘rational happiness.’ Elizabeth wants to make sure that when she gets married, she is doing it for the right reasons. Similarly, Mr. Darcy looks beyond wealth and economics and chooses to marry Elizabeth, “the inferiority of your connections.”(*P & P*, p. ١٢٥)

Although his explanation is not quite romantic, it shows how much in love he is with Elizabeth since he is willing to overlook her family’s inadequacies. He too wants a successful marriage and wants to marry for the right reasons. That is why both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are perfect for each other because they both looking for the same things in a relationship. They also shared the same personalities. The joining of these two people show how Austen was in favour of marrying for love and nothing else regardless of wealth or social background. We see at the end that Elizabeth finds happiness without compromising her personality. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen represents her views on women's selfhood and place in family and society. Elizabeth declares her personal and private choice without capitulating to the

pressure of the patriarchal community. Jane Austen exposes the burden of female passivity and mocks the dominant paradigm of gender.

Austen wishes us to believe that the choice of love over money is the smarter one. She wanted the reader to know that marriage should be approached as a package – deal – a deal of love, financial stability, physical attraction, and happiness. She makes an important subtle statement of society, by the techniques she uses in writing about education, money and reason in manipulating the stories and making examples out of characters. There are enough critical examples that become apparent to make the claim of feminism being evident in Austen's works to the reader. In fact, you may find that you can make a good argument for calling Jane Austen a feminist and her novel a feminist novel. In her novels the undercurrent of feminine disapproval of "masculine aggressiveness" is shown through oblique irony or through direct statements.

IRONY

Jane Austen employed wit, irony to address the social and political concerns, of nineteenth-century men and women. For example notice her irony in her description of Mr. Collins proposal to Elizabeth. In the opening words of chapter XV, we are told that 'Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, having now a good home and very sufficient income, he intended to marry.' He sets out his reasons, in detail and with ineffable complacency, in chapter XIX when he proposes to Elizabeth:

“My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every Clergymen in easy circumstances (like myself example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honor of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too |) on this subject

(*P & P*, p. ۲۸۵)

Mr. Collins's reasons for proposing Elizabeth are that he seeks to make amends to the Longbourn family for inheriting their father's estate by marrying one of Mr. Bennet's daughters; (he thought his plan ' an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part ') as Mrs. Bennet tells him that Jane is about to be engaged to Bingley, he applies on the principle of strict seniority to the next in line to Elizabeth. All this is amusing and funny. His reasons for marrying are entirely wrong: they leave out all questions of mutual affection and personal compatibility. (John Odmark, ۱۹۸۳, pp. ۱۴۸ – ۱۴۹)

Jane Austen uses irony to criticize the society of her time, commenting on the titled gentry. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, in *Pride and Prejudice* is the highest character on the social ladder, using Lady Catherine as an example,

Jane Austen shows the way in which nobility does not necessarily result in good manners. Lady Catherine is abominably rude and has very little power. When she hears rumours of possible marriage between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy her nephew, she travels to Longbourn in order to dissuade her says to Elizabeth,

“Honour, decorum, prudence, nay interest, forbid it. Yes Miss Bennet interest, for do not expect to be noticed by his family or friends; if you willfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured slighted, and despised, by every one connected with him. Your alliance will be disgrace, your name will never even be mentioned by any of us.”
(*P & P*, p. ٤٢٦)

Jane Austen can never reconcile to the insufferable self-importance of Lady Catherine, her grounds of superiority on the basis of rank and wealth. Lady Catherine's stupidity and vulgarity may be of a superior type; but they render her no more amiable or respectable. So is the case of Mr. Collins. In fawning on Lady Catherine as he does, he shares the false values she attaches to rank and wealth. Mr. Collins is completely engrossed by such matters as social rank, prestige, position and family connection and money.

Austen also attacks social pretentiousness. Her narrative irony is a means of exposing truth with subtlety, economy, and impact. We see this in the description of Miss Bingley, and Mrs. Hurst in chapter ١٧: are extremely pretentious,

“They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank, and were, therefore, in every respect entitled to think well of themselves and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.”(*P & P*, p. ٢٣٢)

Here in this passage the irony is stimulating and amusing in itself, but it operates by reference to standards of values. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. They also unfairly criticize those who they consider to be inferior. Through Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst's definition from the beginning of the passage, as 'very fine ladies,' we are implicitly involved in consideration of what the word 'lady' does mean here and what it should mean. Jane Austen shows us through these characters, the arrogant pride, the snobbery, the passage is not merely of local interest but bears on the novel as a whole.

There is irony in every twist of the *Pride and Prejudice* not only the characters, even the language of the novel shows Austen's ironic involvement in the novel: it is "light, bright, and sparkling, it wants shade, it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense if it could be had, if not, of solemn specious nonsense." (Jane Austen's Letters) Many pages of *Pride and Prejudice* can be read as sheer poetry of wit, as Pope without couplets. For example Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic, humour, reserve, and caprice that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to his wife to understand his character. _ Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, the little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married, its solace was visiting and news.

CONCLUSIONS

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (*P & P*, p, 1) Jane Austen provides subsequent argument with the first line of her novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. A statement that remains true to this very day. Such an opening statement of a book testify that the men "must be in want" of the women, and not the other way round. The man being in need of the women is clearly a feminist view.

This opening sentence on *Pride and Prejudice* can be considered as one of the most famous of all English comedies of manners. She states that a man, financially well off, but with no mate to accompany him to share in his wealth, is undoubtedly in search of a wife. This implies that the man wants a wife and the woman is not in a place to turn him down. We learn from the text that when Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth for marriage he is sure that his proposal will be accepted immediately, as he thinks that he is doing a favour to the Bennet's family by marrying their daughter. When such a man as Mr. Collins has no doubt that his proposal will be accepted, and he is turned down by Elizabeth, he thinks that she is playing hard to get it. He is shocked as men are not used to hear the word no. A man can pick and choose who he marries while women take their first suitor. Due to this reason Jane Austen has made Elizabeth turn down Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy's first proposals. Through the marriage proposal of Mr. Collins who was described as being 'a mixture of pride, obsequiousness, self importance and humility' to Elizabeth, we can see a typical view of the importance of marriage in the society. After Elizabeth's refusal, Mr. Collins, proposes to Charlotte Lucas the next day, making clear to the readers that it is a man who is in need of a wife, not only a woman.

When Mr. Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth, 'she could see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer.' Darcy presumes that it is a woman who requires a spouse and presents himself as Elizabeth's suitor in the expectation of a prompt acceptance. His whole attitude is that he is offering a prize-himself-which no reasonable woman in Elizabeth's position can possibly refuse. But, Elizabeth is an intelligent,

stubborn, and free spirited character, she does what she thinks is best for her and does not abide by society's standards in making both of those decisions. Elizabeth is criticized for her decisions, but these criticisms have no substantial reasoning behind them. Elizabeth's firm decision make the reader thinks that Elizabeth is a woman in the world, where a woman ought to be like her. The way Elizabeth bring out feminist values of equality and sovereignty and the way that the perfect ladies indirectly support them with their criticisms are methods of character manipulation employed by Austen to express her opinions, and shows how dependent the woman is on a man in her English society.

Surely Jane Austen holds feminist views and uses the novel to show her opinions about women's issues. She described situations in such a way that mock the limitations that are placed on women by society. ***Pride and Prejudice*** is a personal essay, a statement of Jane Austen's feelings about the perfect lady, marriage and the relationship between the sexes. In Jane Austen's time a woman must act in a certain way in order to be respected, accepted and deemed accomplished. She was called the perfect lady. Jane Austen exploits this so called perfection to show that her society was quite the opposite when it came to the lives of women. She juxtaposes the perfect ladies, Miss Bingley, and Mrs. Hurst, in order to show that the perfect ladies are really shallow-minded conformist. Austen creates resentment for the accomplished lady generalization in the reader's mind. She makes the reader dislike the highlight of English society, and realize its sexism in restricting women's free will, and favour characters that are vessels for feminist notions, such as Elizabeth.

Jane Austen shows that the sexism of the time also affects the standard of men and women. Agreeable men are described as handsome, polite, rich, and well connected. We never hear that a man needs to paint well or speak seven languages, a clear contrast to the scrutinization of every aspect of a woman. Austen is not mocking the accomplishments, she is ridiculing that the accomplishments are forced on woman. In the English society a woman does not practice playing piano for an hour everyday just because it's fun, but she does it because that is what a woman is supposed to do. Austen is disagreeing with the detailed examination of every woman to see if she fits with society's guidelines, as opposed to the vague ideas of a perfect man and the lack of scrutiny that men face.

To refute the charge of women's inferiority, Jane Austen sided the cause of women's emancipation by a charming display of good manners. Her approach to this problem was urbane and realistic. Her novels acquire a new coherence and significance through feminism. She is a feminist by heart. She was confident of the resourcefulness of women and she stressed it. As Atma Ram says that,

“She, therefore, neither favoured the idea of women as man's equal, nor the old and general notion of female inferiority. Woman had her own identity. A woman should not “give the lie to her feelings.” Woman was a good creature, capable of many things. Home was her proper and favorite field. She was an important companion and fellow of man, with great competence

to make him the “happiest creature” in the world.”
(Atma Ram, १९८९, p. ००)

Austen has been praised and criticized for her feminism. Many critics argue that Jane Austen's novels are written for women whose only interest in life was marriage. Ashford argues that, "this is not true. She wrote about the relationship between men and women; the problems of women in her days and had some scathing criticism of society-especially as it affected women." (Internet Archive, Suit.101.com) Austen concentrates on her women characters not because she was a woman herself but because the eighteenth-century society in her time did the same. She “propounds education as the only route by which the characters can arrive at a solution to their moral problems.” (Southam, १९८६, pp. १९२-१९३)

The situation of women is the subject of debate and reflection even today. Women are humiliated daily. Everyday we watch on television the problems faced by women, how they are humiliated by their husbands, brothers, and fathers. They are suffering sexually, physically, socially, as well as legally. Women are 'prisoners' of feelings and of private life. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Austen shows the means of freeing women from their patriarchal stereotyped sex roles. Austen shows how women can object to the degrading view of her “other” and make the patriarchal representative accept her social existence as a “self.” Women must not emulate men; they have a better role of their own. According to Virginia Woolf, “Women can give men a “renewal of creative power” by the contact of contrasting ways of life and for reason women’s education should bring out and fortify the difference rather than the similarities.” (Virginia Woolf, १९२०, p. ८१)

Women I think, can renew a sense of life in men, and thereby protect them from their own instinctual lust for war and death. So men must co-operate with women and remove the obstacles from hers, such as lack of education, lack of privacy, the interruptions attended upon life at home, lack of economic independence and the use of chastity as a fetish to prevent women from expressing themselves freely, lack of tradition of significant relationship between women, and the instinctive male dislike of publicity for women. This concern, that women should be free to make their own unique development through education is to enable them to make right judgements by understanding the rights and wrongs of social life.

At the end I would like to say that Jane Austen is a feminist and her novel a feminist novel. Through these evidences from the text of *Pride and Prejudice*, we can say that Jane Austen holds feminist opinions and uses *Pride and Prejudice* to show them. Austen shows that the standards for a woman in her society take away their free will and encourage conformity, and her main “good” character is independent and rebels against those ideas, showing the character’s independence and creating Jane Austen’s ideal woman. Thus, we can say that she was a feminist; her protest was very subtle; she did help to pave the way for modern feminists. Her views on women, marriage, and women’s rights in general are very clear in her novels. To the best of my knowledge, her message was read by millions of women all over England and the world and is

read by millions even today. By portraying herself as not just the author but as the critic, she was able to draw the readers to her point of view.

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