

# Austen, Adaptation and the Subcontinent: Postcolonial Critique in *Bride and Prejudice* and *Austenistan*

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**Abstract:** This article considers the adaptability of Jane Austen in South Asia by carefully and pragmatically comparing two contemporary adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). By focussing on *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) and *Austenistan* (2017) this article argues that Austen's universal themes can be translated into any cultural environment. It considers the time period in which both adaptations have been produced and demonstrates how family and dancing are used to for postcolonial critique. Ultimately, this article will establish the appeal behind Austen's timeless masterpiece, and where Austen is situated in contemporary South Asian culture.

*Keywords:* Jane Austen, postcolonial, adaptation

When Henry Austen wrote the first 'Biographical Notice' about his sister, Jane Austen, for the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818, he clearly thought his words would be the last on the subject: '[s]hort and easy will be the task of the mere biographer. A life of usefulness, literature and religion was not by any means a life of event' (Austen 29). As far as Austen's family was concerned, the story of her authorship was over, a few of her remaining letters were bequeathed as keepsakes, while others were simply destroyed or forgotten. The partiality of Austen's family served, what Kathryn Sutherland labels, as a 'mix of careful policing, rivalry and absence of information' (62) to protect her image and reputation. Austen's novels went out of print and her siblings aged and died secure in the belief that the public's curiosity regarding their beloved sister had been satisfied. Yet, more than two hundred years later, Austen's fame and readership have continued to grow worldwide. For literary scholars, her works inspire theoretical, historical and cultural approaches and continue to offer fresh insight into the literary criticism surrounding Jane Austen. She continues to be an important pedagogical influence and inspires an inexhaustible source of critical studies, explored and written from cross-disciplines. Popular appreciation for Austen varies from the modern-day reader to a committed Janeite, and her works are now considered to be part of both high culture and popular culture. Austen, put simply, has become a commercial phenomenon and cultural figure.

It is not feasible to prove that Austen's popularity is greater than any other author's of a literary 'classic' work, but it is possible to demonstrate the diverse and wide-ranging magnitude of her influence. Austen's presence in contemporary popular culture has often been observed and explored, and she is known as much through film and television adaptations of her stories as through the novels themselves – revered by non-readers, readers and scholars (2). Her six completed novels are among the best-known, best-loved and most-read works in the English language. Austen's works have been translated into a multitude of languages; her novels have sold millions of copies worldwide and continue to be printed today. Many critics, like Claudia L. Johnson, have suggested that the reason for this is because her plots and themes provide a refuge for readers when the contemporary world becomes too much for them. Austen is pertinent because her novels focus on issues that continue to dominate many people's lives today. Her universal themes, such as class, courtship and family, contain timeless insights about human nature and can be translated into any cultural environment, ranging from twenty-first century British culture to contemporary South Asian culture.

In the words of Joseph Conrad, ‘what is all this about Jane Austen? What is there *in her*? What is it all about?’ This question has insightfully been addressed in recent years by several scholars such as Claire Tomalin and Rachel M. Brownstein. Though Rudyard Kipling considered her ‘England’s Jane’, she is now, in fact, everyone’s Jane as she is part of today’s multilingual and multicultural society. Adaptations of her novels have been produced in both the West and East. The beauty of Austen’s novels lies partly in their clever opacity, complex irreducibility and witty manner, which has led to their adaptation for screen several times over the years. John Wiltshire, in his introduction to *Recreating Jane Austen*, claimed ‘[r]emaking, rewriting, “adaptation”, reworking, “appropriation”, conversion, mimicking (the proliferation of terms suggests how nebulous and ill-defined is the arena) of earlier work into other media is an important feature of the current landscape’ (2). In contrast, Andrew Wright believes the reason why her works have ‘often been tampered with’ (421) is because it renders ‘Austen in a dialect or patois intended to entice the demi-literature or those of presumably short attention spans’ (Ibid). Although my view is not quite as cynical as Wright’s, he is correct in suggesting that the tampering, so to speak, of her works is targeted with a certain audience in mind. Fundamental elements of Austen’s plot, such as class and gender, will inevitably be adapted to appeal to the audience. However, there is an ongoing debate whether Austen’s works need to be adapted as certain audiences can already identify with the structure, plots and characters of her novels. Claire Harman has claimed that

an article in the Jane Austen Society Report for 1962 showed that the pupils of a school in Nigeria had no trouble understanding the marital imperative of *Pride and Prejudice* [...] *Bride and Prejudice*, Gurinder Chadha’s 2004 Bollywood adaptation of the story, tapped into the same relevance to contemporary Sikhs – a relevance lost to contemporary Westerners (245)

Amar Nath Prasad expresses a similar view to Harman on this debate. He states that Austen portrayed ‘women in Great Britain [as] never socially or traditionally bound like Indian women [...] their suffering is not so intense or heart-touching like that of Indian women because of the liberty they enjoy’ (14). Prasad is suggesting that Indian culture is the only one to suffer from traditional and social expectations, while Harman is claiming that marital imperative is a significant concept lost to contemporary Westerners. In doing so, Harman is indicating that, ultimately, only Sikhs can identify with this theme in an Austen novel like *Pride and Prejudice*. This is simply not true; marriage is seen as an obligatory communion for South Asia, including both Indians and Pakistanis – Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike. The appeal of adapting Austen is that her novels focus on themes that are identifiable: love, happiness, heartbreak and societal pressures. The social restrictions seen in her novels have been adapted – from an interracial romance in *Bride and Prejudice* to single, modern Londoner in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* – to increase its appeal so it continues to be contemporary and relevant. These two different, but overlapping, cultures inform this essay, which seeks to examine how subcontinent narratives, such as *Bride and Prejudice* and *Austenistan*, introduce critiques of the West by using Austen’s universal themes such as family and class. The purpose of my essay is to extend and update our understanding of the growing body of Austen centred fiction by South Asian women and women of South Asian descent, as well as Austen’s contemporary cultural popularity, by drawing on Felicity James’ argument that Austen adaptations and retellings demonstrate ‘how her writing continues to thrive across boundaries of period, genre and place [while] she continues to be firmly located in a very specific English landscape’ (132), ultimately asking how is Austen situated in South Asian contemporary culture?

There has been a subcontinent Austen phenomenon emerging in recent times through the form of screen adaptations and literary fan fiction, whereby her recurrent themes – family pressure, gender inequality and tension between love and economic standing – have become a particular strong contemporary resonance. South Asian cinematic adaptations have been produced for three different Austen novels: *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (*Sense and Sensibility*), *Bride and Prejudice* (*Pride and Prejudice*) and *Aisha* (*Emma*). In the last year alone, there have been a plethora of

publications by authors of Indian and Pakistani descent. They have reworked Austen's stories so that they are now set in a contemporary South Asian society – either in India, Pakistan or as immigrants living in the West. Sonali Dev's novel, *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors*, is set among wealthy Indian immigrants in San Francisco; *Ayesha at Last* by Uzma Jalaluddin is based during the midst of the Muslim Diaspora in Toronto; *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal is set in contemporary Pakistan while *Austenistan*, a collection of seven short stories edited by Laaleen Sukhera, includes both contemporary Pakistan and the West. Sukhera points out that the subcontinent Austen resurgence is due to the fact that 'Austen's world is our world; in Pakistan, we often feel as if we're caught between the twenty-first century and the Regency. We don't just empathize with the social pressures and constraints that the Bennets and the Dashwoods endure; we live them' (488).

In 2014, Sukhera founded the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan, which began as a small literary circle consisting of middle-upper class Pakistani women who shared a mutual love of Regency era fiction. Originally known as the Jane Austen Society of Islamabad – the city where Sukhera resided – interest soon spread throughout the country and the name changed so that it was more inclusive. Labelling the society a 'journey of possibilities', Sukhera discovered that Austen's world was much like her own and that of other Pakistani women. The society's humble beginnings have led to a socio-cultural movement that inspired dialogue, celebrated Austen's work and produced a literary homage in the form of *Austenistan*. Inspired by characters and settings from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Lady Susan*, *Austenistan's* seven short stories are all set in contemporary Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and England and have been written by members of the society. Reworking old classics, the stories all detail modern-day Pakistani women 'de-exoticizing representations of Pakistani and South Asian women while channeling candor, humor, and sensitivity in a manner that we hope Ms. Austen would approve of' (Sukhera 487). Though the settings are contemporary, the problems encountered by the Regency-era heroines closely parallel the society Sukhera and her co-authors experience in Pakistan and the book explores the implications of combining Austen with South Asian popular culture. In her foreword to *Austenistan*, Caroline Jane Knight writes that this book 'is an anthology inspired by Austen's writings, characteristics, and settings, written by women who, in many ways, have far more in common with Jane's world than modern western readers' (x). This is achievable because the characters and themes of her novels can be perfectly structured within a contemporary Pakistani society. The seven short stories that appear in *Austenistan*, all told in first-person narrative, vary in tone but certain themes pervade in each: the omnipresence and imposition of marriage, matchmaking and courtship, the preoccupation with materialistic and superficial aspects of a person's character and appearance, the preference for and familiarity with Western culture and the insertion of, and commentary on, social situations.

Like *Austenistan*, *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) explores the implications of combining Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) with South Asian popular culture. The film's director, Gurinder Chadha, suggests this is achievable because the characters and themes of *Pride and Prejudice* can be perfectly structured within a contemporary Indian society:

[t]he combination is possible since the themes of Jane Austen's novels are a perfect fit for a Bollywood film. I chose *Pride and Prejudice* because I feel 200 years old, England was no different than Amritsar today. Once I had set up the idea that the Bennets would become the Bakshis from Amritsar, it was easy to adapt the novel (Marhur).

It is clear to understand that Chadha's own experience has led her to believe that India is no different from the Regency Period. One of the reasons for this is the way in which South Asian society view marriage. It is regarded as a culturally and socially approved relationship between a man and woman and seen as a social institution, wherein individuals make a commitment to one another, and therefore, legitimise a sexual and economic union. This is similar to, if not exactly like, the view held by Austen's society, who believed women must marry a man with a good

fortune in order to have a secure and comfortable life. The opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates people's attitude towards marriage: '[i]t is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (Austen 5). This establishes the framework for the narrative of courtship and class issues that will serve to pervade the story. Like Austen, the film's title *Bride and Prejudice* suggests instantly a strong gravitation towards a subject of marriage. Therefore, both societies focus on the relationship between marriage, money and social status, which is why *Bride and Prejudice* is able to adapt the novel in a convincing manner, and fit within the context of 1790s English society. In spite of this several aspects of *Pride and Prejudice* have been changed to accommodate the transference from the eighteenth-century English countryside to twenty-first-century India, and it is these adjustments, such as the adherence to Bollywood convention, adaptation of class, the role of the father and the critique of the West.

*Bride and Prejudice* is set in modern day Amritsar, London and Los Angeles. The scope of the locations enables Chadha to critique the West, particularly America, in several aspects. By recasting the role of Bingley as a British-Indian, Chadha is representing Britain in terms of its immigrant identity, while white British identity has been reduced to a single character- Johnny Wickham. However, *British identity is evident throughout the visuals of the film. England is first identified by a panning shot that covers everything from Big Ben to the mosque, and later Buckingham Palace is seen in the distance through a window.* Recasting Fitzwilliam Darcy as an American entrepreneur distinguishes the re-envisioning of white British imperial identity strongly in the film and, in doing so, Chadha effectively shifts the focus from Britain to the U.S. She insists the reason for this is she did not 'want Darcy to be English, [...] because of Colin Firth and his performance in the BBC television adaptation' as she 'did not want to put that pressure on a British actor' (Aftab 2004). Despite this, it is clear to see that by casting Darcy as an American, the U.S is now targeted as being the imperial power, with London being no more than a stopover from Amritsar to Los Angeles.

*Bride and Prejudice* was released in 2004, a year after the invasion of Iraq and a time were America was not looked upon in a favourable manner. Chadha adapts Austen's critique of the patriarchal family to critique the contemporary Western world. By celebrating the family to critique the West, Chadha portrays the Bakshi family as having both a narrative and moral core. Will Darcy acknowledges the superiority, and unity, of the Indian family lifestyle. When asked what he likes about Indian culture, he replies: 'I think it's nice the way the families come together' and contrasts this with his own dispersed, broken family. Chadha's focus on the family unit is, in part, due to Bollywood conventions. Bollywood places an emphasis on an individual's social life and structures the 'characters in a web of social relations of which kin are the most significant' (Granti 77). Lars Eckstein has acknowledged that the 'revival of Austen's works and the world of Bollywood cinema are hardly incompatible as a first glance would suggest, but rather that they are in several respect an ingenious match' (51). Austen's views on society are compatible with the ideologies, structures and plots that are created by mainstream Bollywood films (Eckstein 46). Bollywood films usually re-establish the values of a typically middle-class family as love interests are integrated into the cultural norm (Ibid). For example, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...!* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2003) are three of the most popular films of the last twenty years. All three films express family values as being, ultimately, more influential than romance. This is very similar to Austen's moral universe wherein individual love and desire is subordinate to moral values and rules of conduct. In fact, it is possible to view *Bride and Prejudice* without any prior knowledge of Austen as its characters and narrative pattern are entirely inclusive within a well-established Bollywood tradition.

Families within many of Austen's works are hardly utopian and as Claudia Johnson has shown, a significant part of Austen's critique lies in her interrogation of the supposedly benevolent institution of the family: 'fathers, sons, and brothers [...] may be selfish, bullying and unscrupulous' (10). Critics have commented that adaptations, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, foreground heterosexual

romance at the expense of feminist critique in what Deborah Kaplan describes as ‘the harlequinization of Jane Austen’ (178). Kaplan explains that the ‘focus [of] a hero and heroine’s courtship [is] at the expense of other characters’ (Ibid). Ultimately, a modern Western audience seem to favour heterosexual romance over family. However, *Bride and Prejudice* is quite the opposite: it foregrounds family over heterosexual romance. It significantly recasts the Bennet family, in particular its patriarch, and presents Mr Bennet as a sensitive and kind father whose role in the family’s misfortune is continually downplayed. For example, the law of entail is at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*. Upon Mr Bennet’s death, Longbourn– the family’s estate– will be ‘entailed in default’ (Austen 27) and passed into the possession of Mr Collins, which is why ‘[t]he business of [Mrs Bennet’s] life was to get her daughters married’ (Austen 7). However, the film erases Mr Bennet’s role in his daughter’s financial plight and omits the nature of entail altogether; the Bakshi family’s financial situation is a function of the global economy and Mr Bakshi’s commitment to India. In the film women are protected by the family structure, but in the novel women’s economic disenfranchisement occurs precisely through the patriarchal family system. *Bride and Prejudice* has removed the patriarch from direct responsibility for the poverty of women and, in doing so, removes a fundamental element of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The depiction of the family is due to *Bride and Prejudice*’s post-colonial critique. Chadha has explicitly spoken about the film touching ‘on American imperialism, the way the West looks at India and what people regard as backward or progressive’ and ‘question[s] the audience’s Eurocentric attitudes’ (Aftab). By contrasting the cohesive Indian family (the Bakshis) with the fragmented Western family (the Darcys), the film is indicating that in its quest for material success, the West has lost its sense of family. The closeness of the Bakshis is part of the film’s challenge of U.S superiority. To emphasize this point, the film has removed the characters of Mr and Mrs Gardiner, who in the novel are an implicit critique of Mr and Mrs Bennet. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Gardiners play an important role as uncle and aunt, for they give Elizabeth advice, comfort and practical assistance that ought to be forthcoming from her parents. In order for *Bride and Prejudice* to maintain its idealisation of Mr Bennet, the Gardiners are completely left out. Beth Lau has argued that ‘Austen’s happy endings feature utopian communities, much like those in other Romantic texts, in which a perfectly matched couple and a handful of like-minded friends create a society, with the unworthy kept at bay’ (264). Elizabeth and Darcy do just this. They establish their life away from the Bennets, with Jane and Mr Bingley soon following suit, they,

remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to her mother and Meryton relations was not desirable even to *his* easy temper, or *her* affectionate heart [...] he brought an estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other (Austen 310).

In the final paragraph of the novel, the reader is told that: ‘[w]ith the Gardiners, they [Elizabeth and Darcy] were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them’ (Austen 312). The Gardiners are seen in a parental role, and this is important to the novel’s critique of the patriarchal family. The novel ends with the Gardiners in mind; however, as they have been excluded altogether from *Bride and Prejudice*, the film closes with Mr and Mrs Bakshi, sharpening Chadha’s point on family. Will Darcy looks over at Mr Bakshi for approval before embracing Lalita, indicating that Mr Bakshi is the patriarch of the family and his opinion is and always will be respected and valued. In addition, *Bride and Prejudice* has dramatically improved the characteristics of Mr Bennet’s personality. While in the novel, Mr Bennet consistently amuses himself at the expense of his wife, there is only one such instance during *Bride and Prejudice*. When Mrs Bakshi lectures her daughters on the importance of good behaviour during Mr Kholi’s visit, she says: ‘It’s very important to make a good impression. Stand straight. Smile. Don’t talk unnecessarily, and don’t say anything too intelligent’. Upon hearing this, Mr Bakshi mutters under his breath, ‘It’s a shame she only practices selectively what she preaches’. However, this is



said with a conspiratorial wink at one of his daughters. Apart from this one instance, he is consistently kind, and instead of exposing his wife to ridicule, two scenes are invented where he attempts to shield her from public embarrassment.

The art of dancing performs several important functions for both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bride and Prejudice*. Laurie Lyda has pointed out that '[d]ance patterns emulate courtship rituals, marking dance as a microcosm for courtship and marriage – two main themes of the novel'. As marriage was necessary in Austen's England, and a good match was considered essential, occasions to meet eligible men and women were limited. Assemblies and balls provided an arena for introductions, thereby facilitating the opportunity for courtships to be pursued. Peter Knox-Shaw has pointed out that during the Regency Period the quest for a social partner was uneasily saddled together with the life of civil refinement (86). To substitute his claim, Knox-Shaw cites a passage from Richard Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry* (1805), whereby Knight claims that dance is a form of expression to 'straddle these divided worlds' (Ibid). This is noticeable within the central courtship of *Pride and Prejudice*, when Sir William Lucas tries to persuade Darcy to dance and Darcy replies, 'Certainly, Sir; – and it has the advantages also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. – Every savage can dance.' (Austen 24). Darcy is dismissive towards dancing, associating the art with savages and carelessly betrays a pride in his performance at Meryton. His refusal to dance is dressed up in principle and rises from the determination to avoid any entanglement in what he considers to be inappropriate company. Subsequently, the issue of class is reinforced. The importance of dance is revealed in *Bride and Prejudice* in a similar manner. Asian weddings are joyous occasions that are epitomised by traditional dancing. The most frequent type of dance is Bhangra, which is generally related to the middle and lower classes of society. Bhangra is a dance that was constructed by Punjabi farmers to celebrate the coming of Vaisakhi – a Sikh festival, with specific moves of Bhangra reflecting the manner in which villagers farmed their land. Will Darcy sees Bhangra as being an 'easy dance' that looks like someone is 'screwing in a light bulb with one hand and patting a dog with the other'. Chadha is once again displaying the ignorance of Darcy, who has failed to respect the Indian culture. Therefore, Chadha has employed a similar scene from the original text to critique the West and exploit the clash of cultures.

In a similar manner, characters in *Austenistan* are expected to uphold standards of beauty that have been adopted from the West. These percolated ideals perpetuate a societal insecurity that they are, by nature, unattainable – the impossibility of attainment only enhances the desirability. Arguably, this contributes to the concept, though irreversibly intertwined, often stressed in the book that Pakistani and European society (in particular high-brow) should not mix. The paradox is evident in 'On the Verge' when Roya exclaims, "A bhangra? At your ball? At Avondon Hall?" [she] said, hoping the Gainsborough on the nearby wall couldn't hear [them]" (Sukhera 164). Roya's astonishment at her host's choice to perform a bhangra at a ball in the English countryside demonstrates the idea that Pakistani culture belongs in Pakistan. In contrast, with a special emphasis on education and imports being from abroad, Pakistan embraces the West. Roya further clarifies this belief by specifying that Avondon Hall was an additional basis for her incredulity. In Roya's view, the (fictional) Avondon Hall, a lavish estate formerly owned by Lady Avondon, is a quintessential specimen of British high society, and to perform bhangra dance in this unsuitable location exacerbates her dismay. Her consternation is especially significant given that, as the ball is a birthday celebration, bhangra dances are frequently performed in Pakistan for joyous occasions, like weddings or birthdays. By hoping that 'Gainsborough on the nearby wall couldn't hear', Roya is implying that bhangra is worthy of condescension. She is aghast at the thought of it and indicates that a pillar of high-brow western society should be disgraced to see such a dance performed in its presence. When bhangra dances, and other traditional Pakistani dances, are performed in the book while the characters are in Pakistan, there is no indication of inferiority or offense – only when performed internationally does there appear to be disdain. The perceived superiority of British customs and culture is evidenced throughout the short stories.

In 'Begum Saira Returns', some characters put-on a British accent because they believe that this will elevate them in society. This strengthens the argument that Pakistani society consider British characteristics to be vastly appealing as it will help them reach the social status they desire. Moreover, Islamabad housewives praise the popular tailor, Raiz, in 'The Autumn Ball' for his ability to 'replicate Western clothing' (Warnasuriya 120). The protagonist, Samina, in 'Only the Deepest Love' bitterly describes the postcard of her estranged father, and his young British wife, Rebecca, as a picture of 'sunny first-world happiness' (Rehman 140). Each one of these instances is preserved with the image of the unattainable. The accent and clothing are inauthentic and copies of their superior originals. Samina's bitterness stems more from the nature of her father's new life than its general existence. Her father's new wife met him when she left England 'to intern as a reporter and experience 'exotic' Pakistan' (Ibid). Her attitude towards Pakistan exhibits feelings of superiority promulgated by western visitors. When she marries Samina's father, the couple move to England where they enjoy 'sunny first-world happiness', a state which Samina herself cannot secure. The comparative dominance of 'first-world' England and 'exotic' Pakistan demonstrates the social tension between the two cultures and establishes a subcontinent narrative which depicts the superiority of western culture above their own.

*Bride and Prejudice* also shows cultural difference as the foremost source of social tension through the uneasy courtship of the Indian Lalita Bakshi and American Will Darcy, the character of the Americanised Mr Kholi, and the seduction of Lalita's sister Lakhi by the young Englishman Johnny Wickham. Chadha does this by combining the British and South Asian culture. This can be seen most prominently within the character of Johnny Wickham, who immerses deep within Indian society, more so than Darcy, yet his relaxed British sexual mores nearly corrupt Lakhi. This subplot is the only feature within the film that significantly differs from Austen's novel. The de-escalation of the affair is required for a happy ending that ties in with Bollywood convention. However, arguably it avoids isolating Diaspora and Indian audiences in terms of culture and gender, and therefore, as Chadha has stated, 'show a multicultural blend in the film [...] on a global level and make it popular'. There are two further characters in the film that combine both cultures: Balraj (Bingley) and Kiran (Caroline Bingley) who are British citizens of South Asian ancestry. Balraj and Kiran are hugely wealthy, Oxford educated and, as Stephanie Jones points out, 'there is some sort of postcolonial challenge in the film's easy assumption of their sense of aristocratic nationality' (178). Consequently, this reading portrays reclaiming the throes of colonialism by firstly reducing it to one character of questionable morals and secondly, using it to celebrate migration and the success of multicultural upward mobility.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote about the British and French empires as being 'whatever is good or bad about places at home is shipped out and assigned comparable virtue and vice aboard' (79). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that after two hundred years of British rule, the 'virtues and vices' of English culture have disseminated its way throughout India and Pakistan. It is evident why women of the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan connect so directly to Austen – British culture incorporated into Pakistani culture through centuries of imperialism, which is preserved and displayed in Austen's novels. It also explains why, despite feminist strides, the short stories that appear in *Austenistan* end with the 'accession to stability' through the prospect of marriage for the heroines. The novel, as expressed by Said, projects a 'knowable community of Englishmen and women' which 'shaped the idea of England in such a way as to give identity, presence [and] ways of reusable articulation'. Novels, such as Austen's, not only reflect their culture, but are also instrumental factors in creating culture. By imbedding the society into writing, Austen's word transcend geographic and era specific boundaries to become 'reusable' – not only in literal reinterpretations, such as *Austenistan* and *Bride and Prejudice*, but also in daily life. Austen's plots, which convey an attainable quality of life, are conceivable and her characters and situations familiar. This has resulted in establishing modern connections in her work and, as one Jane

Austen of Society of Pakistan member pointed out, reading Austen's novels has helped Pakistani women to better understand and guide their own lives. It would be remiss not to mention, however, that while the cultural impact of imperialism is undeniable, the increasing influence of popular culture has helped create a preference for, and dominance of, western culture. The visible connections between Regency England and modern-day India and Pakistan are highlighted prominently throughout *Austenistan* and *Bride and Prejudice* in several ways. Partialities to the west, which began under imperial rule, are now perpetuated through travel, dancing and class. The two-hundred-year-old society, which Austen so pertinently depicted, has found such traction in present-day Indian and Pakistan.

Though Austen never travelled beyond southern England, she left a lasting impression throughout the world. Arguably, new adaptations can have the same lasting impact as Austen's works and are important cultural literature in their own right. It is often period dramas that are thought of when considering Austen and adaptations, but the most interesting adaptations do much more than a period realisation of Austen's stories. South Asian contemporary adaptations build upon the original texts and are a means of keeping Austen's much-loved narratives – and observations – current for modern audiences and future generations. Ultimately, the quality of Austen's storytelling, wry humour and ongoing relevance make her appealing to audiences, old and new. Jane Austen's adaptability lies predominately in her ability to write about issues that appealed to the public; issues such as class, family, courtship and marriage were themes that epitomised the middle-classes throughout Austen's time and it has proven to be a contributing factor to South Asian contemporary life. Austen is located at the centre of every most, if not all, South Asian homes through her focus on human relationships and situations, which are still significant in South Asia today.

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