

**The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches**  
**Dr. Aruni Mahapatra**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**  
**Lecture - 17**

***Pride and Prejudice: Textual Analysis***

Hello learners. This is the sixth video in which we are continuing our discussion of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. In the previous lecture, I briefly introduced the household of Sir William Lucas, who are the immediate neighbours of the Bennets, and I described how in Sir William Lucas's life and career, we see a counterpart to that of Mr. Bingley. We see a very different understanding of wealth and how wealth can translate or fail to translate into social capital or social power. For Sir William Lucas, it was not about wealth or rather it was not about wealth from trade, rather it was more about the kind of validation or recognition one received from royalty. And Sir William Lucas had decided to give up income from trade and settle as a knight. He had decided to give up a certain amount of wealth and translate whatever title he had received, that is, the knighthood, which made him 'Sir' William Lucas, and satisfy himself with more recognition, more proximity to royalty, and less in terms of absolute wealth.

And this also is signified in the last sentence of that quote, in which the narrator mentions that the proximity to St. James had made Sir William Lucas more courteous. Now, in this household as well there is a single woman who faces the same challenges, the same scarce opportunities and the same odds for survival really, which Mrs. Bennett's daughters face. This woman's name is Charlotte and in this lecture, we will understand how Charlotte's thinking on love and marriage and property and her decision work as a foil. They help us understand the path that many women took, but they clarify a path which the protagonist of this novel, that is Elizabeth Bennet, chooses and refuses not to take. So, we've described the first meeting of Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy and this very social event in which Mr. Darcy is identified as a disagreeable, dislikable, prideful, conceited man. The scene in which pride was established as, if not a sin, then a very, very bad thing to do and something which almost completely closes off any good and any future good outcome for Mr. Darcy. His pride is almost an unforgivable sin. Immediately after that, we are allowed to witness a conversation in which the daughters, the single women who are supposedly trying to win the hand of one or two of these single wealthy men, are having a conversation about the perceived pride of Mr. Darcy. And one of these women is Charlotte, who has a conversation with Elizabeth about Darcy's pride.

And this is how the novel describes it. Charlotte speaks first:

"His pride, said Miss Lucas, "does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud."

"That is very true", replied Elizabeth, "and I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mortified mine."

I will focus on this conversation at some length, but before I go on, I want to highlight the pragmatism inherent in Charlotte's understanding of pride. Charlotte notices that Darcy's behavior, his actions and the things Darcy said and the things he refused to say, what he did and what he refused to do, they very strongly signify that he was a proud and conceited man. While agreeing with these facts, Charlotte explains them and justifies them by referring to Darcy's background, the facts of Darcy's life. What are these facts? The fact is that he's a man with a great fortune. Not only that, he's also a fine young man, meaning he has a good appearance, he has a good personality and he has a good fortune. All of these things dispose Darcy to think highly of himself. Now, of course, he thinks maybe a bit too highly for himself. And that overreach, in Charlotte's view, is forgivable and justifiable. It is justifiable because as a man, he has a right to do that. This is Charlotte's view. And Elizabeth, who we have just seen, is one of the most discerning, most critically aware, most objective and most considered observers, replies also in agreement with Charlotte's observation. Elizabeth says, "that is very true and I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mortified mine." And we have just seen, those of you who have read the novel thus far will remember that in that first meeting, when Darcy was perceived to be too proud, he had rejected and he had made a comment about Elizabeth as someone who smiles too much and who is not as handsome as some of the others. Which is to say, he had cast aspersions on Elizabeth's personality, demeanor, as well as her appearance. And Elizabeth had found out, she had overheard, and she remembers that now, and she uses that as her decision to not forgive Darcy's pride. And the assumption in this statement is that wealth by itself does not constitute the sole criteria for thinking highly of oneself. Although Elizabeth, as a single woman with no fortune, may have nothing with which to compete with Darcy in terms of wealth or income, there is something in Elizabeth as well which gives her as much right as Darcy to think highly of herself. While Darcy is not wrong to think highly of himself, he is certainly very wrong, and this sin is most unforgivable, the fact that he has mortified

Elizabeth's pride. Now, this conversation goes on and Mary, who is among the youngest of the Bennett sisters, makes a comment about pride, which I will read because it demonstrates a certain trend in literary publishing, a convention in the literary culture of 18th century England, which Austen was very aware of and to which Austen makes a response.

Mary makes contribution to this discussion of pride, whether it is justified or not, and how it can be perceived. Mary speaks:

"Pride", observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, "is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us."

Now, in the very first page, we have been introduced to Mary as someone who reads a lot. Mr. Bennett has introduced Mary as someone who reads many books and makes extracts. The 18th and 19th century English publishing scene were full of a great deal of innovations in printing. Because printing was a new thing and a lot of people were quite excited by the commodity of printed matter, people enjoyed buying books, reading books and storing and gifting books. You could say that the modern culture of book trade was inaugurated in 18th century England. One consequence of this exotic perception of print was that there was a trend of publishing extracts. Not only was there a trend of publishing extracts, but there was also a perception that the best way to read and understand a book was to make extracts of quotable or memorable portions from it. And Mary is one such reader. In fact, the narrator convinces us or conveys to her readers that Mary was an avid reader of books by the fact that she made extracts. What kind of books did Mary read? Among the books that were greatly popular in 18th century England were conduct books, books that describe the ideal behavior for men and women, but more importantly, which focused on how women should conduct themselves in order to both secure a husband and having secured a husband, having achieved matrimony, how they should conduct themselves and how they should manage their households in order to secure the well-being of their families. In this conduct literature, there was a great deal of advice on

emotional matters. And it is some such advice that Mary has read and which Mary is citing in this instance.

As you can tell, the distinction between pride and vanity is quite sensible, quite objective, and there's nothing disagreeable about it. But this paragraph has the quality of revealing a person who is quite impressed with what she has read and is quite excited by the knowledge that it gives her. And is quite happy to share this knowledge with others, even though it may be quite obvious to others, the fact that she's sharing. And additionally, it also clarifies exactly what Elizabeth and Charlotte have been talking about immediately before this passage, that yes, pride itself is not a bad thing. The fact that Darcy is perceived to be proud does not disqualify him from any human sympathy, rather it was his behavior towards others which has made him as disliked as he is at this point in the novel. A little bit later, it has become very clear to everyone that Mr. Bingley has a great deal of interest in Jane, who is among the elder of the Bennet sisters. And there's a conversation that Charlotte has with Elizabeth in which Charlotte, who we've just seen speak about Darcy as someone who has a right to be proud.

And I mentioned earlier that Charlotte seems to have a very practical notion of the value of wealth and how wealth can shape or dispose a man's behavior towards others. It is this individual Charlotte who gives some advice to Elizabeth and hopes that Elizabeth can pass this on to her sister Jane with regard to securing the hand of Mr. Bingley in marriage. And this is what Charlotte says:

"If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it she may lose the opportunity of fixing him and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all begin freely--a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better show more affection than she feels. Bingley likes her sister undoubtedly, but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on."

I just mentioned that there were a great deal of conduct books, books that sought to describe the ideal behavior, the most perfect kind of disposition, speech and action which women should display if they were to secure a wealthy man's hand in marriage. And Charlotte here is echoing some such advice when she advises Elizabeth that Jane should

not be so subdued or subtle in reciprocating Mr. Bingley's affections. She should be a little more forthright. She should be a little more public in her display of her preference and her affections for Mr. Bingley because the burden of this kind of emotional labor lies heavier on women. Because they stand to lose more if the object of their affection, in this case the wealthy man Mr. Bingley, remains ignorant of their affections and they also stand to gain more if the object of their affection understands exactly how they feel. So far so good. This seems to be a very practical advice. It seems to be a logical consequence of the financial and social inequality of which we have received enough evidence so far. And further, Charlotte explains and Charlotte speaks a sentence which is quite remarkable for being an extremely pithy explanation of the relationship between love and security. Charlotte writes and she's speaking about Jane and Mr. Bingley. "When she is secure of him, there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chooses."

So, in this sentence, we understand what love means and how love is not so much a coincidental, serendipitous circumstance of fate, but rather it is purely an effect of certain calculations. What are these calculations? The calculations are that Jane does not have a fortune. Bingley has a great fortune. Further, there are some more calculations as well. There is one Mr. Bingley, but there are many Bennet sisters. In addition to the Bennet sisters, there are other single women 'in want of a great fortune', to reverse the novel's opening sentence. And therefore, there is a great inequality. While there are at least five or six women who are vying for the hand of this one man, he is only one and they are many. This is a calculation. And within this calculated universe, Charlotte believes that Jane should first secure Bingley's affections and then she can go about falling in love at leisure. It seems to Charlotte in this sentence that the choice, the leisure of falling in love is a luxury that only certain people can afford. And in Charlotte's view, Jane is not someone who can afford that luxury.

Let us see how Elizabeth reacts to such a statement, such an understanding of a very calculated relationship between love and security. Jane replies,

"your plan is a good one, where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married. And if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane's feelings; she is not acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of the degree of her own regard, nor of its reasonableness."

So, Elizabeth's view is an extremely different view. It is pulled apart. It is almost a diametrical opposite to what Charlotte has just said. Let us try and understand the view that Elizabeth has just put forward. Jane's view or Jane's intention in this whole interaction, according to Elizabeth, and she assumes the right to speak on behalf of Jane. Jane's plan is not merely to secure a good marriage. And therefore, Charlotte's advice, Elizabeth feels, is misplaced. It would be good advice if Jane's intention was simply to get married. And Elizabeth puts it thus, if I were determined to get a rich husband or any husband. But Elizabeth argues that that is not Jane's desire. In fact, she is not acting by design. This view flies in the face of what Mrs. Bennett articulated on the very first page, which is this very ironic comment on design. Mrs. Bennett knows that nobody has any overt design and yet Mrs. Bennett feels that she can produce and impose a covert design. What is that covert design? The covert design is that Mr. Bingley will fall in love with one of her daughters and here we have that design slowly falling into place. We see that there is a great deal of potential for Mrs. Bennet designed to achieve its purpose without looking like it was designed. And the difference between Charlotte's and Elizabeth's views are that Charlotte has taken the facts too literally and has created a design and a script based on the facts, based on the scarcity and the inequality. And we can say that Charlotte's view is a highly economic understanding of love and decides that love can be a luxury that can be indulged in once the material scarcity has been solved. On the other hand, Elizabeth's view is a much more holistic understanding of love. Love is not simply security, love is not simply a luxury, but rather love is the means to a hope for happiness. And here Elizabeth feels that, like herself, Jane too does not have the goal of being married to a wealthy husband, rather the larger goal is to find a degree of happiness from life and for which marriage to a husband or a rich husband may be one means of securing the same.

Now, in response to this very different understanding of happiness, luxury, love and material comfort, Charlotte says this,

"I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him to-morrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness, as if she were to be studying his character for a twelve-month. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always contrive to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of

vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."

We see, in addition to being an economic understanding of love, in which love is a luxury, Charlotte also has a very cynical understanding of marriage. And not just a cynical understanding of marriage, but it is a cynical understanding of interpersonal relationships as well. It is cynical because Charlotte believes that even though people may appear to be compatible before marriage, they continue to grow incompatible in small and imperceptible degrees after marriage. Therefore, "happiness is entirely a matter of chance." And happiness cannot be made the goal of one's activity. Rather, the goal should be survival, the goal should be material comfort, the goal should be some source of wealth, property, etc., and later on happiness or its lack can be managed. This is a view that Charlotte Lucas articulates and here Charlotte is speaking for many women in Jane Austen's England. The point of this very sophisticated, very clearly expressed view and very well written and very easy to understand view is to establish one path that the novel describes some women as taking, but this is also the path that the novel gives us to understand that the protagonist Elizabeth does not take. Much later in the novel, and now this is the only instance in which we will fast forward a great deal to read a portion from the 22nd chapter. Much later in the novel, we see that Elizabeth receives a proposal of marriage from a person named Mr. Collins. This person, Mr. Collins, is a highly disagreeable character in many ways. I won't go into the details of exactly why Mr. Collins appears disagreeable, but the point is that Elizabeth refuses this proposal.

Immediately after Elizabeth refuses the proposal from Mr. Collins, he proposes to Charlotte and Charlotte accepts that proposal. When Elizabeth finds out that Charlotte has accepted this proposal, she is quite shocked. And this is what Charlotte says in response,

"I see what you are feeling", replied Charlotte,-- "you must be surprised, very much surprised,--so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

So, it seems to be a very statistically and mathematically very logical and persuasive argument. I say mathematically and statistically because Charlotte has always had a very practical view of happiness and also a very realistic view of the opportunities and more importantly the lack of opportunities that faced women like herself. An indication of irony and the way in which the narrator describes the accuracy and the persuasiveness of Charlotte's thought that readers can make up their own mind about whether this is in fact a true and a safe bet on happiness.

"I am not a romantic, you know I never was. I ask only a comfortable home and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast."

It seems that Charlotte knows that the only thing guaranteed by her acceptance of this proposal is a comfortable home. Anything more than that is left to fate. It's a gamble. And she is quite aware of that. She knows that it is a risk, but she also accepts that it is a better risk, that this state of risk, that this state of uncertainty, that the danger of being unhappy in a comfortable home, is a very good and doable and much better situation for her to be in than the lack of a comfortable home and the hope of happiness. If Charlotte were to reverse the situation, that would be much worse than what she has. So here is what Elizabeth has given up and here is what Charlotte has gained when Elizabeth refused Mr. Collins's proposal and Charlotte accepted it. Elizabeth has given up a comfortable home and she has gained the hope of happiness. On the other hand, Charlotte has given up the hope of happiness and she has gained a comfortable home. This is how it appears from the narrator's description of the scene. Of course, Elizabeth thinks, from Elizabeth's perspective, Charlotte has given up every chance of happiness. In fact, Charlotte has guaranteed for herself that while she gets a comfortable home, she will be condemned to unhappiness. However, it is left to the readers to decide whether the choice that Charlotte has made, whether it is in fact a good choice, whether it is in fact the right choice or the wrong choice. Now, of course, the narrator is also aware that no choice is perfect, that in fact choices are simply decisions that one makes to prioritize one thing and to subordinate another thing. So, Charlotte's choice is a decision to prioritize material comfort and to subordinate emotional or intellectual comfort.

Now, it is left to readers to decide whether this is a choice they would like Elizabeth to make or not and we will find out exactly how Elizabeth goes about making this choice in the subsequent lectures.