PUNJABI LOVE STORY

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A **STUDYGUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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OVERVIEW > This is a story about love and marriage, loyalty and friendship, customs and traditions, set in a place many Australians know little about. In following the developing relationships between two young couples in the Punjab region of Pakistan, universal values of love, friendship, family tensions and marriage are shown against the background of a country where change can be rapid and sometimes difficult for people of different generations to accept.

Synopsis

n Australian woman, Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed, lives with her Pakistani husband, Mohammed Saeed, in their home of many years in the Husain Sugar Mill, in the Punjab region of Pakistan. Saeed is general manager of the sugar mill, and Jocelyn has set up a school. Two young people, Nawaz the cook and Mehnaz the maid, look after their house, and live nearby.

The Sugar Mill compound is surrounded by a high wall, topped with barbed wire. The only access is through a gate manned by guards, keeping out all but the residents and legitimate visitors, making it a world in itself. Outside these walls is the dusty and ramshackle town of Jaranwala. and beyond that, the farms which supply sugarcane to the mill.

Filmed over eighteen months, this observational documentary captures the lives and loves of this household. Narrated by Jocelyn, the story seamlessly moves from the upstairs to the downstairs, from the lounge room into the kitchen. This soap opera of love affairs and youthful angst happens against a backdrop of deep-rooted political change in Pakistan.

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, hard-line religious parties have been voted into power in the general elections. The new Government is sworn into Parliament in December 2002. Pro-American Military chief General Musharraf is still the President of the Nation, but the struggle erupts be-



tween him and the anti-American lobby, now emboldened by their support in Parliament. There are daily reports of Anti-American rallies in Lahore and Karachi, and ever-growing resentment against the Presidency. This political unrest adds a new dimension to the daily life of the Sugar Mill compound.

The Filmmaker: Kay Rasool

Kay Rasool graduated in Journalism in 1998 at the University of Technology, Sydney, and has since produced and directed several award-winning documentaries in Australia that have screened at major film festivals around the world. She is currently developing her first feature film.

Curriculum Links

Using Punjabi Love Story in the classroom

This documentary will be of specific interest and relevance to teachers and secondary students from years 7-12 studying:

- Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE/HSIE)
- International Studies
- Studies of Asia
- Cultural Studies
- Political Studies
- Media Studies
- English
- Religion and Society
- Learning Outcomes

The themes and activities developed in this study guide will have interest and relevance for students from the junior to senior years of secondary school and relate to the following learning outcomes:

- Understanding the core values of groups and societies
- Exploring the nature of marriage in different cultures and societies
- Explaining how diverse cultures and groups value family relationships
- Developing an understanding of the changing attitudes towards caste and class in countries such as Pakistan
- Exploring the roles of women in an Islamic society.

Jaranwala, the small town where the story is set, is two hours drive from Lahore, in the Punjab Region. Lahore is a large city south of the capital Islamabad.

Information about Pakistan

- Islamabad is the capital city of Pakistan.
- Lahore, a city of 8.5 million people, is the provincial capital of the Punjab region.
- Pakistan's population is 165 million.
- Religion: Ninety-six per cent of population Islamic, four per cent Christian, Hindu and others.
- In 1947 the country achieved independence from Great Britain.
- Pakistan is an Islamic Republic with an elected government.
- Head of State and President

is Pervez Musharraf, Head of Government and Prime Minister is Shaukat Aziz.

- With Western borders to Iran and Afghanistan, Pakistan has been under pressure from Western countries including America not to allow militants to hide in the country. In some parts of Pakistan society, there is strong anti-American feeling, particularly concerning General Musharraf's perceived close relationship with the American government.
- In October 2005, a massive earthquake devastated many areas and communities in the North-West Province and Kashmir areas. 73,000 people were killed and thousands of families were made homeless. A massive relief effort is still underway to help the people rebuild their towns and lives.
- Australia imports goods from Pakistan including fine bed and table linens, floor coverings, a range of woven textiles and rice.
- The Punjab region where this documentary is set produces many crops including wheat, cotton, rice and sugarcane.
- Until March 2006 there was an official ban on showing films from neighbouring India which has an enormous popular film industry, producing amongst others, romantic singing and dancing stories known as *Bollywood* films.

Understanding religious and social traditions in Pakistan

With ninety-six per cent of the population Muslim, it is helpful when watching this film to understand the basic beliefs of the people, as they govern many aspects of daily life.

The five pillars of Islam are: The profession of faith in Allah (Sha-

hadah) – the declaration that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger.

Prayer (Salat) – establishing of the five daily Prayers.

The paying of alms (Zakat) - which is

generally 2.5 per cent of the total savings for a rich man working in trade or industry, and ten or twenty per cent of the annual produce for agriculturists. This money or produce is distributed among the poor. Also, one may give twenty-five per cent of found treasure such as money won in a non-gambling lottery. You must give to the needy.

- Fasting (Sawm) refraining from eating, drinking or satisfying sexual needs from dawn to dusk in the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar.
- The Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) this is done during the month of Zul Hijjah, and is compulsory once in a lifetime for one who has the ability to do it. If the Muslim is in ill health or in debt, he or she is not required to perform Hajj.

Education

While boys and girls may attend the same school they are generally taught in separate classes.

Women and girls often wear a hijab/ headdress or veil to cover their face. In some Western countries like France, female students are not permitted to wear the hijab in government schools, or indeed any religious attire that may be part of their faith. This issue has also been debated in Australia.

Glossary

- Sufi a Muslim Holy man, usually a mystic
- Chapattis flat bread eaten with most meals, generally made in home kitchens
- Caste groups often defined and identified by a particular occupation. People are expected to mix and marry within their family caste.
 This social system originated in India but is also still followed in other countries.
- NGO non-government organization, generally involved with health, education and welfare

Before Watching *Punjabi Love Story* > Read the following questions and record your answers. Sharing responses to these questions should assist you to understand and respond to some of the issues explored in this documentary.

- 1. In the words of an old song, do you believe that 'love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage'?
- 2. Do you believe that getting married and having children is the most important thing people can do?
- 3. What is your understanding of 'an arranged marriage'?
- 4. Why do you think women wear the hijab or veil?
- 5. Which country has the largest Muslim population?
- 6. Write down five things you know about Pakistan.7. What range of educational opportunities do you think are open to women in Pakistan?

Pre-viewing research > Working in small groups, select one of these topics and using internet resources, (some of which are referenced at the end of this guide), prepare a report for the rest of your class.

- Research the recent history of Pakistan over the past 100 years, explaining how the tensions with neighbouring India have developed.
- 2. What is the West's current relationship with Pakistan?
- 3. Research how the institution of marriage has changed over the past 100 years.

The main characters in this story

Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed – founder/patron of a local school, poet

and wife of Saeed

- Mohammed Saeed Manager of the local Sugar Mill, husband to Jocelyn
- Mohammed Nawaz cook to the Saeed family and sugar cane plant worker

Habiba - Nawaz' wife

Mehnaz Anwar - maid to the Saeeds

Shahzad - Mehnaz' husband

Running sheet for viewing the program > These questions ask you to look closely at the three central relationships in this documentary, between Jocelyn and Saeed, between Nawaz and Habiba, and between Mehnaz and Shahzad. The story develops over eighteen months. It is narrated by Jocelyn Saeed and moves between the three pairs of couples, each relationship and life contrasting with the others.

As you watch the film, think about how being filmed and recorded might influence the way people behave and speak in this film.

Is it possible to be natural, spontaneous and honest when you know your words and actions are being filmed?

Think about programs you may watch on television, often called 'reality TV programs' and consider how the style and substance of this film is both similar to and different from the more artificially created households we may see on *Big Brother* or *Survivor*.

These questions break the film up into ten sections, or episodes. You may decide to divide your class into small groups with each group responsible for making notes on a couple of sections.

You could write catchy titles for each 'episode' which give a flavour of the episode, such as '(1) Is everything sweet at the sugar mill house?'

(1) Opening scenes

The opening sequence of the film shows the sugar mill in Jaranwala, and then cuts to an Australian woman singing. We see two young Pakistanis arriving at the house. Jocelyn Saeed then tells us something about her life.

- 1. How did she come to be living in Pakistan?
- 2. How long has she been there?
- 3. How is Jocelyn dressed?
- 4. What is her husband Saeed's job?
- 5. How many children do Jocelyn and Saeed have?
- 6. How are the two young people, Nawaz and Mehnaz, part of the Saeed household?
- 7. What are their jobs?
- 8. Describe the Saeed's house and the grounds and gardens in which it is set.

(2) Nawaz, Mehnaz and their families

1. What do we learn about Nawaz

and Mehnaz from the scene in the kitchen of the Saeed house? Do they seem to get on together? What does Nawaz predict for Mehnaz from reading her palm?

- 2. Where does Mehnaz live?
- 3. What do we find out about Mehnaz' mother?
- 4. What is Mehnaz's mother's attitude towards her daughter and marriage?
- 5. How long has Nawaz been working for the Saeeds?
- 6. Where does he live?
- 7. Who is he married to?
- 8. Where does his wife live?
- 9. How does Nawaz describe his marriage?
- 10. How much privacy is there for the people in the household where Habiba lives?
- 11. How would you respond to the teasing of Habiba that happens amongst the women?
- 12. Describe the personalities of Nawaz and Mehnaz.



(3) The Saeed's life

- 1. What is Saeed's job?
- 2. How many workers are there at the sugar mill?
- 3. Why did Saeed not retire from managing the sugar mill?
- 4. What do we learn about people's attitudes to President Musharraf from the television news footage?
- What is the immediate background in world events that might help to explain the hostility to Musharraf? (This is 2002 and Pakistan's position in the world is difficult both politically and geographically)
- What did Jocelyn say to Saeed in her telegram of 1959? (before emails and long-distance phone calls, telegrams were the quickest way of contacting people)
- Describe the school Jocelyn Saeed established. Who attends it and how many students are now enrolled?
- 8. Who is Jocelyn meeting off the train in Lahore?
- 9. Why are these visitors coming to Jaranwala?
- 10. In what religion were the Saeed children raised?
- 11. What is Jocelyn Saeed's religious background and beliefs?
- 12. What evidence is there that she still observes her own religious traditions?

- 13. In what sense might the Saeed's marriage be described as 'mixed'?
- 14. What do you think Jocelyn is handing out to the compound workers in her living room?

(4) Mehnaz heartbroken, Habiba not happy

- 1. Why is Mehnaz 'heartbroken'?
- 2. Why can't she marry Suhail?
- 3. How does Nawaz react to Mehnaz' news?
- 4. Why is Nawaz' wife Habiba unhappy?
- 5. The two young women in this story are unhappy for different reasons. How recognizable and universal are their responses and how far are they particular to the lives of young people in Pakistan?

(5) More about marriage; Jocelyn and Saeed, Nawaz and Habiba

- 1. Where do Jocelyn's visitors come from to visit her?
- 2. What is the purpose of their visit?
- 3. How did her marriage to Saeed come about?
- 4. What type of marriage ceremony did they have?
- 5. What is the purpose of the meeting of the Health, Education and Literacy Committee Jocelyn attends?

- 6. How did you respond to Jocelyn reading one of her poems at the committee meeting? What is the poem about?
- 7. Why do Nawaz and Habiba travel to Lahore with Jocelyn?
- 8. How do they spend their time in Lahore?
- 9. What do we learn about each of their expectations of marriage?
- 10. Why do you think there is an offseason in summer at the sugar mill?
- 11. What is the purpose of the Sufi's visit to Saeed?
- 12. What does Jocelyn's household do on 11 September 2002?

(6) Mehnaz in love again

- Why does Mehnaz' mother disapprove of her new boyfriend, Shahzad?
- 2. What caste does he come from?
- 3. What caste does Mehnaz' family belong to?
- 4. How do we know how strongly Mehnaz' mother is opposed to the match between her daughter and Shahzad? What does she threaten to have done?
- 5. Why does Saeed ask Mehnaz and Shahzad to leave the compound?
- 6. What is Shahzad's job and financial position?
- 7. What was Nawaz' advice to

Mehnaz about how to win Shahzad?

- 8. Where are Mehnaz and Shahzad now living?
- 9. Which members of Mehnaz' immediate family are supportive of her wish to marry Shahzad and which are opposed to it? Does this indicate a difference in attitudes between the generations?
- 10. Shahzad believes he will eventually be accepted by Mehnaz' mother and uncles. He says 'Why does caste matter so much to you? The world has moved on but not you'. Is this the main problem?
- 11. Mehnaz' mother says she will not visit her younger daughter or have her attend her funeral. What do you think are the reasons for her attitude?
- 12. Mehnaz, although she is living with Shahzad, says she won't have a proper wedding until her mother accepts her choice of husband.

(7) Jocelyn, Nawaz and conflict

- Nawaz talks about the bombings in Pakistan and says that 'Muslims are selling out'. To what is he referring?
- 2. After her swim in the lap pool, Jocelyn seems rather cranky with Nawaz, her cook. What are some of her complaints and criticisms of him?
- 3. How does Nawaz respond to these criticisms?
- 4. How can we tell that the row seems to have blown over?
- Can you imagine being in a master/servant relationship? What would be the difficulties on each side?
- (8) Troubles for young lovers
- 1. What are Mehnaz and Shahzad shopping for in Lahore?
- 2. What does this trip suggest about Mehnaz' mother's changing attitude?
- 3. Which members of Mehnaz' family are still opposed to her marriage and threatening violence?
- 4. Nawaz is worried about his wife

Habiba. What are some of the difficulties they are facing?

- 5. What does Nawaz do in response to Habiba's claims of ill-treatment at the hands of his family?
- 6. Why does Nawaz say it is too difficult to have Habiba at the Saeed compound?
- 7. In response to her uncles' threats to attack Mehnaz, where does Shahzad take her to live until things quieten down?
- 8. Why do the Saeeds hire a new cook and find Nawaz a job at the sugar mill?
- 9. What advantages does Nawaz' sugar mill job have over being the Saeed's cook?
- 10. Why is Habiba happier now?
- 11. What do Mehnaz and Shahzad squabble about?
- 12. What is the final outcome of Mehnaz' family's attitude to her marriage?

(9) Meanwhile back at the Saeeds

- Jocelyn tells us about her own family's response to her marriage to Saeed. How did her father refer to Saeed?
- 2. Who are Jocelyn's latest visitors from Australia?
- 3. What is her daughter intending to do during her visit?
- 4. Jocelyn's daughter says, 'I am trying to fit into my mother's space'. How does this remark contrast with Habiba and Mehnaz' situation with their families?
- How are the physical circumstances, including space and amenities in their houses, different for each of the three sets of families? In what ways does this matter?

(10) The rhythms of marriage, children and changes

- 1. Why does Nawaz want his old job back, as cook for the Saeeds?
- 2. What reason does Nawaz give for his friendship with Shahzad?
- 3. What is the pre-nuptial agreement Mehnaz has got from Shahzad?
- 4. Why do you think this was important for her?

- 5. What is the atmosphere like when Nawaz visits Mehnaz and Shahzad after their marriage? Why do you think the social situation seems awkward between the three?
- 6. Why does Shahzad tell Mehnaz to put on her veil?
- 7. What did Mehnaz and Nawaz fight about when they were both back working at the Saeed house?
- 8. What was Saeed's response to Mehnaz' complaints about Nawaz?
- 9. Nawaz says he has a reputation for being 'a ladies' man', and that Mehnaz as a working girl is not someone he would marry, but rather 'someone to have fun with'. He says that 'Habiba has led a restricted life ... that's what we like – someone who is untouched, not the free ones'. What do these remarks tell us about his attitudes towards women?
- 10. Mehnaz says of her marriage to Shahzad, 'I think I've done the right thing ... now we have to put up with each other, whatever happens'. What signs are there in these scenes in the film that their marriage will or won't last?
- 11. Saeed and Jocelyn are in Lahore. He says that people did not believe their marriage would work. What does Saeed attribute its success to? Jocelyn acknowledges that as a poet she is idiosyncratic and can be difficult to live with. Yet they have been together for more than forty years. Why do you think this marriage seems to be so enduring and happy?

Ending

Mehnaz tells us that she is pregnant and frames this story by saying 'we came together in that house. Now there's a film about the story in that house'. Like many people, the recording of this story is important to her sense of herself and her place in the world. The film ends with Jocelyn's daughter Maryam singing one of her mother's poems, *Moon of Memory*.

Did you find this ending satisfactory or did you want to know more?

Style and content – deconstructing a film text > The way in which a film is put together is important in shaping viewers' responses to the themes and issues. In *Punjabi Love Story* the filmmaker moves between the three sets of relationships, aspects of each mirroring and contrasting with the others. They are all set within the world of the Saeed household and the immediate world outside, on the outskirts of Jaranwala and in Lahore.

- Sometimes the people in this film seem to be like characters in a soap opera, playing out their own dramas. How far might this be a consequence of the slightly artificial process of filming daily life and love and people's awareness of being recorded?
- 2. How important is place, context and background to an understand-

ing of people's lives in this film?

3. As the film develops, we learn more about Jocelyn and Saeed's life together in Pakistan, intercut with the developing dramas in the lives of two of their employees, Nawaz and Mehnaz. Does this technique of moving between the three sets of families help us to understand the differences apparent in the relationships?

- 4. What part does caste and class play in people's lives in this film?
- Does the filmmaker make either explicit or implicit judgements about either the society and/or the individuals in this film? Consider what she chooses to film and what remains private.

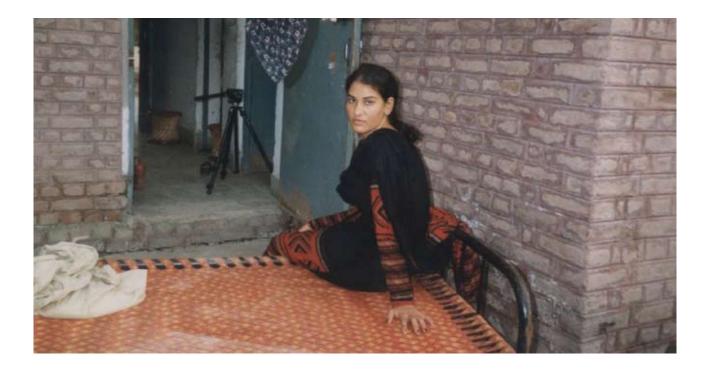
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Extension Activities

- Imagine you return to Pakistan to see what has happened in these peoples' lives five years on. Write the next episode in the story of one or more of these couples.
- Research the practice of 'arranged marriages'. Are they any more or less likely to endure, be happy or end in divorce than marriages where individuals choose their partner more freely?
- 'A bit of sweet, a bit of sour. There's some arguments in every home.' (Shahzad). Does the secret to a happy marriage lie in working through arguments, in compromise?
- 4. Choosing a partner with whom to live is one of the most important choices many people make all over the world. How do people learn how to make these choices and what part does luck play in getting them right?
- 5. What opportunities do Mehnaz and Nawaz have for expanding their educational opportunities?
- In the three 'marriages' shown in this film, is the male the dominant partner who makes the choices? Look carefully at how these people relate to one another.
- Many women in Pakistan do not enjoy the same rights that women in other countries have. Read the following extract about women in Pakistan.

When I was growing up nobody believed a woman could be Prime Minister, nobody even asked the question that, Can a woman be Prime Minister? Except for my father who was always telling me that Nehru, the Indian leader, his daughter became Prime Minister, my daughter's going to become Prime Minister too. I'd say 'No papa, I'm not going into politics' and he'd say 'Yes you are' and nobody else ever believed that a woman could ever become Prime Minister. When my father was killed that's what people said. Particularly in the military. There's no way that a male dominated society like Pakistan, entrenched in it's traditions, is ever going to vote for a woman and that too a young one. I'd have people telling me 'Why don't you get married and settle down', I'd have relatives tell me that, I'd have friends tell me that 'Why don't you get married and settle down, what is all this politics?', 'When Zia goes you can't come because of (a) the military won't accept you, (b) you are too young, people don't - I was, anyway, under thirty - you were too young and you're a woman so why don't you let the men do it, why do you want to go to jail, why do you want to suffer. So all the time I was told that the decks are stacked and that a woman can't - it's never happened in the Muslim world, where has it happened? And

I'd say 'Well, the holy prophet [?] married a working woman and if he could marry, the messenger of God could marry a working woman isn't that an example for us, and people would just sort of roll up their eyes and say 'Be realistic - where does it happen?' but I've always have this deep faith in me that I would win. And I always tell people that if you want to succeed remember two things: reach for the stars and be persistent. And I believe it. That's my prescription for life, that one must reach for the star and that one must never be dismayed by a setback but being a woman was more of a threat to my society than I had ever imagined. I'd done politics with people who were liberal, who were enlightened in the Pakistan People's Party. However, when I became Prime Minister I entered a whole new world. I found from the Mosques sermons that were given that Pakistan has been thrown out of the pail of Islam because a woman has been elected and every Muslim is pained and has to rise and revolt before Pakistan can come back into the Islamic fold. I had had my opponents in the election saying that anybody who voted for me would have their marriage dissolved. So it was just an amazing phenomenon to come against a wall of hate. A wall of hate, that was built just on the fact that I was a woman and seen want-



ing a man's job and then I became Prime Minister, the Chief of the Military received me without a hat and people said that's because we can't salute a woman Prime Minister. It was just ... I had been brought up by father who believed and taught me to have faith in myself. Who taught that men and women were equal. Who, through my religious education, taught me that my religion proclaimed equality of men and women and I did my politics amongst a group of enlightened people who believed the same but when I began to run for Prime Minister, and I actually became Prime Minster, I came across a total wall of hate and since then I've come to the conclusion that my most important identity is as a woman because at the end of it, if you take away the politics and the political affiliations and everyone takes away the family affiliations, at the basic point one becomes a woman. Not just a person but a different type of person, the male person and the female person, and that's how I see my identity now - as a woman.

Benazir Bhutto in 1998, after she had been twice deposed from the prime ministership of Pakistan.

Men, Women, and the Division of Space

Gender relations in Pakistan rest on two basic perceptions: that women are subordinate to men, and that a man's honor resides in the actions of the women of his family. Thus, as in other orthodox Muslim societies, women are responsible for maintaining the family honor. To ensure that they do not dishonor their families, society limits women's mobility, places restrictions on their behavior and activities, and permits them only limited contact with the opposite sex. Space is allocated to and used differently by men and women. For their protection and respectability, women have traditionally been expected to live under the constraints of purdah (purdah is Persian for curtain), most obvious in veiling. By separating women from the activities of men, both physically and symbolically, purdah creates differentiated male and female spheres. Most women spend the major part of their lives physically within their homes and courtyards and go out only for serious and approved reasons. Outside the home, social life generally revolves around the activities of men. In most parts of the country, except perhaps in Islamabad, Karachi, and wealthier parts of a few other cities,

people consider a woman – and her family – to be shameless if no restrictions are placed on her mobility.

Source: http://www.islamfortoday. com/pakistanwomen.htm

 To what extent are some of these constraints on women apparent in the film?

References

Books

Bapsi Sidhwa: This young Pakistani woman has published four novels in the 1990s, all written in English. They are *The Pakistani Bride*, *Cracking India* (adapted for screen as *Water*), *Croweaters* and *The American Brat*.

Films

Few films made in Pakistan about the lives of ordinary Pakistanis have been shown in the West. In 2006 a government ban on showing films from neighbouring India in Pakistan was lifted. India has a thriving film industry.

Water, the third film in a trilogy by

Deepa Mehta, is now able to be seen in Pakistan. The second film in this trilogy, *Earth*, is a love story encompassing conflicting religions and politics between India and Pakistan. *Water* is available for general release. It is about the plight of widows in India in the 1930s, who often lived in poverty and, without a husband, had nowhere to live and were dependent on charity.

Useful websites

http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/ voices/citizen.htm

(Accessed 5 April 2006) Information and activities for teachers and students about citizenship in Pakistan

- http://www.askasia.org/ (Accessed 5 April 2006) Curriculum resources on Asia.
- http://www.asiasource.org/ (Accessed 6 April 2006) Comprehensive listing of online current affairs articles related to Asia.

- http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ WWWVL-AsianStudies.html (Accessed 6 April 2006) Extensive Australian-based directory of websites related to Asia.
- http://www.pakpositive. com/2006/01/11/karachi -matchmakers-reveal-changing -marriage-trends/ (Accessed 7 April 2006) This site features positive stories about life in Pakistan, and has some interesting stories about women and marriage.
- http://www.infopak.gov.pk/ (Accessed 7 April 2006) Official government site including information about the geography, economy, government, culture and news of Pakistan.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan (Accessed 5 April 2006) Information about Pakistan's history,

geography, culture and political life. http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/

pakistan/

(Accessed 5 April 2006)



Human Rights Watch site detailing treatment of women in Pakistan

- http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ engASA330181999 (Accessed 5 April 2006) Amnesty International Report on the lives of women in Pakistan
- http://www.islamfortoday.com/ pakistanwomen.htm (Accessed 5 April 2006) An account of the changing status of women in Pakistan.

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