

Q.1 Discuss the appropriateness of the title *Pride and Prejudice*

Or

Elizabeth and Darcy as well as other characters in the novel are closely related to the theme of pride and prejudice. Discuss.

Or

Do you consider the title of the novel to be the right one or does it only suggest a partial view of the theme?

Or

To say that Darcy is proud and Elizabeth prejudiced is to tell but half the story. Discuss.

Or

Justify the change of title from *First Impressions* to *Pride and Prejudice*.

Ans. Introduction

Pride and Prejudice was first written in 1797 under the title *First Impressions*. It was later revised and published under the title *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. Jane Austen took the title, and therefore, the theme, of this novel from Fanny Burney, who wrote of her novel *Cecilia*, 'The whole unfortunate business' was 'the result of *Pride and Prejudice*'.

In the novel, first impressions do play an important part : Elizabeth is misled in her judgement and estimate of both Darcy and Wickham. Her regard and sympathy for the latter and her hostility and prejudice against Darcy are due to first impressions. But when we study the novel deeply and seriously we can easily see that the title *Pride and Prejudice* is more apt and more befitting to it. The first impressions which the characters get of each other take up only the first few chapters. The novel is more about the

pride of Darcy and the prejudice of Elizabeth and the change of attitude in Darcy and Elizabeth's correction of her first impressions.

The Theme of Pride and Prejudice

At a superficial level, Darcy embodies pride — he is possessed by family pride. As Wickham tells Elizabeth he has a "filial pride, his pride in his father now dead" and as "brotherly pride, his pride in his sister Georgiana" Darcy himself says that his pride consists in being selfish and overbearing, caring for none beyond his own family circle, thinking meanly of all the rest of the world.

There is no doubt that he is a proud man. Nothing can excuse his remark about Elizabeth. "...tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me nor, indeed, the statement that "my good opinion once lost is lost for ever." His first appearance is appallingly insolent and we tend to agree with Mrs. Bennet's complaint. 'He walked here and he walked there, fancying himself so very great' and share with her the desire to see Mr. Darcy get a set down.

The set-down comes at Hunsford parsonage which is the climax of Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice. In the scene which has been built up to step by step, Darcy lays his proud heart at her feet and learns what she thinks of him. His proposal is eloquent on the subject of pride and rests primarily on his sense of her inferiority. He remains blind to the faults of Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley and is prepared to think meanly of those beneath him in social standing.

Darcy's pride piques Elizabeth and her prejudice stems from her feeling that he is all pride. Having been prejudiced against him by his refusal to dance with her, she wilfully misinterprets all his utterances, all his actions. Her prejudice clouds her usually clear judgement and she listens to Wickham's biased and slanderous account of Darcy with complete belief declaring Darcy to be 'abominable'. Blinded by prejudice she rejects his proposal.

It is at Rosings that their process of self-discovery starts. At Netherfield Park, Elizabeth's family — her mother and her sisters have seemed vulgar and ill-bred. At Rosings, Darcy is embarrassed by the vulgarity of his aunt Lady Catherine and realizes that refinement of manners is no monopoly of the elite, nor their depravity the bane of the low. His lesson is complete when he is totally humbled by Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal. Confident of being accepted

her rejection makes him realize his misplaced pride in the acquirements which cannot please the woman he loves. This excessive love for Elizabeth is what cures Darcy of his pride and humbling himself he writes an explanatory letter to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's prejudice is neutralized by the revelation of Darcy's character. Her moment of self-awakening comes on receipt of Darcy's letter. Learning the truth about Wickham, she realizes her own blindness and prejudice in having judged Darcy and Wickham on mere first impressions. She is able too, to see the validity of some of his objections to the Jane-Bingley marriage. From the housekeeper's testimony, at Pemberley, she learns that Darcy's austerity of manner, stems partly from an inordinate shyness and she is further softened towards Darcy. The Lydia-Wickham episode brings the final reconciliation, with Darcy having overcome his pride completely to involve himself in the Bennets' disgrace and have for his brother-in-law the man he most despises. This overwhelms Elizabeth and cures her of her initial prejudice against him. She recognizes that Darcy was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her.

Pride and Prejudice — not the only Theme

However, to say that Darcy is proud and Elizabeth is prejudiced is to tell but half the story. The fact is both Darcy and Elizabeth are proud as well as prejudiced. The novel makes clear the fact that Darcy's pride leads to prejudice and Elizabeth's prejudice stems from a pride in her own perceptions. Darcy is proud of his social superiority and refinement and this leads him to have a general prejudice against people beneath him in the social hierarchy. Elizabeth's prejudice on the other hand stems from her pride. Her pride is offended when Darcy refuses to dance with her and this leads her to be prejudiced against him. In the proposal scene there is an ironic reversal as Darcy accuses Elizabeth of hurt pride while Elizabeth accuses him of prejudice against Wickham, Jane and in general against people who do not fit into his social world. Both suffer from the faults of pride and prejudice, but they are also the necessary defects of desirable merits: self-respect and intelligence.

It is true that Jane Bennet and Bingley are not part of the theme of *Pride and Prejudice* but their love is an important link in the novel and without it the story cannot be complete. Jane is a specimen of faultless beauty and she is free from all the vices of Elizabeth's temperament — she is neither

willing to see good in everyone. Similarly Bingley is easy going and friendly and has none of the haughtiness, pride or cold reserve of Darcy. But both Jane and Bingley are simple characters and are not sufficiently profound. It is the intricate characters of Darcy and Elizabeth that hold our interest and exemplify the theme and title of the novel.

The Theme of *Pride and Prejudice* in Minor Characters

Darcy and Elizabeth are of course, the pivotal characters but the subsidiary characters also tend to demonstrate further aspects of the main themes. Thus, we have the theme of pride and its adjunct flattery and sycophancy repeated in the characterization. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a hilarious caricature of the same faults of pride and prejudice. She has all the pride of family and position that Darcy has plus an unfailing sense of her own personal superiority, which prejudices her against Elizabeth. Mr. Collins is a mixture of obsequiousness and pride. He is a sycophant, an out and out flatterer of Lady Catherine. Mrs. Bennet has a pride in her daughters and in her stupidity develops a prejudice against Darcy stronger and more blind than Elizabeth's. Miss Bingley says rightly of Elizabeth that she is a mixture of pride and impertinence but the fact is that Miss Bingley herself and her sister Mrs. Hurst, are only further representations of precisely these qualities.

The Aptness of the Title

The title *Pride and Prejudice* is thus, very apt and points to the theme of her novel. The novel goes beyond a mere statement of first impressions and explores in depth the abstract qualities of pride and prejudice — how they grow and how they can be overcome. This theme is worked out through not only her pivotal characters Darcy and Elizabeth but also through the various minor characters. Jane and Bingley do not, it is true, represent these qualities but by contrast they throw into relief the obstacles that pride and prejudice bring in the lives of Elizabeth and Darcy. Alliterative and pithy— it is a title which does complete justice to the theme and subject of the novel.