

Maps for Lost Lovers,

Nadeem Aslam

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Maps for Lost Lovers

Maps for Lost Lovers (2004) is the second novel by British Pakistani writer Nadeem Aslam, also the author of Season of the Rainbirds. In Maps for Lost Lovers, Aslam has discussed the issue of homelessness of the Pakistani immigrants in quite a new light because he has linked homelessness with the loss of some important human emotions like love.

The novel, which at first glance seems like a mystery novel that revolves around the two missing lovers Jugnu and Chanda who "came back to England and '85'85disappeared", is much more than that and the absent lovers redefine the lives of all those other characters who are related to them, namely Shamas, Jugnu's brother, Kaukab his wife and their children Charag, Mah-Jabin, Ujala, Chanda's brothers and her parents. They are two unfortunate lovers and young Pakistani immigrants who are thought to be murdered by Chanda's brothers in the name of honour. This murder mystery is not revealed until the very end of the novel and the questions how exactly, when and by whom both the lovers were murdered makes you keep turning the pages of the book.

The story of the novel has been weaved around this murder mystery through the lives of other immigrants and their families and the reader through Aslam's intricate portrayal of his characters tries to reach to an understanding of the conflict between love and violence. This double murder could not be understood without understanding the

immigrant orthodox mentality that is largely defined by fear of exile. Therefore, Aslam has brought in a very diverse and colourful community of Pakistani immigrants, especially immigrant wives who control and shape other immigrants' and their families' lives according to back home religious and social philosophies. He takes his readers on a double journey where they not only follow the sequence of the past events, where Chanda's two brothers are facing a trial and her parents are trying their level best to save them and on the other hand there is Shamas, his wife Kaukab and their three children who follow the proceedings of the murder case. He has brought to life characters like Kaukab and has analysed her religious obsession through her immigration experience that has bereft her of compassion, love and the ability to empathise.

Aslam has structured *Maps for Lost Lovers* in four sections according to the four English seasons and each section is further divided into chapters which explain the minutest of the details of the story for the easeful progression of the events. The book infect becomes a map for lost lovers where it guides them just like a map towards the supreme natural emotion of love. The map leads the readers towards the conclusion that love makes us human and if we are devoid of it then we can turn into human monsters.

He has gleaned his story with different shades of love and throughout the book there is a persistent feeling of fear for the death of love. Although the book ends on a hopeful note for the lovers and he calls them "The First Lovers on the Moon" but it is clear from the lives of other lovers in the book be it Mahtaab and Chakore, Shamas' parents, or Chanda and Jugnu or Muslim girl and the Hindu boy or Shamas and Surayya that love exists for a short while in some sort of Safeena on Earth and then it succumbs to the wishes of others and comes to an end in this life. Shamas dies by the lakeside with the hope of Suraya's return to him and the Hindu boy roams the cemetery where

his girlfriend is buried. The image of moon as the symbol of love is also suggested through the names of Mahtaab, Chanda and Mah-Jabin and the title of the last chapter of the book becomes all the more significant because finally the two would be lovers will ensure its continuity.

Aslam has contrasted Dasht-e-Tanhai (Desert of Loneliness) with Sohni Dharti (Beautiful Land), human life with nature, love with violence and through this contrast he invites his readers to read the text with an open mind and leaves it upon the reader to judge the characters according to the human criteria and that is why we do not come across any villains in the story. The book is replete with beautiful natural imagery that somewhat soothes the violence of the events. Aslam is a painter who paints with his words and reading this book is a real treat for the senses. A must read.

Reviewer

Memoona Saqlain Rizvi

