



An excursion regarding women's impediments in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract— *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel of manners. In the novel Jane Austen characterises the complex conditions of women in nineteenth-century England. A woman's happiness is associated with marriage. Her social status is being guided by a man whom she chooses as her husband. Happiness and love are the secondary themes in the marriage, what carries weight is the wealth and the property of the man or groom. A woman tries to mould her identity at the optimum level to deem fit for married apparel because unmarried daughters are considered a burden on their parents. Women's priorities and choices are often ignored. The patriarchal civilization has always dominated the female counterparts through their authoritative voices. Women play a submissive role in society, their voices are crushed and they are compelled to follow in the footsteps of their husbands and fathers. In the novel, there is not a single self-made woman. All women are tied to societal constraints.

Keywords— *Material possessions, Marriage and Love, Male Gaze, Position of women*

OBJECTIVES

Following are the objectives of the present paper

- * To study how material possession govern the life of people during the era
- * To analyse women's sacrifice of their individuality
- * To estimate the objectification of woman
- * To survey the treatment of women
- * To study how women's rights are sidelined

INTRODUCTION

Pride and Prejudice is a novel written by Jane Austen two centuries ago, it continues to win the hearts of readers till today as a fool proof romantic tale with a happy ending. The novel was first published under the title of "First Impression" in 1796 which later changed to "Pride and Prejudice" in 1813. Jane Austen's novels embody "two inches of ivory". Her novels are subjugated around female characters who are fully developed and, often acknowledged as complex and round characters. Her novels

like American novelist Henry James talk about a narrow section of the society where the characters drive the engine of the plot. The novels are a bridge among the three generations of literature. The plot construction resembles the comedy of manners of the Restoration era, Austen has borrowed the technique of epistolary novels from the novels of Samuel Richardson and some elements of Romanticism also appear in the novel. This novel illustrates the condition of women in the Queen Victorian epoch.

Condition of women :

The novel whirls around the theme of marriage and class - structure. A materialistic world has been shown that ends up in comic resolutions. Mrs. Bennet is concerned about the material possession of fortune for marrying off her daughters. She imagines "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls." Women's prosperity is being compiled in marriage at a time when "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." It is mandatory for the eighteenth-century woman to

eternally coordinate with her husband to acquire love in marriage otherwise she will lose the goodwill of her husband as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, their relationship was originally based on lust which with time develops into an abusive alliance. Mr. Bennet treats Mrs. Bennet as a fool. Even Elizabeth loves and respects her father, admits she "could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort" based on her parents' marriage. On the other hand, Mr. Collins confesses "my dear Charlotte and I have but one mind and one way of thinking". Two individuals perpetually think in different ways, but to determine herself into a happy marriage, Charlotte tries to resemble her ideas as per the wishes of her husband. It brings the sentiments of a woman who mends her character to remain in the limelight of their husband. Whereas unmarried daughters are treated as a responsibility on their parents where Mrs. Bennet suffers "when a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her beauty". Moreover, an adult unmarried daughter is supposed to be a symbol of shame, Lydia comments on Jane "how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty".

Laura Mulvey's concept of the Male Gaze is deemed fit in this novel. The "male gaze" invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggests a specialised way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women. In the male gaze, a woman is visually positioned as an "object" of heterosexual male desire. Her feelings and thoughts are considered less important, that of her being "framed" by male desire. In the novel, the male-dominated society is being depicted where women are continuously subjected as an object. "Bingley was the principal spokesman and Miss Bennet the principal object". Even though all the five daughters of the Bennet family "were not the only object of Mr. Collins' admiration". The subplot of the novel shows that woman is a sight to behold where Mr. Bingley finds Miss Bennet "is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld". The manner of objectifying women brings a spotlight to the condition of women during Austen's time.

The pre-existing absurd myth of man that when a woman says NO she means YES is found here. When Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth Bennet for marriage, which she straightforwardly rejects. But dummies of the society contemplate it differently "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the address of the man whom they secretly mean to accept". In the end, it is proved that NO of Elizabeth means No. In England during the time of Jane Austen property rights were being restricted to males only. Women act as a governor of the house who often performs their duties as a housewife in the house. All the women depicted by the author depend financially upon their male counterparts.

Not a single woman in the novels is self-made or financially independent to earn their livelihood. If in case a couple is having only girl children then their property should pass to the closest male relative as Mr. Collins became the heir of the Bennet family where both parties do not meet virtually before but still both are aware that property belongs to Mr. Collins because there is "no occasion for entailing from the female line". This truth is accepted blindfolded by maturing youth passively but a young spirit of Mrs. Bennet contradicts which is being suppressed by other members of the family.

One commits the crime, and the other gets punished. It is an unethical statement but gains momentum in Lydia's episode. When Mr. Wickham and Lydia elopes, her father restrains the freedom of Kitty. When a female commits a crime, her female peer gets the constraints. Mr. Bennet gave his jurisdiction to Kitty after Lydia's fugitives "Balls will be absolutely prohibited... and you are never to stir out of doors." The ending of the novel is being left exclusively questionable by the author where Elizabeth at first rejects the very proposal of Mr. Darcy but after Mr. Darcy aided her family in the affair of Mr. Wickham and Lydia, she started developing a soft corner for Mr. Darcy and ultimately accepts his proposal. But what happens when the episode of Lydia's fugitives does not happen? This incident contributes to the monetary aid of Mr. Darcy in the marriage of Lydia which leads him to his marriage with Elizabeth where Elizabeth accepted this marriage after the financial assistance of Mr. Darcy in Lydia's marriage. Therefore Elizabeth approved this marriage because of Darcy's wealth.

CONCLUSION

The novels of Austen deal with the status, position, and role of women in society. Women are demonstrated as the oppressed victims of society. It depicts that marriage dominates the life of eighteenth-century women.

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