



RESEARCH PAPER

Austen's Sub-continental Fans: A Comparative Study of *Pride and Prejudice's* Fan Fiction from Pakistan and India

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares and analyzes Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* (2019) and Sonali Dev's *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* (2019) both loosely based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Labeling both Kamal and Dev as Austen's Sub-continental fans the paper closely reads their works in relation with fan fiction theory. The hallmark features of fan fiction, collected by Hellekson and Busse (2014) in their edited essay collection spanning over the ideas of the leading theorists and critics of the expanding field of Fan Fiction Studies, help establish both the novels as emblems of Kamal's and Dev's status of being the pioneering Sub-continental fans of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Both novels depict their respective protagonists situated in a social background similar to that of Austen's time and explore how social conditions influence a female's psychological structure and anxiety towards marriage.

KEYWORDS Fan Fiction Studies, Jane Austen's Sub-continental Fans, *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors*, *Pride and Prejudice*, Sonali Dev, Soniah Kamal, *Unmarriageable*

Introduction

Both Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* and Sonali Dev's *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* are very much similar with each other as their respective writers have tried to create re-tellings of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Kamal's protagonist Alys Binat is just like Elizabeth Bennet: straight forward, bold and never afraid to voice her opinions. Mrs. Binat in Kamal's novel is similar with Austen's Mrs. Bennet who always thinks about her daughters' marriage. Kamal's Valentine Darsee is just like Austen's Fitzwilliam Darcy: a man full of pride. Just like Austen's Mrs. Bennet's five marriageable daughters Kamal's Mrs. Binat has five marriageable daughters. Mr. Collins of *Pride and Prejudice* can be seen in *Unmarriageable* as Mr Farhat Kaleen. All the characters in Austen's novel are portrayed in Kamal's novel too with different names. Kamal's novel is a Pakistani version of *Pride and Prejudice* portraying Pakistani culture through her characters. The chemistry between Alys and Darsee is exactly similar to that of Elizabeth and Darcy. Dev re-tells Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from an Indian perspective though her characters also portray American culture with their Indian-American background. Her protagonist Trisha is the fan fictive substitute of Elizabeth and DJ Caine is that of Darcy. Their love-hate relationship creates a great chemistry between them. Her central pair of lovers, just like Austen's, starts with hatred followed by mutual understanding and love for each other. Just like Darcy and Elizabeth, Trisha and DJ Caine belong to different classes and due to class differences they face many problems regarding their

relationship. Just like Darcy's sister DJ Caine has a younger sister in the novel named Emma who is also the patient of Dr. Trisha.

Along with the concerns raised in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the characters of both Kamal and Dev also experience prejudice, domestic violence, marital problems, and legal fraud, each of which is addressed in their own respective contexts. Their novels encourage the readers to be grateful for the basic things in life often taken for granted. Both Kamal and Dev are fans of Jane Austen and the paper aims to highlight the similarities and differences between these novels being samples of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*'s fan fiction. These two new versions of Austen's novel are not exactly similar to her novel as they go beyond by adding their nuanced cultural backgrounds and settings with *Unmarriageable*'s Pakistani setting and *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors*'s Indian and American setting as its heroine Trisha belongs to India but works in the US.

Literature Review

This segment of the paper presents a brief picture of critical observations on both the selected novels. Masad believes that Kamal's *Unmarriageable* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are strikingly similar. She sees in Kamal's book changing of characters names in a unique way, Fitzwilliam Darcy's name was changed to Valentine Darsee the word for 'Darzee', which means tailor in the Urdu language that is spoken in Pakistan. Therefore, in official certificates, here a forebear changed Darzee to Darsee. Name of Elizabeth Bennet changed to Alys Binat, and Mrs. Bennet became Mrs. Binat. She also observed how *Pride and Prejudice* was retold by other authors, each of whom presented their books in a distinctive way (NPR, January 20, 2019). Melissa Brown (2019) is of the view that Kamal sets Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in 2000's Pakistan reimagining the story with a fresh look. *Unmarriageable* for her is a proof that Austen's novel is timeless even after centuries as her old plotline finds home in many different cultures (Book Page, January 2019). The fact that Kamal's *Unmarriageable* is a re-writing of Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* is not a secret, in Piehl's opinion. Being herself an Austen fan, she says we can see that Kamal's story accurately captures contemporary Pakistani culture. Piehl observes that Kamal has stretched the satire even further than Austen with the figures of Bungles, the head of a feminine products fortune, and Mrs. Binat's desperate situation, which is both humorous and heart-breaking (BookBrowse, February, 2019). Cynthia A. Graham observes that Kamal's novel is an enlightening glimpse at Pakistani culture and that Kamal has, by producing relatable women, shown that a good story never goes out of style. Moving five Bennet sisters from England to contemporary Pakistan seems to happen quite naturally with Kamal (*New York Journal of Books*).

Iqbal et al. (2021) read Kamal's novel *Unmarriageable* with reference to the social conflicts in Pakistani society highlighting the novel's themes like materialism, feminism, marriages and fight against an unchangeable mindset. The novel, portraying the social issues and current situation of Pakistan, stresses that some stereotypical families still force their children for the marriages especially the girls which is the major problem the Pakistani youngsters are facing (pp. 124-132). Harner noticed in Kamal's novel *Unmarriageable* that the protagonist Alys Binat who is a teacher guides her student's thesis topics about Austen's works because Alys was shown as a fan of Austen in the novel. She views that Kamal's novel relocates Austen's 19th century *Pride and Prejudice* to 21st century Pakistani *Unmarriageable*. Alys' conversation in the novel tells about English literature through the point of view of Pakistani Women. Kamal challenges double silencing through her protagonist who speaks and writes back in her novel as a voice of Pakistani women (*Jane Austen Society of North America*, Summer 2021).

Abid et al. (2022) discuss female marital problems as the center of human life. Through their reading of Kamal's *Unmarriageable* they highlight that the middle class struggles a lot to make both ends meet in Pakistan. Using Harris and Dolimore's theory of culture materialism they compare the marital concerns of 19th century and the issues of 21st century (pp. 322-330). Razia et al. (2022) highlight the Phallogocentric orientation in Pakistani society that how the males dominate the society by exerting their superiority over females. The researchers, using the framework of Phallogocentrism - a neologism in deconstruction theory produced by Jacques Derrida, maintain that Kamal, through her female characters of Alys Binat and Qitty Binat (working as teacher and blogger/columnist), establishes a positive feminine image in the developing world. (pp. 121-132). Sabina Akram (2022) compares two other South Asian versions of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice: Bride and Prejudice* (2004) and *Austenistan* (2017) and contends that any culture can translate the universal ideas of Jane Austen. She explains how family and dancing were employed as postcolonial critique in both of the adaptations (pp. 94-102). Saeed and Rabbani (2022) through their close reading examine the aspects of colonial imitation and cultural identity in the novel to highlight the function of colonial mimicry and critique. (pp. 1708-1775). Zainab et al. (2022) zero in on both Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Kamal's *Unmarriageable* to highlight their mix with each other focusing on the likenesses and contrasts between the two. The study distinguishes and classifies the different manners by which these two particular novels are like each other in order to get a hand on the inter-textual similitudes that exist between the two. (pp. 622-630).

Kamrun Nesa observes that Bollywood meets with Jane Austen in San Francisco in the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors*. The novel for her is "just more than reheated Austen" (NPR, May 11, 2019). Janine (2019) in her letter to the author published on the website *Dear Author* believes that Sonali Dev's *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* gives a fresh look to Austen's storyline by telling the story of an Indian-American community and also reversing the gender roles as here the character of Trisha is the inversion of Austen's Darcy whereas the character of Caine is similar to Elizabeth (*Dear Author*, November 25, 2019). Carrie (2019) believes that Dev's novel "isn't so much a straight adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* as it's an exploration of *Pride and Prejudice* themes (*Smart Bitches Trashy Books*, May 9, 2019).

Theoretic Framework

Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, recording the importance and scope of the phenomenal emergence of Fan Fiction Studies as a field of study, observe that being in its early stages it is spreading all over the world quickly day by day as an academic discipline and providing a platform to carve theoretical frameworks for the fresh creative fan responses from the audience/fans of the classics (Hellekson and Busse, 2014, p. 1). Fan Fiction re-tells a story but from different perspective by elaborating and using extensions. The new versions of the same story based on fan fiction are also very important to the fans just like the primary work that is the source (p. 21). Quoting Henry Jenkins Hellekson and Busse observe that his ideas about fan fiction consist of his argument that the difference is not about the style or method but is about the context whether it's different in legal or economic context. In his view, fan fiction is the repairing that occurs in cultural system (p. 21). These aspects are vivid in both the selected novels for study in this paper.

Roberta Pearson views fan fiction as a big project based on famous heroes and about their ideological allotments by presenting different works of multiple writers like the fictional characters of James Bond and Batman (Pearson, 2014, p. 45). Likewise both the texts by Kamal and Dev contain Austen's protagonists (Elizabeth and Darcy) from

Pride and Prejudice along with their ideological allotments. Cornel Sandvoss believes that fan fiction follows many genres like horror, sports, indeed, comic, etc. But it's very hurtful that it faces sometimes criticism from the neighboring disciplines (Sandvoss, 2014, p. 61). In accordance with Sandvoss' observation both the fan novels studied in this paper also have a mix of a number of genres in them like comedy, romance and love. As Joanna Russ thinks, talking about *Star Trek* a famous television show, that fan works deal with the extensions on the protagonists and their friendships and relationships (Russ, 2014, p. 82), likewise Kamal's and Dev's novels are also based on friendship and relationship between the characters and give their respective extensions to them in the authors' cultural context/background.

Lamb and Veith find fan fiction containing heroism and romance in its created universe (Lamb and Veith, 2014, p. 98). Both these elements of romantic love and heroism form a new kind of *Pride and Prejudice* in respective different cultures of Kamal and Dev. Camille Bacon-Smith viewing fan fiction, through the fan writings about the character of Mary Sue, observes that we can see many re-tellings written about her: Sue's beauty or her highly educated background, her portrayal as a successful women or as a brave lady and sometimes even portrayed as a victim. A fan fiction character like that of Mary Sue can also be subjected to criticism as a part of fan fiction (Bacon-Smith, 2014, p.139). This aspect of fan fiction having different shades of one classic character represented in various versions of up-coming fan fictions is very much evident in both the fan creations of Austen's characters from *Pride and Prejudice* in the selected novels of Kamal and Dev.

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst quoting Friske present his argument that fan fiction is very productive semiotically and textually. Through semiotic production Friske means the activity that is the characteristic of popular culture (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 2014, p.170). These two aspects are clearly visible in both the selected novels showing that how these two fans: Kamal and Dev have produced modern day *Pride and Prejudice* in their cultures respectively. Karl Lancaster believes that the producer's interaction with fans helps to build the reputation as performer (Lancaster, 2014, p.194). Both the selected novels by Kamal and Dev fully appeal the readers as their production by the novelists is a result of their interactions within Austen's fan clubs/the readers, thus the performance of both the novels on reader's charts is amazing. Francesca Coppa points out that fan fiction's performance is based on its dramatic re-telling alongside its literary performance (Coppa, 2014, p. 218). So these two texts are so much dramatic and the performance of characters is perfect in the novels thus the novelists made great effort to make a re-writing full of drama. The above review of the hallmark features of fan fiction, collected by Hellekson and Busse in their edited essay collection spanning over the ideas of the leading theorists and critics of the expanding field of Fan Fiction Studies, shows that both the novels are emblems of Kamal's and Dev's status of being the pioneering Sub-continental fans of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Results and Discussion

Unmarriageable is Soniah Kamal's second novel and depicts various marriage related issues in Pakistani society. Kamal illustrates the condition of Pakistani society that how girls of marriageable age have to face different problems regarding their marriages. Kamal is the first Pakistani author who created a re-telling of the plot of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in order to entertain readers as well as to highlight the love story between the protagonists which takes place in Pakistan. In *Unmarriageable* (2019), Kamal places a love story within the social complexities of Pakistani society by portraying the struggles of middle class people to support their family. This novel

concentrates at the love story of Alys Binat and Valentine Darsee who are based on characters of Elizabeth and Darcy from Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel at the same time illustrates the masterful practice in fan fiction creation meticulously exercised by a Pakistani Anglophone author: Sonia Kamal, notwithstanding fan fiction's capacity to represent the complexities in the life of a common man in his social milieu.

Unmarriageable is divided into three parts. The first part illustrates how the protagonists meet with each other and the development of their love-hate relationship. Some misunderstandings develop between Alys and Darsee because Wickham portrays Darsee as a person who has taken his inheritance from him. Feelings of love develop between Jena and Bungles but they become separated in the end of part one because of a misunderstanding as Darsee thought Jena is not interested in Bungles so he told him that it is not Jena who's interested in him it's her mother's interest who is pushing her to be close to him. The second part of the novel demonstrates the proposal of Darsee to Alys because he has fallen in love with her but is rejected as Alys thinks him to be a proud man with cruel heart but through his letter to Alys he accepts that he was behind the misunderstanding between Jena and Bungles as he thought Jena did not like Bungles. He also clears about Wickham regarding his womanizing and many illegitimate children from various women. So his inheritance is used to build school for unprivileged kids, where Wickham's babies also get free education. In the final part of the novel, Alys goes on a trip with her Uncle and Aunt just like Elizabeth Bennet. During her trip she gets the news that Lady had run away with Wickham. She returns quickly. Wickham demands a lot of money to marry Lady and Binat family is worried that how they could pay that large amount of money. However, Darsee pays the money to Wickham to make him marry Lady but he shows as if Uncle and Aunt of Alys had paid the amount. When Lady visits her family after marriage she tells Alys that Darsee was present at her marriage and she comes to know that it was Darsee who had actually paid money for the marriage. After knowing all this Alys immediately accepts Darsee's marriage proposal. Jena and Bungles marriage also takes place at the end because Darsee realizes that she loved Bungles and Darsee in return tells him and the love between Jena and Bungle blossoms again. Kamal is a fan of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as her title of the novel is based on the protagonists because Darsee and Alys thought each other *Unmarriageable*.

Sonali Dev narrates the crucial issues of Indian culture while portraying NRI protagonists through her work *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* (2019). The novel highlights certain social and cultural issues of Indo-American culture through fictional characters and settings which are based on Austen's novel. There is an intervention of the events and characters from the history of *Pride and Prejudice* and this is what gives a historical depth and significance to the story in the novel. Dev also depicts nostalgic past of the characters in the novel and also tries to illustrate beauty and bounty of America through elucidation of the Rajes family. The novel revolves around a young Doctor Trisha who is a neurosurgeon and treats the patients of brain tumor. Actually, with the help of this young character, Dev has tried to represent how this character is a modern form of Elizabeth and her male hero DJ Caine as modern Darcy. *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* is evidence of Dev's practice in fan fiction based on Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and demonstrates the complex issues of marriage. It illustrates how age is used as a tool for marriage? According to some critics, Dev also tries to portray role of a female in a society with the help of strong female characters of Trisha, Nisha her sister and Emma - DJ Caine's sister. Trisha is a strong lady who has interest in medical and lives as an independent woman after having trouble in her relations with her family. She works in the US as a doctor who helps her patients to recover from brain tumor. Similarly, her

family the Rajes also lives in US and her brother is a politician participating in elections because he wants to become the governor. The novel starts with the depiction of Dr. Trisha Rajee who is with her patient telling that the tumor is not fatal rather it's easy but she does not know how she can manage it? Her patient is an artist so it's very difficult to tell her that she was going to be blind. Gradually Dev molds the plot of the novel towards the main protagonists Trisha Rajee and DJ Caine. DJ Caine is a chef who cooks food and is invited by Trisha's brother Yash to cook for the dinner that is to be held by Yash. As the protagonists meet in the start, they don't like each other and start to argue. The novel also illustrates various other issues of Indian American culture such as blackmailing and its impact on the life of people. The title of the novel is based on Austen's novel as Austen's title was *Pride and Prejudice* so Pride was used for Darcy because he's proud and Prejudice was used for Elizabeth because she was having prejudice. Austen's title was based on protagonists Darcy and Elizabeth. Dev's title of the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* is similar to Austen and based on the protagonists as well. The title is swapped here as 'Pride' is used for Trisha Rajee and not for DJ Caine whereas 'Prejudice' is used for DJ Caine instead of Trisha Rajee and 'Other Flavors' is used in the title because she added a flavor in the content of the essential characters of the novel through gender swap. Further DJ Caine is a chef who cooks food of many flavors with lots of seasoning and Trisha Rajee likes the food he cooks so in the novel Dev also uses a lot of tasty food as 'Other Flavors' along with 'Pride and Prejudice'.

The opening sentence of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a reality generally recognized that a solitary man possessing a favorable luck should be in need of a spouse" (p. 105) is adapted by both Austen's Sub-continental fan novelists: Kamal and Dev. Just like Austen's novel Kamal's novel also begins with the opening sentence similar to the original in *Pride and Prejudice* as *Unmarriageable* begins: "It is a reality generally recognized that a young lady can go from homeless person to princess or princess to beggar in the only seconds it takes for her to acknowledge a proposition" (Kamal, p. 3). Austen's opening line contains irony in it and is about marriage but Dev's opening line is not about marriage rather it contains irony in it: "So much about the world baffled Dr. Trisha Rajee, but she was never at a loss for how to do her job. Telling a patient her tumor was not fatal should have been the easiest thing, but Trisha had no idea how she was going to manage it. How on earth did one tell an artist that she was going to go blind?" (p. 1).

Conclusion

The comprehensive critical discussion of both the novels: *Unmarriageable* (2019) and *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* (2019) presents them as fan fiction based on Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) through the portrayal of plot, setting, events and characters. Kamal and Dev have created their respective re-makings of *Pride and Prejudice* for the 21st century as they both are fans of Jane Austen. Kamal adapted her novel according to Pakistani culture still entrenched in Austen's novel whereas, Dev as an Indian writer provides Austen's novel an Indian molding of Bollywood style. When we read her novel it seems that we are reading a Bollywood film story. Though both the novels *Unmarriageable* and *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* are similar to *Pride and Prejudice*, the novelists, however, also made changes in their re-tellings while creating their new versions. Interestingly both *Unmarriageable* and *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* are similar with each other too. The most common similarity between both the novels is that they both portray aspects of sub-continental culture because their authors belong to the sub-continent. Therefore, Kamal and Dev are sub-continental fans of

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Greatly inspired by Austen's novel they created their respective re-tellings according to their respective countries: Pakistan and India.

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