



Re-Orientalism and Colonial Nostalgia in Pakistani Austen Rewritings: A Case Study of *Austenistan*

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Abstract

Our paper aims to explore the recent Austen rewritings in Pakistani Anglophone fiction such as *Austenistan* as an example of professional fan fiction and postcolonial literature. These rewritings, we argue, possess such qualities that not only appeal to Janeites but also adhere to Re-Orientalism. The primary premise of our work focuses on the strategic use of ‘Austenmania’ by Pakistani Anglophone female writers in their fiction and its tendencies to project an oriental gaze on Pakistan, while also aligning it with the ‘benevolent modernity’ of former colonial masters. In our paper, we have critically analysed seven stories from the anthology *Austenistan* by mainly drawing upon the theoretical lens of Re-Orientalism propounded by Lisa Lau along with other relevant theories of Robert Dryden, Sarah Brouillette, Patricia M. E. Lorcin, and William Bissell, etc. Our research explores that Pakistani Janeites employ the practices of “possession” and “self-othering” in *Austenistan* through compromised and pejorative representations of Pakistan which is a manifestation of their nostalgia for the colonial past.

Keywords: Janeites, Regency era, South Asian writers, Pakistani Anglophone fiction, Self-othering, Re-Orientalism, Colonial Nostalgia.

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Introduction

Pakistani Austen Rewritings are fictional works that take up the task of setting Austenian stories of eighteenth-century England in contemporary Pakistan by Pakistani Janeites¹ who mostly belong to an organised fandom known as Jane Austen Society of Pakistan or JASP. Considering the postcolonial positionality of Pakistan and its amalgamation with Austenian canon which is considered as the supporter of colonial discourses (Said 93-95), such an arrangement warrants an investigation into the impact of the West and the Empire reflected in Pakistani Austen Rewritings like *Austenistan*. To understand the positionality of the Pakistani writers as postcolonial subjects who present a particular portrayal of Pakistan and Pakistanis, we have mainly employed the theoretical framework of Lisa Lau regarding Re-Orientalism along with supporting theories of Robert Dryden, Sarah Brouillette, Patricia M. E. Lorcin, William Bissell and Ranjan Bandyopadhyay. *Austenistan* is written by Pakistani Janeites who believe that the Regency Era of Jane Austen's books and contemporary Pakistani society have various stark and undeniable similarities (Warrach 2017). Such a foundation brings the discussion to the point where outlandishly centrifugal digressions from Austenian fiction in Pakistani Rewritings are problematised, and investigated as nostalgia for the time of Colonial rule particularly because of the inclusion of "authentic accounts" (Lau, "Re-Orientalism" 585) about political tribulations and "immigration belief" (Lorcin, "The Nostalgias for Empire" 270) in Pakistan. The fictional stories by Pakistani Janeites furnish numerous instances of colonial nostalgia through the recreation of Austen stories in the Pakistani settings.

In this paper, we contend that *Austenistan* compellingly illustrates the intersection of immigrant belief and colonial nostalgia, revealing how characters' quests for Western amenities and economic prosperity embody a deep yearning for the stability and modernity once associated with former colonial powers. We argue that the anthology's portrayal of personal ambitions and familial successes underscores the economic motivations driving postcolonial subjects, while simultaneously romanticizing the colonial past. We assert that *Austenistan* navigates the intricate interplay of economic and social influences, providing a critical examination of how colonial nostalgia continues to shape contemporary postcolonial identities.

Jane Austen Society of Pakistan (JASP): Navigating Social Representation in *Austenistan*

The authors of *Austenistan* are active members of the "Jane Austen Society of Pakistan (JASP)" (Gupta 2017). One of the prominent events organised by JASP is the annual costume tea party. Laleen Sukhera, the founder of JASP and the editor of *Austenistan* has talked about these costume tea parties in several of her interviews, published in online newspapers and different blogs. In an interview with *The Asian Age* in 2017, Sukhera recounts that during these

¹ Janeite is a term used for a 'fan' of Jane Austen's novels.

meetings in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, and London - members of JASP “host annual dress-up tea parties where they channel Regency fashion and Austen characters and ‘unleash’ their eccentricities” (Gupta 1) as an act of “possessing” the legacy of their beloved writer (Dryden 114). The vehemence which becomes the driving force behind the celebration, consumption, and dissemination of Austen-related products is termed as “Austenmania”² (Svensson 203-204). JASP channelise their act of possession and Austenmania in the form of fan fiction and tea parties. Since the society started as a Facebook group, various glimpses from these parties can be seen in the form of pictures where several Pakistani Jane Austen fans can be witnessed, all dressed up in Regency-era-style gowns, sipping their tea in a Regency-era setting with obvious adherence to English manners. This resonates with the tourism culture in England which is an attraction for Janeites, where they go to Regency-era-themed costume balls. Dryden observes that for Janeites adorning “Regency garb” while “playing at early-nineteenth-century life” is an experience like “stepping back in history just for a few hours” (114). The phrase ‘stepping back in history’ can be taken in the context of JASP and their annual costume tea parties, as they seem to evoke ‘nostalgia’ and their memory of the colonial era, showing a connection between British colonial times and its commemoration in professional fan fiction³ (Svensson 206) by Pakistani Janeites. Another attempt at establishing a direct connection of Pakistan with the British Regency era is reflected in Sukhera’s statement where she admits to calling the anthology “*Austenistan* since Pakistan may be perceived as the land of Austen (‘stan’ means land). We are 21st century in some ways, yet quintessentially Regency in many others!” (Hasan 2017). These statements highlight the fact that Janeites not only consider the possibility of Pakistan to be a land of Austen but also find striking similarities between Regency England and 21st-century Pakistan.

JASP’s affinity for British-style balls can be discerned in the two stories of *Austenistan*: “The Autumn Ball” and “On the Verge”, where the climax, main event, and highlight of the story, all are encapsulated in the form of a ‘Grand Ball’. In “The Autumn Ball”, a much talked about ball takes place in Pakistan (Sukhera 117) which justifies the rewriting of Austenian fiction within a Pakistani setting, but in the story “On the Verge”, the writer makes the protagonist attend a lavish ball in London (153). The inclusion of balls in the two stories out of seven in *Austenistan* can be rendered as an endeavour to pay homage to Jane Austen’s novels, although the latter story betrays the promise of setting Austenian stories in Pakistan with characters from contemporary Pakistani sociological backgrounds.

The authenticity of Pakistani characters and society in many ways, is problematic in *Austenistan* which is endorsed by different notable reviewers of the anthology like Nudrat Kamal and Radhika Oberoi. The short reviews printed on and inside the anthology stand in clear contrast to the ones published otherwise. On the back cover of *Austenistan*, Rebecca

² Austenmania is a phenomenon concerned with fans of Jane Austen by virtue of which fans admire, celebrate, further and propagate the works of Jane Austen. (Heredia-Torres 60)

³ Professional fanfiction is different from amateur fanfiction. Formally published fanfiction by an established publishing house is known as professional fanfiction. Amateur fanfiction is informally published by Janeites. (Svensson 206)

Smith comments approvingly: “I smiled all the way through”, somewhat similarly Ashok Ferrey regards the anthology as “A fascinating look at the lives of young Pakistanis today.” Moni Mohsin⁴ deems *Austenistan* as “A piquant morsel at a time... Austen with garam masala”. The foreword describes the short stories as “fictionalised snapshots of Pakistani society amid humour, drama, and romance” which are written by “women who have ethnic, cultural, or geographical ties to Pakistan” (Knight x). However, it is significant to note that the book’s reviews by notable academics and critics in South Asia have a differing stance as far as the claim of ‘authentic portrayal’ is concerned. Nudrat Kamal (2019) begins her analysis by calling *Austenistan* “frankly, atrocious” and proceeds to justify her opinion by elaborating that the book “didn’t engage in any meaningful way with Pakistani society’s intricate system of social class beyond a sliver of the uber-rich strata...”, later she proceeds to point out that it does not address “system of class” and the way they “intersects with other axes such as caste and gender”. Radhika Oberoi straightforwardly dismisses “the collection of seven stories” as “...an insipid attempt at recreating Austen’s world of mild manners and lavish balls” (1). Oberoi debunks the claim of the JASP that their stories constitute the elements of Austenian fiction and offers her analysis, beginning with the premise by observing that “the story itself is devoid of Austen’s comical satire, her admonishments, her exposure of the duplicity in the men and women who dwell in her novels” (1). A motive in the majority of the stories is the frequent travel between London and Pakistan by Pakistani characters which is not realistic and an easy feat for ordinary Pakistani nationals, Oberoi strongly criticizes this by alluding to “...planes that take-off to London (or return from it) with a frequency only matched by travellers in Bollywood”. For the depiction of realistic experiences suffered by Pakistanis in the West, Oberoi (2017) advises the JASP to read Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*. In short, among both South Asian reviewers: Kamal concludes that the writers of *Austenistan* only spin their stories about and around the “uber-rich strata” of Pakistan, the same is highlighted by Oberoi with her allusion towards frequent air travel to and from London by Pakistani characters. These critiques of Pakistani and Indian reviewers support the argument of the problematic portrayal of Pakistanis in *Austenistan* where the focus is only on the urban populace with affluent backgrounds and lives.

To counter the critique of the repetitive nature of the selection of characters from only the wealthy faction of society, Laaleen Sukhera, in one of her interviews to Soumyabrata Gupta, has denied the allegation and highlighted the presence of characters from all walks of life and diverse social classes of Pakistan. Sukhera “...begs to differ on the fact that it only highlights one section of the society”. She rather insists that “we’ve actually juxtaposed the upper echelons with middle and upper middle class characters and contexts as well” (Gupta 1). But despite the protest of Sukhera, it can be seen that Caroline Jane Knight - a descendant of the Austen family- is also aware that stories in *Austenistan* are about an esoteric lot. Knight,

⁴ Moni Mohsin was lauded as Jane Austen of Pakistan in “Karachi Literature Festival” by Francis Robinson (Shah 2018).

just before introducing the anthology as ‘snapshots of Pakistani society’, writes “*Austenistan* is an anthology...written by women who, in many ways, have far more in common with Jane’s world” (Knight x). It can be inferred that the writers of *Austenistan*, all of whom are active members of JASP, are in a league of their own and their stories showcase selective representation of Pakistan. The writers remain unsuccessful in doing justice to the diversity and social intricacies of Pakistan because of the practise of “totalisation” which “in the literature” produced in South Asian postcolonial spaces, has been going about “imposing the culture, values, attitudes, etc., of a select minority as representative of the diverse majority” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 573). These reviews vividly highlight and support the premise of our study that *Austenistan* is a depiction of the colonial nostalgia of the Janeites as they try to recreate the same colonial settings and narratives in their stories.

Re-Orientalism in *Austenistan*

With regards to the identity of authors, Re-Orientalism renders “diasporic women writers” as “the creators and keepers of the global literary image of South Asian culture” (Lau, “Making the Difference” 238). South Asian diasporic women writers largely perpetuate Re-Orientalism in their fiction, while in comparison, “home authors” do not practise this frequently. Authors who are based in more than two countries belong to the category of “sojourner authors” who nonetheless incorporate Re-Orientalism in their fiction (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 579). In the light of Lau’s theorisation, the seven female authors of *Austenistan* can be categorised as ‘home authors’, ‘sojourner authors’, and ‘diaspora authors’ in the light of biographies of all authors in the concluding part of the anthology. With respect to the geographical location, Nida Elley is the only author who fits into the description of ‘diasporic writers’ because Elley lives and works in “Austin, Texas” (Sukhera 177). Gayathri Warnasuriya is an exceptional case because although she is of South Asian origin, she is not Pakistani and in terms of her recent dwellings, she is more like a nomadic than a ‘sojourner author’ (178), so the closest category she belongs to is a ‘diaspora writer’. Mishayl Naek and Mahlia S. Lone are the authors who can be considered as the ‘home authors’ because they are living in Pakistan (177-178). Similarly, Sanniya Gauhar currently lives in Islamabad (177), whereas Sonya Rehman and Laaleen Sukhera are currently residing in Lahore (178-179); which also renders them as ‘home authors’. Tracing the current work and residential location of these authors grants them the title of ‘home author’ but the central point of Re-Orientalism lies in the authors making use of their identity as an ‘Orient’ and assume a supercilious tone while aligning themselves with the “non-Oriental or Occidental” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 572). In this context, Sanniya Gauhar, Sonya Rehman, and Laaleen Sukhera all have hybrid identities because although they currently reside in Pakistan, their biographies, riddled with their academic pursuits and work experience gained abroad in the UK and USA (Sukhera 177-179) heavily reflect in their fan fiction and lives of their heroines. Because of the association with both East and West, these authors get to enjoy and utilise their ‘positionality of powerful’ to become both, “where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other” (Lau,

“Re-Orientalism” 572). At best Saniyya Gauhar, Sonya Rehman, and Laaleen Sukhera are more close to the definition of ‘sojourner writers’ than ‘home authors’. Although in the case of *Austenistan*, ‘home authors’ also take part in Re-Orientalism because “residence in metropolitan centres” gives them “access to Western publishers”, “an international readership” (Salgado 6) and the global literary market (Brouillette 56) where they are in “positionality of powerful”, playing their part in the creation of ‘the global literary image of South Asian culture’ (Lau, “Making the Difference” 238).

Weighing between their association with the West and their identity as South Asians; South Asian women writers strategically opt for “skewered representation” of their own culture (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 585). The focus of this discussion is to explore the three strategies rather ‘problems’ through which Re-Orientalism is perpetuated in *Austenistan*; the first strategy is “overemphasis on being South Asian” (582), the second is the “totalisation” or “overgeneralisation” (584), and the third main strategy is to embed “autobiographical essentials of the authors in the fiction” (585). The first and foremost strategy is the “overemphasis on being a South Asian” by the authors in their fiction which leads to the misrepresentation of the society and their people (582). To “over-compensate” and to “pre-emptively” negate the allegations of not being qualified to stand among the ranks of true South Asians, these writers entrench their fiction in ‘plotlines, narratives and characters’ which predominantly exude the “South Asian characteristics” (582). These South Asian characteristics are manifested by the inclusion of information about how people, culture, and society operate in Pakistan in a documentary-like manner. Lone’s short story, “The Fabulous Banker Boys” opens with the character of ‘Javed’ who was born in a Pakistani “comfortable landowning family” and hailed “from a dusty town in rural Punjab that had remained unchanged for centuries...” (Sukhera 2). Such phrases explain the nature of ‘rural Punjab’ as something which “had remained unchanged for centuries” and depicts the writer’s attempt at overemphasis on being a Pakistani who has insight into ‘self’ which is only akin to an ‘insider’ (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 572). Nida Elley’s story details information and commentary about wedding rituals in Pakistan: “Typically, red was reserved for the bride...” (Sukhera 31), and Lone includes information about “matchmaking busybody known as rishtay waali amma” (31). Saniyya Gauhar’s “The Mughal Empire” contains a vivid description of a *mehndi* ceremony where a “*shamiana*” was set up, “white sheets covered... floor of the lounge...two *mehndiwalis* sat applying intricate designs”, “colourful glass bangles, multi-coloured silk *dupattas*” were present for guests, where in the feast “*haleem, biryani, halwa, puri* and small clay bowls of *kheer*” and “an assortment of *mithai*” were served (96); all these excerpts from the anthology, account for more traces of the declaration of being a ‘true’ South Asians by the authors. This practice of narrating the portions of the cultural practices of Pakistan resonates with the production of ‘Indo-chic’ (Ponzanesi 33). Consequently, a faction of overemphasis on being South Asian/Pakistani exemplifies the commodification of Pakistani culture in the selected texts.

The second strategy is embedded in the “sweeping generalisations” and “totalisation” which help in furthering the “stereotypes” and “clichés” which are responsible for portraying “Indian women...bound in perpetual servitude” and disseminating “skewed and/or misleading information on South Asian, re-orientalising in damaging ways” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 584). Articulating the stereotypical and clichés images of Pakistani women, Lone portrays the idea of the character of a wife: “*No man likes a headstrong and blunt wife*”, further she writes about one of her daughters that she must be taught “*to at least appear more subservient and pliant*” and comments about her eldest child, twenty years old ‘Jahan’ that she “...was angelic in looks and temperament, docile and good-natured, full of the sort of sweetness that men found appealing” (Sukhera 5). Sonya Rehman abets the “bound in perpetual servitude” clause by introducing the mother of the protagonist in the story “Only the Deepest Love” in this way: “Mum was in the kitchen peeling a head of garlic when I got home” (138). Such “generalisation” does not just cease with the ‘stereotype’ of women but also encompasses the “sweeping statements” about men; thus resonating with Lau’s statement about “a select minority as representative of the diverse majority” (“Re-Orientalism” 583). Emaan in “Emaan Ever After” states her opinion about Pakistani men and poses a question: “What is about Pakistani men that allow them to be hideous, both in looks and in nature?” (Sukhera 61). Commenting specifically on the male population of Lahore, Nida Elley overgeneralises: “He wasn’t sleazy like other Lahori men...” (44), and “Most Lahori men blow a fuse if a woman so much as says hello to another man!” (45). These are some examples of the sweeping generalisations from the stories in *Austenistan* which support Lau’s argument regarding the oriental gaze of the South Asian writers.

Negotiating between two identities, South Asian writers “deal in broken mirrors” because of “the hybridity of their cultures” (Rushdie 76) but while dealing with hybridity, South Asian authors adhere to “an unwritten agenda” which renders them to “claim insider knowledge (and status), while... distancing themselves enough to claim the position of knowledgeable representative or emissary” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 585). With the power of representation, they assert to possess “the best of both worlds” and assume the role of “guide and translator of South Asian customs” for “western readership” (585). Projecting characters with muddled identities, Emaan in “Emaan Ever After” mentions her “British Born Confused Desi ex” (Sukhera 63). Maya in Warnasuriya’s “The Autumn Ball” upon her return to Pakistan, oscillates between the poles of hybrid identity, simultaneously playing the role of a guide to Pakistan. In Britain, Maya felt “too Pakistani to be British” and in Pakistan she worries about being “desi enough for Pakistan” (Sukhera 115). Assuming the role of a ‘guide’, Maya critically introduces the geographical description of Islamabad with the tone of a tourist guide by enunciating that “The city was a grid of alphabetical sectors and street numbers” and explains: “...E is for the elite, F is for the foreigners, G is for government, H is for hospitals, and I is for the idiots who think they’re living in Islamabad but are actually living in Pindi,’... (116). Sonya Rehman also maps out the demographic details of Lahore and its outskirts. Her

protagonist as, a preamble, expresses her dislike for the “long commute to the suburbs” and then immediately blames her displeasure on: “Chocolate brown cows and lethargic buffaloes grazed in fields broken up by the enormous farmhouses of Lahore’s new money” (132). In comparison to the portrayal of cities in the West like London and Paris in most stories - particularly in Sukhera’s “On the Verge” - which reeks of overt admiration; both subtle and obvious tones of condescension adopted for the description of Pakistani cities in the quoted excerpts, give away an obvious attempt at “self-othering” because “elite group of Orientals still reference the West as centre and place themselves as Other” (Lau and Mendes 4). The depiction of the Pakistani cities by some writers of *Austenistan* seems to highlight the flaws and failings of these places instead of celebrating and focussing on the richness of their culture and heritage.

The laurel of “guide” and “translator” is also achieved by South Asian authors when they furnish a critique of “backward traditions and patriarchal oppressions” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 585). *Austenistan* casts a spotlight on and criticises the “backward traditions” along with the prevalent “patriarchal oppressions” in Pakistan which are reiterated when Sukhera’s heroine, ‘Roya’ is handed over a “box of Xanax by a well-meaning matron” when it was undoubtedly the “fiancé’s errant ways” that resulted in their broken engagement (Sukhera 152). Elley in “Begum Saira Returns”, highlights the ostracization and prejudice towards a widow who wants to lead a full life (28-29). Similarly, Sonya Rehman’s female protagonist talks about the abusive behaviour of her father, suffers from an episode of active violence by her male student Asif, who is the archetype of a tyrannical Pakistani man: he is the son of a corrupt politician (133), he physically assaults her teacher for a failing grade (141-142). Being a “guide” to ‘pedantic’ customs of Pakistan trespasses into the realm of political ideologies, and *Austenistan* celebrates the defeat of “patriarchal oppression” in the form of political happenings in Pakistan while infusing “Western ideals of equality, individual autonomy, freedom of speech” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 585). Nida Elley’s Saira draws confidence to face the society by iterating that “*We have a woman prime minister*” and repeats the intonation: “*We have a woman prime minister, I can attend a wedding on my own*” (Sukhera 30). A woman coming into power in one of the highest offices in Pakistan co-opts the ideals of gender equality which is preceded by the end of “patriarchal oppression” reverberating in the news about the death of a dictator: “President Zia had been killed in a plane crash”. Saira is informed by her renowned journalist friend when she continues to tell: “Benazir Bhutto had become the first female head of state of Pakistan, indeed, of any Islamic nation” (30) and this is a symbol of hope for Saira. But amidst all the hope and positivity, misrepresentation or lack of ‘authenticity’ by Nida Elley who is a diaspora author, peeks through when she calls the two-time prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto “head of state of Pakistan” probably mistaking Pakistan for the USA. Pakistan has a parliamentary form of government and here prime minister is the head of the government (Dos Santos and Jalalzai 192). With the “power of representation” at their disposal, this kind of mistake by the author, falls in the category of “skewed” representation (Lau and Dwivedi

2), when such important information is relayed through the character of a prominent fictional journalist.

Interestingly, the description of politics in Pakistan plunges into a bleaker realm when the totalitarian rule of “Zia” is detailed. Elley showcases the “patriarchal oppression” on the state level in Pakistan and vehemently condemns “women hating *mullahs* who’d protested Benazir’s win to finally sod off and bury themselves in the ground besides Zia’s grave” (Sukhera 30). While professing “internal insecurities, particularly over self-identity” and in an attempt at “self-othering” (Lau, “Re-Orientalism” 572); ‘Saira’ hopes that the “country would reverse its backward trek into the dark ages, and take its place among the progressive nations of the world” (Sukhera 30) and contemplates a reply to her own wish: “*It was hard to tell...looking around, if anything had moved forward or not*” (30-31) when just a moment ago Saira was full of optimism and hope to be alive in the era of a female prime minister in Pakistan. Such characters in the stories of *Austenistan* align with Lau’s idea of Re-Orientalism as they showcase the oriental gaze on Pakistan, its culture, politics, and history.

Nostalgia for Colonial Era: A Critique of Narrative Strategies

The socio-economic pejorative portrayal of Pakistan in *Austenistan* not only facilitates in foregrounding Re-Orientalism but also accounts for the manifestation of Colonial nostalgia. Lorcin theorises that the yearning for the time of colonial past “has more recently been expressed by nationals of former colonies, usually in troubled economic or political situations” (Lorcin, “The Nostalgias for Empire” 270). The snippets concerning turbulent “economic or political situations” in Pakistan are placed in different stories of *Austenistan* which is peculiar because most of the information either shows Pakistan in a negative light or in a near to neutral aspect. Elley’s “Begum Saira Returns” dedicates discussion to the politics of Pakistan on more than one occasion. Readers are served with pessimistic “political situations” of Pakistan when Elley’s protagonist condemns the political regime of “Zia”, expresses a death wish for all “women hating *mullahs*”, and desires to see “country” shoulder the rank of “progressive nations of the world” (Sukhera 30) but immediately negates the possibility with a gloomy observation that “It was hard to tell...” if anything changed for better (31). At another social event in the story, a new character ‘Nina’ comments on the transition of power from Zia to Benazir Bhutto. She is of the opinion that with Zia being out of the political picture, “things can only get better” but again the commentary ends on an adverse observation: “...you know what they’re saying about Benazir. That she’s married that slimy Zardari and that’ll be the end of her” (37). Even the optimistic remarks are shadowed by the grim assumptions.

Deleterious portrayal of political episodes continues in “Emaan Ever After” where Emaan in passing mentions “about being trapped in a conversation about CPEC” with the fulcrum of discussion oscillating on “how the influx of Chinese immigrants will affect housing prices” (65), an observation which is about the morbid implication of the project. Emaan in another place randomly complains to her friend ‘Saba’ that she has “been listening to people

discuss Panama Papers all night” (70). The placement of all these political excerpts which are not related to the seam or flow of stories in *Austenistan* are worth pondering upon because they only portray Pakistan’s “troubled economic or political situations” by incorporating ‘authentic information’ but fail to “answer the major political questions that it raises” (qtd. Marx 814). With that being established, *Austenistan* is produced with the promise of recreating the Austenian fiction whose nature is not entirely apolitical which a “lowbrow reading”⁵ of the canon renders it to be (Peters 75), but the Austenian novels are political (Neill 205) however in such a subtle manner (Southam 8) that even after two hundred years, scholars are still debating about its precise politics (Grady 2017). Therefore, not subtly but vividly inserting snippets and references about the politics of Pakistan, in a Pakistani rendition of Austen’s fiction, is not without a purpose. The pessimistic portrayal of political upheavals, coupled with ‘patriarchal oppression’; undoubtedly evokes ‘Colonial nostalgia’. The anthology also abets “nostalgia for empire” because *Austenistan* abundantly mentions London, UK, and US; but the book goes about “serving the function of silencing or obscuring past traumatic events” which translates to the “nostalgia for empire” (Lorcin, “The Nostalgias for Empire” 273). The lack of “past traumatic events” and focus only on the castigation of home politics in postcolonial literature act as an accomplice to the “Imperial Amnesia” which helps former empire to collectively forget the wrongdoings they inflicted in the past on their former colonies and remember their efforts in the dissemination of modernity in former colonies (Tharoor 236). Declaration like “London was the center of the world and she loved it...” (Sukhera 113) manifests the continued belief in the “benevolent modernity” (Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia” 104) of colonial rule and supports the ideology that it was “strict or even harsh at times” but there were “rules” along with the existence of “effectiveness of its planning and management” (Bissell 222). The presence of colonial nostalgia in *Austenistan* is evident because only a pejorative picture of the political system of contemporary Pakistan is floored in the stories and major political allusions are not inquisitive in nature or much deliberated upon in a constructive manner.

Nostalgia for Economic and Political Stability of British Raj

In the postcolonial age, colonial nostalgia sprouts from the tempestuous economic or political conditions and operates by reflecting itself in the “restorative dimension” and takes up the form of “nostos or yearning for the home” which in the case of colonial nostalgia “for a past lifestyle” (Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia” 98). Although the fundamental foundation of colonial nostalgia remains unchanged but the way it is manifested by postcolonial subjects differs “in the way in which such nostalgia is lived and articulated” and the experience “is more regionally specific” because colonial nostalgia is connected to the “differences in the colonial ‘heritage,’ on the variations of colonial paradigms, and on generational distinctions”

⁵ “Highbrow” reading accounts for a critical reading of Austenian fiction while “lowbrow” reading corresponds for a casual reading which is largely meant for pleasure. (Peters 75)

(104). The presence of the traces of colonial nostalgia found in *Austenistan* therefore colludes with the colonial “heritage” which is the residue of English colonial rule, also known as “Raj nostalgia” (Bandyopadhyay 167). In the context of the selected text *Austenistan*, “Raj nostalgia” is a yearning, harboured by Pakistani characters for the “past lifestyle” which in the case of Austen rewritings is the Austenian Regency era. This yearning melts into “personal or familial experience” (Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia” 98). Since colonial nostalgia is mostly “personal” (107) and is equivalent to “a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym xiii–xvi), and these “fantasies of the past are defined by the exigencies of the present” (Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia” 98). The personal involvements and romancing “one’s own fantasy” mirrors in the enthusiasm which female protagonists of “The Autumn Ball” and “On the Verge” show for ‘balls’ and the great lengths they go to, to prepare for and then attend these parties. The last story of the anthology particularly builds up the narrative towards the event of the “Avondon ball” which takes place at “Avondon Park”, an estate in the United Kingdom (Sukhera 162).

While reminiscing and romancing with her own “fantasy”, Roya’s journey to the Avondon ball begins with the preamble about the invitation to the ball. This preamble is elaborated with the nuances of a narrative of a fairy tale where she regards her “Sweetie Aunty” as her “Fairy Godmother” and relates that “She literally got me invited to a ball, and in the English countryside!” (153). The ‘fantasy’ vividly manifests colonial nostalgia in references to the era of British colonial rule with terms like “Georgian” and “Victorian-era Raja”. These two particularly are the markers of “colonial chic” (Lorcin, “The Nostalgias for Empire” 273) that play their role in strengthening and solidifying other parameters of colonial nostalgia. The exterior is described as “truly wedding-cake glorious” (Sukhera 162). The Georgian interior of the house is admired in detail: “The hall screamed Georgian glamour with its Rococo splendour and art...”. Roya walks into the “gallery” which is embellished with “paintings and sculptures”, and “exquisite snuffboxes, Dresden china and gleaming silver”. The ballroom has been embroidered “with beautifully high ceilings amid a treasure trove of oil paintings, and pillars of gilt and marble”, “antique chandeliers” along with “floral festoons” and “silver candelabras” (162). Clubbing the description of Avondon Park with ‘Georgian’ aesthetics and the ballroom with fairy-tale nuances aligns with the arguments of “aestheticisation” and “dehistoricisation” of postcolonial literature, which exonerates the former colonisers from any allegations and shows them in a favourable light (Brouillette 16). Another reference to the era of English monarchy pops up when Roya equates “Scott” with “a young desi man dressed as a Victorian-era Raja” who adorned “strings of seed pearls fastened by a large ruby onto a garish silver-wire embroidered sherwani” (163) because “Victorian-era Raja” stands complicit to “evocations of a past lifestyle and an idealised vision of the intercultural relations within the colony that existed at that time” (Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia” 103). These elaborate and exquisite details of the Empire manifest the longing for the colonial era.

Gayathri Warnasuriya's "The Autumn Ball" is also centred around 'ball' where protagonist Maya's excitement reflects in her thoughts about the autumn ball: "It wasn't a dinner or cocktails, it was a ball" (Sukhera 118), and even when she is feeling down 'ball' is the source of exhilaration for her: "slightly deflated, but still excited at the idea of the ball" (119). Preparations for the ball begin with her preparation for a dress by her tailor 'Riaz' in "Blue Area" who is instructed to sew a dress with "the neckline (deep), the hem (low), the swing and flow of the skirt" (120). The design of her dress corresponds with the dresses worn by the members of the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan at their annual tea parties which are the blueprint of Regency-era gowns (120): a manifestation of Austenmania. Maya's enthusiasm in making her dress is somewhat similar to romancing with her fantasy and also at par with the fervour of Janeites who feel like "stepping back in history just for a few hours" (Dryden 114) by attending Regency era themed balls which in the context of Pakistan is the era of British colonial rule. Therefore Warnasuriya's Maya and Sukhera's Roya manifest colonial nostalgia by realizing "fantasies of the past" through "the exigencies of the present" (Lorcin, "Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia" 98).

Immigrant Belief in Postcolonial Subjects

Another incarnation of 'colonial nostalgia' in contemporary times is the presence of awareness of economic turmoil and as a consequence the emergence of "immigrant belief" within the postcolonial subject which means that seeking "European citizenship" or that of former colonisers is embedded in the certainty that they "provide for better economic opportunities" than their native lands (Lorcin, "The Nostalgias for Empire" 275). Most of the characters in the anthology, are from a financially sound background, so economic turmoil is really not the prime concern of the book, still the immigrant belief can be seen in the story of "Emaan Ever After", "The Mughal Empire" and "On the Verge". Emaan of "Emaan Ever After", after the acquisition of a degree in Economics from LSE (London School of Economics), is shown to have promising career prospects in England which she abandons to come back to Pakistan, regarding the move as one of the "questionable decisions" (Sukhera 59); only to, in the end travel back to London where she lands a job at "Instagram's London office in Communications" even before landing in the country (80-81). The swiftness with which Emaan gets a job rejuvenates the notion of better economic aspects and opportunities which are the core element of "immigrant belief". Similarly, Kamila Mughal who is the privileged progeny of a plutocrat, at the conclusion and resolution of the short story travels "for her summer vacation to London" (110). She gets married to "Siraj" in "an elegant ceremony at Chatsworth House" and decides to publish her book "*The Problem with Mr. Darcy*" which sells "truckloads of copies" and lands "a film deal" (111), and all of this epitomises the narrative of economic opportunity and prosperity flourishing in England. 'Roya' also affirms colonial nostalgia through the immigration belief when she travels and resides first in France and then England; but particularly colonial nostalgia is manifested through her character in two ways.

The first one is about her desire to marry a wealthy person and settle in Avondon Park for good, which is no different than striving for ‘Western citizenship’. The second example - which is more of a proof than an insinuation – is about the family of Scott Tanvir; whose father “Sir Jimmy Tanvir of Surrey”, by immigrating to England, builds a business empire out of “halal burgers” (154) and become socially and financially prosperous enough to buy “Avondon Park” (162). In addition to the better economic prospect, the stories in *Austenistan* talk about England and America in elevating terms, “On the Verge” also mentions the French beach; collectively these incorporated appreciations manifest a desire for “immigration” which is again embedded in the belief in “stability” and presence of “benevolent modernity” in the present homes of former colonial masters.

Conclusion

One of the poignant issues that we have explored through our analysis is the charged role of apparently innocent professional fan-fiction (Svensson 206) of *Austenistan* in the promotion and propagation of narratives that cast an oriental gaze on South Asia by the South Asian female writers and Janeites whilst highlighting the former and contemporary cultural, economic and geographical references of their former British colonisers. Through a specific postcolonial lens concerned with the significance and repercussions of amalgamating Austenian fiction - originated from the very heart of the British Empire - with contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction, the claims of the authors of *Austenistan* for their stories about the portrayal of similarities between Regency era England of Jane Austen and contemporary Pakistan has been debunked. *Austenistan* falls short in doing justice to the merits of Austenian fiction by overtly exploiting their hybrid or dual identity; channelling self-othering and weighing more towards Western affiliations. Self-othering is orchestrated through strategies of over-generalisation, skewed representation with specific emphasis on patriarchal and backward practices. Within the paradigm of backward practices, in its stories, *Austenistan* infiltrates ill-placed nuances of economic conditions and political bits from Pakistan’s history; while creating a binary with the upper hand given to the British aisles where Pakistani characters are shown to reach the pinnacles of personal and financial happiness - surreptitiously corresponding with “immigrant belief” (Lorcin, “The Nostalgias for Empire” 270). The plot thickens with the fact that Jane Austen’s fiction is sorted with the British literature that strengthened the Empire and is used to subdue the nations under their colonial rule (Said 93-95). *Austenistan* does not opt for decolonisation or steer away from the colonial narratives but abets them. It does not celebrate the Austenian legacy as claimed by the Pakistani Janeites by highlighting the similarities between Pakistani society and Regency England; instead presents the Austenian enthusiasts with a questionable reiteration of binaries of the East and the West, with this time overtly prioritising and celebrating colonial era through threads of colonial nostalgia.

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