

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

Snapfile 6 Unmarriageable

As proud as a peacock p. 76

Today I'm doing a mini-book review of Unmarriageable by Soniah Kamal. This is a Pride and Prejudice retelling set in Pakistan. It's also set in the years 2000 to 2001. I love a good Austen retelling and this one goes down as one of my favourites. In this story, the main character is Alys Binat. She is a 30-year-old woman living in Dilipapad, Pakistan. She's been a teacher of English literature for 10 years at the British School of Dilipapad. She lives with her parents Bark and Pinkie, and her older sister Jena, and three younger sisters Lady, Qitty and Mari. The family has gone through some controversy in the past. Her uncle, her dad's older brother, cut them out of the family's fortunes, so, whereas once their surname was looked upon with great respect, they're now looked down upon in Pakistani society and in the past they've actually also lived in Lahore and Dubai. And so the girls are quite well-read, they're quite cultured especially Alys and Jenna who're both teachers. Their mother Pinkie is determined to marry them off. In fact, she's quite disappointed that she has a thirty-one-year old and a thirty-year old daughter who are unmarried, especially because their younger sister, Lady, is desperate to get married, be part of society and fall in love.

The Jane Austen Society of Pakistan p. 78

Voice 1: Really you've married Mr Darcy?

Voice 2: I have

Voice 1: Oh my God! You guys

Voice 3: In a way, in a way.

Laaleen Sukhera: I'm Laaleen Sukera. I'm the founder of the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan. It started off as a Facebook page and then we had a dress-up tea, super eccentric, super quirky. And it was just so much fun, there was no looking back.

[Photographer giving instructions]

Laaleen Sukhera: We discuss things and we analyse things. We draw parallels to our own lives and the society around us. And we see Mr Collins and Mr Elton. We see Mr Wickham and Willoughby. We don't really see Mr Darcy very much. We would love to.

One member: Lizzie overcoming prejudice in her life was the biggest hurdle which she overcame.

Lalheeen Sukhera: It's very easy for us, you know, in the Commonwealth, and with our postcolonial legacy, to sort of draw parallels between the Regency era 200 years ago and our society here in South Asia right now. And it's always very amusing and entertaining, but then there is a dark side to it as well. I mean the misogyny and the hypocrisy and keeping up appearances.

Member: I'm also married to Mr Bennet. Sometimes he may become Mr Collins too.
(that's very interesting) ...on a dancefloor.

Mahlia Lone: We still have a lot of similarities with 200-years-ago England, and that's basically especially for women. Our sphere is limited. The power we have over our own lives is limited. Our financial independence is limited. Do I need to go on more? Marriage mart. It's the same here, it's over a tea trolley. Literally, the girl is expected to pour tea as the in-laws are sitting. And how she pours the tea and how

she hands the cups and all of those things are very... She has to be demure, she has to be domestic. That's Regency England, isn't it?

Afshan Shafi: That's why she's so popular in Pakistan. It's a comfort to read Austen. I think. I think that's how I would describe it. It is like the greatest comfort to lose yourself in Austen's works.

[Girls dancing]

Marriage and class p. 79

In the society in which Jane Austen lives, and remember of course, we're dealing essentially with the middle and upper classes, she is never looking at the kind of society that Dickens looks at. She is not looking at the kind of poverty that Dickens describes, say, in *Bleak House* or *Oliver Twist*. She is looking at society for middle-class women. And in her society, at this particular time, inherited property runs through the male line, so a woman might be born into affluent circumstances but she will find that that affluence does not follow her through life. The only way to ensure it is marriage. And that's why, of course, marriage is so important in Jane Austen's novels. It's why too that, even though we enjoy the romantic fulfilment, which is such an important part of those novels, and of the course of the plot that runs through them, we're never allowed to forget that material circumstances matter.