

## **THE PROBLEM OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE NOVEL PRIDE AND PREJUDICE BY JANE AUSTEN**

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### **Abstract**

The article analyzes the problem of gender equality in the novel "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen. In the novel the history of the Bannet family reflects the solidarity of the family and the strength of a woman who has always defied the culture of marriage in the society she lived.

**Key words:** Feminism, social criticism, second person, novel.

The second daughter in the Bennet family, the most intelligent and quick-witted, Elizabeth is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and one of the most well-known female characters in English literature. Her admirable qualities are numerous- she is lovely, clever and the dialogues in the novel show that her speech is as brilliant as any high-educated person. Her honesty, virtue and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and the behavior that pervade her class-bound and often her spiteful society. The way of life in the family described in the novel shows Elizabeth's liberal feminist ideas of marriage who believes that affection, friendship and respect are major elements of a happy and strong marriage. She rejects the notion that one should marry for wealth or social status, she wants to show that the women are not in low position than men. Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, but she flatly rejects him, though her mother Mrs. Bennet is outraged by her refusal, her father supports her decision. Due to her own parents' unhappy marriage, as well as her own idealized views of romance and marriage, she was also determined not to enter into a marriage just for the sake of financial security or convenience. In spite of the fact that she faces with many problems in her life with all her skills, she is able to solve this problem and finds happiness. From the findings of Jane Austen's novel feminism reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader understands that *Pride and Prejudice* also provides a social understanding of the definition of the role of women in the early 19th century, which has always been considered weak.

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies that pursue a common goal: to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women. This includes the fight for equal opportunities for women in education and employment. According to Ritzer, "Feminism is a kind of critical social theory grounded in the political, economic and historical social context that unjust people face." [5].

Feminism was born to defend the rights and role of women in society, as the development of culture and social structure increasingly divides women and men. The difference between men and women becomes discrimination, which then causes harassment.

According to Ratna "Feminism is the concept of generalizing women. Criticism of social theory, the purpose of which is to ensure the rights of women." [4, p. 588].

Various types of social criticism made by women, have increased their social status in society through various breakthroughs in both the physical movement and the ideological movement of society. Women can gently participate in social criticism and education through the creation of literary works.

In a variety of literary books, many writers socially criticized the phenomenon that arose against women in society at the beginning of the 19th century. One of the writers who have

sharply criticized society in this century was Jane Austen.

Jane Austen is one of the most famous women writers of the 19th century. She lived in simple conditions that distinguish social status between men and women, causing intimidation for women by men with the thought that the woman can't be happy without man's comprehensive support. This viewpoint was to be changed in the society Jane Austen lived and it made her write and discuss this problem in her literary works.

The novel is one of the literary works which gives the reader joy, knowledge and leads him to a particular situation, place, or period that occur in the story. Though a series of events and conflicts were experienced by the characters throughout the novel, we permeate the characters' life at the end discovering the meanings, messages or values revealed by the author.

Austen's novel deals primarily with the social structure of England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a patriarchal society in which men held economic and social power. In satirical portraits of men and women struggling to survive, Austen subtly and ironically points out the shortcomings of the system and raises questions about the values of English society and the country's power structure.

Pride and Prejudice is a novel by Jane Austen, first published in 1813. The story manifests the main character, Elizabeth Bennet, as she deals with issues of manners, upbringing, morality, education and marriage in the society of the landed gentry of the British Regency.

The limitations of women's rights in the novel Pride and Prejudice show that Elizabeth does not have the right to choose her husband at the beginning of the novel. Because in that society the woman was considered to be unacceptable even for travelling alone. It is seen in the episode when Elizabeth wants to visit her sister Jane who remained at Mr. Bingley's estate for some days, for she fell ill. This episode shows the opinion of Elizabeth's circle towards her travelling alone in a rainy weather in order to visit her sister :

"To walk three miles, or four miles or five miles or whatever it is above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone. What could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum." [1, p. 43].

The above episode refers to Elizabeth's walking several miles on her own to see her sister's condition and look after her sister who was ill and stayed at Mr. Bingley's home. She decides to walk to Nether field, although the road is still muddy from the heavy rains of the previous night. She arrives at Mr. Bingley's house in dirty clothes because the street is wet. Mr. Bingley politely accepts Elizabeth's arrival; his behavior is different from his sister, who ridicules Elizabeth. According to her, a woman is considered inappropriate for this kind of activity. The

episode given above demonstrates the fact that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the British society men had dominance over women. [2]. Women were considered as a second person who were considered to be weak in many aspects of life, such as in economic, social and educational spheres. In this society men are illustrated more powerful than women in all aspects of life. As a result, discrimination against women was widespread.

One more episode reflecting Elizabeth's attitude towards the existed rules concerning the women to be considered as a second person after man:

"I'm thinking about story"-replied Elizabeth. "Behavior cousin hurt my feelings. What underlines Vigilante attitude itself is it?" [1, p. 276].

Elizabeth's speech shows that she gets insulted and it makes her offended. The reason is that she feels as though she were not a perfect woman who might be easily hurt and even despised. Her sharp tongue and tendency to make hasty judgments often led her astray. *Pride and Prejudice* is essentially the story of how Elizabeth overcomes all obstacles in order to find romantic happiness. She overcomes her hopeless mother's and her distant father's opinion of the existed rules in the society they lived, her two badly behaved younger siblings attitude towards life, and several snobbish antagonizing females, her own mistaken impressions of Mr. Darcy which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. Her charms are sufficient to keep him interested in her, fortunately, while she navigates familial and social turmoil. At last she comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy's character; she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century of British society, people live in a materialistic society. Parents used their daughters as a means of achieving happiness, believing that marriage is a great way to achieve a goal for them. This is due to the roles of parents who wanted to find rich and noble men for their daughters. These parents hoped that their daughters will marry a great man and then they will find real happiness.

The society's viewpoint concerning the women to be considered as a second person after man is changed by Elizabeth Bennet who is the main character in the novel. Elizabeth, and the characters like Elizabeth explicitly changed the society's viewpoint, especially the parents', that the marriage is not the best way to change social status of women in the society.

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