

**STRUCTURE**

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**5.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Acquaint you with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*
- Enable you to appreciate it as a work of fiction

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**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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*Pride and Prejudice* has been accepted as Jane Austen's best work even as Austen herself has been accepted as an important novelist in English literature. As Lord David Cecil says, "All discriminating critics admire her books, most educated readers enjoy them; her fame of all English novelists, is the most secure".

In the last two units, you have already studied about *Pride and Prejudice* in detail. In this unit, you will study about the various kinds of responses that Austen received as a novelist, especially with reference to this novel. You will also be able to analyse the novel from a sociological approach.

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**5.2 THE WORLD OF WOMEN**

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While the word feminist was not in use during Austen's era, there is plenty of evidence that she was aware of and unhappy about disparities in rights and opportunities between men and women.

Jane Austen: "Give a girl an education and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody."

Jane Austen's world is principally a feminine world. Being a woman, she naturally looked at world and its problems from a woman's

point of view. Writing with a clear purpose and design, Austen's life itself may be the best argument for Austen as a feminist. Women weren't supposed to write novels, which many considered to be lurid and in bad taste. They especially weren't supposed to publish them. Women were supposed to confine their lives to the private sphere of family and the home. (In *Persuasion*, Austen writes: "We live at home, quiet, confined...") The "public" aspect of publication should have disqualified Austen as an author—according to the customs of the time. But Austen did publish, and she published as "a lady," rather than using a male pseudonym, as the Bronte sisters did later. It was obviously important to her that readers knew her books were written from a female perspective.

In Austen's works you can also find many demonstrations of feminist beliefs. While none of her characters agitate overtly for changes in gender norms, they also do not blindly follow the dictates of convention. Elizabeth Bennet is too outspoken for a woman and refuses to bow to societal pressure to marry for the sake of money. Fanny Price sticks to her internal sense of right and wrong no matter what her "betters" say. *Sense and Sensibility* is a very eloquent examination of how women wrestle with questions of being ruled by head or heart. In all her books, the heroines are struggling to find a place in the world where they can be true to themselves—without compromising their values and needs. We penetrate into the secret life of each novel with the heroine. It is the life of the heroine in the midst of all social pretensions, ambitions, balls, visits, shopping, sewing, gossip and other trivial matters that is depicted in the novels. As we read them, we have a clear knowledge of their hopes, fears and speculations about love and marriage.

Another important feature of Austen's writing is that she left the masculine world untouched. Men are never seen except in the company of women. Male characters in all her novels are important in so far as they are fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, suitors and husbands to the women characters. Her men have been called 'puppets' by some critics. Most of her male characters are one-dimensional and the readers see them only through the eyes of the women characters. They are never seen at work; in fact, their occupations are hardly ever stated or described. If we consider the male characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, we are told that Bingley was the tenant of Netherfield Hall and the possessor of an income of nearly a hundred thousand pounds inherited from his father. But in the novel, he is seen only as the prospective husband of Jane. We know that Darcy owned Pemberley, a property in Derbyshire, and the estate was worth a clear ten thousand per annum. Elizabeth was certainly impressed by it when she saw it. However, we do not know if Darcy attended to it or had any trouble handling it. Darcy is there in the novel to fall in love with Elizabeth, to be misunderstood and spurned by her, and finally to marry her. She never attempted to draw her male characters outside the domestic circle. It is very clear that Austen is presenting a feminine world and in that world, men are drawn from the feminine point of view.

We could quote Charlotte Bronte to describe Jane Austen's portrayal of men: "In delineating male character I labour under

disadvantages: intuition and theory will not always adequately supply the place of observation and experience. When I write about women, I am sure of my ground. In the other case, I am not so sure....". Keenly alive to the problems of the women of her time, Jane Austen portrayed a world in which she engraved a criticism of life. She was aware of the importance of education which was denied to most girls, the lack of proper upbringing which made girls 'silly' and which she portrayed with irony and wit. She did not idealise her female characters, nor was she cynical about them. With her meticulous fidelity to the truth of contemporaneous life, she did not turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of the women of her times. She dealt honestly with the two problems that women of that age faced--- economic security and harmonious relationship within the family.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

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

1. In addition to economic security, women of Austen's Age faced the problem of \_\_\_\_\_ within the family.
2. Austen presented men from the \_\_\_\_\_ point of view.
3. As most of Austen's men are one-dimensional, they are called \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Jane Austen firmly believed in the importance of \_\_\_\_\_ for women.

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### **5.3 PORTRAYAL OF CLASSES**

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Chronologically, Jane Austen's literary career had its fruition in the early years of the nineteenth century, but the society she portrays in her novels is that of an earlier age. Jane Austen restricted herself almost exclusively to the gentry of England. The gentry were the class which had a place of pivotal importance in English society, standing in between the aristocracy and the middle class and forming a sort of link between them. For Austen, the gentry were at the centre of her universe and this was the class she knew best. She never strayed outside the familiar regions of the gentry: neither to the aristocracy or to the common folk. She seemed to have no curiosity to overstep the limits of that sphere of social life. She lived and wrote in a social environment in which one class felt completely isolated from another and because of this sense of its distinct group life it also felt safe from all intrusion of elements foreign to its nature.

This class is self-contained and constitutes a small world of its own. It seems to receive outside influences rather tardily and with extreme difficulty. They often are parasitical and appear to be under no pressure or obligation to work. However, even within that class there are differences as between Bingley and Darcy. Darcy is considered superior because of his connection with older families. Being proud of his status, the gentleman has no wish to mix in any circle other than his own. As Lady Catherine de Bough tells Elizabeth when trying to persuade her to refuse the hand of Darcy, "If you were sensible of your own good you

would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up”. Not to be threatened or cowed down by the vain Lady, Elizabeth answers with her characteristic confidence, “In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter: so far we are equal”. It is people like Lucas with their servile adulation of the aristocracy, who help keep alive the attitude of condescension in the gentry.

Austen never shows us men who work for money, except for the soldiers who come home on leave after hard campaigns. They bring into the novels a sense of adventure and a vision of heroism and danger. The young girls are obviously impressed as we see in the case of Wickham. The church is the only other profession that receives some importance in Austen’s novels.

English society is thus portrayed as divided into water-tight compartments. With each class knowing its position and having due respect for the position of others, there was a stability and no urge for social change.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

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

1. Soldiers bring a sense of adventure into the novel.
2. Lucas exhibits a servile adulation of aristocracy.
3. Darcy is not related to Catherine de Bourgh.
4. There was a free inter-mingling of the classes in Austen’s Age.

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## **5.4 SATIRE**

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Satire is prevalent in all her novels. As with her other characteristics, even her satire was subject to discipline. Her satire pursued many objects and took many forms. For example, she thought that Mr. Bennet had “gone too far in his pursuit of absurdities” and her criticism seems to be steeped in laughter. Her satire pursued many objects, and took many forms. It sometimes sprang from a kind of ‘fellow-feeling’ as when she portrayed any figure of the cynical type. She and Mr. Bennet had a common hobby --- the delighted observation of human eccentricity. In his attitude of amused detachment, he was very close to his creator. Her satire often seemed to be completely sympathetic. Her instinctive delight in absurdity goes hand in hand with a singular delicacy of insight. She seems to have a peculiar fondness for people who make fools of themselves. “When Miss de Bourgh drove past the vicarage, Sir William Lucas, to Elizabeth’s high diversion, was stationed at the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before him, and constantly bowing whenever Miss de Bourgh looked that way”. A little later, she writes: “Sir William did not say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble names”.

Jane Austen had her pet aversions and if she found something bad about people, she could never say anything good about them. The best example is in her portrayal of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She was hard on lurking excesses and insincerities and this can be seen in her portrayal

of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, when she satirises their penchant for small talk. “Their powers of conversation were considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit”. She was aware of society’s attitude towards women in that age where they were expected to be mere wall-flowers: “Where people wish to attract, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an ability of ministering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. If she has the misfortune of knowing anything, she should conceal it as well as she can”. Her heroines are all quiet-voiced but not insipid. Austen was always hard on insincerities. It has been said of Shakespeare’s Beatrice that she ‘was neither a cat nor a kitten’. Some critics suggest that Austen has the same indefinite feline suggestion: she has within her a catlike strain which sharpened her perception of its existence in other people.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

**Match The Words/ Phrases In Column A With Appropriate Ones In Column B.**

A	B
i) Austen’s heroines	a) observation of human eccentricity
ii) Miss Bingley	b) not insipid
iii) Austen’s satire	c) sprang from fellow-feeling
iv) Mr. Bennet	d) small talk

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### 5.5 CRITICAL VIEWS

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It is important to appreciate the mixed responses that Jane Austen has received. Here, you will learn about some of them.

Since the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1813, individual reaction to Jane Austen’s novels has oscillated between extremes of approbation and disdain as well as adoration and condescension. In 1851, the critic Lewes writes, “Dealing as she does with every day people and everyday life, avoiding all the grander tragic emotions and more impassioned aspects of Life, her art consists in charming us by the fidelity of the picture while relieving it of all the tedium of reality. ... She makes her people speak as they speak and act in everyday life; and she is the only artist who has done with success and pleasant effect”.

In a review in 1852, an unnamed reader expressed it succinctly, “... in the careful, artist-like management of her story, in the skilful evolution of its processes, in the tactics of a gradually-wrought denouement, in the truthful and natural adaptation of means to ends, she is almost, if not quite unrivalled. Nothing can be more judicious than her use of suggestions and intimations of what is to follow. And all is conducted with a quiet grace that is, or seems to be inimitable”.

The American critic Kirk believes that, “The authoress herself is never visible, never even peeps from behind the curtain. The characters are not described; they exhibit themselves in action and speech... the individuality of all the actors is well maintained”. Further, he says, “Miss

Austen's humour is rich and suggestive. She is not a humourist... She never satirises a class. She finds a theme for comedy only in those peculiarities which are laughed at by the entire world; but she exposes these traits with a bold, yet delicate touch".

Another critic is of the opinion that "She is the perfect mistress of all she touches... she fascinates you with common-place people". And again, "Of all imaginative writers, she is most real. Never does she transcend her own actual experience; never does her pen trace a line that does not touch the experience of others". By simply describing what she knew and had seen, she seems to present a photographic picture.

*Pride and Prejudice*, we could conclude, is a finely-constructed work with a fine artistic sense. In many ways, she continues to be unrivalled and unsurpassed.

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

##### **WRITE SHORT NOTES.**

1. Write a paragraph on the praise that was heaped on Jane Austen soon after the publication of her works.
2. Discuss satirical Language in the *Pride and Prejudice*.

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

1. "Jane Austen's heroines are struggling to find a place in the world where they can be true to themselves—without compromising their values and needs." Do you agree with this statement? Discuss your views with the reference of Elizabeth Bennet.
2. Write a critical note class and its influence in Society in *Pride and Prejudice*.

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#### **5.6 LET US SUM UP**

In this unit, you have read of the various strains that go to making a great novelist. Her world of women as well as her portrayal of classes helps you get a true picture of the times, she lived in. Her satire remains an under-current in all her novels. The critical responses to her writing will help you place her in her rightful place among the novelists of England.

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#### **5.7 KEY WORDS**

- Discriminating** - the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, sex, or disability, Prejudice, Bias
- Disparities** - difference, inequality
- Lurid** - presented in vividly shocking or sensational terms.
- Sphere** - an area of activity, interest, or expertise; a section of society or an aspect of life distinguished and unified by a particular characteristic. ,Realm
- Agitate** - make (someone) troubled or nervous, upset

**Outspoken** - rank in stating one's opinions, especially if they are shocking or controversial, Frank , Straightforward  
**Eloquent** - Fluent or persuasive in speaking or writing.  
**Speculations**- the forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence, investment in stocks, property, etc.  
**Delineating** -describe or portray (something) precisely.  
**Meticulous** -showing great attention to detail; very careful and precise.  
**Fidelity**- faithfulness to a person,  
**Exclusively** - to the exclusion of others; only.  
**Gentry** - people of good social position, specifically the class of people next below the nobility in position and birth.  
**Intrusion** - the action of intruding.  
**Tardily** - at a slow pace  
**Threatened**- having an uncertain chance of continued survival  
**Cowed** - cause (someone) to submit to one's wishes by intimidation

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## 5.8 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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1. Jane Austen : The Critical Heritage Ed. B.C. Southam
2. Jane Austen : Her Concept of Social Life by Sushila Singh

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## 5.9 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>
- 5.

## ANSWERS

Check your Progress 1

- 1) Harmonious relationship 2) feminine 3) puppets 4) education

Check your Progress 2

- 1) True 2) True 3) False 4) False

Check your Progress 3

1-b, 2-d, 3-c, 4-a