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PRESTIGIOUS HEROINE OF JANE AUSTEN

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ABSTRACT

Today Feminism is an interesting topic to be analysed since the process has been started long ago. This paper gives a brief pen picture about the feministic aspect of Jane Austen and her Self-Esteemed Heroine, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. British women novelists have been portraying women in various manifestations. Among them Jane Austen is quite artistic in portraying her heroine characters with immense charm, courageous and spiritfull. She is remarkable for depicting the society of manners yet there is much to be understood how she exposes the men's attitude towards women in her age. Though her novels had won so many triumphs, and unfolded so many rare experiences and mighty passions since Jane Austen's time, readers find pleasure in the familiar little world of her novels because of the abiding charm of her characterization, particularly in regard to her women. It is almost universally admitted that she does not succeed so well in the delineation of her men in the portrayal of her women. This is a small attempt to recollect the golden writing of Jane Austen's feministic approach in British Fiction.

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FEMININE VIEW POINT

Jane Austen, like her predecessors, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and other women novelists of the period, exemplifies the feminine point of view in fiction. Before the advent of women novelists, the novel of manners had been cultivated by men. Among them, Richardson had gained the reputation of interpreting the feminine mind with tolerable success. After the bloom of women novelists, the outlook is entirely reversed. For the first time, the world is presented in fiction as it appears to a woman.

On the other hand, the heroines of the novels become the centre around which the men revolve. The most important aspect of a man's character is whether he promises to do well as a husband. While the novels in the past had not only written by men but also written for men, the novels of Burney and her followers were primarily for the women. Thus Jane Austen and her predecessors all created for novel a wholesome moral atmosphere.

JANE AUSTEN'S PORTRAYAL OF HEROINES

Jane Austen's world is small, yet she is capable to produce variety of women characters in her novels. Even though she creates weak characters like Mrs. Bennet, her creation of heroines are awesome. Her heroines

are always good and attractive. Elizabeth firmly repudiates Collins. Fanny Price rejects Crawford. Anne Elliot refuses to have her crafty cousin. The words in which they express themselves are not less eloquent than their actions. Similarly, Emma, Catherine and Marianne Dashwood are in no way less nobler than the other heroines. Though Jane Austen belongs to an era of women suppression, she boldly portrays her predominating roles of women in a more prestigious manner. None of her heroines are persuaded by the wish of heroes. All her male characters are finely designed alike the Victorian men but the females never behave so.

ELIZABETH BENNET IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Jane Austen pictures Elizabeth Bennet as "Strong and intelligent, yet bewitching in a completely feminine way." Her strength of character, moral integrity, great intelligence and an attractive personality make her unique among other heroines of Jane Austen. Critics have compared her with Shakespeare's Beatrice of "Much Ado About Nothing." Saintsbury regards her as "one of the five heroines of nineteenth century literature. Bardly says, "I am meant to fall in love with her and I do."

The strength of her personal integrity is highly evident in her refusal of Darcy's first marriage proposal. Darcy too finds her bewitching because she is so different from other women. No doubt many women he knows covet his wealth and status. They flatter him and agree with him to gain his favour. But Elizabeth wants to marry for love and is unimpressed by Darcy's material possession and social status.

Elizabeth is also intelligent in that she is clear-headed and astute. She sees through Caroline Bingley's hypocrisy in proclaiming her affection for Jane and yet working against her interests in trying to keep her brother away from Jane. In this matter Jane is initially contrast to Elizabeth and finally admits "It must have been his sister's doing."

Elizabeth also possess moral strength. She constantly tries to restrain Lydia's frivolity and innocence. When Lydia interrupts Collins' reading aloud of a sermon, Elizabeth bids her to hold her tongue. She strongly feels the impropriety and shame of Lydia's constant and avid seeking out of male attention and company. When Lydia wishes to go Brighton, She tries to prevent further degeneration of Lydia's character and morals, and the consequent endangering of her family's respectability.

In the midst of timid women characters like Mrs. Bennet, Kitty, Mary and Lydia, Elizabeth is powerful in her character who is tested and proven under difficult circumstances. That's why Miss Austen, herself states: "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print:" In all, Elizabeth is highly worthy of praise and proves as Jane Austen's best prestigious heroine.

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