

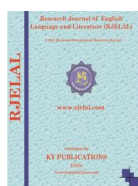


FEMINIST APPROACH IN JANE AUSTEN'S "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" IN CONTEXT TO ELIZABETH BENNET

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Abstract

Jane Austen's feminism is the most concerned topic of study regarding to the emergence of woman. Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the significant feminist characters. The feminist views in *Pride and Prejudice* is well-balanced in literary aspects. In this paper a short discussion is focused on Elizabeth's feminism as seen in the prominent contrast to her female role within the novel when compares to Jane, Catherine, Lydia and Charlotte. These women characters confirm the social imposed gender biased norms prevailed in English society, whereas Elizabeth skilfully challenges gender based difference. In the novel other women characters adapt their views like traditional women who choose the similar path of marriage and want to live a settled life with husband and children. Elizabeth persistently refuses to lie down against traditional norms. She defies traditional way and affirms her feminist approach by accepting her father's proposal regarding to her marriage. She chooses her own match for life partner in physical shape of Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth desires to marry Darcy only when he will leave off his pride. Darcy has a good reputation in the society and if he wants to win Elizabeth's affections and finds her a suitable match for him to marry. In this view of argument the character of Elizabeth is not completely feminist but it is to be estimated only in contrast to other women of the novel Catherine, Lydia, Jane, and Charlotte. This research study is quite comparison of the character of Elizabeth and other ladies regarding to different approach of life.

Keywords: Feminism, Comparison, Gender Bias, Contrast, Traditions

Introduction

The study reveals that Elizabeth Bennet's feminine perspective is not feminist in the real sense, but demonstrates her assert determination against social bounds and prevailing traditions. The contents of the novel show that the different position of Elizabeth Bennet in the novel. She has a distinguish aim in her life to live, shown through her influence on Darcy in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth has an ability to expose a positive impact on most reputed person of society. Darcy reveals in himself an evidence of tradition for the male-

dominated society of England. A close observation of Elizabeth while comparing to other women in the novel shows a feminist approach found in her views. The traditional views about marriage create obstacles in the way of being self-autonomous of woman and make her dependent on others. Elizabeth's feminism and her unconventional ambition of impartial gender equality is to be made on the social platform she advocates the right of equality to both genders. The presence of other female characters in the novel shows a clash of thinking and tendency among themselves. The other

women of the novel believe that they must change their opinion in order to gratify the men in their lives and attain a husband. Elizabeth acts contrary to other females, having strong resolution to her feminist approach in the novel. Elizabeth's feminism reveals in contrast with traditional followers females. Her personality reveals the purpose of her own vision against conventional form of marriage. It is an idea to convey the treatment of feminist approaches in society.

The main character in the novel Elizabeth faces the issues of feminism and experienced the effects of feminism in which she had skilfully conveyed the feminist approach in support to the right of women in value of self-voice, choice, freedom, and status of equality in male dominated society. The effect of feminism in quest of autonomy was the claim of individualism as she can develop her individual approach by speaking clearly about herself and her feelings and she also reflects her freedom in exposing herself as woman who has moral and right to speak and do what she wants to do to explore herself as a human being. But the effect of prevailed system was against of individualism and with a view to express the right to choose and determine her own life though Elizabeth experienced her own strategy and she has to make quarrel on the same issue with Mrs Bennet her mother.

Jane Austen a well known writer of feminism however gives a portrait of her heroine as one and only preserver of feminism in that society while others are the followers. Among her works, *Pride and Prejudice* is more often cited one of the best works regarding to female life and having a feminist approach and perspectives, with overtones of familial world are inherent in her heroine, Elizabeth. The feminism seen in the works of Austen was in a primary stage in nineteenth century. The writer was aware of social gaps between genders, inequality partiality. Her views towards the lack of education for women is quite a part of observation for the contemporary writers what she has done in her *Pride and Prejudice*, The novelist asserts her awareness regarding different views on what has already exists in the society. She gave importance to necessary changes as requirement for the demand

of the time like education for women and their upliftment in society.

The views that take research he on Elizabeth's feminist approach is required to estimate the usual practices prevailed in the nineteenth century society is better revealed through the study. The novelist describes beautifully the female environment through her characters. The character study of Elizabeth is shown in totally different way as compared to others in the novel. How she reacts after reading a letter by Darcy:

"How despicably I have acted" she cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratify my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust! How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted possession and ignorance, and driven reason away where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself"

The author also gives a portrait of male protagonist, Darcy, who first has a pride in nature but finally surrenders in front of Elizabeth's intellect an admirable quality. The portrait character of Elizabeth illustrates a vision to explore in writing especially to the extent that affords her as a female protagonist. Women were considered downtrodden to men in the society and have neither legal right to possess their ancestral property in any form nor control over their own intentions. Novelist focuses on patriarchal views of society and writes about female protagonists who not only tried to change their own life but also impacted the lives of other people as well. Elizabeth the protagonist says Darcy when he proposes her consider her lower in financial status and her quite bold move of her refusal to him shows her strength of self decision making woman

"From the very beginning--from the first moment, I may almost say--of my life acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."

She also proves her suitability to Lady Catherine who shows her the high status of Darcy and upset with his decision to marry Elizabeth lower to him in status when she comments "*He is a gentleman, and I am a gentleman's daughter. So far we are equal*" Elizabeth's assertiveness and outspokenness would have given something new to the reader and affirms her female stereotype. The defiant nature of the heroine displays her real feminism in respect to her denial on several issues in the novel with her feminist approach. That was times' need to change and elevate the status of woman in the society. It has been concerned that the heroines in Austen's novels are of enduring personality when it concludes a well-told potential character of a love story in form of Elizabeth.

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* is an exercise of Austen's own personal life and experience which she tries to defy by permitting Elizabeth her character, when she gave her refusal to Mr Collins and clearly states her words "*Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.*" This refusal is astonishing for everyone and treated as against to social connectivity. This rejection was unappreciable to society regarding to her economic gain and happiness for the rest life. The marital philosophy of Elizabeth that she accepts is "togetherness should be in assertiveness" provides her a position of being a great feminist and glimmering woman in English society. Even the same opposing attitude of woman can be marked after many years of fictional life of Elizabeth Bennet. Now also we can see such kind of kind of women protagonist who would have approved her

objections to men, in many ways. "*Women are forced to be agreeing against arrangements that suit men and not the woman*" has become now a past consideration due to such rebellion attitude like Elizabeth is adopted by some woman.

The concept of an independent woman has completely changed whose image was settled in mind of a housekeeper, nurturer, and caretaker of household. She does not need a man on every step in search of her existence, happiness and reputation. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth has good skills of communication and her wit is different when it compared to her contemporaries who often estimate disadvantages, of life without a man such as Charlotte Lucas whose opinion is always in favour of marriage and living a common life as claims:

"Without thinking highly either of man or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object. It was the only honourable provision for well educated young woman of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness must be their pleasantest preservative from want"

This vision about life of Charlotte was odious to Elizabeth and she perfectly thinks that woman is not supposed to be the puppet of such irrational things and she has a good sense in her opinion regarding to self-justification. The plot of the story turns in many ways where Elizabeth had to face many challenges in respect to her sex and social stature, though she has a firm resolution to face such challenges with her denial at several stages.

Conclusion

In this study the feminine approach is the foremost concern of the behaviour of the nineteenth century woman. The writer presents the society in an economical way and the wants of woman is only restricted to live and eat whatever her husband earns. This prevailed norm was the current problem contemporary society not agreeable to woman like Elizabeth Bennet. There are different aspects of life in which we can divert the everyday life like love, marriage, sex, familial and other subsequent problems of the society. The research students can get something for their

studies as an opportunity to analysis the reflected feminism in their research works as they have observed in *Pride and Prejudice* through the character of Elizabeth.

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