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Vivekananda College

Thakurpukur

Topic- Irony in Pride and prejudice

Semester - 4

Department - English

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Irony is basically a contrast between appearance and reality. Jane Austen uses irony to bring compactness and subtlety to her narrative, to give depth to her characterization and in order to give a comic touch to the presentation of life.

The theme itself brings out ironically the contrast between intricacy and simplicity in respect to the various characters on the basis of their response to marriage and money. The intricate characters, Darcy and Elizabeth, are contrasted with Jane and Bingley, to bring out the latter's 'lacklustre' love relationship. Darcy and Elizabeth have depth, thus they have pride and prejudice and they go through the uneven course of a tumultuous journey to recognize their love for each other. Simplicity ironically does not help and thus Bingley and Jane are less assertive and easily influenced, thereby courting



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trouble not prompted from within but from without.

The tone of the narrative itself is ironic beginning with the first sentence which unfolds an aphorism that echoes a rampant social problem, i.e. marriage of girls. The irony of the young man or eligible bachelor being the hunted one rather than the hunter adds to the truth of the aphoristic statement of the first line. The materialistic overtone can be deciphered from the irony of statements like "rightful" property in the context of the young man or Mrs. Bennet's "business" in life was to get her daughters married. The irony becomes extended when we come to know that she has no discernment about the young man, be it Collins or Wickham. The ironic tone can be spotted in the use of "fine" ladies while bringing out the vanity and conceitedness of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley. The comic irony



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latent in many statements, Mr. Bennet regarding Wickham - I defy even Sir William Lucas to produce a more valuable son in law-actually derogating both Collins and Wickham, are examples of how Austen entwines irony with almost every sentence and situation in the novel.

Pride and Prejudice abounds with situational irony. Darcy's caustic first comment about Elizabeth and his gradual enchantment for her as the situation of Jane's illness brings him more in her proximity, on the one hand, he removes Bingley from a marriage alliance with the vulgar Bennet family but himself gets involved in exactly the same family, are examples of Austen's dexterous handling of irony. Some other situations would be, Collins proposes to Elizabeth when she is intensely infatuated with Wickham and most importantly, Darcy proposes to her when her



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heart is most embittered about him for instrumenting the separation of Bingley and Jane. When the militia departs from Meryton, it is supposed to have put an end to Lydia's flirtatation but the end result is her elopement with Wickham. Consequently, the elopement is supposed to further distance Darcy because of his pride in his aristocracy, but it helps to renegotiate their relationship and gives Darcy the opportunity to bring out his innate elite quality .

The characters and their dialogues are also steeped in irony. Elizabeth takes pride in her ability to study characters, specially intricate ones, she even complains that Jane is too good for not being able to see any negatives in any one. Ironically, Elizabeth herself is unable to study characters who are in close proximity, Charlotte and Wickham . She lacks the objectivity required in the study of character and later recognizes her blindness



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infused by prejudice in the case of Darcy. Irony also lurks behind Darcy's first proposal, the irony of privilege has left him blind to the self esteem of the character, despite her humbler social status. Wickham is graceful and polished, yet he turns to be the villain of the novel . Austen with this galore of characterization, is pointing out the incongruities in human nature. The dialogues too have ironical overtones, Mr. Bennet's sarcastic humour at the expense of his wife and younger daughters, much of Elizabeth's wit is from her ability to employ irony. Many of her comments are overloaded with irony, specially when she is engaged with Darcy. Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet are the fools against whose fixity, the intricate qualities of pride and prejudice are measured.

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The novel employs irony as an instrument of moral vision too. It contrasts marriage based on physical beauty (Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Lydia and Wickham), marriage based on economic pressure (Charlotte and Collins) against the importance of love and esteem as the basis of a sound marriage (Darcy and Elizabeth).



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