

# Elizabeth and Darcy Relation in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'

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## Abstract:

The main purpose of this paper is to study Elizabeth and Darcy relation in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice.' The writer presents a systematically comprehensive study of the various relationships in stressing the implication of the courtship and marriage as the major theme in 'Pride and Prejudice'. Though the fundamental theme of this novel is about the relation of girl and boy before marriage, the situation of real life certainly teaches them lot about believe and trust. Elizabeth is one of the most popular and loved characters in the novels of Austen. Her love for Darcy stands between pride and prejudice. The fog of misunderstanding which has separated these two eligible partners for a sufficiently long period dissolves after removing all the differences between them. The romantic love and marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy despite challenging the demands of family authority and considerations of rank are ultimately confined within the conservative notions of marriage. The circumstances forced them to accept one another in the end of the novel. The close study of the novel reveals that few of the people of society pay more attention to the materialistic things, but there are those like Elizabeth who gives more values to the feelings.

Key words: Jane Austen, Elizabeth, Darcy, relation, marriage, love etc.

## Introduction:

Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' is a social comedy set in the provincial district of Hertfordshire, England, about the end of the eighteenth century. Jane Austen presents a systematically comprehensive study of the various relationships in stressing the implication of the courtship and marriage as the major theme in it. Though marriage is the common theme in almost all of her novels, it doesn't embezzle all other basic human relations which combine human beings in the society to keep his status. The novel contains a fine understanding of feminine identity, romantic desire and gender relations as formed by the social context. Austen has given an elaborate exploration of all such relations in all its complexities and intricacies whether it is father-mother, father-daughter, mother-daughter, lover-beloved, sister-sister, friend-friend or more than this. Christopher Brooke rightly comments –

“A fundamental theme of 'Pride and Prejudice' is the problem of how a man and a woman get to know one another before marriage.”<sup>1</sup>

Jane Austen's opening of the novels suggests the major idea of the novels. The sentence establishes the broad scope of the novel, placing courtship and marriage within the considered parameter of a business transaction. –

‘It is truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.’ (3)

The first sentence of the novel conveys the simple and general truth that a young man of considerable wealth ought to marry or it is the duty of a marriageable girl to search for a wealthy partner to marry him. In fact the significance of the sentence cannot be described to the mundane level; it is more than this which shows the relation of the number of characters who represents the different stages of human beings in society. A careful study of the couple -

Elizabeth-Darcy and their internal relations with one another furnished and enabled us the broader idea of the author about the eighteenth century relations of the families. Bernard J. Parish expresses his views –

“‘Pride and Prejudice’ is Jane Austen’s most sophisticated exploration of the relationship between the individual and society.....Marriage is an ideal vehicle for Jane Austen’s thematic concerns. It is at once a personal relationship and a social institution, and both of its aspects are important.”<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, can be regarded as Robin Mayhead rightly says, ‘as the very bedrock upon which the novel stands.’ The central relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy provides not merely the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, but also its structure. Even though their relationship challenges the social constrictions of rank and class it is also embedded in the social context. Elizabeth is the one who understands the feelings of others among all the Bennet girls. She has ‘more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister’ (11) She is endowed with both sense and sensibility and with her cool sense and unruffled temperament she is a better judge of persons and situations. She is the second of five daughters from a middle-class landed family. We can see her as the mouthpiece of the author in drawing her meaningful impressions on the social manners and relations of the numerous characters in the novels.

Mr. Darcy is the proud, aristocratic gentleman who falls in love with the socially inferior Miss Bennet-Elizabeth and must overcome his reservation about her family to marry her. He is an independent gentleman with an income of ten thousand pounds a year and a beautiful estate in Derbyshire, England. He is introduced in the third chapter of the novel in ball at Netherfield. He soon draws the attention of the people by his fine, tall person, handsome features and noble men. Within five minutes of his entrance the report of his having an annual income of £ 10,000 is in general circulation. The news of his wealth transforms the atmosphere of the ball much in his favour. The gentlemen, who are present there, pronounce him to be a fine young man, the ladies declare that he is ‘much handsomer than Mr. Bingley’, (8) and he is looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners create a sense of disgust among them. His silence turns the tide of his popularity. When everybody knows that he cannot be easily pleased they find him proud and fastidious; and they manage to discover in him ‘a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend....His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.’ (8) Andrew H. Wright says about both of them–

“To say that Darcy is proud and Elizabeth prejudiced is to tell but half the story. Pride and prejudice are faults; but they are also the necessary defects of desirable merits ; self-respect and intelligence. Moreover, the novel makes clear the fact that Darcy’s pride leads to prejudice and Elizabeth’s prejudice stems from a pride in her own perceptions.”<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth stands apart in contrast to all the remaining characters in the novel in her attitude to marriage. Her first meeting with Darcy in the ball at Netherfield is not satisfactory for further mutual relation between them. The bitter memory of that sour meeting and the comments made by Darcy on her haunts her mind for a long time. The painful remark of Darcy constantly disturbs her: ‘She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me.’ (9) The sentence of Darcy probably was hindrance for the further development of relation between him and Elizabeth. Darcy is not like his friend Bingley who can easily adjust himself to the situation. Though Bingley encourages his friend to dance with Elizabeth who is by their side, the latter expresses his unwillingness to participate in dance, because he thinks Bingley is lucky to dance with Jane the only handsome girl in the room. Elizabeth standing by their side overhears Darcy’s remark which gradually pierces her heart as well as her ego. Her feminine pride is deeply hurt and she

develops extreme prejudice against the otherwise eligible man. She fancies Darcy to be proud, arrogant and fastidious man. Elizabeth with a relentless determination tries to find defects in Darcy. She satisfies pointing the demerits through a magnifying glass of her deep-rooted prejudice. His insulting remark makes her unrest. She suffers from too much of confidence in her own powers of judgment, which is not entirely free from error. She does not accept others' views so easily and from the beginning she misunderstands the characters of Darcy and Wickham, which automatically leads to the underestimation of the former and a totally wrong estimation of the latter. Since her ego suffers a jolt by the rather uncharitable and denigrating comment of Darcy, her mind involuntarily takes her away from him whose company, as far as possible, she tries to avoid and his presence logically an eye-sore for her. John Hardy says –

“..The relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy begins in a haughty aloofness on his side and a readiness to oppose him on hers; yet her constant challenging of him fosters and holds his interest.”<sup>4</sup>

Elizabeth's observation of the people around her is quite good enough, but her attitude and judgment about Darcy is mistaken by her. She sees the politeness of Bingley and the crudeness of Miss Bingley. She seriously feels that Jane, being too good and innocent, richly deserves Mr. Bingley in many ways. There are two reasons behind her failure to recognize the good nature of Darcy—the first owing to her growing dislike of the man, and the second on account of the charming influence on her by Wickham who deliberately attempts to slander about Darcy's good nature. Darcy comes to the right conclusion of her present disposition and is true to his words that 'she willfully misunderstands' the words, actions and movements of Darcy. D. D. Derlin said –

“Elizabeth's progress is not simply from prejudice against Darcy to love to him; she moves from pride and prejudice because she loves him.”<sup>5</sup>

Douglas Bush is right in his comment on the power of Elizabeth on his mind –

“Darcy's proposal gives us a pleasant shock of surprise in realizing Elizabeth's power over such a formidable man, though we knew he was bound to speak, since the growth of his interest has been steadily recorded.”<sup>6</sup>

Darcy quite unexpectedly proposes to Elizabeth at Rosings and is rejected from a lady of extremely self-determining and sensitive nature. When he states his admiration and love for her, her sense of astonishment is beyond words, for her understanding of his character so far doesn't fit into the framework of present situation. He proposes her with over-confidence and he takes her acceptance for granted, but her refusal is a greater shock to him than his proposal. Her angry rejection marks the beginning of the great change in Darcy. The reason behind the refusal of his proposal is certainly his way which completely offended and insulted her feelings. She feels so bitter and furious that to her his proposal is more of humiliation than of pride. She had two substantial reasons to reject him because the unkind and the mean role he has played in separating Jane from her lover Bingley, and finally his supposed wickedness and cruelty in depriving Wickham of his clergyman-ship. The doubts and suspicions that hunted from long time in her mind and heart struggling positively and negatively, she expresses to him in the chapter 34. Elizabeth's reasons behind the rejection of his proposal are nothing but the twist between the pride and prejudice of them. But the author's intention of their meeting is revealed by the blames and asking explanation on her part to him for the follies he has done with her and others. The readers are aware about the pride and prejudice as well as the thought behind the minds of the hero and heroine. Her words, 'had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner' (131) run deep into his heart like daggers. He looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and embarrassment. But the force of her feeling and anger couldn't stop here; she continues to scold him and expresses deeper sentiment of her heart. It is the most famous climactic encounter of

decisive relationship between two equally spirited characters ever delineated by the author in the novel. Yasmine Gooneratne says –

“Darcy’s proposal and Elizabeth’s refusal of it provide the climax forwards which the pride and the prejudice they have in common has been leading.”<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth’s rejection of his proposal forces Darcy to recognize the truth that he cannot separate her from her familiar roots. She shall not be his social inferior grateful for his attention but shall be equal partner. Stuart Tave –

“The turning point of their developing relation is Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth and his rejection. He has no right to propose. Elizabeth is quite to reject him; he would not be good husband. He has not, even in proposing, behaved in a gentlemanlike manner and is startled to be told that truth, and more than startled.”<sup>8</sup>

But his true affection and love for Elizabeth does not end at this awful disappointment; rather the clarification given to him by her strengthens his love for her. The next day after their encounter, he gives in the garden his detailed explanatory letter to the questions raised by her. He explained in it his role in the love matter of her sister with Bingley and deprived to Wickham from being clergy. The letter of Darcy plays a significant role in unfolding the villainy of Wickham and the honesty of Darcy in everything. She willfully continues to live in the world of her own creation until she gets a jolt, almost shocking to her, in the form of lengthy and informative letter of Darcy. He takes much pain to explain himself patiently to her misguided self lest his worthy character should be portrayed in dark colours. Her feelings after reading the letter is stunning one. She reads letter repeatedly to clear her doubts. She thought too much on the explanation given to her by Darcy and the incidents that happened to her previously. Now there is a gradual change in her response to Darcy and she begins to think positive about him.

Lloyd W. Brown says about his letter to Elizabeth –

“Here, for the first time, Darcy’s character has been exposed in a form and context which frees Elizabeth’s shaky judgment from the distracting clashes of debate, and from the kind of distorting conflicts that marked the Hunsford quarrel.”<sup>9</sup>

The letter throws light on various aspects which she hitherto has supposed in an altogether different way. Darcy is excused of his sins, while Wickham appears in a new light of darkness. But her restless mind couldn’t ignore the budding love in her heart for Darcy. The very state of her mind and the experiences with the world which appears to her mysterious and the way of the various factors that influence her family are sufficient to make her unrest and even the selection of her friend-Charlotte’s mercenary marriage forced her to think more about it. Stuart M. Tave says about her confusion-

“The perfectly satisfied Elizabeth finds herself becoming dissatisfied, not with herself but with the world; every day confirms her belief of the inconsistency of all human characters and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense; Bingley is one instance and Charlotte or for the sake of one individual change the meaning of principles and integrity, confuse selfishness with prudence.”<sup>10</sup>

Elizabeth’s visit with the Gardiners to Darcy’s estate at Pemberley encourages her to see the right side of the behaviour of Darcy apart from her prejudice. Her visit ultimately solves her problem of marriage by thinking that he himself is the proper man for her. She learns more about

him at Pemberley and is pleased to see in him a benevolent landlord, an affectionate brother, a kind master and a polite gentleman. David Monaghan says –

“This social enlightenment has profound consequences for Darcy and Elizabeth’ relationship, and these can be best demonstrated by examining the contrasting patterns of interaction that characterize their encounters at Rosings and Pemberley”<sup>11</sup>

Her meeting with him at Pemberley is a mere surprise and astonishment on both parts. He receives them not in terms of perfect harmony, at least in perfect politeness. He enquires about her family which makes her surprised at the change in his manner since their last tumultuous parting at Hunsford. He requests to be introduced to the Gardiners and desires to introduce his sister to them. Mrs. Gardiner sees nothing of pride in him and to Mr. Gardiner, ‘He is perfectly well-behaved, polite and unassuming’ (172) The hatred of both has vanished long ago and she has felt quite ashamed of her past prejudice. She grows instinctively to respect him by the conviction of his valuable qualities. The feelings that force her to balance her emotion could better express by author in the chapter 44. Mary Lascelles says –

“ here Darcy and Elizabeth see one another for the first time in favourable –circumstances : he at his best on his own estate.... and she among congenial companions.”<sup>12</sup>

The significant role of Darcy in Lydia’s settlement with Wickham fills Elizabeth’s mind with immeasurable gratitude which is unshakable foundation of her love for him. The nobility of Darcy is revealed by his practical role in the settlement of their elopement into the marriage by helping financially and socially. He found fault with almost all the members of Bennet family with the exception of the two elder sisters for total want of politeness and decency. But he now generously shoulders the most irksome burden of tracing the fugitives and finally bringing them under the yoke of matrimony. He undertakes the economic responsibility of clearing off Wickham’s debts secretly with extreme kind-heartedness and liberal mindedness taking only the Gardiners into his confidence. He played major role in the affair of elopement is only because of his ardent love for Elizabeth. But Elizabeth was unknown about his crucial assistance in marriage of Wickham and Lydia and felt that she should not tell him the elopement of Lydia. The thought of marriage with Darcy couldn’t pass from her mind and tumult arises in her mind by elopement were presented by the author in the chapter 50. Though she is uncertain about his response, when she learns from the letter of Gardiner about the major role of Darcy in making Wickham marriage with Lydia, her joy knows no bounds : ‘Her heart did whisper, that he had done it for her’(218) The elopement brings Elizabeth and Darcy very close to each other. The sentiments of Elizabeth have been expressed by the author. Darrel Mansell said –

“the elopement is the event that finally draws Elizabeth down into the world and brings about her marriage.”<sup>13</sup>

When Darcy makes the renewal of his proposal, her excitement is boundless. Their is a union opposite, a harmony in variety, and variety is the spice of life that can save the pair from falling into any dejection and unhappiness. Darcy speaks to her in a very polite tone, he is very friendly, pleasant and amiable. He speaks –

‘If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever.’ (246)

She is very happy on the occasion when he expresses the emotion of her heart through his lips. She is expected the same from him, but she feels that her family problem may prolong their union. Being a man violently in love with her, her consent makes his happiness immeasurable.

He shares with her the incident of his first proposal to her and his behaviour to her at the time had really merited the severest reproof. His arrogance to her was unforgivable and the very thought of it at present is hatred to him. She has taught him a lesson which has truly humbled him. Her manner and thought provoking suggestion makes her his 'dearest, loveliest Elizabeth' Chapter 58. A. Walton Litz says –

“The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy resolves not only their personal differences but the conflicts they have represented, with the result that the novel provides a final pleasure unique in Jane’s Austen’s fiction, a sense of complete fulfilment...”<sup>14</sup>

Elizabeth comes to the final decision of sharing her life with Darcy only after a careful and long drawn consideration. When she discloses to her people her confidential engagement to Darcy, the general reaction is more of uncertainty and uneasiness than cheerfulness. Her sister–Jane asks her about the happy married life with that man. Elizabeth’s answer to her question proves her confident on her as well as on him. She says: ‘There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world.’(211) But her mother gives her advice to ‘do anything rather than to marry without affection.’ But she is not like her mother and would not like to give secondary place to love or affection in her life. Laura G. Mooneyham says in regard to pride and prejudice of Elizabeth and Darcy –

“The secret of *Pride and Prejudice*’s popularity lies in the dynamics between its hero and heroine. The spark of their relationship depends on their equality of intelligence and perception, for Elizabeth and Darcy are more fully equal in this sense than any other Austen’s protagonists....However, at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, though both lovers gallantly assume a more than equal share of the blame, the true portion of responsibility for their initial misery and later happiness is in equilibrium. Equality of errors lead to equality of education.”<sup>15</sup>

Towards the conclusion, ‘*Pride and Prejudice*’ is one of the best examples of the relations of man and woman that depicted by the author in her novels. There are good and villainous characters, but they did express the grudge against each other and terminate their relation, rather there is a settlement for every possible happy ending towards the end of the novel. The close study of the novel reveals that few of the people of society pay more attention to the materialistic things, but there are those like Elizabeth who gives more values to the feelings.

The flame of her love towards Darcy burns bright in her passionate heart and she makes up her mind to marry him because she heartily feels that she can be happy with him alone. From the beginning of their acquaintance, a strong undercurrent of mutual attraction can be seen beneath the surface waters of widening dislike or hostile relationship. She also looks forward to their union as bringing together their opposite qualities. Elizabeth’s angry refusal is the consequence of her own deep prejudices against the man; but it initiates a great change in him. Even he stands by her and proves himself indeed to be a friend in need at the crucial period of her family by bringing back the runaways to the altar of marriage. The fog of misunderstanding which has separated these two eligible partners for a sufficiently long period dissolves after removing all the differences between them. The romantic love and marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy despite challenging the demands of family authority and considerations of rank are ultimately confined within the conservative notions of marriage.

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