

**STRUCTURE****4.0 Objectives****4.1 Introduction****4.2 Themes****4.3 Milieu and Society****4.4 Characters****4.5 Irony and Humour****4.6 Let Us Sum Up****4.7 Key Words****4.8 Books suggested****4.9 References****Answers**

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**4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, you will study about

- The various aspects of the novel
  - The milieu and the characters
- After reading, this unit you will be able to:
- Analyse the features of this novel
  - Appreciate the character portrayal

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**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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*Pride and Prejudice* is generally considered to be the best of Austen's novels. With its interesting story, compact dramatic plot, lively and witty dialogues, delightful humour and revealing irony, living and realistic characters, *Pride and Prejudice* is indeed a brilliant product of Jane Austen's art as a novelist. Austen wrote out of the sheer love of writing and with no great importance attached either to publication or monetary gain. Her literary field was that of a household, the chief pleasure in country gatherings, and the chief interest in matrimony. A critic pointed out: "Life, with its mighty interests, its passions, ambitions, and tragic struggles, swept by like a great river; while the secluded interests of a country parish went round and round quietly, like an eddy behind a sheltering rock". This was true of all her novels but most critics and readers would agree that *Pride and Prejudice* is her best novel. Somerset Maugham who includes it among the world's ten great novels said, "The great mass of readers, I believe, has accepted *Pride and Prejudice* as her masterpiece, and in such a case it well to accept their judgement". Macaulay was just as lavish in his praise when he said, "I have

now read once again all Miss Austen's novels; charming they are. There are in the world no compositions which approach nearer to perfection".

In order to fully appreciate the novel, you will now read about the milieu, the character-portrayal, her limited range and the humour and irony that pervade the entire novel.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

#### **State Whether True Or False.**

1. Jane Austen believed that novels are written only for publication.
2. Somerset Maugham was one of Austen's greatest detractors.
3. Most readers believe that *Pride and Prejudice* is her best novel.

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## **4.2 THEMES**

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The novels of Jane Austen, including *Pride and Prejudice*, can be considered on three levels of meaning: first, the purely local—that is, they can be looked at as illustrative of country life among the upper middle classes in Southern England at the end of the 18th century. Second, they may be taken as broad allegories, in which sense, sensibility, pride, prejudice, and a number of other virtues and defects are set forth in narrative form and commented upon. Third, there is the ironic level and hence various incidents, situations and characters imply something beyond what they embody as symbolic rather than allegorical.

Marriage: As with all her other novels, *Pride and Prejudice* also deals with the theme of love and marriage. The novel begins with: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". This sets the tone of the novel. It portrays different types of marriages along with their consequences. The ill-matched couple, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, shows the effects of a marriage without love.

For Jane Austen love was absolutely necessary for a good marriage. However, in English society at the time, which is depicted in the novel, love is not the greatest consideration for marriage. The ideal goal for marriage is to marry someone financially capable of supporting you. Love is secondary. Austen mocks this practice in the book. For example, Mrs. Bennett is constantly reminding her daughters about the rule that since there is no male heir among her children that their home will pass out of their family to the next male in the family, Mr. Collins. The Bennets will be homeless when Mr. Bennett dies. So it is imperative that the girls, especially Jane and Lizzy, find husbands who can provide them with a home and possibly their mother and sisters as well. Marriage is considered an arrangement between parties who occupy the same social level. Love is certainly a necessary consideration, but not required for a good match. For example, Darcy has been promised to Lady Catherine De bourgh's daughter since birth. Even though he does not love her, he is supposed to marry her. Darcy is an exception, since he does fall in love with Lizzy, but is reluctant, at first to court her because he believes that her family is socially inferior. Darcy and Lizzy's marriage is an example

of both love and financial security coming together. She and Jane both marry men who not only love them but can support them well.

The next important themes as the title suggests, are pride and prejudice. Elizabeth is shown to be guilty of prejudicially judging Darcy to be prideful. In addition, it turns out that improper pride is actually the reason behind Elizabeth's prejudice. Finally, while Darcy is recognized as feeling above his company, the reality is that he really is the noble character in the book and found to actually not have any improper pride. We know that pride and prejudice are the most dominant themes in the book because it is these two themes that create the main conflict in the story, which is Elizabeth's dislike of Darcy and Darcy's unrequited love for Elizabeth, also expressed as character vs. character.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

### **Write Short Notes on:**

- a) The theme of marriage
- b) Darcy representing pride

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## **4.3 THE MILIEU AND SOCIETY OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE***

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In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennets are, like Jane Austen herself, members of an educated upper middle class known as the “gentry” or the “landed gentry.” Considered socially eligible to mix with the landowning aristocracy, but quite a step beneath them in wealth, resources and precedence, the landed gentry included country squires, military officers and many forms of clergy; all acceptable roles for the educated younger sons of the aristocracy and their descendants. Gentry may have owned less than 1,000 acres of land, may have leased to tenants or overseen the farming directly and typically lived in the country year-round, visiting London only to take care of occasional legal matters.

The fact that she kept to the world she knew gives a unique irresistible flavour to her work. Of organised society she manifests no idea. She had no interest in the great political and social problems that were being debated in her day. She was a realist and made no attempt at social fantasy. She seems to be anti-aristocratic often and accepted the social values of the world. She writes, “Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentle-manlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by nature as by education. The Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man, who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouse, could have been so well-bred and agreeable”.

Within her narrow range, Austen is indeed among the greatest literary artists. Her work is like that of a miniaturist or illuminator. Charlotte Bronte says: “There is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting of life by Jane Austen.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

### **Fill In The Blanks With Appropriate Words/ Phrases.**

- a) The Bennets belonged to the class known as the \_\_\_\_\_

- b) Austen writes about the world she \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) The gentry visited \_\_\_\_\_ to take care of legal matters.
- d) Mr. Gardiner was \_\_\_\_\_ to his sister.

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#### **4.4 CHARACTERS**

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Margaret Oliphant writes, “Miss Austen is not the judge of the men and women she collects round her. She is not even the censor to mend their manners... She has but the faculty of seeing (the character) all round as if he were a statue, identifying all his absurdities, quietly jeering at him, smiling with her eyes without committing the indecorum of laughter”.

It is interesting to note that Austen contemplates virtues, not as fixed qualities, or as definable qualities, but as continuous struggles and conquests, as progressive states of mind.

Let us now look at some of the important characters in the novel.

Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, is the second-eldest Bennet daughter. She is intelligent, spirited and opinionated. Elizabeth is closest to her older sister, Jane, and serves as a foil to Jane’s innocent and trusting character. Upon Elizabeth’s and Mr. Darcy’s first meeting, he calls Elizabeth “tolerable . . . but not handsome enough to tempt me,” wounding her pride and spurring her prejudice against him. Elizabeth is often judgmental, and although she does not truly know Mr. Darcy, she almost immediately judges his character as haughty and proud.

Elizabeth's sparkling and teasing wit brings on Lady Catherine's disapproval and Darcy's admiration. She is always interesting to listen to and always ready to laugh at foolishness, stating, "I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can." Because of her exceptional powers of observation, Elizabeth's sense of the difference between the wise and foolish, for the most part, is very good. She is very close to her father and sister Jane and tolerant of her other sisters and mother.

Darcy exhibits all the good and bad qualities of the ideal English aristocrat — snobbish and arrogant, he is also completely honest and sure of himself. Darcy is not actually a titled nobleman, but he is one of the wealthiest members of the landed gentry — the same legal class that Elizabeth's much poorer family belongs to. While Darcy's sense of social superiority offends people, it also promotes some of his better traits. As Wickham notes in his sly assessment, "His pride never deserts him; but with the rich, he is liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable — allowing for fortune and figure." The novel projects a very changed Darcy as he gradually realises his deep love for Elizabeth. Darcy's humbling makes him more sensitive to what other people feel. In the end, he is willing to marry into a family with three silly daughters, an embarrassing mother, and Wickham as a brother-in-law. It may be that he becomes more easy-going about other people's faults because he is now aware of his own.

Bingley is a handsome, friendly, and wealthy young man. He is a foil (contrast) to Mr. Darcy, who is, at first, snobbish and rude. Jane says about Mr. Bingley, "He is just what a young man ought to be...sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!--so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!" In fact, Jane and Mr. Bingley are very similar in terms of personality. In many ways, Mr. Bingley seems like the ideal man. However, he is also easily persuaded by his family and friends. For example, although he loves Jane, Mr. Darcy and his sister are able to convince him to leave Netherfield Park (and Jane). Unlike Mr. Darcy who is shown to hold onto convictions, Mr. Bingley seems to be more easily swayed. Mr. Bingley isn't very well-developed in the novel. Like Jane, he isn't a very interesting person on his own. It's only in contrast to the more interesting Mr. Darcy that we see Mr. Bingley's true purpose in the novel.

Jane Bennet, the oldest Bennet daughter, is beautiful, good-tempered, amiable, humble, and selfless. Her good nature does result in a level of naiveté, especially when it comes to recognizing the wickedness of others. Her sweetness leaves her vulnerable to injury from insincere friends like Caroline Bingley. A rather static character, Jane remains a model of virtue throughout the novel.

An officer in the regiment stationed at Meryton, Officer Wickham possesses a charm that hides his dissolute, untrustworthy personality. He was godson to Darcy's father. However, Wickham betrayed Darcy by seducing Georgiana when she was only 15. He also spreads false rumours about Darcy throughout Hertfordshire and Meryton. Overall, Wickham is driven by self-interest, revealed by his many romantic engagements (or lack thereof, in the case of Elizabeth). He is also a static character and marries Lydia only because Darcy provides a financial incentive. In the epilogue, Austen implies that Wickham tires of Lydia after a certain point.

Mr. Bennet, the father of the five Bennet ladies, is eccentric, intelligent, and sarcastic. Mr. Bennet is a small landowner, and, since he does not have any sons, his estate is entailed to Mr. Collins, his closest male relative. In his youth, Mr. Bennet married Mrs. Bennet for her beauty, unaware of her shallowness. He is now disappointed with his marriage, but he copes with Mrs. Bennet's ridiculous nature through sarcasm and indifference. Although aloof, negligent, and often emotionally closed off to his daughters, Mr. Bennet loves and admires Elizabeth Bennet, viewing her as his most intelligent daughter.

Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bennet's wife, is silly, shallow, and interested only in getting her daughters married to wealthy men. She favours her youngest daughter, Lydia, but she also takes a great amount of pride in the beauty and grace of her eldest daughter, Jane. Mrs. Bennet shows contempt towards Elizabeth, often pointing out Elizabeth's flaws in beauty and manner as compared to Jane's. Mrs. Bennet constantly seeks out attention and adds to the Bennet family's continuous embarrassment in social situations. However, for all of her flaws, Mrs. Bennet's concerns about her daughters' futures are valid. As opposed to Mr. Bennet, who

largely ignores the problem, Mrs. Bennet actively encourages her daughters to marry so that they will be financially stable when their father passes away. Her aggressive pursuit of suitors for her daughters, while comical, is also a manifestation of the very well-founded concern that they will end up destitute and with no prospects, showcasing a genuine, if sometimes misguided, love for her children.

The boorish, pompous, and ridiculous heir to the entailed Bennet estate, Mr. Collins is also a clergyman whose parish is in the estate of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He's obsequious and conceited—he says that he "sometimes [amuses] himself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions". In other words, he practises his speeches ahead of time. His stupidity, self-importance, servility and cringing devotion to Lady Catherine, pompousness and clumsiness make him a memorable character.

Jane Austen breathes life even into her minor characters and makes them fully individualistic by a few touches of her brush. The novel provides us with a slew of characters; some caricatures, some satirical, some humorous and some typical of certain features of the Age. We could list here the conceited, empty-headed Bingley sisters, the practical Charlotte Lucas who believes economic security is the only reason to get married, the pompous and haughty Catherine de Bourgh who sneers and mocks at anyone she considers beneath her class, the other Bennet sisters with their own eccentricities etc. It is important to remember that there is no mention of servants even in the big, rich households—probably because Jane Austen did not have much experience with that class.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4**

**Write short-notes.**

- 1) Elizabeth Bennet
- 2) Caroline Bingley
- 3) Lydia Bennet
- 4) Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5**

**Match the characters in Column A with their characteristic features given in Column B.**

A	B
i) Elizabeth	a) cunning and devious
ii) Bingley	b) aristocratic
iii) Wickham	c) sweet and trusting
iv) Darcy	d) intelligent
v) Jane	e) servile
vi) Collins	f) gentlemanly

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### **4.5 IRONY AND HUMOUR**

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Austen's form seems to be the comic drama of reason, in which the happy ending comes about not through the lucky disappearance of accidental impediments, but through a dramatic action in which one of the

leading characters learns something important enough about reality and his own nature to experience a deep change of mind and heart. As Darcy tells Elizabeth, "The feelings of the person who wrote and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it, ought to be forgotten".

The protective quality of her irony sometimes leads her to a complacent view of the civilised nature of her times. The critic Lewes believes that our delight in her novels arises from "our relish of humour, and our intellectual pleasure in art for art's sake".

A great deal of Austen's wit is actually seen through the use of irony. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we see all three types of irony displayed: verbal, situational, and dramatic.

The use of verbal irony particularly expresses Austen's use of wit. Verbal irony is usually recognized as sarcasm. It is the moment someone, such as a character or narrator, says one thing, but means the complete opposite. One perfect example of verbal irony can be seen in the very opening line of the book, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Ch. 1). The irony in this line is that, while the women of an English village in Austen's time might "acknowledge" the truth above, the wealthy men the line is referring to actually might not; therefore, the above is not really a "truth universally acknowledged." Instead, this opening line is a perfect example of sarcasm, or verbal irony, and a perfect example of Austen's wit.

Situational irony describes a moment when something occurs and the exact opposite was expected to occur. Either the audience or the characters can have the opposite expectations. One instance of situational irony can be seen early on in the novel at a party that takes place at Lucas Lodge. After Elizabeth is asked to play and sing, the party begins to dance. At the same moment that Sir Lucas is trying to convince Mr. Darcy to join in the dancing, Elizabeth begins walking towards them. Mr. Darcy so adamantly protests dancing to Sir Lucas, even insulting the activity, saying, "Every savage can dance," that when Sir Lucas sees Elizabeth and encourages Darcy to dance with her the reader as well as Elizabeth are very surprised when Darcy "requested to be allowed the honour of her hand" (Vol. 1, Ch. 6). Darcy's behaviour in this instant is a true reversal of his earlier behaviour, especially at the Meryton assembly. Hence, this is a perfect example of situational irony. In addition, the moment is also amusing due to the sudden change of behaviour, also making it another example of Austen's wit.

Dramatic irony occurs when the reader is aware of something that the characters have no idea of. This scene is also a fine example of dramatic irony. The reader has already begun to get the impression that Darcy feels an attraction for Elizabeth, which the reader began to see when she was tending to her sister at Netherfield. Therefore, the reader knows that Darcy's sudden interest in dancing with Elizabeth is actually genuine while Elizabeth still believes that he dislikes her and is merely asking in an attempt to be well mannered. Again the situation is amusing

due to both Elizabeth's and Darcy's reactions to the situation. Hence, again, this use of dramatic irony also demonstrates Austen's wit.

Plenty of comical text passages or situations can be found in the novel. She uses humour to keep up the interest of the reader. It is often expected that the novel is simply a story about love and marriage, but it is not at all. In fact, it is more a complex and should be recognised as a comical story about manners with romantic subplots. Jane Austen uses different ways to show humour and irony to the reader: She shows it by giving imagery, character descriptions and of course by creating comical conversations. In her novel the reader himself is often a “victim” of her ironic way of writing. She gives readers a point of view of themselves in a very specific way, so that they are able to laugh at themselves. She also loves to create characters and to make fun of them afterwards by presenting them as ridiculous persons. Persons she likes to attack are often foolish, arrogant or ignorant. Her intention is not only the entertainment of the reader. She also uses irony and humour to show her personal opinions on society. Satire is used by Jane Austen to show unintelligible behaviour in morals or ethics and stupid social manners. There are different techniques and styles Jane Austen uses to give the novel the required wit. It is perhaps the mixture of different types of humour that makes Jane Austen’s novel so special.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4**

1. Types of Irony used in the novel-*Pride and Prejudice*
2. Theme of the novel
3. Explain the terms: Dramatic irony, verbal irony, situational irony.

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#### **4.6 LET US SUM UP**

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The novel is a true reflection of the Age and society in which the novelist lived and wrote. You have read about the themes and characters in this unit.

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#### **4.7 KEY WORDS**

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<b>Eddy-</b>	a circular movement of water, wind, dust, etc.
<b>Reluctant-</b>	not wanting to do something because you are not sure it is the right thing to do
<b>Aristocracy-</b>	the people of the highest social class who often have special titles
<b>Precedence-</b>	the right that somebody/something has to come before somebody/something else because he/she/it is more important
<b>Squires-</b>	man of high social standing who owns and lives on an estate in a rural area, especially the chief landowner in such an area
<b>Gentry-</b>	people of good social position, specifically the class of people next below the nobility in position and birth.

<b>Clergy-</b>	the body of all people ordained for religious duties, especially in the Christian Church.
<b>Fidelity-</b>	faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support
<b>Absurdity-</b>	the quality or state of being ridiculous or wildly unreasonable
<b>Jeering-</b>	making rude and mocking remarks, typically in a loud voice
<b>Indecorum-</b>	failure to conform to good taste, propriety, or etiquette
<b>Pompous-</b>	affectedly grand, solemn, or self-important
<b>Obsequious-</b>	obedient or attentive to an excessive or servile degree

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#### **4.8 BOOKS SUGGESTED**

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1. Lord David Cecil: Jane Austen
2. R.W. Craik: Jane Austen—The Six Novels

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#### **4.9 REFERENCES**

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1. Pride and Prejudice (2005) (English)
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dYv5u6v55Y>
3. Bride and Prejudice (Hindi)
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6cs4hUxSAc>

#### **ANSWERS**

Check your Progress 1

1-F, 2-F, 3-T

Check your Progress 3

a—gentry, b—knows, c—London, d--- superior

Check your Progress 4

1-d, 2-f, 3-a, 4-b, 5-c, 6-e