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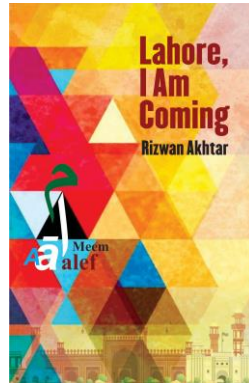
Lahore, I am Coming Rizwan Akhtar

by Nafhesa Ali

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Rizwan Akhtar is a Pakistani poet who presents his first collection of poems *Lahore, / Am Coming* with enthusiasm. The book immediately draws your eye to the cover and its representation of the eclectic mix of Lahore's vibrancy of colours, Islamic architecture, and heritage against the book's title, typeset in English. This fusion spills over into the tone of Akhtar's collection, summarized by Fiona Sinclair, in the preface, as Akhtar's desire to "write the world" (2017: p. xiii) through his poetry.

Akhtar's poetry is written to cross boundaries through its ideas and linguistic style, but also the diverse nature of poems included in the collection. With over 150 poems, this in-depth collection at first seems overwhelming due to its array of themes, but thematic diversity is what Akhtar does best. The collection shares many themes on and around Lahore, from its colonial past, city politics, and modernity to the forbidden fruits of love and lust hidden within Lahore's dusty streets. It is ultimately a collection about coming home, but has a wider appeal as Akhtar includes poems about the sights and sounds of living in the west.

Poems about desire, helplessness, fidelity, emotions, and memories that are not fulfilled but aroused by everyday life, place, love, and history are also included, adding variety to his collection. Akhtar also draws in poems highlighting major events in Pakistan and across the world, in which lighter notes on Shakespeare and even a quote from Oscar Wilde is thrown into the mix. This highlights Akhtar's desire for intertextuality and his diverse range of styles, but also his wish to share his range of cultural and spatial influences within his poetry.

Akhtar's poetry evokes the senses and the reader feels the essence of Lahore from the perspective of a Lahorite. This style is beautifully descriptive in its reminiscences of the sights and sounds of the city.

Akhtar's love for Lahore is solidified in the title poem "Lahore, I Am Coming," which embodies the book's grace and character as well as Akhtar's return to the familiarity of the metropolis that is intertwined with his family roots.

Colonialism is a theme that is ever present and shared in poems such as 'The Empire's Days in Lahore,' which is telling of the continued pain felt from the Empire. Yet, Akhtar doesn't fail to address the modernity of Lahore, and this contrast of modern life with memories of home does not dilute the nostalgia around Lahore, but Akhtar is able to address more serious issues of class divides and Lahore's political situation. Such expressions about social inequality are set against poems that recollect city events, such as the 2015 park bombing and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death. This persona of the poetic east-west traveler is crafted in delicate layers as the collection progresses, and Akhtar's couplets are imbued with reflections on the return home to Lahore.

Akhtar's language is beautiful to read and recalls Urdu's Persian linguistic and poetic heritage.

Akhtar's poems are written in English, but his Urdu influences are noticeable through his metaphorical style, descriptive detail, and textured musings of this poetry. Akhtar's poems highlight how culture can influence a poet's prowess on multiple levels of language and thematic diversity, but also his need to pick out language to break boundaries and challenge unspoken cultural discourse.

In summary, Lahore I Am Coming is an enjoyable and varied collection, which can challenge the mind through the emotions and sensory experiences evoked through this collection and the historic city it describes. As soon as the reader settles in one place, Akhtar immediately transports them somewhere else. As such, this nomadic collection of poems encourages the reader "to enjoy the language and reveal the layers of meaning" (Sinclair in Akhtar 2017: xiv).

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Nafhesa's interest lies in South Asian research exploring the personal and intimate relationship practices of young British Pakistani Muslims, ageing experiences of older settled South Asian migrants in the UK, and utilizing creative methods in social research.