
(I am presently reading the same and have covered around 50 chapters. Hence, the review below is of the book I have read)

Jane Austen (16 December 1775 – 18 July 1817) was an English novelist, who used realism, biting social commentary and free indirect speech in her novels. Austen's works are more or less affected by her background, place and time. They critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the eighteenth century and are part of the transition to nineteenth-century realism. Austen's plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. One of the strongest influences on her writing and her works are concerned with moral issues.

Pride and Prejudice follows the life of Elizabeth Bennet, a headstrong, intelligent woman. Taking place in the early 1800's it is a romantic comedy about the pride of a man and the prejudice of a woman. In a time where the only way for a woman to become wealthy, or increase her social status is by marrying, there is the family of Bennets. The fact that the Bennet family has no son and five adolescent daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Lydia and Kitty, are arguably middle-class affects their social behaviour.

The events begin with the arrival of the Bingley’s in Hertfordshire where the Bennets lived. The Bennet girls and Mr. Bingley were introduced at a dance and right away Mr. Bingley took a liking to Jane. Mr. Darcy is a close friend of Mr. Bingley and is also present in the party. His unusual reserved laconic attitude is taken and understood by the social gathering as improper and pompous, particularly Elizabeth. Ironically, he begins to like her. Events lead Mr. Bingley to fall in love with Jane. However, Mr. Darcy is circumspect and believes Jane isn’t in love but after money, and so tears them apart. Following long periods of no interaction between the families, the Bennets give up hope of Jane’s marriage and are depressed, especially Mrs. Bennet whose sole aim in life is successful marriage of her daughters.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham can be said to be as the villains. Their introduction brings about difficulties in lives of the Bennets, particularly the latter who cheats Lydia, the youngest Bennet, into love and runs away and later demanding money for their marriage, so as to avoid notoriety to the Bennet family. Among these events Elizabeth is proposed by Mr. Darcy and she, ignorant of the truth and full of hatred towards him, refuses him coldly. However, she later comes to know the true character of Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy, and regrets her past actions and prejudices.

The plot and story is quite simple. The events bring about to the reader the prevalent custom among families, men and women. “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. And, of course, a single woman in search of a good fortune must equally be in want of a husband who has one!” These lines seem true for all the characters in the book, be it Miss Jane, or relatively rich Miss Darcy. The story focuses on the social problems concerning young girls of diverse characters, be it optimistic Jane, prudent Elizabeth, introvert Mary and Kitty, or the ignorant flirt Lydia.

The described context may not be found in western countries today, but such situations can be discovered in developing parts of India. The superb catering of guests and other formalities certainly
be absent from today’s society, but a family of five daughters only may very well face similar problems and public humiliation due to improper conducts similar to that by Miss Lydia Bennet. The book in itself doesn’t convey a message, but asks of its readers for develop their own understanding.

The language of the novel is quite plain and verbose at times, rendering the reading monotonous as is the case with most feminist novels. However, one cannot expect a feminist book written in typical Dan Brown suspense fashion in 1813. Personally, I won’t recommend the novel to others, primarily because there are thousand others worth reading first. Even ‘Catcher in the Rye’ on first read makes more sense than ‘Pride and Prejudice’.

Abhinav Pandey
B. Tech in Mechanical Engg.
060301
Book review submission, Course: Indian Novel