



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research  
Vol. 11, Issue, 01, pp.948-951, January, 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.34038.01.2019>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### WOMANISM IN JANE AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

\*Jane Austen, I.

M.A. English, Vazhapet, Nellikuppam, Cuddalore 607105

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2018

Received in revised form

28<sup>th</sup> November, 2018

Accepted 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2018

Published online 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2019

#### ABSTRACT

The paper intends to throw light on the critical analysis in detail and its effect on women characters. It will also examine the contribution of the novelist, Jane Austen in her work, 'Pride and Prejudice'. It is a brief survey of the selected text of Jane Austen from the entire canon of British literature. The nucleus of this survey is the portrayal of women in the 19th century. Their recognitions were little during the Victorian age. Women were subordinated to men during the 19th century. This novel pictures women who were dependent on men.

##### Key Words:

Women characters, Jane Austen,  
Pride and Prejudice,  
19<sup>th</sup> century, subordinate.

Copyright © 2019, Jane Austen et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Jane Austen, 2019. "Womanism in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice", *International Journal of Current Research*, 11, (01), 948-951.

## INTRODUCTION

**Life of women in England in the 19th century:** An English proverb says, 'Silence in the best ornament of a woman'. Thus women were expected to be silent in the past and they were always accused of over-talking no matter how much they ever talk (Coates, 2004). Men and women were not treated equally. Women were considered as intellectually inferior to men. Therefore, women were naturally viewed as weak when compared to men. This construe that women were left with the domestic chores while men were left with heavier labor. Simone de Beauvoir is a French writer and a feminist. Her primary thesis in her theory, 'The Second Sex' is that:

"men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them, on every level, as the Other, defined exclusively in opposition to men. Man occupies the role of the Self, or subject; woman is the object, the other. He is essential, absolute, and transcendent. She is inessential, incomplete and mutilated. He extends out into the world to impose his will on it, whereas woman is doomed to immance, or inwardness".

Women were isolated from being educated and for voting. Education for women is provided at their home or at girls' schools. "These studies were thought to be sufficient to provide a girl with the accomplishments necessary to attract a suitable husband" (Swords).

They were ranked as second - class people. Economic balance was taken care of only by men. And so, women had no other choice than to rely on men. Throughout their lives, they were dominated by men - father, brother and husband. If a woman gets married, she has to spend her entire life in serving her husband. If she remained a spinster, she was ridiculed and condescended by the society. Women were classified into three different classes - upper-working class women, lower-working class women and underclass women. Jane Austen, being a woman novelist, has furnished the reality of women characters of the 19th century in the novel - *Pride and Prejudice*. This will be delineated in this paper.

**Minor female characters:** Minor characters in the novel, *Pride and Prejudice* are unique and different from each other. The play would have been incomplete without their ubiquity.

**Societal expectations:** The novel '*Pride and Prejudice*' depicts the picture of women who lived during 19th century. Jane Austen beautifully characterized the women characters to represent the status of women during her age. When we read the novel, our mind captures the societal expectations of the age and how the characters of this novel lived upto that. Each of them had a unique characteristic. Some were into the societal constraints and a very few out of it. Let us look into the different nature of women. Jane Bennet, 23 years old and the eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs. Bennet, lived upto the expectations of the society at that age. It was expected of the society for a girl to get married at this age. She is also aware "that she has reached the age where it is beyond proper, rather

\*Corresponding author: Jane Austen, I.

M.A. English, Vazhapet, Nellikuppam, Cuddalore 607105

necessary, for her to marry" (Reena 128). Girls were not allowed to meet men often. They had chance of meeting men only during balls, assemblies etc. "Assemblies provided the opportunity for social advancement and were the perfect venue for matchmaking" (Huges 201). But there were also a restriction for it where this kind of opportunity was not frequently made. "Public balls are not much frequented by people of good society, except in watering places and country towns. Even there a young lady should not be seen more than two or three in the year" (Huges 202). Jane's characterisation best suited to the period during which a woman should live. Elizabeth is the second daughter of Mr & Mrs. Bennet and is contradictory to the anticipation. Elizabeth has a sharp tongue and she directly tells her opinion and this makes others to be startled. She is also the most intelligent and quick-witted person. Marxist theory was first developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They state that "Marxists always struggle to overcome the manifold forms of domination and exploitation in and through the self-emancipation." Elizabeth is considered to be one of the famous literary characters of all ages - "For the first time in English literature, outside Shakespeare, we meet heroines who are credible, with minds, with the capacity to think for themselves, with ambition and wit" (qtd in 'Study Guide for Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen' 10). Elizabeth also proves to be a modern woman who is out of the clutches of the class and rank systems during her time. "Elizabeth's opinion is the product of common sense, not a social conventions" (Golemac, 6).

Reference to Mrs. Bennet - she forces Mr. Bennet to give introduction of their daughters to Mr. Bingley who is an unmarried wealthy young man. An important idea is brought out. That is, a woman had to move her steps only through her husband. This shows how women were dependent on men. There is an agenda where girls were not allowed to come out for assemblies, as mentioned a little earlier in this paragraph. This border was crossed by Lydia Bennet, the youngest daughter who was only 15 years old and she was brought into public at an early age. (i.e: she went to balls when she was too young). Lady Catherine criticizes her that the younger ones out before the elder are married. This also shows how a woman criticised someone of the same gender if they came out of their trapped circle. The society also creates a picture of giving a great importance to the upper class people. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is the wueen of her territory. She always points out others as less important by expressing her dignified stature through her words and actions. "Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 317). These words were uttered by De Bourgh to Elizabeth. The words, 'reasonable young woman' refers to a woman who would do whatever de Bourgh says. She expects young girls to be under her control. This dominating character of hers is because of her high economical status. She expects everyone to nod their head but Elizabeth never gives up her self-respect to please someone. Women are being brought up by the patriarchal society, where some women's mind are fossilated with different ideas which are appealing to men's principles. A woman with such nature, Caroline Bingley. She has a lot of expectations for upper class people. She says that: A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her address and

expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved." This shows how women were used for entertainment. Simone de Beauvoir in her work, "The Second Sex" says that 'women are not born feminine but are made to be feminine'.

**Values, standards and ideals:** Each character adds various colours to the plotline. They also bring in the advancement to the plot. In spite of their purpose which differs from each other, their existence in the play decorates the plot. Mrs. Bennet, wife of Mr. Bennet plays a vital role in the novel as a mother. She was very ambitious. She wanted to see her five daughters getting married to perfect suitors. "The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 3). Marxist theory of class and ideology suggests that society is driven by money and economy, says Gobeil. Mrs. Bennet is the embodiment of Marx's ideology of class and economy. Money shapes one's mental outlook and actions of the people. She had both positive and negative terms where she was very concerned about her daughters' lives and on the other side she was also little loud and had some kind of inappropriate social behaviour. Throughout the novel, she is very particular about her ambition. To look at Mrs. Bennet's inappropriate behaviour in a situation, for instance: In spite of being aware of the forthcoming downpour, she makes Jane (her eldest daughter) to go to Netherfield. And so she will have to stay at Mr. Bingley's house and get closer to each other. At times, Mrs. Bennet's motherly love is darkened by her ambition. She was not troubled when Jane was sick, instead, "she was very happy and satisfied because of this opportunity that her daughter is having to be there for more time and to be closer to Mr. Bingley" (Florentino Oliviera 16).

Elizabeth Lizzy Bennet (20 years old) is the protagonist of the novel, 'Pride and Prejudice'. She is been described differently by her parents. Their terms varies from each other. She is the second daughter and Mr. Bennet's favourite daughter. Mr. Bennet describes his daughters - "they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 5). On the other hand, her mother says, "she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humored as Lydia" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 3). Elizabeth has a great quality of bringing out her identity and knows the importance of marriage. She could also be portrayed as the representative of identity. She brings out her opinion and fights for it to attain it and she does not care about others opinion. Elizabeth once refuses Lady Catherine's request by saying:

"You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How for your nephew might approve of your interference in his affair, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 396). When Jane is compared with Elizabeth, Jane is gentler and more reserved than Elizabeth. "Jane united with great strength of feeling a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner, which would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 17). Jane represents the exact picture of the 19th century woman who has all the required and expected qualities of a girl at that period. Charlotte Lucas, Sir. William's daughter and is the best friend of Elizabeth. She is 27 years old. And she is six years older than Elizabeth. Her ambition was focused on getting married to

a wealthy man and so, she could lead a luxurious life. She is a woman who is not fond of getting married out of love. She is to demonstrate that the heart does not always dictate marriage. Though the Bennet sisters were born to same parents, they had an entirely different values and behaviour. The last three Bennet sisters' nature and standards are being discussed and compared. Lydia is the youngest of the Bennet sisters. But she is not a minor character because the third volume whirls mostly around the discreditable elopement with one of the militia officers, Mr. Wickham. And this puts down the reputation of her entire family at risk. She is also described as untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy and fearless. She is a woman who flirts with men. She is very dependent, that she spends all her money and asks her sisters to provide her cash and spends the amount lavishly and profusely. She is a spendthrift. Mary is the middle Bennet sister. "Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 20,21).

The mentioned few unpleasant characteristic has been manifested in the Netherfield Ball, as she embarrassed her family by playing and singing badly. She is very much bookish and pedantic. "I confess they would have no charms for me. I should infinitely prefer a book." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 197), says Mary to Lydia. But Lydia heard not even a single word. She respects others and she is intelligent like Lizzy. But she is in contrast to one of her sisters, Lydia. Mary appears good with moral values unlike Lydia who has no morals at all. Mary is a little confusing character throughout the play where she brings in the dilemma to the readers whether she is good or evil. She also gives out some disparaging comments when Lydia elopes.

"Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable - that one false step involves her in endless ruin - that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 255).

Kitty is the fourth Bennet sister. She has less definite qualities. She always shadows Lydia and observes what she does. Kitty isn't smart enough but she is better than Lydia. She represents a woman who is even dominated by her own sister, Lydia, who is of course younger than Kitty. Her purpose in the novel isn't much brought out. She is present only because of her sisters. Though, in the beginning her qualities are not delivered good, later under the influence of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, there is some kind of improvement in her characteristics: "less irritable, less ignorant and less insipid" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 343). There is not a drastic change, but still this kind of betterment is appreciable. Women are not selfish and this is been incorporated through the character, Mrs. Gardiner who is Mrs. Bennet's sister-in-law. Mr and Mrs. Gardiner affirm to be better parents for the Bennet daughters when compared to Mr and Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. Gardiner cares for them and also nurtures them. "Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Phillips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces. Between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a particular regard. They had frequently been staying with her in town." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 125). There is

a comparison made between Darcy's sister and Bingley's sister. Georgiana Darcy is Darcy's sister who is so pretty. She is also an expert in playing the pianoforte. She is 10 years younger than Darcy. She was once betrayed by Wickham, one of the militia officers. He calls her "exceedingly proud" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 229). By saying this he makes fool of the girl thinking she was in love with him. She forgives and seems to be a nice girl. But, Miss. Bingley who is Mr. Bingley's arrogant and egoistic sister. She hates Elizabeth because of her middle class background. Her hatred towards Elizabeth increases as Darcy admires Elizabeth where Miss. Bingley tries to pursue Darcy's attention, but it ends up in vain. This shows how the standards varied from each women.

**Women and their priority:** Every human being has their own prioritisation in their life. Let us look into the things to which women give priority. The importance of income is widely spread. A girl is given into the hands of a man only by looking at his financial status. This is because, their daughter would lead a wealthy life. "If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield (a place where Mr. Bingley lives)... and all the others equally well married. I shall have nothing to wish for" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 6). Jane Bennet is considered to be the perfect girl in the country. This became the talk after the meeting in the ball. When Mr. Bingley was asked a question about who was the prettiest girl around, he declared that, "Oh! the eldest Miss. Bennet without a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 15). Jane was almost admired and praised for her adorable beauty. Mr. Darcy, friend of Mr. Bingley said to him that "you are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 9). The talk of the town about Jane is because of her beauty.

It is because of Jane's precedence of giving importance in making her look beautiful. A daughter whose parents have less fortune has a little chance of finding a groom for her. Charlotte Lucas is the daughter of a poor knight and do she accepts the marriage proposal of Mr. Collins to lead a luxurious life forever. Because of her poor economical status, without having a second thought, she just agrees with Mr. Collins' marriage proposal: "Without thinking highly either of men or of 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." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 222).

It is very clear that her thoughts about her married life will be in a higher position than her poor life being a spinster. "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." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 224). Such kind of dependent woman have very little chance of leading a happy and fulfilled married life. Miss Darcy's first concern was her humbleness and gentleness. "Miss Darcy was tall and on a larger scale than Elizabeth and though little more than sixteen, her figure was formed, and her appearance womanly and graceful. She was less handsome than her brother; but there was sense and good humour in her face, and her manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 229,230). The words, 'womanly and graceful' doesn't reach her without she giving priority to it.

Catherine de Bourgh yokes different plot lines. She is Darcy's aunt and Mr. Collins' patron (employer). She is a rich noblewoman and this makes her to be bossy. "Those who suffer from pride and assume that they are better than others, which means that they also assume that others are less intelligent, elegant or well-behaved, which means that they are prejudiced toward others" (Anderson.16). She doesn't want Elizabeth to be married to Mr. Darcy because of Elizabeth's middle class status. This is very much evident when Elizabeth and De Bourgh take a walk and have conversation about Darcy, where she says that Darcy is to marry her daughter, Anne. Bourgh's greatest importance was given to imperiousness. To come to an end, we have looked at the female characters and their diverse individuality in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is clear that the life style of women in 19th century differs from each other. The sufferings of the lower class and the pride of the upper class was easily distinguishable. Their struggle for the survival along with their dreams for better married life is evident. The manifestation of the dependency of women towards men is also axiomatic. In Austen's novels, her heroines always learned to think about the problems they met and tried to solve those problems themselves, because in Austen's opinion, women should be capable of learning morals independently as men. Thus, Austen's feminist identity is out of question. (Chen.2). The complexity of the characters in Austen's novel with no doubt has amazed the readers.

## REFERENCES

- Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New Delhi. Oxford University, 1988 Print.
- Chen, Weijie; How female Characters are portrayed - An investigation of the use of adjectives and nouns in the fictional novel *Pride and Prejudice*:2010. Pg:5-151
- Coates.J (2004). *Women, Men and Language*.3rd ed Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Florentino Oliviera, Thais R. *The Role of the Woman in the Family and Society in the Novel Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen*. Franca:Centro Universitario De Franca 5th Oct.2007.Web 5Apr 2015 PDF file.
- Gobeil, Alfred. *Pride and Prejudice Marxist Theory*.
- Golemac, Andrea. *Representation of Women in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion*. 2014.Pg:1-23. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/helo/marxism.htm> m.sparknotes.com>...>The Second Sex.
- Hughes, Kristin. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday life in Regency and Victorian England from 1811-1900*. Cincinnati:Writer's Digest Books, 1998.PDF file.
- Reena. "Women in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*." *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies* 4.7/8(2012).Web.15 Apr.2015.
- Swords. Barbara W."Woman' Place in Jane Austen England *Persuasions* 1988.Web10Apr.2015.

\*\*\*\*\*