

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

Jane Austen

Everything Everywhere All at Once

"I'm feeling very nostalgic and thinking a lot about the past these days". My father says to me while on a call. I listen and nod, understanding where he is coming from. This feels like a collective reckoning amongst all of us. At least those of us who can afford to reflect and think about the changing times and compare what was to what is. Those of us who've lived through better times and not realized it just gets worse (in most terms). Weather, wars, cost, crimes, culture, attention, addiction, competition, local disharmonies, Inequalities, insecurities, health crisis, technology. It's a big black hole to get sucked down into. Each word is a whirlpool in and of itself. Each word, a mind-numbing eternal squalling kid, you'd want to swear off having kids.

Those of us who are not whirling around into one of those whirlpools or at least chilling at the edge of the merry-go-round, think and write and debate. We create discourse. Read Economists (Guilty), get stuffed with too much and sound the whistle. Information overload is real. Every news is sensational. Every crisis world-ending. The tangible lives-impacting systemic issues become discussion points during lunch break, debating circuits and first dates. I won't say they are reduced to conversation starters and chai pe charcha but the paralysis due to frequency and number of issues, the distance accorded by the virtue of your economic bracket and life which is yours and close and enough problem-ridden as it is, takes you through the easiest route of making sense of it all, talking.

It's a conveyor belt of problems. We want to focus on our bag and problems affecting our bag. The structural issues of delay in bag-spitting or the confused layout of the baggage arena are secondary and beyond our repair. Even so, political anxiety and climate anxiety are a growing phenomenon pushing people to therapists. The impact might not be so direct on the living-in-a-bubble but the mental stress from these issues is like having a stalker that pops up in random places, reminding you of its presence. In other words, we focus on our personal problems, but larger systemic anxieties still infiltrate our minds in unpredictable ways.

In moments like these, we look for somewhere to rest our minds, somewhere softer. Nostalgia becomes that temporary shade, which is cool, familiar, and just a little better than the present. It's the only free time machine contraption left in an age of inflation, accessible to everyone, whether through songs, movies, or a sudden Google Memories pop-up. I'd wish I could make a home out of that Backstreet Boys album or that Green Day song. I'd experience that bittersweet pang while coming across that KK song or think back on those power cut days with candles put out in strategic locations. Sleeping on the terrace, looking forward to getting bored, watching T.V, talking like really talking without that nagging feeling that I left my limb somewhere, my phone. Now that everything is available at our convenience, I feel like a druggie, the dosage of instant gratification keeps increasing, while the simple joys of life keep decreasing.

So, it's perfectly fine to escape the reality through whatever licit means, revival of 80's and 90's Bollywood songs, meme-fying to digest reality-altering headlines, reels featuring 2016 cultural signifiers with *Lean on*

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playing in the background. We do whatever in our capacity to look after ourselves, our family and talk about our world in general and to question authorities through their soundproof walls and cushiony insulation rooms. We cope the only way we know how. Sometimes that looks like knocking back a Xanax, listening to *Ooh Child* by The Five Stairsteps in the background and simply talking to your dad about the good ol' days.