

Mimicry, Resistance, and the Desire for Assimilation in *Unmarriageable*: Reclaiming Identity through Writing Back to the Empire

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines Sonia Kamal's Unmarriageable (2019) as a postcolonial narrative that oscillates between 'assimilation' and 'resistance,' ultimately producing a mimicry of colonial literary form. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'mimicry' helps analyse the tendencies of mimicry and a desire for assimilation in Kamal's narrative. Bill Ashcroft's concept of 'writing back' explains how postcolonial writers use literature to reclaim their cultural identity, rewrite history, and counter the dominant Eurocentric perspective. The research contends that while writing back, instead of creating a narrative rooted in Indigenous culture, Kamal's work reflects a propensity to replicate her colonial predecessors' literary forms and structures. This form of mimicry serves as a tool to resist in a postcolonial context through literary re-appropriation. This study critically examines how Unmarriageable (2019) serves as a site of cultural negotiation, where the desire for acceptance (assimilation) within the global literary world results in a significant mimicry of English literary traditions. The study examines whether such mimicry undermines the potential for authentic expression and merely reflects the influence of colonial power structures in shaping postcolonial literature, or whether, as the analysis suggests, mimicry can be valued as a meaningful reimagining and a form of resistance that offers a rich perspective on postcolonial identity by reinterpreting the plot of Pride and Prejudice (1813), a novel rooted in colonial representation.

Keywords: assimilation; resistance; writing back; mimicry; Bhabha

INTRODUCTION

On July 3, 1982, Salman Rushdie wrote an article titled "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance," which was published in the newspaper 'The Times' (London). He wrote it right after the Falkland Wars (1982) between Argentina and Britain. The article is a critique of British imperial nostalgia and the resurgence of colonial attitudes under Margaret Thatcher's government. The central argument of the article is that though the former British Empire was politically dismantled, it continues to exert its cultural, ideological, and psychological influence on postcolonial subjects. He plays on the title of the 'Star Wars' film 'The Empire Strikes Back' to suggest that instead of the empire striking, the colonised subjects are now responding by 'writing back', that is, by reclaiming narrative power.

The phrase “empire writes back” later became a source of inspiration for the influential postcolonial theoretical book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, first published in 1989, written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin. Ashcroft et al. (2003) used the term ‘writing back’ in the book *The Empire Writes Back* to explain how postcolonial writers interact with and question the literary canon of the former colonial powers. They contend that writings from formerly colonised countries subvert and transform colonial narratives rather than merely responding to them. The dominant British and European literary traditions, which frequently depict colonised people as inferior or foreign, are reinterpreted and resisted by postcolonial literature. Instead of merely rejecting colonial discourses, postcolonial writers emphasise how postcolonial writings appropriate, revisit, and disintegrate colonial strategies. The book explores how postcolonial authors disrupt English by frequently fusing it with regional dialects and languages. Such linguistic resistance enables the recovery of identity and the assertion of cultural independence, echoing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1986) call to decolonise language as a means of reclaiming the self. A key idea in the book *The Empire Writes Back* (2003) is intertextuality. The authors investigate how postcolonial authors adapt and reinterpret classic works of European literature from marginalised or indigenous viewpoints.

‘Assimilation,’ ‘resistance,’ and ‘mimicry’ are among the few major concepts used within the postcolonial theory. According to Moulettes (2024), assimilation is the process by which people or groups adopt the customs, values, language, and behaviours of the colonising or dominant culture. It often involves suppressing or rejecting one’s indigenous or original identity in favour of the coloniser’s identity. Therefore, postcolonial subjects experience a sense of losing their identity, traditions, and language. Assimilation serves as a coloniser’s strategy to immerse indigenous groups in the name of civilising them. Colonised subjects internalise a desire for assimilation into the imperial culture, seeking validation and access to power through this alignment. The act of assimilation can be responsible for creating internal conflicts within individuals or communities, known as ‘double consciousness,’ a term articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Rabaka, 2024).

The other concept, ‘resistance’ in the postcolonial context, refers to opposing the cultural, social, or political hegemony of colonial power. It emphasises reviving native culture, languages, and norms to counter the colonial power structure (Nayyar, 2024). Therefore, it can take the form of rebellion or a critique of colonial ideologies. It may also produce hybrid identities fusing colonial and native cultures. Bhabha (2012) argues that when a postcolonial subject exhibits an amalgamation of assimilation and resistance, it results in ‘mimicry.’ The mimicry takes a subversive role quite unintentionally, as the colonised hardly realise that through mimicry, they are challenging the dominant system of colonisers. Mimicry “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha, 2012, p.126). He emphasises the powerful nature of colonial mimicry and suggests that the colonised can use it to subvert the coloniser. His argument that colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p.126), asserts the coloniser’s desire to improve the ‘Other’ and to make him (colonised) like himself (coloniser). However, this imitation is never perfect; it is always somewhat flawed or incomplete, creating a sense of ambivalence and maintaining a clear sense of difference. Mimicry, in this sense, is both a strategy of colonial power, a tactic to immerse the colonised in their culture, and a source of resistance for the colonised as an assertion of autonomy and identity.

In this trajectory of postcolonial experience, the act of writing back emerges as both a literary and ideological resistance to colonial assimilation. It turns the conflict between assimilation, resistance, and mimicry into a useful place for cultural negotiation. Bhabha (1984) posits that the postcolonial subject exists in a "third space" where identity is neither wholly coloniser nor colonised but rather hybrid, serving as a platform from which the subject can 'speak back' to the prevailing discourse. Consequently, "writing back" serves as a symbolic act of resistance, enabling formerly colonial voices to regain narrative authority through the processes of rewriting, reinterpreting, and reconstructing imperial narratives.

In *Unmarriageable* (2019), Kamal utilises the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), a classic novel by English author Jane Austen. She adopts a witty style to retell Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) set in modern-day Pakistan. Readers take it as 'Austen with a South Asian twist.' The novel reimagines familial and societal expectations through the lens of Pakistani culture and contemporary issues.

The research argues that reading *Unmarriageable* (2019) in a postcolonial context exhibits a strong presence of 'mimicry' in the plot, themes, and characters reflective of postcolonial mimicry that aligns with a desire to assimilate and resist simultaneously. In a postcolonial context, 'mimicry' refers to emulating the culture, language, and lifestyle to gain acceptance within the colonisers' setup. The research asserts that the novel is a deliberate act of imitating Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) that serves as a tribute and a site of negotiation, reflecting postcolonial intricacies of cultural assimilation and identity formation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE DYNAMICS OF 'WRITING BACK': SOUTH ASIAN RESPONSES TO COLONIAL LEGACIES

While 'writing back,' South Asian postcolonial writers address a range of issues that define the distinctiveness of postcolonial literature. Through 'writing back,' these authors engage a variety of concerns that distinguish South Asian postcolonial literature. By addressing issues of cultural hybridity, historical trauma, colonial legacies, and identity conflicts, the authors subvert mainstream Western narratives while reclaiming their voices. In order to create a rich literary tapestry that captures the diversity of postcolonial South Asia, their works frequently combine indigenous traditions with inspirations around the globe. Through satire, subversion, and reconstructed histories, they glorify resilience and cultural reawakening while observing oppressive hierarchies. The dynamic interplay between resistance and assimilation distinguishes South Asian postcolonial writing as a powerful and distinctive force in world literature.

Bhabha's idea of hybridity has influenced South Asian postcolonial literature, which frequently integrates several languages, cultures, and norms. In order to create new forms of expression, writers blend English with regional languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, and other South Asian languages. For instance, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) uses Malayalam terminology and unusual English grammar to represent regional speech patterns. The 1947 Indian partition, which represents the grief of the colonial split and the hardships of recently independent states, is a significant theme in South Asian postcolonial literature. *Cracking India* (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa depicts the terrible effects of division on common people from a child's perspective.

Many South Asian postcolonial writers write back to assess patriarchy, gender oppression, and the impact of colonialism on women. They also explore the postcolonial immigrant experience, identity crisis, and cultural displacement. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) examines the struggles of an Indian immigrant family in the U.S. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) addresses migration and refugee crises in a globalised world. South Asian postcolonial writers have also integrated myths, epics, and folklore into contemporary narratives, sometimes using magical realism to blend history and fantasy. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) weaves personal and national histories together. Rushdi's *Shame* (1983) and *Midnight's Children* (1981) use magical realism to comment on political events. Persisting phenomena of economic imperialism, globalisation, and Western cultural dominance in the post-independence era add a significant dimension to the works of postcolonial writers as they engage in 'writing back' to challenge and deconstruct these enduring structures of power.

D'Cruze (2023) states that postcolonial writers use their writings to give voice to silenced communities misrepresented in colonial literature. Therefore, they emphasise the richness of their indigenous languages, traditions, and ideologies. In this process, they try to utilise non-Western forms of writing, linguistic, and cultural hybridity. This helps them explore displacement and struggle to negotiate fractured identities in a postcolonial context, thus developing a tendency to resist imperial hegemony. However, at this stage, the possibility of assimilation also gains impetus, potentially leading to the mimicry of colonial predecessors.

REVIEWING THE CRITICAL LANDSCAPE OF *UNMARRIAGEABLE*

Many critical studies have examined Soniah Kamal's novel *Unmarriageable* (2019), providing deep insights into its feminist, cultural, and narrative aspects.

Abid et al. (2020) examined the impact of materialistic and societal values on matrimonial behaviours by examining *Unmarriageable* (2019) through the lens of cultural materialism. Regarding marriage dynamics in the novel, the study emphasised the similarities between Pakistani culture in the twenty-first century and English society in the nineteenth century. It examined how consumerism, particularly dowries and social constraints, shapes women's experiences. This study also highlighted the conflicting roles of parents in this regard. It demonstrates how mothers are eager to find their daughters favourable mates and how fathers are preoccupied with financial obligations. Kamal's work places these marital problems in the perspective of a contemporary, middle-class society in its Pakistani location. The study reflected the persistent interplay between cultural expectations and economic realities.

In another study, Ramzan et al. (2023) examined the patriarchal oppression and cultural materialism evident in Kamal's novel *Unmarriageable* (2019) and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). This comparative analysis revealed how patriarchal norms, reinforced by materialistic ideologies, marginalise women in both historical and contemporary contexts. The results show that although the socioeconomic systems are different, women nonetheless face remarkably comparable underlying issues concerning marriage as a cultural institution entwined with social and financial status.

Another important paradigm for examining *Unmarriageable* (2019) is feminist narrative theory. In order to investigate the novel's feminist foundations, Batool et al. (2022) used narratological theories developed by Susan Lanser, Mieke Bal, and Franz K. Stanzel. It looked at how Kamal challenges the patriarchal and canonical domination of literature by rewriting Austen's story to amplify women's voices. The study emphasised Lanser's contention that to challenge established literary hierarchies, writers need to confront gender biases and incorporate female

voices. Kamal's storytelling strategies, which retell Austen's works in a South Asian context, perfectly illustrate how narratology may endorse feminist criticism and raise women's realities.

A study conducted by Gul et al. (2023) further reinforced feminist viewpoints by criticising the patriarchal institutions portrayed in *Unmarriageable* (2019) using Kate Millett's radical feminism. It examined how early marriages, as an expression of patriarchal dominance, hamper women's social mobility, education, and personal development. The study's results demonstrated the complex challenges female characters face, especially Alys, who defies social expectations and places a high value on her education and independence. Through a feminist retelling of Austen's novel, Kamal gives a vision of resistance and strength in addition to criticising gender inequality.

Joseph et al. (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of *Unmarriageable* (2019), along with other adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and shed light on its place within global literary traditions. The researchers position Kamal's work as fan fiction¹, comparing it to Sonali Dev's *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavours* (2019). Both novels, rooted in South Asian contexts, reimagine Austen's classic to reflect contemporary societal issues and cultural specificities. This approach placed Kamal within a broader framework of 'Austen's subcontinental fans,' highlighting the cross-cultural adaptability of Austen's themes. By incorporating fan fiction theory, the study underscores the creative engagement of authors like Kamal with canonical texts, highlighting their ability to reinterpret and reshape literary traditions.

Saeed and Ain (2020), in their research article, utilised Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes's Re-Orientalism theory. The authors analysed how the stories in *Austenistan* (2017) reinforce imperialist narratives under the guise of celebrating Jane Austen in a South Asian context. Saeed and Ain (2020) argue that rather than challenging colonial stereotypes, the narrative reinforces them through 're-orientalism'—a concept where postcolonial writers perpetuate the colonial gaze by essentializing their own cultures for a Western audience. In these stories, the focus is on Pakistani elites as representatives of Pakistani society. The authors claim that *Unmarriageable* (2019) is a representative of an uncivilised picture of Pakistani society rather than a presentation of an authentic version of South Asian social structure. The study emphasises how the stories glorify Western culture and ideals rather than challenging colonial ideology. They attempt to meet Western expectations while failing to represent the diversity of Pakistani culture. In this manner, they contribute to the re-orientalization of South Asian culture.

While the existing scholarship provides valuable insights into *Unmarriageable* (2019), a gap is identified in analysing the novel from a postcolonial perspective, mainly through the theoretical stance of 'writing back' by Ashcroft et al. (2003). According to the critics, postcolonial writers interact with and modify Western canonical literature to affirm cultural identities and contest colonial ideals. Kamal's novel embodies the act of writing back by rewriting *Pride and Prejudice* in a Pakistani context. This research article focuses on the study of *Unmarriageable* (2019) as a narrative of 'assimilation' and 'resistance' in a postcolonial context. This study reveals how postcolonial writers can exhibit 'assimilation', 'resistance', and 'tendencies' of mimicry in their personalities through their writings. By applying Bill Ashcroft's concept of 'writing back' along with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of 'mimicry,' the study uncovers how Kamal's replication of colonial literary forms and structures can reflect a subtle negotiation with colonial influences. This study addresses the lack of critical engagement with the complexities of assimilation and resistance in postcolonial literature and its implications for negotiating cultural identity and authenticity.

¹ *Fan fiction* refers to the creative reworking of existing texts by readers, often involving parody, reimagination, or cultural adaptation.

DISCUSSION

WRITING BACK IN THE SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

According to Bashir (2024), throughout the history of literary studies, the relationship between culture and society has continually evolved. While some critics regard literature as a self-enclosed aesthetic construct independent of social, political, or cultural realities, for others, literature serves as the mirror of the society that reflects and interrogates the world from which it emerges. Kamal's *Unmarriageable* (2019) aligns with the latter perspective as her narrative vividly mirrors contemporary Pakistani society, exposing its cultural norms, class dynamics, and gendered expectations.

Reading and analysing Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* (2019) in the literary tradition of 'writing back' illuminates that she does not engage with postcolonial themes directly or overtly politically like many classic South Asian postcolonial texts. Instead, her writing operates through a subtler, cultural, and feminist critique rather than explicit discussions of colonial history, nationalism, or migration. She chooses to challenge norms through literary writing. Her approach to resistance is through literary re-appropriation. By taking a British literary classic, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and shifting it into a Pakistani setting, she challenges the persistent dominance of English literature in postcolonial education (as seen in the character of Alys Binat's profession as an English teacher). Her narrative embodies a nuanced understanding of assimilation in a postcolonial context, appropriating Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1803) to assert its universal relevance. By highlighting the cultural distinctiveness of Pakistani society, *Unmarriageable* (2019) simultaneously opposes complete assimilation and highlights the limitations of Western classics that assert universality without taking into consideration diversity.

She highlights the elitist preference for Westernised values over indigenous traditions in South Asian societies. She portrays feminism as a mode of resistance. Instead of explicitly engaging with colonial oppression, Kamal focuses on patriarchal oppression in Pakistani society. She locates her resistance within social structures rather than in colonial history. Alys Binat is financially independent, refuses to marry for social status, and openly comments on the expectations placed on women. "But how about the daughter earn a good income of her own and secure this freedom for herself" (Kamal, 2019, p.13). The novel also highlights women's limited choices in marriage, education, and personal freedom, showing how gender norms, many of which were reinforced by colonial rule, continue to shape Pakistani society. As Alys Binat, a mouthpiece of Kamal, says, "I don't either," Alys said complacently, "but the issue is that women don't seem to have a choice that is free from judgment." (p. 16)

Kamal uses humour, satire, and irony rather than outright defiance to evaluate social norms. This differs from the more serious, politically charged tones of many South Asian postcolonial novels. Kamal satirises social class, wealth obsession, and outdated moral standards, mirroring Austen's critique of British society but applying it to a Pakistani context. Instead of presenting trauma or postcolonial suffering, the novel takes a lighthearted yet sharp look at contemporary South Asian society (Siddique, 2025).

"The sole entertainment for most Pakistanis was to eat out, and the elite English-speaking gentry in particular believed they deserved dining finer than Dilipabad offered" (Kamal, 2019, p.56). In this statement, Kamal, in a lighthearted manner, paints a vivid picture of Pakistani society, where simple pleasures like eating out are a rare luxury for most. Yet, for the wealthy, English-speaking elite, those who move in privileged circles and often have international exposure, local dining options in a small town like Dilipabad simply are not good enough. They prefer foreign-

influenced cuisine, thereby reinforcing a deeper divide in which Westernised tastes are valued as superior and deemed local culture inferior. This attitude reflects the lingering effects of colonialism, where fluency in English and a preference for global trends become status symbols. The elite's disdain for what Dilipabad offers is not just about food; it is about distancing themselves from the everyday realities of most Pakistanis. Meanwhile, ordinary people, with fewer opportunities and resources, find joy in the little things, like a simple meal out.

Readers find Kamal's narrative globalised due to an element of cultural cross-pollination. Rather than framing her novel as a battle between colonial and indigenous identities, Kamal portrays a world where British and Pakistani cultures have merged in intricate ways. Her characters celebrate Pakistani customs while quoting English literature, demonstrating that contemporary South Asian identity is about dealing with the West rather than rejecting it. By acknowledging postcolonial subjects as already mixed identities, she transcends the binary opposition between assimilation and resistance, as the given quotation shows: "English came with the colonisers, but its literature is part of our heritage too, as is pre-partition writing" (p.81). Kamal focuses on the complex relationship of Pakistani society with the English language and colonial literary heritage, showing how resistance and assimilation coexist. On the one hand, English functions as a lingering symbol of British rule, imposed by colonisers and still tied to elitism and privilege. On the other hand, Kamal positions English literature, including pre-partition works, as absorbed into South Asian culture and redefined as part of its intellectual and artistic legacy. Alys Binat, the protagonist, embodies this duality: she resists the snobbery of the Anglophone elite yet passionately teaches English literature, asserting that classics like *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (which the novel retells) now belong to everyone, not just the colonisers. By reclaiming pre-partition writings, readers enact what Ashcroft terms *writing back*, a postcolonial strategy of resistance that challenges colonial authority while redefining cross-cultural exchange. This tension reflects a broader postcolonial reality: while rejecting the oppressive roots of English, Pakistanis have appropriated the language and its literature for their own expression. Kamal's novel is an act of reclamation using Austen's framework to tell a Pakistani story, blending critique and homage. Thus, *Unmarriageable* (2019) illustrates how postcolonial societies resist imperial legacies and assimilate them into new, hybrid identities.

REFRAMING RESISTANCE AND ASSIMILATION IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

Scholars in postcolonial and cultural studies often conceptualise resistance and assimilation as opposing forces. There is a theoretical contradiction between the two ideas, as resistance is the act of opposing, rejecting, or undermining prevailing cultures, beliefs, or power structures (Multani, 2023). Implicit forms of resistance include literary rewritings and cultural adaptations, whereas revolutions and protests are examples of explicit forms of resistance. The process of assimilation occurs when people or groups frequently take on the customs, language, and values of the dominant culture to improve their social standing or obtain financial advantages. These ideas, however, usually interconnect in intricate and dynamic ways rather than being mutually exclusive. Resistance and assimilation are not required to be mutually exclusive; they can coexist and shape cultural identities through adaptation and negotiation.

The situation appears to be conflicting at first, as assimilation implies giving up resistance, whereas opposition to a dominant culture implies rejecting assimilation. However, examining this phenomenon in Bhabha's (1984) theoretical stance shows that these concepts operate together. He contends that rather than merely opposing one another, cultures in colonial and postcolonial

contexts combine, negotiate, and produce new hybrid forms. Resistance and assimilation frequently coincide in this setting. Thus, at times, strategic adaptation leads to hybrid identities, while at other times, strategic assimilation turns into resistance. For instance, a colonised person may assimilate (take on the coloniser's language) but utilise it to protest colonial authority (resistance). To negotiate power dynamics and maintain their cultural identity, many minority communities selectively assimilate. For example, authors such as Salman Rushdie and Chinua Achebe transform assimilation into an act of resistance by incorporating indigenous cultural components into English, a colonial language.

Assimilation is not always surrender, but rather a practical decision. Frantz Fanon (1963) explains how colonised people may embrace Western traditions to survive while also restraining them from colonial mentality. The intersection between assimilation and resistance is present in the novel, where Kamal adopts Austen's pattern but defies its Eurocentric framework. She incorporates local voices, viewpoints, and critiques into colonial literature while retaining the literary structures of the colonisers. Incorporating aspects of Indigenous culture transforms assimilation into a form of resistance. According to Ahmed and Mahmood (2024), "The postcolonial text has the potential to establish a transcultural moment...The creative freedom of transculturation is a place of transformation where readers and writers can participate in envisioning and remaking cultural norms and identities" (p.137). Kamal's narrative offers readers this freedom by creating a transcultural literary space where British and Pakistani cultures collide to produce new meaning. This process of cultural blending allows hybrid forms of social and cultural belonging that challenge both colonial legacies and restrictive local norms.

POSTCOLONIAL MIMICRY: BETWEEN CONTROL AND SUBVERSION

According to Bhabha, "...colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (2012, p.126). According to this theoretical stance, colonial mimicry is the method by which the coloniser attempts to transform the colonised subject into a person who is similar to yet distinct from the coloniser. This control tactic results in a 'reformed, recognisable Other'—a subject who seems to submit to colonial authority while still being identified by difference.

The paradox of mimicry can be observed in the expression 'almost the same, but not quite.' Although the colonisers encourage the colonised subject to adopt the coloniser's language, traditions, and habits, they never allow the colonised subject to emulate the coloniser completely. Thus, the result is the maintenance of colonial hierarchy. The colonised would question the coloniser's authority if they were fully absorbed. Instead, mimicry maintains them in a transitional state, neither completely alien nor wholly embraced.

During British colonial India, the government encouraged Indians to pursue Western education, producing a class of English-speaking elites who helped run the country. However, colonial power structures denied these elites genuine equality, reinforcing fixed hierarchies. They were 'almost the same' as the British regarding knowledge and manners, but their continued subordination highlighted their differences.

Thus, mimicry becomes a two-edged sword. It has the potential to be subversive even though its purpose is to uphold colonial control. Partial colonial adoption by the colonised subject can lead to resistance and reveal the brittleness of colonial authority. This is what Bhabha (2012) refers to as 'mimicry as menace' when imitating undermines colonial control instead of strengthening it.

MIMICRY AND HYBRIDITY IN UNMARRIAGEABLE

Kamal chose to write on a social issue in the context of Pakistani society while opting for a well-established plot of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) written by Jane Austen in the 19th century. Following Austen, Kamal's focus is mainly on the institution of marriage that correlates with the themes of class and cultural norms in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Her narrative mimics *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) on different levels, including plot structure, thematic parallels, character similarities, scene-by-scene mimicry, social and cultural parallels, and the mimicry of Austen's writing style.

The narrative structure of the novel closely resembles Austen's novel. Alys Binat resembles the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, as an independent woman who likes to challenge traditional gender roles. The character of Valentine Darsee is a model of Mr. Darcy, who has the exact characteristics of staying aloof in the beginning and the eventual transformation in his personality. The narrative includes Darsee's prideful proposal and Aly's initial rejection, reflecting Elizabeth and Darcy's famous scenes.

Regarding thematic parallels, both novels focus on the importance of marriage in their respective societies. Marriage was a social issue in 19th-century British society and remains the same in the 21st century in South Asian regions. Kamal criticises the marriage institution in contemporary Pakistan just as Austen did in Regency England. The mimicry helps show a persistent patriarchal structure as well. Class prejudice, another significant theme of the novel between the Binats and Darsee, reflects the tension between the Bennets and Darcy in Austen's original story. Kamal depicts socioeconomic inequalities in Pakistani society, reflecting Austen's investigation of class prejudice. For instance, the decline of the Binat family reflects the Bennets' unstable social position.

Considering the character's analogues, Jena Binat, Alys's elder sister, is as gentle, kind, and reserved as Jane Bennet. Fahad Bingla is Jena's romantic interest, paralleling Mr Bingley's amiable and easygoing demeanour. Barkat Binat mimics Mrs Bennet's obsession with marrying off her daughters to wealthy men. Kaleen Taneen mirrors Mr Collins as a pompous suitor rejected by Alys, reinforcing her independence.

Kamal adopts Austen's writing style using the same witty and ironic tone. This helps her present the Pakistani context while retaining the flavour of British literary conventions. Kamal's mimicry suggests a postcolonial need for acceptance in a literary legacy based on colonial power systems, which goes beyond plot and characters to thematic consensus with Austen's convictions.

She starts her novel by borrowing Austen's introductory lines: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 1813, p.3). She utilises the expression to imitate Austen's writing style with a focus on the theme of marriage: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a girl can go from pauper to princess or princess to pauper in the mere seconds it takes for her to accept a proposal" (Kamal, 2019, p.3). She appropriates Austen's famous first line and reconfigures it to reflect contemporary Pakistani societal pressures around marriage, wealth, and female agency. This reflects Bhabha's (1984) idea of mimicry as "almost the same, *but not quite*" (p.127), as the form is Austen's, but the content criticises South Asian gender norms. Austen's novel analyses Regency England's marriage institution, where women's security depends on marrying well. Kamal reworks Austen's plot by transplanting it to postcolonial Pakistan, where comparable pressures persist but are reshaped by Islamic culture, caste, and postcolonial class dynamics. Alys, an English schoolteacher, invites the

whole class to take an active part in the creative task to modify and add to the given expression according to their mental setup. The first selected girl picks up a blue chalk and writes on the board:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young girl in possession of a pretty, a fair complexion, a slim figure, and a good height is not going to happily settle for an ugly husband if he doesn't have enough money unless she has the most incredible bad luck (which my cousin does)"

(Kamal, 2019, p.4)

The humour and exaggeration in the phrase (which my cousin does) reveal the absurdity of universal 'truths,' destabilising both Austen's original and contemporary Pakistani patriarchy. This is how she starts imitating the original plot of Austen's novel on different levels and adheres to it throughout the narrative. Another girl writes on the blackboard, "It is unfortunately not a truth universally acknowledged that it is better to be alone than to have fake friendships" (p.5). Then, another girl writes in red, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that every marriage, no matter how good, will have ups and downs" (p.5). Then another student adds, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that if you are the daughter of rich and generous parents, then you have the luxury not to get married just for security" (p.5). The students' rewritten versions further parodied Austen's tone while exposing local prejudices (e.g., valuing fair complexion, wealth, and social status). These playful rewritings not only parody Austen's famous opening but also put it in a modern South Asian cultural context, highlighting the conflicts between lived social realities and inherited literary traditions. In doing so, they modify a classic work into a site of resistance where local voices redefine universal claims.

Kamal's mimicry does not merely copy Austen; it hybridises her framework. For example, the novel includes Urdu phrases such as "*Angrez ki aulad*"² (p.95), used as a sarcastic taunt toward those who flaunt their proficiency in English. Expressions such as "*wazeefays*"³ and "*manaats*"⁴ (p. 206) in Mrs. Binat's speech evoke traditional practices of prayer and vow-making in a highly localized, emotional register. Pakistani wedding rituals and references to Bollywood, create a third space (Bhabha's term) where colonial and postcolonial cultures intermingle. Characters' social expectations and rituals set in a Pakistani setting (weddings, dowries, marriage proposals) but colored by local-language idioms and tonal shifts, which transform Austen's plot rather than simply retell it.

The students' chalkboard exercise literalizes that their rewritings are appropriations, not replications. The satirical lines by Alys's students highlight how globalized materialism "princess to pauper" (p.5) intersects with local expectations. As Bhabha (2012) argues that mimicry is inherently ironic because it both repeats and mocks the original. This irony is evident when one of Kamal's characters writes on the board, "It is a truth universally acknowledged in this world and beyond that having an ignorant mother is worse than having no mother at all" (p. 8). The line about "an ignorant mother" uses Austen's aphoristic style to comment on local familial power structures, not British ones. By parodying Austen's iconic sentence, the students expose the contradictions within their own society, where parental authority is often unquestioned yet deeply flawed. The humor sharpens the critique, transforming a witty remark into a commentary on generational

² The Urdu phrase "*Angrez ki aulad*" literally means "children of the English," and is used satirically for people who excessively imitate Western values or lifestyles.

³ The term "*wazeefays*" refers to Qur'anic verses or prescribed recitations performed repeatedly as supplications, often seeking divine intervention or the fulfilment of personal wishes.

⁴ "*Manaats*" refers to vows or devotional offerings made in fulfilment of spiritual requests, a common practice in South Asian Muslim culture.

ignorance and misplaced values. In this way, the text highlights how mimicry functions not merely as imitation but as a strategy to unmask the hypocrisies embedded in both colonial and indigenous systems.

The act of rewriting activity becomes mimicry as resistance. When Alys Binat asks her students to rewrite the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), “Her new batch of Year 10s were starting *Pride and Prejudice*, and their first homework had been to rewrite the opening sentence of Jane Austen’s novel...” (p.11). Although the students mimic a colonial text, they do not reproduce its meanings; instead, they appropriate its form to expose their own society’s gender inequalities. The act transforms a symbol of British literary authority into a tool for critiquing local patriarchal norms shaped by colonial legacies. For example, a student writes on the blackboard, “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young girl...is not going to happily for a very ugly husband, if he doesn’t have enough money...” (p.10), allows Pakistani girls to resist both patriarchal and colonial legacies through a hybrid, subversive re-voicing of a British classic.

By having Alys (a Pakistani teacher) teach Austen, Kamal reverses the colonial gaze as now the ‘native’ interprets and revises the canon. The students’ parodied lines—like the inversion “a single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a husband” (p.6) highlight how mimicry can empower marginalized voices to criticize both Western and local hegemonies.

Kamal’s novel aligns with Bhabha’s theory by demonstrating how postcolonial texts repeat with difference. The mimicry of Austen’s style and plot is not homage alone; it is a strategic tool to expose the contradictions between colonial legacies and Indigenous patriarchy. The students’ playful rewritings embody that their ‘universal truths’ are at once Austenian and defiantly Pakistani, revealing how mimicry can be a form of creative resistance. According to Bhabha (2012), mimicry is threatening because of its twofold nature: exposing the instability of colonial rhetoric and destabilizing its control. This is precisely what Kamal’s novel accomplishes: it wields Austen’s influence to subvert fixed cultural ideologies.

The concept of mimicry is very close to mockery; therefore, it is alarming for the colonizer. It pinpoints a lack of the colonizer’s ability to control the behavior of the colonized (Bhabha, 1984). Lord Macaulay’s *Minute to Parliament*, which Kamal has also referred to at the beginning of her novel *Unmarriageable* (2019), is a strategy to make a mimic man. “A class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and intellect” (Macaulay, 1835, p.162). In one of her interviews, Kamal mentions the essays she had added at the beginning of her novel; she explains that she wanted to give herself an identity that includes Pakistani and English language and culture. She further explains that she was brought up in an environment where the linguistic legacy of colonialism was present with all its complications. As a response to a question about why she chose to write a parallel plot of Jane Austen, she responded that she intentionally chose to write a plot that runs parallel to the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) because if she had written an inspired-by plot, she could have given it a different beginning or ending. She intended to write the same plot, treated through a postcolonial lens (Cox, 2020). Therefore, all her characters are the same as in Austen’s plot. For her, the challenge was not to deviate from the original plot and, even then, make it her own. Therefore, the essential traits of each character are all the same, but they have a flavor of Pakistani norms and traditions.

According to Bhabha (2012), mimicry can also be subversive since it establishes a place in which the colonized subject both replicates and questions the authority of the colonizer. Kamal's mimicry in *Unmarriageable* (2019) reveals the universality of Austen's criticisms, implying that the social problems Austen tackled are still pertinent in postcolonial settings. Kamal challenges the Eurocentric monopoly on Austen's story by adapting *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) for a South Asian audience in a Pakistani setting.

BEYOND IMITATION: AUTHENTICITY AND SUBVERSION

Kamal's mimicking of well-recognized classic positions her work in a place appealing to local and global audiences. However, such literary parallels may raise questions about how postcolonial literature must conform to Western literary norms to get acceptance in the global market. *Unmarriageable* (2019) reflects a tendency to undermine the potential for an authentic postcolonial voice, as it prefers to align with a colonial literary tradition rather than exploring the tradition of indigenous storytelling.

On the surface, *Unmarriageable* (2019) closely resembles *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) regarding plot, character archetypes, and key events. This strict adherence to Austen's book is a kind of imitation devoid of narrative uniqueness. However, this interpretation is constrained and reductive because Kamal reviews postcolonial and patriarchal norms by recontextualizing Austen's plot and goes beyond simple copying.

While *Unmarriageable* (2019) uses Austen's plot, Kamal transforms the meaning by situating it within a postcolonial Pakistani society. Critiquing colonial education, Alys Binat, the protagonist, openly challenges how English literature (including Austen) is privileged over indigenous literary traditions. In a confrontation with the headmistress, Naheed accuses Alys of challenging the dominance of English literature: "Another year you told them that they should be reading Urdu and regional literature instead of English" (p.23). This self-awareness makes the novel more than just mimicry as it reviews colonial influence. Kamal examines marriage, respectability, and class in a way that speaks specifically to postcolonial Pakistan, making it a reinterpretation rather than just a replication. Linguistic hybridity is another characteristic of the novel that presents an instance of postcolonial mimicry. By integrating Urdu words, Pakistani customs, and local idioms, Kamal subverts the English literary tradition. It resembles Chinua Achebe's use of Igbo words in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), resisting the total dominance of English.

ORIGINALITY IN POSTCOLONIAL RETELLINGS

It is a simplistic claim that retelling cannot be original if it borrows its plot from an existing work. It is a reductive assessment that overlooks the transformative power of perspective, context, and intent. While *Unmarriageable* (2019) follows the narrative structure of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), its originality emerges through its cultural reinterpretation and subversion of the original. Likewise, celebrated works like Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) are praised not for rewriting the plots of *Jane Eyre* (1847) or *Heart of Darkness* (1902) but for their bold recontextualization of these stories through marginalized viewpoints. For example, Rhys gives voice to a suppressed character in Brontë's work by reimagining Bertha Mason as a multifaceted character. In order to examine the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism from an African viewpoint, Salih simultaneously flips Conrad's Eurocentric viewpoint. These literary works are interrogative rather than imitations,

utilizing the structure of pre-existing narratives to question and challenge the beliefs they contain. In literature, originality is not only characterized by the creation of novel plots but also by the creative reimagining of well-known stories to subvert prevailing narratives. Rewriting is used explicitly in postcolonial retellings as a strategy to undermine colonial viewpoints and recover agency.

In these situations, the retelling's originality lies in its new perspectives, cultural distinctiveness, and critical engagement with the original text. These works attain a profound uniqueness that goes beyond the confines of the plot by reinterpreting well-known stories via the marginalized lens, providing fresh perspectives on the world. Mimicry is a subversive tactic in *Unmarriageable* (2019), not to undermine originality. Kamal engages in what Ashcroft et al. (2003) calls 'writing back to the empire' by rephrasing the story via a postcolonial feminist lens rather than merely copying Austen.

CONCLUSION

The study argues that *Unmarriageable* (2019) is a distinctive postcolonial narrative, offering a layered exploration of assimilation, resistance, and mimicry. Kamal engages in what Bill Ashcroft terms 'writing back to the empire', a strategy postcolonial authors employ to challenge and reinterpret dominant Eurocentric discourses by reworking Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) within a contemporary Pakistani context. However, Kamal's novel also exhibits a nuanced form of mimicry, retaining Austen's foundational literary framework while weaving in local cultural, social, and feminist critiques. The duality of accepting and subverting Western literary behaviors emphasizes the inherent ambivalence in postcolonial literature, where a tussle between asserting cultural authenticity and seeking global literary acclaim often persists. While her emulation of Austen's structure and style may engage both local and international audiences, it also raised questions about whether it dilutes the possibility of a more distinctly postcolonial voice. Critical analysis of *Unmarriageable* (2019) through Bhabha's concept of postcolonial mimicry concludes that this rewriting does not undermine originality instead gives a diverse perspective on the act of 'writing back.'

The study concludes that Kamal's narrative is not a mere imitation of Austen's story but a deliberate act of subversion. It asserts that *Unmarriageable* (2019) carries the intricacies of postcolonial literature, where resistance, assimilation, and mimicry intersect in intricate and sometimes contradictory ways. Through the novel, she contributes to the broader project of 'writing back,' thus challenging the dominance of Western literary canons and reaffirming the value of postcolonial perspectives.

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