

Research/Inspiration for *Marrying Ameera*

In 2006 I was visiting Pakistan on an Asialink Fellowship for research on an idea I had for another novel. My host school in Murree Northern Pakistan became a base to travel from and in between I worked in classrooms and did research in the comprehensive library on Pakistani culture and history, the Pathans, Gujjar nomads, as well as on societal customs such as weddings, folktales, crafts and religion.

The school was tight on security due to a terrorist attack a few years previously, but since I had my husband with me I was able to take many research trips – including up the Karakorum Highway, where we passed the tribal areas of Kala Dhaka (Black Mountain) and Kohistan (Land of Mountains), to Azad Kashmir and other the earthquake affected areas.

It was on that trip to Azad Kashmir that we met an English couple who knew a man from the Forced Marriage Unit in the British Consulate. I immediately could see the idea for a new novel. The next day at the school I was able to do mind maps on the characters and write up an outline. This rarely happens so quickly but all that I had been seeing and hearing for the last five weeks suddenly erupted into this story and I began writing it at once. I also started collecting folktales, cloth, patterns for outfits, news clippings and Pakistani literature.

Although I had spent seven years in Pakistan when I was younger, I felt that this time I understood the richness of the culture so much more than I did before. I was able to visit in local homes, even overnight, and gained much insight into the Pakistani people and customs, including experiencing first-hand Pathan hospitality with its gun firing at parties, and honour, segregation and protection of women. I was taught how to make local foods and parathas and was present during Eid celebrations.

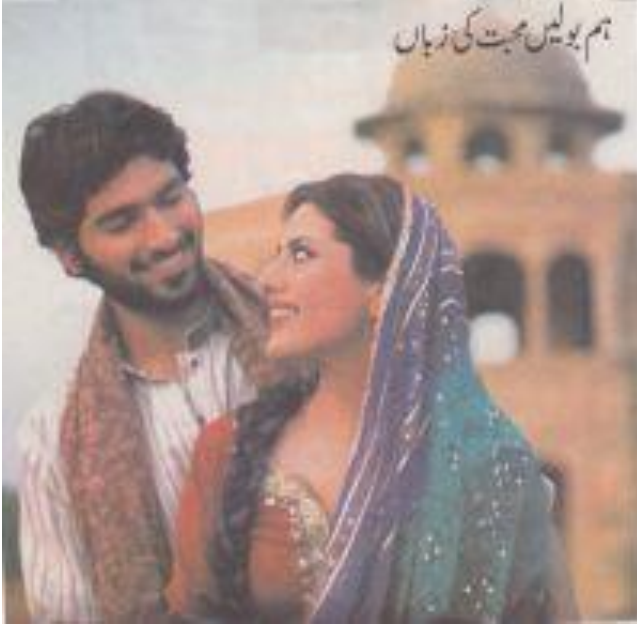
I was also inspired by certain people that I met. Once I was standing on an earthquake devastated space where a multistorey hotel had stood. All I could find was a piece of china and I looked out onto a wave of tents. A boy watched me. 'Did you lose your house too?' I asked. He nodded. Then he said, 'Come to our place for tea.' That place and moment has found its way into *Marrying Ameera*, as has a beggar boy I saw that day, the train trip we later took to Karachi, seeing a donkey suspended in midair by an overweight cart and visiting Oghi in the shadow of Khala Dhaka (Black Mountain) tribal area.

I don't think I have an idealised view of Pakistani culture; I know there are positives and negatives as there are in every society, but the heightened awareness of it made me feel secure. For me writing is a way of talking, a way of interacting with the world and making sense of what I hear and see. Sooner or later what I experience becomes assimilated into my work, and that has happened with what I saw and experienced in Pakistan and *Marrying Ameera*.

Rosanne Hawke, April 2010

This is a tent school for girls.





I found this advertisement for mobile phones in a Pakistani newspaper. The Urdu writing at the top says Hum bolen mahabut ki zabaan, i.e. We speak the language of love.

I thought this advertisement amazing in a country like Pakistan and I wonder if technology such as the mobile phone will change the culture in Pakistan.