



University of Mumbai



**CoHaB IDC's Extension Lectures**  
**Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha's online lecture on Jane Austen's *Emma* for TYBA English students in Konkan region**

In the lockdown period, the CoHaB IDC, apart from conducting online lectures and webinars in diaspora studies, is broadening its scope of activities and reaching out to faculty and students in other related academic areas too.

In this context Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre, delivered an online extension lecture on Jane Austen's *Emma* for TYBA English Literature organized by Mumbai University's Vijayalakshmi Vishwanath Dalvie College, Vishwbhushan Bharatratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar College and Dombivli Shikshan Prasarak Mandal's K. V. Pendharkar College on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.



Professor Bharucha began the lecture by talking about the author Jane Austen. She discussed how there are different portraits available of the author but the one validated by her biographer Paula Byrne, known as 'the Byrne Portrait' is the most favoured one by many critics.

Also available are the water colour sketches by Austen's sister Cassandra and an Engraving commissioned by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh. Jane was one of the eight children born to Revd George and Cassandra Austen. Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 and grew up in Steventon, Hampshire.



The Byrne Portrait: circa 1813-15, London



Water colour and Sketch by Cassandra, 1804 and 1810



1870 Engraving commissioned by nephew James Edward Austen Leigh

Austen started writing by the age of 11 and between 1796 and 1798, she started working on *Elinor and Marianne*, *First Impressions* and *Susan* which were later published as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Northanger Abbey* (1818, posthumous) respectively.

In 1809, Austen lived in her brother Edward Austen-Knight's cottage on his estate in Chawton, which is now known as the Jane Austen House Museum. In 1811, at the age of 35, Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* was published, followed by *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814 and *Emma* in 1815.

On 18 July 1817, Jane died at the age of 41 in Winchester either from Addison's disease or Arsenic poisoning as is being suggested now.

In *A Memoir of Jane Austen* by James Edward Austen-Leigh, the author has drawn attention to Jane Austen's remarks on *Emma* and that no one else apart from her, would like its heroine. However, this has proved incorrect as *Emma* is still popular with readers and there have been multiple film adaptations and documentaries of the novel in Hollywood and Bollywood (*Aisha*, 2010). *Emma* was dedicated to the Prince Regent who was a fan of Austen's work.

Professor Bharucha then spoke about the major themes of marriage and social status that Austen deals with in the novel. Austen talks about how a woman's destiny in the then male dominated socio-economic reality was marriage. However, what makes Emma Woodhouse different in the novel is her economic independence and her pliant father. She is almost above the laws of the marriage market owing to her independent social status. The character of Emma in the novel is also very different than the female characters in Austen's other novels who more or less followed the existing social norms.

Professor Bharucha then focussed on the main narrative strands in the novel, i.e. match-making and social discrimination.

Professor Bharucha went on to discuss how we need to look at the novel's relevance in our current times. *Emma* is a canonical text which can be re-interpreted by doing feminist and postcolonial re-readings.

From a feminist point of view we need to look at how Emma thinks of herself as a person who does not need a man to make her complete. This was groundbreaking in Austen's times.

As for a postcolonial reading of Austen, Edward Said in *Orientalism* discusses how Austen and her contemporaries are intentionally silent on the colonial rule. Said is very critical of Austen and the other authors of her time.

In conclusion Professor Bharucha spoke about how the novel reflects the situation prevalent in Austen's time and how ultimately Emma is ready to accept the changing social structure. At the same time, Austen's Emma does not give up her independence and accepts Mr. Knightley's marriage proposal on equal terms. In fact, Mr. Knightley can be seen as a liberated man because in spite of his independent social status, he chooses to live with Emma in her father's home.

Professor Bharucha's lecture was live streamed on Dalvie College's YouTube channel and was well received by the audience.

You may view the entire lecture at the link given below:

**[Jane Austen's Emma - Online Lecture by Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha on 21 September 2020 organised by Dalvie College, Konkan](#)**