

Indo-Chic and the Postcolonial Exotic: Marketability and Legitimation in Pakistani Rewritings of Jane Austen

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that Pakistani Anglophone Rewritings and adaptations of Jane Austen's fiction strategically incorporate features that are marketable and appealing to transnational Jane Austen fans (Janeites) and cosmopolitan readers of postcolonial literature. The phenomenon of marketability related to professional fanfiction has been underscored in Anette Svensson's, Henry Jenkins' and Nicole Peters' exploration of the characteristics and capitalistic end of the commodities fashioned for fandoms like Janeites. An examination of the marketability of postcolonial literature is facilitated by drawing upon Graham Huggan's concept of the "postcolonial exotic" and Saadia Toor and Sandra Ponzanesi's notion of "Indo-chic" to explore the dynamics of reimagining Austen's stories within the Pakistani cultural context. This paper further explores the role of various "agents of legitimation" - publishers, critics, readers and authors - in shaping these rewritings by employing hybrid identity, Indian aesthetics and commodified culture within the parenthesis of "Indo-chic". The detailed analysis of these theoretical strands, embedded in Soniah Kamal's novel Unmarriageable (S. Kamal, 2019) and Austenistan (2017), an anthology edited by Laaleen Sukhera, demonstrates that the strategic commodification of South Asian culture and the union of Anglophone South Asian narratives within an Austenian sheath produce market-driven texts that cater to Global Janeites and international cosmopolitan readership. Such strategic commodification raises critical questions about the broader implications of these texts, as they run the risk of turning rich and diverse cultures of Pakistan into a monolithic cultural identity, while their Western-friendly narratives push local cultures to an inferior rank and particularly prioritise British culture to appease Global Janeites. This study contends that market-driven cultural commodification in Pakistani Austen Rewritings not only compromises authentic representation of Pakistan but also reinforces the postcolonial hierarchies even as the texts claim to challenge them.

Keywords: Postcolonial Publishing Industry; Postcolonial Exotic; Global Janeites; Culture Theory; Adaptation Theory

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of an era of global markets for postcolonial texts, several scholarly studies have been conducted to comprehend the connection between postcolonial literary texts and international markets (Brouillette, 2007; Huggan, 2001). As an endeavour to explore this phenomenon in Pakistani Austen Rewritings, my study examines the unique blending of the Austenian canon with Pakistani Anglophone fiction from a vendible angle. Primarily, this exploration is engineered by highlighting the marketing strategies these particular rewritings leverage to position themselves as culturally authentic yet market-friendly products within the international literary landscape. Such amalgamation posits these rewritings in a commercially advantageous position from the perspectives of transnational publishers who publish these pieces, while considering the Janeites (fans of Jane Austen) (Lynch, 2000; Raw, 2013) and postcolonial literature readership as the target audiences, who have a penchant for both the familiarity of the Austenian canon and the novelty of the Pakistani cultural settings. The unique marriage of Jane Austen's stories and Pakistani context

makes Pakistani Austen Rewritings appealing to not one but two markets: Austenmania (commercial component of Janeitism that includes fanfiction) (Svensson, 2013) and the postcolonial literary industry. Philosophically underpinning the above proposition, two strands of academic inquiry, related to the production of fanfiction and the commodification of culture within Anglophone postcolonial literature, are employed to trace the marketing tactics by which Pakistani Austen Rewritings navigate the literary market for Austenian fanfiction and postcolonial literature in the global context. Through a close textual analysis, this research endeavour first examines how the selected texts, *Unmarriageable* (2019) and *Austenistan* (2017), embody the demands of Austenian fanfiction.

These works channel a manifestation of “fanfiction” (Svensson, 2013, p. 206) and “Austenmania” (Svensson, 2013, pp. 203-204) by strategically recreating Austenian tales within the Pakistani context, utilising local characters, locations, and settings to justify the close connection of their Austenian adaptations with Pakistan, while striving to remain true to the essence of Jane Austen’s style. The second aspect of the investigation focuses on deciphering the role played by the “agents of legitimation”, including readers, publishers, authors, and critics, in the creation and dissemination of new versions of “exotic” in South Asian Anglophone fiction. By weaving “Indo-chic” aesthetics into their narratives, these adaptations commodify Pakistani culture, shaping and making it accessible and palatable for Western and global metropolitan audiences. Where the commercial end of these market strategies enhances the chances of securing global readership for Pakistani Austen Rewritings, the whole enterprise may largely be executed by entrenching reductive and homogenising representations of complex Pakistani culture and reinforcing the colonial hierarchies under the guise of hybridity, which these works apparently seek to subvert.

The initial step towards understanding the nature of Pakistani Austen Rewritings and how they develop marketable features is through a basic introduction of the selected texts.. *Austenistan*, an anthology of seven short stories, features adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Lady Susan*, which the book’s blurb promises are set “in contemporary Pakistan” (Sukhera, 2017). *Austenistan* is edited by Laaleen Sukhera, who has also authored the final story, “On the Verge,” in the same collection. The short stories and their authors, as listed in *Austenistan*, are: 1. “The Fabulous Banker Boys” by Mahlia S. Lone, 2. “Begum Saira Returns” by Nida Elley, 3. “Emaan Ever After” by Mishayl Naek, 4. “The Mughal Empire” by Saniyya Gauhar, 5. “The Autumn Ball” by Gayathri Warnasuriya, 6. “Only the Deepest Love” by Sonya Rehman, and 7. “On the Verge” by Laaleen Sukhera. Similarly, Soniah Kamal retells *Pride and Prejudice* in her novel *Unmarriageable*, setting the story in the Pakistani cities of Lahore, Islamabad, and the fictional town of Dilipabad. Both *Austenistan* and *Unmarriageable* adapt Austenian stories with significant fidelity to the plotlines and characters of the original. These Pakistani Austen Rewritings are seen to be significantly influenced by market-driven forces targeting two primary audiences: Janeites and the postcolonial readers. The inclusion of both obvious and clever allusions to Jane Austen’s novels in chosen texts serve as one of the strategies that endeavours to engage the attention of Global Janeites as potential readers (Peters, 2018, p. 75). Additionally, both texts have been published by two major transnational publishing houses – *Unmarriageable* by Penguin Random House and *Austenistan* by Bloomsbury, respectively. Their editorial preferences and marketing apparatus play a crucial role in shaping how these works incorporate Indo-chic aesthetics, and position themselves as culturally authentic products for metropolitan readership (Huggan, 2001, pp. 16-18), which translates to “an international readership” (Salgado, 2004, p. 6) with the “Western Eyes” (Toor, 2000, p. 20).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to examining the particular market mechanisms that operate in Pakistani Austen Rewritings, it is imperative to establish the scholarly background that frames this inquiry. Since this study deals with the relation of Pakistani Austen Rewritings and the two marketable factors related to fandom and postcolonial markets inhabiting these texts, the major theoretical underpinnings of key concepts like Janeites, Austenmania and the economics of fan production are discussed in the first section of the theoretical framework, while philosophical underpinnings corresponding to postcolonial industry are elaborated in the latter part of this section. This theoretical division is not just structural; it also reflects the analytical trajectory of this study, moving from fandom-based cultural production towards postcolonial market dynamics that shape the circulation of Pakistani Austen Rewritings.

The fans and followers of the nineteenth-century literary works of Jane Austen are known as “Janeites” (Raw, 2013, p. 48), a term whose first usage dates back to the late 1800s when George Saintsbury endearingly coined the very term for fans like himself (Lynch, 2000, p. 14). Claudia L. Johnson (1997) traces the cultural politics of Austen’s canonisation by analysing the changing nature and demographics of Janeites through the ages, documenting that, unlike contemporary times, Janeites initially consisted of both men and women; particularly men who were “cultured”, “sensitive” and “exponents of urbanity” (p. 213). In the “Royal Society of Literature”, these fans elevated Jane Austen above the literary merits of her work and regarded her as their “*divine* Jane” and “*matchless* Jane” while they were “her *cult*”, “her *sect*” and “her *tribe* of ardent adorers” (p. 214). Extending the discussion beyond the cultic devotion of early Janeites, Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (2007) theorise a third wave of fan studies, in which the phenomenon of fandom is examined as “part of the fabric of our everyday lives” and as a broader cultural practice of identity and community formation (p. 9). This understanding of fandom offers a valuable lens for comprehending why Austen Rewritings carry commercial potential beyond their immediate fan communities: if fandom is so widely shared, texts fashioned for Janeites need not remain confined within Janeite circles. It can, therefore, be argued that fandom operates as a productive cultural force that sustains the circulation and commercial adaptation of Austenian narratives.

Earlier, the esoteric enthusiasm of Janeites had been both self-congratulatory and exclusive in nature, but its exclusivity was fissured with the rise of the phenomenon of “Austenmania” (Svensson, 2013, pp. 203-204) in the 1990s. As Lynch (2000) documents, the commercial appropriation of Austen’s legacy transformed Janeitism from a coterie enthusiasm into a global culture industry, driving a surge in adaptations, sequels, spin-offs, retellings, and fanfiction of Jane Austen’s novels. Austenmania is thus the commercial and economic extension of Janeitism: it generates a lucrative market for Austen-related products and professionally published rewritings by practising “textual poaching” - appropriating and repurposing canonical texts for new audiences: “Fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions” (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 23-24). Jenkins further leverages the “participatory culture of fandom” by pointing out the paradox that fans “become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings” (p. 24). In a somewhat similar vein to participatory culture, Svensson (2013) details the categorisation of Janeites’ fanfiction as “amateur fanfiction” and “professional fanfiction”, where the latter is formally published for lucrative means (p. 206). Pakistani Janeites become producers of professional fanfiction by incorporating cultural

components of Pakistan into the “raw material” of Austenian fiction. This amalgamation of the culture of a postcolonial nation with Jane Austen’s fiction – a prominent British canon from the colonial era – invites the theoretical workings of postcolonial literature.

Rationalising the correlation between the production of postcolonial literature and the global market, Graham Huggan (2001) discusses the creation of the exotic within the premises of postcolonial literature under the influence of market forces. In the global market, a certain segment of Western readership is captivated by the consumption of ‘exotic’, which results in “culture commodification” (Huggan, 2001, p. 18). He points out that “difference is appreciated” (Huggan, 2001, p. 27) and that the “foreign fitfully translated into the non-threatening and familiar” is essentially the exotic “disguised as hybridity” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 16). He further contends that exotic literature is shaped by Western readers’ appetite for traits such as “aestheticisation” (Huggan, 2001, p. 16). This “aestheticisation” translates into “Indo-chic”, which branches out into “cultural commodification” and “hybrid identity”. Customs and cultures of South Asian peoples are grouped under a single narrative of “Indo-chic” which insinuates that the culture is a mere commodity which is “disposable”, constituting “world music, ethnic food, fashion and interior design along with new, blended notions of multicultural fusion and hybrid identity” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2). Cultural elements as entities are shaped for and endorsed by “Western consumers,” creating “cultural commodities” for mass consumption (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2). The authors of postcolonial literature are not oblivious to such market forces and “commodity fetishism,” often incorporating these elements in their works to enhance the global appeal of postcolonial writing (Huggan, 2001, p. 16). Therefore, the creation of the postcolonial exotic is orchestrated by market players like publishers, writers, critics, and readers.

While Huggan (2001) postulates that these market players or “agents of legitimation” (p. 5) influence various factors involved in the production of postcolonial literature within the global market, Sarah Brouillette focuses on the role of writers in the postcolonial industry. She seeks to understand the “strategic exoticism” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 7; Huggan, 2001, p. 26) of the “general postcolonial authorial self-consciousness” in the postcolonial marketplace and observes that both the writer and the reader “negotiate” their “tourist guilt” of postcoloniality (Brouillette, 2007, p. 7). Similar to the tourist industry, the postcolonial industry recognises the “marketability of...production and consumption of what circulates within it”, and with this realisation, “postcolonial authorship” is utilised as a tool which is saleable in the market (Brouillette, 2007, p. 7). The hybrid identities of the postcolonial authors become a marketing tool themselves (Marx, 2009, p. 811).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this study is a qualitative study that employs close textual reading as its primary analytical approach. The first analytical part of the article will closely analyse Soniah Kamal’s *Unmarriageable* (S. Kamal, 2019) and the stories of *Austenistan* (2017) by drawing upon Anette Svensson’s (2013) concept of Austenmania and theorisation of professional fanfiction by Janeites; Henry Jenkins’ (1992) notion of textual poaching and participatory culture of fandom, and Nicole Peters’ (2018) idea of lowbrow and highbrow readings of Jane Austen to study the incorporation and presence of market-driven elements in the chosen texts. The second portion of the analysis is concerned with the marketability of selected Pakistani Austen Rewritings within the context of the postcolonial literary and cultural industry. An elaborate analysis is orchestrated by building upon

Graham Hugga's (2001) concept of the postcolonial exotic and Sandra Ponzanesi's (2014) and Saadia Toor's (2000) notion of Indo-chic as interpretive lenses through which specific passages, character depictions and narrative choices in both texts are examined for their market-oriented function. Paratextual evidence comprising publisher blurbs, cover copy, authors' biographies, and published reviews drawn from international newspapers, online blogs and websites is gathered to support the analysis of agents of legitimation in the production and reception of both texts. This dual approach moves between the textual and the extra-textual, capturing both the internal market strategies of the works and the external mechanisms that construct and maintain their marketability.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

AUSTEN REWRITINGS AND CAPITALIST ENDS

Austenmania as the commercial facet of Janeitism has been systematically harnessed by commercial agents: Robert Dryden (2013) and Elise Barker (2013) have documented how fan culture intersects with commercial interests, while Raw (2013) demonstrates that Janeite communities now span the globe, creating a ready transnational market for Austen adaptations. Robert Dryden (2013) further explores the "connections between commerce and Janeites" (p. 111) by emphasising the importance of associating products with Jane Austen's brand. Similarly, establishing her Pakistani Austen Rewriting as a product by a Janeite for Janeites, Soniah Kamal in the "Acknowledgements" section of *Unmarriageable* gives a nod: "To Janeites the world over and Jane Austen Society members everywhere - especially Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), where I first discovered fellow Austen fans and scholars" (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 380). By acknowledging the presence of both "fellow Austen fans" and "scholars", *Unmarriageable* aims at those "who read Jane Austen's novels for leisure" and "highbrow readers", respectively (Peters, 2018, p. 75). *Austenistan* continues in a similar vein, demonstrating the writers' dedication - who are also members of JASP (Jane Austen Society of Pakistan) - in weaving Jane Austen's stories into a Pakistani context for their fellow fans (Gupta, 2017; Jane Austen International, n.d.). The dedication in *Unmarriageable* and the promotion of *Austenistan* as the brainchild of JASP members render these books examples of fanfiction geared towards Jane Austen enthusiasts. These declarations collectively also identify the authors of the under-discussion texts as the members of Jane Austen's "tribe of ardent adorers" (Johnson, 1997, p. 214) who practise "participatory culture" of fandom by employing "textual poaching" (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 23-24) to rewrite Austen's novels in Pakistani contexts. Here, identifying with the fandom might just be the cultural end of Janeitism, but exercising the latter two amounts to the commercial mechanism involved in the production of Austenian fanfiction.

Regarding Austen's "re-presentations" or fanfiction in electronic and printed forms, Svensson (2013) examines differences between "amateur" and "professional" fanfiction (p. 206). The term "amateur" broadly describes the fans who do not seek to profit financially from their fanfiction. At the same time, "professional" writers publish their work to generate income, as it is "aimed at English-speaking or international readers and thus reach a global audience" (Svensson, 2013, p. 206). *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan* can be classified as professional fanfiction as they are published by well-known publishing houses, Penguin Random House and Bloomsbury, respectively. Given that these examples of fanfiction are part of Anglophone literature "aimed at... international readers" and have been professionally "published in the public sphere" (Svensson,

2013, p. 206), it can be suggested that Pakistani Austen Rewritings as professional fanfiction have the potential to reach a global audience with a profit-oriented aim.

Extending beyond Svensson's scholarly binary of fanfiction, Henry Jenkins (1992) theorises fanfiction as a form of textual poaching in which fans creatively draw on source texts to produce new cultural meanings, challenging the authority of original authors and their institutional gatekeepers. Abigail De Kosnik (2016) further complicates this picture by situating fan production within freely accessible, volunteer-run digital archives, contending that "memory has gone rogue" (p. 1) and comparing fan communities with the free-culture and free-software movements. Measured against such archives, commercially published adaptations can be seen to occupy an ambiguous position: they benefit from the cultural capital of fan communities while simultaneously abandoning the non-commercial ethos that defines fundamental fan production. These perspectives are pertinent to Pakistani Austen Rewritings, which borrow the aesthetic conventions of fan production while operating fully within the logic of the commercial literary marketplace.

PAKISTANI PROFESSIONAL FANFICTION: CRAFTING MARKETABLE ADAPTATIONS: REMAKES AND MAKEOVERS

Austenian fanfiction, based on its various characteristics, can be categorised either as a "remake" or a "makeover" (Svensson, 2013, p. 204). The first involves a "remake" of Austen's stories, where they are reenvisioned in a new way, generally understood as "an adaptation"; the second is a "makeover", where the story is altered to suit "a new target consumer" (Svensson, 2013, p. 204). These re-presentations, particularly the remakes, allow "Austen's narratives, settings, and characters" to "exist in several forms and contribute to a growing franchise" (Svensson, 2013, p. 204), aligning with the practice of "lowbrow reading" or leisure reading favoured by Janeites (Peters, 2018, p. 75). "Lowbrow reading" is pursued purely for entertainment and does not require Janeites to critically engage with the text; conversely, "highbrow reading" involves a critical and analytical approach (Peters, 2018, pp. 75-76). Both *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan* aptly reframe Austenian fiction within the Pakistani context by loosely localising the characters' names from their original forms to Pakistani variants, blending elements of both remake and makeover, mainly to appeal to a broader audience by catering to the tastes of lowbrow readers. Nudrat Kamal (2019), in her newspaper article published in Dawn, notes that the appeal for those engaging in recreational reading of *Unmarriageable* is enhanced as "major plot points of *Unmarriageable* can be neatly traced back to *Pride and Prejudice*", alongside surnames like 'Binat', 'Darsee', 'Gardenaar', and 'Wickaam' replacing Bennet, Darcy, Gardiner, and Wickham respectively. Similarly, *Austenistan* demonstrates notable similarities in the first names of female protagonists, where 'Emaan' (Sukhera, 2017, p. 58) and 'Saira' (Sukhera, 2017, p. 28) serve as Pakistani equivalents for the eponymous 'Emma' and 'Lady Susan'.

It is also important to highlight that the subtitles on the cover of *Unmarriageable* read as "Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan" and "A Fresh and Delightful Retelling of the Jane Austen Classic", and the text follows the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* very closely. The novel also provides many intertextual moments where Austenian works are discussed; some prominent examples include the scene where Valentine Darsee and Alys Binat discuss the merits and demerits of "Darcy" and "Mr. Knightley from Emma" (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 136). At another point, Sherry compares Alys Binat with "Elizabeth Bennet", and Alys then discusses the characters of "Charlotte Lucas", "Fitzwilliam Darcy", and "Elizabeth Bennet" (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 170). Similarly, different quotations from Austen's novels are used as epigraphs for each story in *Austenistan*. There

are also intertextual references to ‘Darcy’ and *Pride and Prejudice* present in Saniyya Gauhar’s short story “The Mughal Empire” (Sukhera, 201, p. 84) of *Austenistan*. It could be argued that these simplified references to Austenian works appeal to the taste of the Janeites because of the inclusion of “Austen’s narratives, settings, and characters”, making the texts both “adaptations” and “remakes” (Svensson, 2013, p. 204) that are most desirable for lowbrow reading.

Both *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan*, within Svensson’s (2013) framework, function primarily as “remakes”, given their close fidelity to Austen’s core plotlines like marriage plots and class dynamics; major character types and their relationships; Austen’s narrative irony with respect to some character names in adapted form like ‘Darsee’, ‘Gardenaar’, ‘Wickaam’, ‘Saira’ and ‘Emaan’. However, they simultaneously function as “makeovers” as they transpose the stories into a new cultural and geographical context, which is Pakistan, in order to reach a new target consumer: the cosmopolitan, globally oriented postcolonial reader. The cultural contextualisation of Jane Austen’s novel is orchestrated by replacing the English landed gentry setting with Pakistani local and diaspora, upper-middle and often uber-rich ones; Christian social norms replaced by Islamic ones; the Regency historical context replaced by contemporary Pakistan; colonial dynamics replaced by postcolonial ones; and the introduction of Pakistan-specific social institutions like the rishta system, nikah, extended family structures, etc., which are analysed later under the paradigm of cultural commodification. Corroboration with both classifications of remakes and makeovers underscores the dual market strategy of these texts that is meant to satisfy Janeites’ demand for Austenian authenticity while simultaneously appealing to a postcolonial readership’s appetite for culturally specific Pakistani or “Indo-chic”-facilitated South Asian context.

BRIDGING “LOWBROW” AND “HIGHBROW” READINGS OF JANE AUSTEN

Austen Rewritings as commodities fashioned for the fans of Jane Austen’s fiction (Barker, 2013, p. 189) enable both “highbrow” and “lowbrow” readings (Peters, 2018, p. 75), appealing to all kinds of casual readers and Janeites, whether they are well-informed about the canon of Jane Austen or not. It is noteworthy that alongside ensuring the smooth sailing of recreational reading of the books, some Austen Rewritings balance both leisure and critical reading, which caters to more probing and inquisitive readers, “that fundamentally influence and change how her body of work is consumed in both academic and popular contexts” (Peters, 2018, p. 75). *Austenistan* steers clear of the practice of highbrow reading and only adheres to simple references in the form of epigraphs extracted from Jane Austen’s novels at the beginning of each short story (Sukhera, 2017).

On the other hand, *Unmarriageable* includes an excerpt from a letter by Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra as an epigraph of the novel. Later on, the book offers suggestions for critically reading the works of Jane Austen from the perspective of postcolonial studies (S. Kamal, 2019). Such strategies particularly invoke the interest of the readers who are invested in the highbrow reading of the Austenian canon. One such incident occurs when Alys Binat, the female protagonist of *Unmarriageable*, in the capacity of an English teacher, suggests to a student of hers to study Jane Austen as: “... ‘World’s Jane’, a ‘Pakistani Jane’, a ‘Post-Colonial Jane’, Edward Said’s Jane...Discuss empire writing back, weaving its own stories” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 99). Referring to a prominent scholar like Edward Said and the use of the term post-colonial in the above passage can be construed as an attempt to establish the novel as a post-colonial text. Also, the reference to ‘Edward Said’ serves as a tool for involving the elements of “agent of legitimation” because Said is the pioneering scholar of postcolonial studies whose works have been published and promoted

by Western “publication houses” and literary circles (Huggan, 2001, p. 4). It can be argued that such strategies aim to add value to the text, which consequently enhances its marketability in the postcolonial literary market. More specifically, the invocation of Said’s theoretical authority and the explicit labelling of the novel as “post-colonial” are not merely intellectual gestures but calculated market signals. By aligning itself with canonical postcolonial scholarship, *Unmarriageable* positions itself as both a literary and academic text, thereby appealing to highbrow readers – academics, critics and journal editors – whose endorsement is essential to securing credibility within the postcolonial literary market. As Huggan (2001) argues, the postcolonial exotic is shaped by the tastes of a metropolitan readership that values cultural difference only translated into familiar aesthetic forms (p. 27); by citing Edward Said, Kamal effectively invites this readership to recognise the novel as a legitimate contribution to the postcolonial canon, making it commercially and institutionally viable across both popular and scholarly audiences; particularly “scholar-fans” (professional academics whose primary identity is academic) and “fan-scholars” (fans who deploy academic concepts within fan communities outside institutional academia) (Hills, 2002, p. 2).

INDO-CHIC AND CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION: EXPLORING *UNMARRIAGEABLE* AND *AUSTENISTAN*

The exotic as a saleable entity in the global market has been studied in conjunction with the culture industry to explore the manifestation and exploitation of culture against the backdrop of postcolonial literature. Sandra Ponzanesi (2014) argues that the commodification of Indian culture enhances the marketability of postcolonial products by observing that “Indianness is uniquely different and inherently marketable” (p. 43). The postcolonial global market, through the perpetuation of “exoticism, tokenism and fetishisation” of culture as a means of harvesting “otherness as an attribute of distinction and branding”, promotes the “otherness industry” (p. 1). This otherness industry turns marketable Indianness by bunching up and homogenising all the cultures of South Asia under the term “Indo-chic”, which constitutes “world music, ethnic food, fashion and interior design along with new, blended notions of multicultural fusion and hybrid identity” which is then endorsed by “Western consumers” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2). Austen Rewritings in Pakistani Anglophone fiction are especially notable for their blend of Pakistani culture with Austenian stories, indicating that the postcolonial literary market is giving way to the postcolonial culture industry. The inclusion of Indo-chic aesthetics, such as South Asian clothing, jewellery, food, and social customs, adds an exotic richness to the Pakistani Austen Rewritings, reflecting cultural commodification and “cultural cannibalism” (Toor, 2000, p. 20). *Unmarriageable* predominantly incorporates various descriptions and documentation of customs within Pakistani society, like “rishta aunties [rishta: a matrimonial proposal] who were the local matchmakers, a perfect job for professional busybodies” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 61), alongside a detailed dissection of “Nikah” [nikah: the Islamic marriage contract ceremony] and what it entails. Nikah is discussed along with a brief explanation of the nature of “haq mehr” [haq mehr: the mandatory gift or monetary payment from groom to bride, stipulated in Islamic marriage contract] according to Islamic tradition, as seen in “NadirFiede wedding” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 94).

Later, in the same wedding ceremony, the execution of “Nikah” is vividly depicted with the involvement of a “maulvi” [maulvi: an Islamic cleric who officiates the nikah ceremony] and the to-and-fro exchange of “qubool hai” [qubool hai: “I accept” – it is the Islamic equivalent of “I do”] (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 96). It is notable that the omniscient narrator shows disdain for the amount of “haq mehr” from the early Islamic era, describing it as a “now paltry figure” (S. Kamal, 2019,

p. 94). Similarly, other cultural elements are included, such as references to traditional wedding decor and Pakistani cuisine during the depiction of the “mehndi” [mehndi: it is a pre-wedding ceremony where songs are sung and henna is applied to the bride’s hands and feet] and “dholki” [dholki: another pre-wedding ceremony which is primarily a musical gathering] ceremonies, where the wedding tent or “shamiana, the huge multicoloured tent...with gold thread” was set up, while “beef seekh kebabs and chicken tikkas” were “cooking on coal grills” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 64). In a similar vein, Indo-chic aesthetics continue to flourish in *Austenistan*, which incorporates a touch of “local colour” with an “organic” depiction of the city, “Pindi,” and through referencing Pakistani sartorial culture such as “kurta pajama” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 120), “gold sherwani,” [sherwani: a long formal coat worn by South Asian men on formal occasions] “crimson pagri,” [pagri: a ceremonial turban] “chantilly lace sari,” [sari: a long garment which women of Indian subcontinent wear by draping it in different ways around the body – usually 6.5 to 9 yards long] and “white shalwar kameez” [shalwar kameez: traditional South Asian attire of a long tunic and loose trousers, worn by both men and women] (Sukhera, 2017, pp. 130-132). These references to local Pakistani clothing, food, and customs in *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan* exemplify the presence of Indo-chic, which is portrayed through an ‘Indian’ aesthetic (Toor, 2000, p. 22) to appeal to the commodity fetishism of a particular readership.

Analysing the strategic placement of culture as a commodity for making these books appealing to Western audiences and all metropolitan audiences worldwide, Ponzanesi drawing on Toor (2000) notes that India has transitioned from being an “exporter” to a consumer of “oriental styles and goods” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 33). This change has given rise to “Neo-Orientalism” for India’s “internal market” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 33). The thing that makes postcolonial prose marketable is its ability to “combine that urban, cosmopolitan aesthetic with the sort of local colour that strikes contemporary editors and reviewers as exotic” (Marx, 2009, p. 812). Elements of this inherently marketable Indianness (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 43) are incorporated in different parts of *Austenistan* in the form of “expensive ‘ethnic’ jewellery or clothes” and an ‘Indian’ aesthetics (Toor, 2000, p. 22). The ‘cosmopolitan aesthetic’ can be observed in scenes set in trendy cafés where female protagonists of stories hang out, such as in “Emaan Ever After” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 58) and “Only the Deepest Love” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 134) in Karachi and Lahore, respectively. In an attempt to give indigenous relevance to the otherwise cosmopolitan nature of Mishayl Naek’s story, her eponymous character Emaan in “Emaan Ever After” talks about “Aunties” who try to get her married again (Sukhera, 2017, p. 60). In *Austenistan*, hybrid phrases like “gori girlfriend” [gori: white], “British Born Confused Desi Ex” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 63), “Sindhi feudal vadera hubby” [vadera: a feudal landlord, particularly in the Sindh province, Pakistan] (Sukhera, 2017, p. 64), and “throw my izzat to the wind” [izzat: honour, dignity and social reputation – a concept that is of paramount importance in South Asian culture specifically for women] (Sukhera, 2017, p. 73) add local colour to a world primarily centred around social media and social gatherings of affluent people with Western tastes. The geographical introduction of Islamabad and its status as a hub for “diplomats”, “government officials”, and “foreigners” (Sukhera, 2017, pp. 116-125) are woven throughout Gayathri Warnasuriya’s “The Autumn Ball”, illustrating a cosmopolitan aesthetic. Yet, the story incorporates a touch of “local colour” when it compares the “organic” layout of “Pindi” with the fabricated one of Islamabad, and by mentioning the lone reference to Pakistani culture with “kurta pajama” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 120). With hybrid language comprising phrases like “gold sherwani” and “crimson pagri” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 130), along with “kundan and-emerald choker set” [kundan: pure gold] (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 66), “crimson turban” and “crimson-and-gold gharara” [gharara: a traditional South Asian formal outfit for women comprising a short tunic over

a wide-flared trousers] (S. Kamal, 2019, pp. 93-94), urban elements shake hands with local colour. In *Unmarriageable*, hybridity of identity and “multicultural fusion” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2) are also depicted through the amalgamation of ‘ullah’ and ‘George’ in Jeorgeullah, a character derived from the full name of Jeorgeullah Wickaam – a character of *Unmarriageable* that is the equivalent of ‘George Wickham’ from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. While all this enhances Indo-chic’s marketability, it blends Eastern and Western themes to craft a hybridised appeal that leans more towards the Western side than the Eastern one.

Another marketable trait, which particularly makes Western readership of postcolonial literature comfortable, lies in a form of exoticism where “foreign fitfully translated into the non-threatening and familiar” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 16) as a Western theme within a hybridised appeal. In JASP’s short stories from *Austenistan*, “non-threatening and familiar” takes the form of Western luxury brand names, such as Calvin Klein (Sukhera, 2017, p. 37) and Victoria’s Secret (Sukhera, 2017, p. 135), as well as an exhaustive catalogue of similar brands.

Hermès, Chanel, Bottega Veneta and Prada; shoes...from Manolo Blahnik, Christian Louboutin, Jimmy Choo, Saint Laurent, Roger Vivier and Dior; lingerie from Rigby & Peller, Agent Provocateur and La Perla...
(Sukhera, 2018, p. 85)

“Emaan Ever After” also illustrates the privileging of Western luxury designer footwear brands over local Pakistani alternatives, when a character, Saba, advises her friend Emaan to wear “Gina strappy heels,” which they got from their “Bicester Village trip,” instead of her “weird bargain Uzma Market sandals” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 64). Similarly, Soniah Kamal’s *Unmarriageable* is filled with American and British musical references throughout the book: Mr. Barkat Binat is a fan of “Beatles and Elvis” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 31), and Jena and Alys discuss “Madonna’s Virgin Tour” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 53), while the graveyard in front of the Binat house in Dilipabad reminds Alys Binat of Michael Jackson’s music video “Thriller” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 54). Additionally, several Western literary references in Kamal’s novel reflect a hybridised appeal. Jena Binat finds comfort in reading “*Alice in Wonderland*” to her sisters after falling into relative poverty and moving to Dilipabad (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 52). Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “Good Country People”, is discussed by Annie dey Bagh after she reads it and thanks Alys Binat for recommending the story (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 262). Alys reads “Reader’s Digest” and “Good Housekeeping” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 99). Two other characters, Gin and Rum, at “NadirFiede wedding”, mention Leslie Marmon Silko’s story “Lullaby,” “The House on Mango Street” by Sandra Cisneros, “Désirée’s Baby” by Kate Chopin, “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison’s “*The Bluest Eye*” and “incest in it” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 100). In these fictional stories, references to Pakistani pop culture are scarce, with instances of names like ‘Vital Signs’ [a popular Pakistani musical band active in the 80s and 90s], Junaid Jamshed [former lead vocalist of ‘Vital Signs’, later turned businessman], and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan [a popular singer of Pakistan] mentioned only sparingly. These examples serve as evidence of a hybrid appeal present in both *Austenistan* and *Unmarriageable* that favours the hegemony of Western products over Pakistani ones. In the light of this discussion, it can be inferred that the relegation of Pakistani culture and literature to an inferior position aligns, in a broader sense, with the narratives that the art and literary markets in the postcolonial context are saturated with the sort of discourses that consolidate the stereotypical representation of the Orient (Zeiny, 2017).

MARKET DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF AGENTS OF LEGITIMATION

Having established the workings of the postcolonial exotic and the role of Indo-chic in the preceding sections, this section turns to a concrete examination of how the ‘agents of legitimation’ – as identified by Huggan (2001, p. 5), namely writers, booksellers, publishers, reviewers and readers – have shaped the marketing and reception of *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan* in both Pakistani and global markets. The propagation of postcolonial texts occurs within “reading communities” that have access to the “privileged metropolitan markets”, which are predominantly “Anglo-American” in scope and location (Brouillette, 2007, p. 4). In this context, publishers emphasise the “celebration of the representation of some ‘other’ region” alongside the “text’s locality, authenticity, or biographical specificity”, which are included to meet the demands of the global literary market (Brouillette, 2007, p. 4).

Huggan (2001) identifies writers, booksellers, publishers, reviewers, and readers as “agents of legitimation” (p. 5) who provide adequate support to a book, helping to establish its place in postcolonial literature and the postcolonial literary market. The admiration shown by characters for Western countries and products in Soniah Kamal’s novel and JASP’s anthology is partly driven by the market forces of postcolonial literature. This paves the path for a certain type of books that are endorsed by “agents of legitimation” and cater to the tastes of the Western metropolitan audience. By creating characters who live abroad or in one of Pakistan’s three major cities—Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad—or frequently travel between abroad and Pakistan, Pakistani Austen Rewritings become more accessible to metropolitan readers. Furthermore, reviews from notable Western news outlets, like the one published in *The Economist* (2017) for *Austenistan* and the *Minnesota Star Tribune* (2019) for *Unmarriageable*, and interviews by the authors published on various online blogs and a foreword penned by Caroline Jane Knight in support of *Austenistan*, enhance their market appeal within postcolonial literature.

A closer examination of how these texts have been actually reviewed, marketed and received reveals the concrete workings of the legitimising forces. The marketing strategy that is embedded in the leaves of the books consists of publisher-supplied paratexts. These paratexts in *Austenistan* include cover blurbs that prominently display endorsements from Austen societies like JASP and postcolonial writers alike, constructing the anthology as a product that is ‘authentic Pakistani’ while remaining safely accessible to Western metropolitan audiences. Paratexts on the cover and copy of *Unmarriageable* market the novel as “Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan” and “A Fresh and Delightful Retelling of the Jane Austen Classic”, which is enough to grab the attention of any Janeite. Similarly, on the cover of the anthology, Moni Mohsin deems *Austenistan* as “A piquant morsel at a time; this is Austen with garam masala”. The foreword to *Austenistan*, penned by Caroline Jane Knight, the fifth great-niece of Jane Austen, is a particularly striking example of how agents of legitimation confer cultural authority on these texts. Knight’s endorsement of *Austenistan* as a text that “provides fictionalised snapshots of Pakistani society amid humour, drama, and romance” alongside her statement that “*Austenistan* is an anthology...written by women who, in many ways, have far more in common with Jane’s world than modern western readers” (2017, p. x) simultaneously validates the anthology’s credentials and brands it as a product suitable for the global fanfiction market for Janeites.

The book reviews published in newspapers and different sites of the internet become a tool of marketing when they endorse the merits of a book. The *Minnesota Star Tribune*’s review of *Unmarriageable* (McCarthy, 2019) similarly foregrounded the novel’s dual identity as both an Austen retelling and a portrait of modern Pakistan, appealing simultaneously to Janeites and readers of postcolonial fiction. Publishers Weekly (2018) markets and promotes *Unmarriageable*

as “a must-read for devout Austenites”. Similarly, *The Economist’s* review of *Austenistan*, published in its cultural supplement 1843 Magazine, explicitly markets the anthology as an exotic cultural product for Western readers, presenting it as a window into contemporary Pakistani society filtered through the familiar comforts of Austen’s plots (Moni, 2017). Newspaper reviewers do not always concur with the positive attributes of the books. When some reviewers celebrate these texts as welcome representations of Pakistani middle and upper-class life in English-language literature, Nudrat Kamal (2019), writing in *Dawn*, points out the texts’ selective portrayal of Pakistani society, highlighting the tension between their market-driven strategies and authentic representation. While Nudrat Kamal affords some praise to *Unmarriageable*, she is dismissive of *Austenistan’s* claim to authentic portrayal: “...it didn’t engage in any meaningful way with Pakistani society’s intricate system of social class beyond the sliver of the uber-rich strata...” (N. Kamal, 2019). Another reviewer, Radhika Oberoi (2017), in a very straightforward and rather harsh manner, castigates the anthology of “The collection of seven stories” as “...an insipid attempt at recreating Austen’s world of mild manners and lavish balls”. This statement might fall into the category of negative visibility, but negative visibility still constitutes a form of publicity.

Besides reviewers, publishing houses act as another agent of legitimation. As Brouillette (2007) notes, although publishing has become increasingly transnational, its production remains concentrated “in a few key cities of the developed world” (p. 56). *Austenistan* is published by “Bloomsbury,” while *Unmarriageable* is published by “Penguin Random House.” These publishing houses have branches in London, New York, Sydney, and New Delhi, playing a significant role in shaping Postcolonial Anglophone Literature. Huggan argues that promoting certain writers and select works through these platforms converges the narratives coming from the margins into homogeneous discourses through “strategic homogenization of postcolonialism” (Brouillette, 2007, pp. 4-8). Consequently, the international reach of these publishing houses fosters “hegemonic globalization” (Marsella, 2005, p. 16), and the role of other agents of legitimation supports the exotic and hybrid identities found in these rewritings, thereby reinforcing their market value.

This metropolitan concentration of production subverts the “representation of ‘other’ region” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 4) by undermining the true essence of representing the Global South. Influenced by these publishing houses, postcolonial writers incorporate viable characteristics like “Indo-chic” and strategic exoticism, which can be easily traced in their postcolonial literary pieces. Working together with the publishing industry, “authors attempt to show” their understanding of the techniques through which they “present the Third World or global South to a presumably apolitical metropolitan audience” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 5). Examining the authorial legacy of these literary endeavours, Brouillette (2007) strings an argument and finds that “trope of self-authorisation” is achieved by authors “through awareness of the political uses or appropriations of one’s works” (p. 74). Never entirely subdued by the influence of publishers and the demands of the markets, postcolonial authors still hold some agency in the making of the exotic.

JANEITES' ELITISM AND "ANTI-REALIST" DEMANDS
OF THE POSTCOLONIAL MARKET

Sarah Brouillette explores the relationship between writers from marginal spaces and the demands of the global market regarding postcolonial literature. Brouillette's (2007) findings boil down to two main points: how writers respond to market demands and how they use their identity as a marketing tool. Writers respond to these market demands by incorporating them into the books sold as postcolonial literature. Brouillette (2007) identifies these responses as characteristics that are often seen in published volumes of Anglophone postcolonial literature: "it is relatively 'sophisticated' or 'complex' and often anti-realist; it is politically liberal and suspicious of nationalism" (p. 61). While *Unmarriageable* chooses both 'sophisticated' and 'complex', *Austenistan* opts for 'sophisticated' because most fictional characters are from the affluent and socially privileged classes in Pakistan, who rarely interact with the middle or lower economic classes. This reflects and resonates with the practice of Janeites' "elitism".

Janeites from other cultures and lands - in the absence of ranks of English nobility and estates with peculiar names - craft characters in their versions of Austenian fiction based on the highest links of their own social hierarchies, leading to the phenomenon known as "elitism" (Barker, 2013, pp. 189-194). *Austenistan*, a product born of Pakistani Janeites' enthusiasm, is not free from elitism. The book is full of characters belonging to the wealthy, politically powerful, or historically noble classes. Friends and all three love interests of Roya, the heroine of Laaleen Sukhera's "On the Verge", belong to this elite group. Her ex-fiancé Princey, a philanderer, is described as someone who is "quite literally a nawab sahib with princely blood coursing through his veins" (Sukhera, 2017, p. 161). Olivier, the intended hero of Sukhera's story, is portrayed at the end as "Europe's hottest princeling" and the "youngest son of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg" (Sukhera, 2017, p. 174). In Mahlia S. Lone's "The Fabulous Banker Boys", the antagonist Dilawar hails from a "rich political family" and drives a "Porsche Panamera and was recently expelled from an American college for cocaine possession" (Sukhera, 2017, p. 6). Similarly, *Unmarriageable* highlights the wealthy male protagonist "Valentine Darsee" (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 74), along with his equally affluent friends, Hammy, Sammy, and Bungles, whose parents reside in California (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 87). Much of the novel focuses on the workings of feudal families in the fictional town of Dillipabad, culminating in the lavish "NadirFiede wedding" between Nadir Sheh and Farhana Farzana Fecker (S. Kamal, 2019, pp. 73-169). Even the female protagonist, who has fallen on hard times, once lived in "Jedda" with her family, received an early foreign education (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 32), and resumes frequent international travel at the end of the story (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 369). This portrayal of Pakistani characters and their circumstances captivate Austen fans, although they represent a selective minority removed from the broader reality of Pakistan.

Elitism is often linked with "sophistication", but the monotony of sophistication is compensated in the selected texts with such events in the stories that can easily be conferred as "anti-realist" (Brouillette, 2007, p. 61). In one of the stories from *Austenistan*, namely "On the Verge", Roya's endless excursions abroad in Europe and London, despite her serious financial woes and her lavish lifestyle with her profession of being a "fashion blogger", do not correspond with the reality of common Pakistanis (Sukhera, 2017, pp. 151-174). Similarly, it is worth noting that Laaleen Sukhera's almost entire story is situated geographically outside Pakistan, even though these rewritings are meant to be set in Pakistani locations. Another noteworthy feature of *Austenistan* is its preference for foreign products over local ones, making the book "suspicious of nationalism" (Brouillette, 2007, p. 61). Although all promotional materials - including blurbs, reviews, forewords, and interviews - employ affiliation with Pakistan as the selling point, this is

not reflected in the contents of the book. In another story, “The Autumn Ball”, a character named Maya states that “London was the centre of the world and she loved it” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 113), and Maya further discusses confused identities: “In Nigeria, she had clearly been a foreigner and an expat; in Islamabad the lines were blurred” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 116). Furthermore, other elements that bear out Brouillette’s notion of being ‘suspicious of nationalism’ are evident in the significant portions of the anthology, which are replete with ‘British’ and Western allusions that have already been discussed in the above sections in detail. This practice is peculiar in the postcolonial context because it translates as an attempt to undermine the identity of Pakistan while privileging the former colonial powers.

AUTHOR AS A MARKETING TOOL

A significant feature of the chosen fictional works is the biographies of the writers of *Austenistan* and *Unmarriageable*, which are detailed at the end of each book. These biographies make use of the authors’ “hybrid identity” (Lau, 2009, p. 572) and “the socioeconomic privilege of this new generation of South Asian writers in English — especially the opportunities granted by their educational background” (Mendes, 2016, p. 224). This enhances the marketability of their books, as John Marx’s interpretation of Brouillette’s philosophy asserts that “the author has become a marketing tool” (Marx, 2009, p. 811). This is evident in the educational background of Soniah Kamal, who wrote her second novel, *Unmarriageable*, as a thesis for her “MFA degree from Georgia State University” (S. Kamal, 2019, p. 379). Additionally, Nida Elley is introduced as a “college teacher, writing coach, and freelance writer” who is “based in Austin, Texas” and has been able to get herself published in “Psychology Today” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 177). The relevance of the “hybrid identity” of author Saniyya Gauhar as a piece of marketable information is established in her biography: “Saniyya has worked in corporate law and litigation in both London and Pakistan” (Sukhera, 2017, pp. 177-178). Laaleen Sukhera is not only the editor of the anthology, but her works also span “Pakistan, the UK, and the USA” (Sukhera, 2017, p. 179). Dr. Gayathri Warnasuriya holds “a PhD in Molecular Biology and Toxicology,” and while she represents Pakistani society, she is from Sri Lanka and has resided in Pakistan for only a few years (Sukhera, 2017, p. 179).

The key aspect of the specifications shared in these biographies is the affiliation of the majority of the writers with newspapers and magazines of international scope, which aligns with the ‘socioeconomic privilege’ that renders writers as a “marketing tool” (Marx, 2009, p. 811), along with their higher education attained from universities in two countries: the USA and the UK. These biographical features of the authors are reflected in the creation of their fictional characters, such as Masooma (Sukhera, 2017, p. 44), Kamila (Sukhera, 2017, p. 83), Emaan (Sukhera, 2017, p. 58), Roya (Sukhera, 2017, p. 151), and Maya (Sukhera, 2017, p. 112). This magnifies the fact that these works are “inevitably coloured by Western representations” (Mendes, 2016, p. 224), either through details of their educational achievements or their work experiences abroad. In this way, writers of both selected books market their identities not only via their biographies but also through narratives that are familiar to and appreciated by the Western readership, while enjoying the allure of the exotic or ‘other’.

CONCLUSION

Austenian fiction rewritten within a postcolonial geographical context involves two markets: one aimed at Janeites and another for the global postcolonial literature scene, which interprets and displays the nuances of the postcolonial culture industry. Mainly, the promotion of Pakistani Austen Rewritings is feasible because they exemplify “professional fanfiction” (Svensson, 2013, p. 206), which is naturally marketable among Janeites as they appeal to mostly “lowbrow” or leisure readers and sometimes cater to “highbrow” or well-informed Austen enthusiasts (Peters, 2018, p. 75). Furthermore, the inclusion of recognisable allusions and references from original Austen novels in Pakistani Austen Rewritings, along with the backing of “elitism” that is innate to Janeites (Barker, 2013, pp. 189-194), suggests the presence of Janeite-friendly elements in both Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* and Laaleen Sukhera's *Austenistan*.

In the context of the postcolonial literary industry, market-friendly strategies such as “Indo-chic” (Toor, 2000, p. 9) and “strategic exoticism” (Brouillette, 2007, p. 7; Huggan, 2001, p. 26) are employed during the creation of these fanfictions. The inclusion of ‘Indo-chic’ highlights certain cultural elements like clothing and customs of South Asian culture, which make *Austenistan* and *Unmarriageable* appealing to the global market, but it also tends to reduce diverse narratives of various South Asian peoples into a single, homogeneous entity. Moreover, by depicting “hybrid culture” through “Indo-chic” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2), these postcolonial stories attract cosmopolitan and international audiences because they prioritise Western influences over those of South Asian, particularly Pakistani, values and products. Conforming to these market forces—such as culture commodification and the hybridisation of the identities of the authors and characters in *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan*—strengthens simplistic stereotypes and caters to the Western gaze.

The postcolonial market-friendly characteristics are integrated through the active participation of the “agents of legitimation,” which include writers, critics, international publishing houses, and the reception of the book by readers. All these agents help shape and promote different types of exoticism in Pakistani Postcolonial Anglophone literature. The commodity fetishism—initially associated with Western writers creating exoticism—develops within Pakistani Anglophone fiction, where Pakistani-identifying authors now voice postcolonial spaces in a somewhat compromised way. These stories become more marketable after gaining approval from Western and cosmopolitan readers, international publishing houses, and reviews in prominent Western newspapers. All these factors, employed by the Pakistani Austen reimaginations of *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan*, position them as market-driven works that undermine the representation and agency of the Pakistani people, which the books originally aimed to support.

These findings further carry implications that reach well beyond the literary texts under examination. If strategic commodification - that operates through the employment of machinery like Indo-chic aesthetics, elitism, hybrid authorial identities and legitimising agents of the postcolonial literary industry - is the primary mechanism by which Pakistani Austen Rewritings secure global readership, a troubling question arises about the cost of this visibility. In catering to the Western metropolitan reader's appetite for a “safe” and “familiar” exotic, both *Unmarriageable* and *Austenistan* present a selectively curated version of Pakistani society: affluent, cosmopolitan and saturated with Western cultural references, while the experiences of the majority of Pakistanis remain in the shadows and perennially marginalised. Instead of empowering Pakistani cultural agency, these market-driven strategies risk consolidating the postcolonial hierarchies they purport to subvert by giving voice to the underrepresented. The

challenge for future Pakistani Anglophone writers is to navigate the global literary market without surrendering the diversity and complexity of the Pakistani experience to the demands of the exotic.

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