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## Dynamics of Successful Marriage between Opposites: A Synopsis from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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### **Abstract:**

*Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice is a timeless novel and is considered a romantic hit in the classic literary world. The novel depicts the society of the early eighteenth century England. From the depiction of the story, to the characters of the novel Austen does the marvelous job of enticing the readers with her avid capability of storytelling and so it is no wonder that the novel has been and is still being analyzed and portrayed by scholars, filmmakers and critics. Though written in the early eighteenth century this novel holds many facets that are yet to be discovered from literary point of view. Such a notion is the fact that this novel holds the secrets to successful marriage from Austen's point of view and gives us a glimpse into the mind of this literary genius lady about the working of a good marriage. So, the author of this article analyzes the characters and tries to decipher what factors make the marriages work from the viewpoint of Jane Austen. The analysis suggests that though the individuals are of different characteristics and nature they can lead a good life with their better halves in the long run and live with self-contentment and bliss.*

**Keywords:** Dynamics, opposite characteristics, couples, successful marriages, understanding, love, choice

### 1. Introduction

Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' is a classical masterpiece that has reached its audience across the eras of English literature. The conflicts of behavior and interest among the characters of the novel motivate the story and the circulation of events and captivate the mind of the readers. On one hand, there are dilemmas between hero's feeling of love and admiration for the heroine and reluctance and disinclination to associate with her family and on the other hand, there is a heroine who struggles with her emotion of adoration and gratefulness towards the hero for his involvement in the time of distress of her family and the hardheaded and somewhat arrogant behavior at the very beginning of the hero towards her. All in all, the storyline of the novel deals with conflicting behaviors and situation patterns. The author of this article focuses on the behavioral conflict and difference between the couples of the novel to express her disposition on the stance of Jane Austen on marriage and her inclination toward making a marriage work between two people of different viewpoints.

The marriages in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are mostly formed in the traditional form and the prospect of marriage always rises from the concerned mother in an arranged scenario. Though there were love marriages at that time too, the prospective grooms then needed to seek approval from the father of the prospective bride and the suitor herself. The norms of society allowed the bride and groom to be formally introduced and then they could meet in other social gatherings and in various formal and informal settings and seek each other's affection which might or might not eventually turn into successful marriages.

Though Jane Austen didn't intentionally base the story on the sole purpose to prove that married people of dissimilar characteristics can make their marriage work, in *Pride and Prejudice*, she portrays such couples who succeed in making their marriage work despite the differences in their characteristics and personalities. The attributes of the individuals, conversations among the people in different scenarios, behavioral pattern of the people, their personal attitude and situations illustrated in this novel help the author of this article to stand by her claim. And now a thorough analysis of the novel will ascertain readers' notion of this viewpoint.

### 2. The Couples in the Novel

#### 2.1. Mr. Bennet vs. Mrs. Bennet

The first time this fact comes to the forefront is when the introductions of the heroine's parents are made. Elizabeth Bennet, the second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is supposedly the heroine of the novel and her parents are the complete opposite of one another in their characteristics. Mrs. Bennet is a lady who is talkative which is apparent and proved time and again in all the scenes where she is present in the storyline, demanding as she demands to her husband to pay a visit to Mr.

Bingley upon his arrival in Netherfield Park by saying, "But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood" (Austen 1978: P-3), impatient for her daughters' marriages and daring everyone to do her bidding and being persistent about it, insolent which is expressed through her behavior towards Mr. Darcy when he visits her home with Mr. Bingley for "He (Mr. Bingley) was received by Mrs. Bennet with a degree of civility, which made her two daughters ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of her curtsy and address to his friend (Mr. Darcy)" (Austen, 1978: P-290) and other neighbors when ascertained by her own daughter Elizabeth as she reminds her mother of the promise of Mrs. Long to introduce them to Mr. Bingley she replies, "I do not believe that Mrs. Long would do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman and I have no opinion of her" (Austen 1978: P-3). This comment on her part in itself is outrageous as she is of the same nature when it comes to her own gain and interest. Her covetous nature is further illustrated by Austen through her desire to marry off her daughters to high society people despite their own unwillingness and sometimes embarrassing tendencies to show them off. She is quite brazen as she openly brags about Lydia and Mr. Wickham's marriage which is in actuality a result of a disgraceful elopement of both.

The father of the heroine and Mrs. Bennet's husband Mr. Bennet is of somehow a very opposite character and is a loveable and encouraging father who shows compassion towards his daughters in their moment of distress specially when his wife becomes tough to her daughters and tries to dictate their behavior and criticizes them too much as is apparent in the novel in the coughing incident of Mary (Austen 1978: P-4) and in her judgment of her own daughter Elizabeth's character she says to her husband, "Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia" (Austen 1978: P-2) where in her desire to counter her husbands' advocacy towards Elizabeth, she undermines the quality of the same. He is depicted as a reserve man who is unwilling to immediately do things at his wife's bidding and sarcastically teases her for her insistence on visiting Mr. Bingley as soon as he arrives in Netherfield Park. In contrast to his wife he is quite understanding of his daughters' opinion for he neither takes their choices for granted nor disregards their wishes as is clear when he directly asks Elizabeth of her negative view on the prospect of marrying Mr. Collins despite his wife's protest and then again asks for her view on the marriage proposal of Mr. Darcy. He also tries to dissuade her from marrying him if her decision is influenced by his wealth and social status which further solidifies the morality of his character. He is also an intelligent person as he understands different situations and motives for he visits Mr. Bingley on his own term but also on his own accord as he at least subconsciously knows the delicacy of the personal house call and knows it would somehow facilitate his daughters' lives. He is levelheaded and composed as he doesn't lose his cool with his temperamental wife in even dire situations and does the right thing by his family like going after Lydia after her elopement, humorous and deters his wife in situations where she becomes impatient with somewhat humor filled comments, (Austen 1978: P-2), and responsible for his daughters' secured future. The husband and wife are so far from each other's type that it is clearly stated by Austen in the novel.

In Jane Austen's language the significant difference in their behavior and character is depicted as: 'Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous' (Austen 1978: P-3)

## 2.2. Mr. Bingley and Jane Bennet

In the novel Ms. Jane Bennet, the elder sister of the heroine, Ms. Elizabeth Bennet has a subdued character and is a meek, calm, good hearted and compassionate young lady. Where she is an obedient and soft-spoken girl who is shyly but swiftly charmed by the ruggedly handsome and charming personality of Mr. Bingley and does live mostly by her mother's bidding, Mr. Bingley is a well-endowed man with money and social status and is described as quite the charmer in the novel who is blown away by her sweet and alluring personality and beauty (the beauty that was also admired by the hero of the novel, Mr. Darcy) (Austen 1978: p-8). Though there were many young women who were willing to be courted by this 'young man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year' and 'a fine thing' (Austen 1978: p-1), he is definitely enchanted by this pretty lady from their very first meeting and indulges himself in his persuasion of impressing and captivating her with his distinct attention. Both Mr. Bingley and Jane are the characters that are close to the hero-heroine of the novel and they value their opinion. Hence the sudden departure of Mr. Bingley from Netherfield Park on Mr. Darcy's bidding and leaving the blossoming attraction or love towards Jane and Jane herself. Though at the near end of the novel this misunderstanding is also cleared with Dr. Darcy's assistance and Mr. Bingley and Jane reunite and eventually marry with the blessings of family and friends.

## 2.3. Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas

Mr. Collins in 'Pride and Prejudice' is depicted as a character that is a 'mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility' (Austen 1978: P-60). His upbringing suggests that the influence of his 'illiterate' and 'miserly' father have not done much to make him a better person with more sensibility. Though he lived in Hunsford, his ulterior motive to visit the Longbourne family was to marry one of their daughters as his life was settled then with a living place and a steady income for the time being. As he inherited their father's house in Netherfield, he wanted to express his proposal in an

inconspicuous way of showing the Bennets his generosity and for that he first chose their eldest daughter, Jane. But as put by her own mother, Mrs. Bennet Jane 'was likely to be very soon engaged' (Austen 1978: P-60).

Mr. Collins then intends to marry Elizabeth, the heroine of the novel at one point and is self-assured of her assent to his proposal. He tends to have an undaunted will when it comes to something of his preference. As he decides to marry and settle down soon, he proposes Elizabeth and is rejected for Elizabeth does not think him to be of her preference. After that event, his intention to marry someone else is then featured quite unexpectedly in the novel. The working of his mind for the matter can't be deciphered very clearly until he actually becomes successful in his endeavor to persuade someone of a good family background to be his lawfully wedded wife.

His choice appears to be Ms. Charlotte Lucas who is close to the Bennet family and is Elizabeth's best friend in the novel. On contrary to the character of Mr. Collins, Charlotte seems to be a much sensible girl who makes considerable choices and her decision to marry Mr. Collins is apparent to this fact. When Mr. Collins proposes her, she is quite relieved to have the good luck of finding such a match for herself who is 'neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still would be her husband' (Austen 1978: P-107)

Though Charlotte does not think very highly of Mr. Collins and his characteristics are not of the similar categories of hers, their wedding and in turn marriage turns out to be a successful one in the novel.

#### 2.4. Mr. Wickham and Lydia Bennet

The couple of Mr. Wickham and Ms. Lydia Bennet is another one of great significance in the novel as their union turns out to be a reason for the change in the direction of the storyline and can be termed as the thrilling point of the novel as this union of elopement blindsides the prominent characters. But though the event occurs suddenly, it also plays an important role to bring the hero-heroine to reconsider their perspective of one another. When Lydia and Mr. Wickham elope together, Mr. Darcy takes the responsibility of rescuing the demented sister of Elizabeth who acts selfishly and on an act of whimsical decision disgraces her family. Totally baffled about the situation, her father Mr. Bennet and her uncle Mr. Gardiner starts searching for her and with the help of Mr. Darcy find out the couple and even then, after such reckless behavior, Lydia is so naïve as to rejoice in the matrimony with a disreputable man who actually has no design to marry her. In the novel, Mr. Wickham is of no honor to respect and return the affection of Lydia and wants to marry someone of good fortune from another country. But, Mr. Darcy dissuades him and bribes him to alter this disgraceful union to marriage. This couple in the novel is opposite in the sense that where Lydia elopes with the man of her dreams despite the disposition of starting a scandal for her family, Mr. Wickham marries only for his own selfish gain and greed. It cannot be said that the couple has a successful marriage afterwards but, till the end of the novel they as a couple, remains to be a matter of great nuisance for their relatives.

#### 2.5. Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet

The main characters of the novel i.e. the hero and heroine of Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' cannot be said to have distinctively opposite characteristics in the novel as both of them are responsible, respectful, compassionate and loving. But both of them have some diverse qualities that may prove them to be of atypical characteristics. Their first meeting seems to draw the line of divergence between them. Elizabeth first sees and hears of Mr. Darcy in a ball where he is assumed to be a man of good looks and great fortune for he earns ten thousand a year. His reputation simmers down to a considerable amount in halfway through the party 'till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend' (Austen 1978: P-7).

Elizabeth proves to be a somewhat jovial natured girl who is friendly, charming, and intelligent and is liked by most in the novel. She even seems to have the much-appreciated attention of Mr. Wickham, Mr. Collins and Mr. Fitzwilliam, a cousin of the hero, Mr. Darcy. Mr. Bingley also seems to be enchanted by her personality on his first meet with her as he points her out to his friend at the very meet mentioned as 'who is very pretty, and I daresay, very agreeable' (Austen 1978: P-8).

Their outlook about themselves is also made in different avenues. For, Elizabeth forms her opinion of him through her and others judgment of his character, Mr. Wickham's wicked lies and his brusque and aloof mannerism, Mr. Darcy seems to have formed his opinion of her through his own avid observation. Where Elizabeth's view of Mr. Darcy gradually turns toward scorn and contempt, Mr. Darcy seems to be more inclined towards her charm with time. Elizabeth accuses Mr. Darcy for Mr. Wickham's distress and he tries to evade the topic and avoids the discussion. Elizabeth forms her opinion pretty quickly and expresses it without much reserve to her contemporaries and Mr. Darcy's evasiveness and less talkative manner does not enable him to be so open and free with anyone except in some cases with his friend, Mr. Bingley. Mr. Darcy's sense of their contrary upbringing and society turn out to be another matter of their major dispute during his proposal to Elizabeth. And Elizabeth, as astute as she seems to understand his reluctance to be tied to her family considering his high society haughtiness but does not like to debase her family and does not even consider his higher class to be a determining factor for settling down. Thus consciousness of their social status seems to play a good factor of difference in their attitude and character. In Mr. Darcy's language the error in his way of life of being class conscious is realized to Elizabeth at one point when he mentions, 'As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately, an only son, (for many years an only child) I was spoiled by my parents, who though

good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own'. (Austen 1978: P-320)

After learning about Elizabeth's opinion about him when she bluntly and very clearly informs him of the impropriety of his ways of judgment and proposal, Mr. Darcy tries to somewhat alter his approach towards different situations and explains some misunderstandings perceived in her mind through a letter. This brings forth another fact that shows the dissimilarity between the prime characters of the novel, and that is while Elizabeth can express things directly toward the other, Mr. Darcy can hardly verbalize his point of view and has to rely on his penmanship to explain his take on things. It seems like throughout the novel, Mr. Darcy's admiration of Elizabeth is never subdued other than the time of her blunt refusal to his marriage proposal while Elizabeth is less inclined to accept his mannerism and the man himself at times, eventually she also is enchanted by his benevolence and admiration and accepts his great regard for her and thus the couple find their marital bliss toward the end of the novel.

### 3. Conclusion

Analyzed from many perspectives, Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' has been scrutinized many a times. Though different people and professionals comment on different issues time and again, the matchmaking of the writer indicates her viewpoint of maintaining balance in human relationships through her portrayal of the characters in the novel. Her development of the characters in the novel especially through the choice of life partners and their characteristics cannot help but emphasizes on the fact that marriage as an institute can be successful even when there are two virtually different entities in this relationship. Thus, couples of even opposite characteristics can thrive in a successful marriage and can make it work by dissolving their apparent contracting issues (Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy), understanding and tolerating the quirk in each other (Mr. and Mrs. Bennet), admiring each other's qualities (Jane and Mr. Bingley), taking care of each other's needs (Lydia and Mr. Wickham) and respecting each other's priorities (Charlotte and Mr. Collins). Thus, if they can compromise and make amends for their partners ways of lives, they can each be happy with their counterparts and in turn can lead a happily married life.

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