



RESEARCH PAPER

Postcolonial Flâneur: A Critical Analysis of Spatial-Cultural Narratives in Rizwan Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming*

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ABSTRACT

This research, through the critical analysis of Rizwan Akhtar's (2017) poetry collection *Lahore, I Am Coming*, employs the subjective interpretations of the postcolonial flâneur to unveil the city's complex cultural narratives of postcolonial Lahore. In the face of rapid urban transformations, documenting the spatial practices of postcolonial flâneur becomes crucial for investigating the repercussions of colonialism on the cultural fabric of Lahore. The study employs qualitative approach to explore the spatial practices and cultural narratives of postcolonial flâneur prevalent in Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming*. By employing the lens of postcolonial flâneur, the findings of this study reveals the intricate influence of space on its culture that ultimately effects the psyche of the inhabitants of postcolonial space. As the exploration of Pakistani landscapes remains relatively unexplored in the domain of flâneurism. Thereto, future scholarly research should prioritize exploring these landscapes which can unearth nuanced narratives of the pre-colonial past and the repercussions of colonialism on Pakistan's postcolonial spaces. By doing so, future studies can contribute to a broader and more profound understanding of the diverse and complex identities that define the postcolonial experience in South Asia.

KEYWORDS Lahore, Postcolonialism, Postcolonial Flâneur

Introduction

By emphasizing the symbiotic link between the city and its inhabitants, the research explores the influence of postcolonial space on the psychological dimensions and cultural narratives of postcolonial Lahore. Through critical analysis of Akhtar's (2017) narrative in *Lahore, I Am Coming*, the research seeks to investigate the cultural fabric of Lahore by unravelling the multifaceted layers of postcolonial flâneurism that ultimately shed light on the cultural implications embedded within the text.

Akhtar's (2017) collection of poetry *Lahore, I Am Coming* represents architecture and animals of Lahore as a text; a text that narrates a story of loss, that manifests a strong connection between language and the fabric of postcolonial Lahore. (Akhtar, 2021) Moreover, the poems in Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* are also distinct by "thematic diversity and fictive poetic diction" (Imtiaz, 2018, p.01) Additionally, in *Lahore, I Am Coming*, Akhtar (2017) has employed the metaphor of silence to express different central themes such as "colonialism and imperialism." (Iftikhar & Zahra, 2021, pg. 263) Thereto, this research examines Akhtar's (2017) first collection of poetry *Lahore, I Am Coming* as an implicit route that delves into the intricate facets of postcolonial flâneurism. Furthermore, the research highlights that the poet, Akhtar (2017), acts as the postcolonial flâneur to

capture the essence of the postcolonial space of Lahore. Additionally, this research emphasises that for the poet, the landscape of postcolonial Lahore is not only a mere setting, but also a culturally rich city that greatly influence the poet's mind and inner feelings. As Adebayo Williams (1997) explores flâneur as a figure who challenges the grand narratives of globalization and repositions it within the colonial context. By incorporating William's (1997) theoretical framework, this paper attempts to unveil the repercussions of colonialism on the cultural dynamics of Lahore through the critical analysis of Akhtar's (2017) collection of poetry *Lahore, I Am Coming*.

The diverse terrain of flâneurial studies is being explored to connect the rich landscape of a specific city with flâneur's inner feelings and psyches. As flâneur has its origin in 19th century European history, the concept of flâneurism is explored mainly through Western landscapes. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce both have inculcated the figure of flâneur in their notable works like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses* respectively. Both literary figures of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century embraced wandering narratives inviting their characters to engross in urban environment subjectively. Additionally, various literary pieces like Pinnock's *Skyline*, Elias Khoury's *The Journey of Little Gandhi* and Adhaf Soueif's *Map of Love* and Tejo Cole's *Open City* etc have been analyzed that provide great insights into the perils of flâneurism and spatial practices. However, in Pakistan, the exploration of the cultural narratives of Pakistan through the subjective interpretations of flâneur remains relatively unexplored. Thereto, by addressing a research gap in flâneurial studies, this research explores the cultural fabric of postcolonial Lahore through the lens of the postcolonial flâneur.

Ultimately, this research bridges a notable gap in contemporary scholarships by investigating indigenous Pakistani poetry through the lens of postcolonial flâneur as the postcolonial flâneur provides a distinctive lens to explore the nexus of psychology with specific geography encapsulating dynamic narratives prevalent within the postcolonial space of Lahore. Consequently, there exists an opportunity to delve into the in-depth exploration of Indigenous poetry through the spatial practices of the postcolonial flâneur, thereby giving a distinct spatial-cultural representation of the postcolonial space of Lahore. We aim to study the spatial practices of postcolonial Lahore by navigating through Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* to investigate how flâneur's subjective engagements are intertwined with his navigation of cultural narratives of postcolonial spaces in *Lahore, I Am Coming*. The research is based on the following two research questions: first, how does Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* demonstrate the spatial experiences of Lahore through the lens of postcolonial flâneur? And second, how do the flâneurial practices in Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* hold broader implications for interpreting cultural narratives within the text?

Literature Review

The exploration of the spatial practices of postcolonial flâneur is undoubtedly engrossing in literature. Through the lens of postcolonial flâneur, Akhtar's (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* offers great insights into the colonial past that has its repercussions on the cultural dynamics of postcolonial Lahore. This section analyses the multiple depictions of Lahore in scholarly journals to illuminate a gap in the exploration and investigation of Lahore. The city of Pakistan; Lahore has been portrayed in multiple research journals as a backbone of the country with rich cultural and political dynamics due to its deep associations with Mughal and colonial legacy. Chambers (2014) in her article "The Heart, Stomach, and Backbone of Pakistan: Lahore in Novels by Bapsi Sidhwa and Mohsin Hamid" explores Lahore as a hub of cultural transitions because of its multilayered past. Through the in-depth analysis of Hamid's and Sidhwa's novels, Chambers (2014)

manifests Lahore as “that is neither urban nor rural, but fuzzy.” (p.149) Furthermore, Ahmed, et al (2021) in their article “Portrayal of Postcolonial Lahore in Selected Pakistani Postcolonial Fiction: Historical versus Modern Perspective” explores Lahore through the historical as well as modernist perspectives because of its colonial past and modern-day globalization.

Moreover, Imtiaz (2013) in his article “A Passage through Amorphous Lahore of the Colonial Era” explores Lahore and its inhabitants as amorphous due to the interaction of multiple forces between the colonizers and the colonized. Imtiaz (2013) claims that at the advent of colonialism, the inhabitants of Lahore endured the assimilation of Western values into their cultural norms which resulted in the amorphous nature of its inhabitants. Additionally, Imtiaz (2014) in his other research “Amorphous Lahore: Questions of Location, Culture, Fiction and Reality” portrays Lahore as a locus of cultural and political transition during the pre-partition and post-partition era. Imtiaz (2014) asserts that “The distinction of Lahore as a city is that it amalgamated, absorbed, digested and assimilated all these opposites to shape itself as an amorphous city of its own kind.”(p.132) Thus, Imtiaz (2014) portrays Lahore as an amorphous city which has absorbed cultural transitions even after the partition; adhering to the opposites that are prevalent even in the post-partition city. Last, but not least, Ghazanfar and Kumar (2022) in their article “Two Tales of a City: Lahore in the Literary Narratives of Bapsi Sidhwa and Mumtaz Shahnawaz” present Lahore as a main metropolitan city of Pakistan where new cultural modes are reshaping the discourses of women in the wake of independence.

Thence, a noticeable research gap exists when considering the study of indigenous poetry in Akhtar’s (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming* through the lens of postcolonial flaneur. Through the spatial practices and subjective interpretations of postcolonial flaneurism, the research will shed light on the repercussions of colonialism on cultural narratives of Lahore that has ultimately resulted in multiculturalism, the commodification of culture and cultural deprivation. Thus, the identified gap illuminates a novelty in the literary exploration of Lahore by exploring the subjective interpretations of flâneur that would unmask the repercussions of colonialism onto the cultural fabric of Lahore.

Material and Methods

This research employs the framework of postcolonial flaneur to investigate and analyse the spatial-cultural representations through the textual analysis of Rizwan Akhtar’s (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming*. The study encompasses qualitative methods to explore the cultural representation of postcolonial flaneurism prevalent in Akhtar’s (2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming*. Through the theoretical framework of Williams’s (1997) postcolonial flaneur, this study attempts to reposition Lahore within the context of colonialism, bespeaking loss of culture and multiculturalism in the context of the postcolonial space. The study intends to unmask the intricate relation among the specific landscape, cultural kinetics and spatial practices of the flâneur, illuminating the multifarious nature of postcolonial life in Lahore.

Flaneur is an essential concept in the studies of psychogeography which explores how subjectively a wanderer, a flâneur, shows a variety of fragments of daily life from the spatial practices of a specific landscape. Ross (2013) states regarding literary psychogeography that this theory “includes the psychological, including the mind in all its creativity...[providing] a framework, it might be said, for the subjective” (p. 06) These subjective meanings are explored through the act of flâneurism which plays a vital role in the portrayal of inhabitants’ feelings associated with specific structured environments. Etymologically, the term “flâneur” originates from the French word

“Flaner” which implies to stroll or loiter. The first reflections of *flâneur* are found in the writings of Baudelaire (1863). Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, strolled the streets and passageways of nineteenth-century Paris observing and exploring the variegated expressions of modern city life. (Seal, 2013) In the twentieth century, Benjamin (1999) established and nurtured the concept of the *flâneur* which is primarily linked to aimlessly wandering without any particular goal.

However, the emerging phenomena of boulevards and urban crowds transform the figure of *flâneur* into the man of the crowd, which Benjamin paradoxically perceived as alienated and disconnected from the multitude. This ever-changing *flânerie* and walking comprise an exquisite relation with being in the world, a sensual instantaneous relation with places that creates a relation with ambiances. (La Rocca, 2017) Ultimately, the *flâneur* adopts the figure of a postcolonial *flâneur* to unveil the repercussions of colonialism onto the specific postcolonial spaces. This postcolonial *flâneur* relies on a critical postcolonial perspective to convey an uncompromising look at the colonial legacies in twenty-first-century postcolonial spaces. Hartwiger (2016) claims that the narratives of “postcolonial *flâneur* provide of the urban landscape leads to a polyvocal representation of a city and the voices that make up its history and its present representation.” (p.07) Thus, the postcolonial *flâneur* is the chronicle of history who unearths the historical and cultural legacies of colonialism through his narration of a specific postcolonial space.

The research employs Williams’s (1997) essay “The Postcolonial *flâneur* and Other Fellow-travellers: Conceits for a Narrative of Redemption” as a theoretical framework for the investigation of the postcolonial *flâneur* in the context of the postcolonial landscape of Lahore. The essay asserts that the postcolonial *flâneur*, by taking into regard not only the accounts of fellow *flâneurs* and rivals but also the spatio-temporal impracticality, heralds the end of all grand narratives and hegemonic discourses. Williams (1997) asserts that postcolonialism bespeaks about the philosophical and ideological rupture. Furthermore, by providing a tenuous connection between *flâneur* and postcolonialism, Williams (1997) portrays postcolonialism as the “ideological nemesis” to globalization, which is the colonizing metropole’s “logical transformation of the dynamics of capitalism after the epoch of colonialism,” (p.836) Thus, this research through the theoretical framework of Williams’s (1997) postcolonial *flâneur*, highlights the psychological engagements of postcolonial *flâneur* with a space that underlines the aftermaths of colonialism onto the cultural narratives of Lahore.

Results and Discussion

Space exerts social, material, physical and psychological repercussions on individuals as a result of their intertwined yet independent relation with space. Thus, how space is re-constructed in postcolonial experience emphasises a need for the exploration of cultural dynamics of that space through the lens of postcolonial *flâneur*. Additionally, postcolonial Lahore is a hub of multiculturalism as a consequence of invasions of the Mughal Empire and the British in the Indian Sub-continent. According to the study of Anwar and Imtiaz (2017), pre-colonial Lahore was considered to be a city of beggars that underwent urbanization at the advent of colonialism. The colonizers negated the pre-colonial Lahore as a locus of commerce and built a discourse that uncovers their superficial mission of bringing modernization to Lahore. (Anwar & Imtiaz, 2017) Thereto, to explore the urban spaces of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, the *flâneur* must see the specific urban space through the context of colonialism. In other words, the postcolonial *flâneur* through his spatial experiences precludes particular urban spaces from being perceived as spaces disjointed and isolated from the colonial agenda that preceded the period. Thereto, the research, through the textual analysis of Akhtar’s

(2017) *Lahore, I Am Coming*, investigates the repercussions of colonialism on the cultural postcolonial space of Lahore.

Akhtar's (2017) work not only illustrates Lahore's physical landscape but also digs into its metaphysical core, capturing the city's essence through captivating imagery and poetic words. Additionally, the poet through his poetic diction unveils the repercussions of colonialism onto the cultural narratives of postcolonial Lahore. As in the postcolonial city, the flâneur cannot remain undisturbed while rooming through the streets. In the poem *Lahore, I Am Coming*, Akhtar's (2017) narrative, "I wander in the squeezed alleys of Lahore." (p.26) portrays his flaneurial practices by introspectively strolling throughout the alleys of Lahore.

As Williams (1997) asserts the most striking legacy of Walter Benjamin's flâneur is the reinvented myth of flâneur which investigates the changing dynamics of the metropolis. In *Lahore, I Am Coming*, Akhtar (2017), being a postcolonial flâneur, is not merely a spectator, he is passionately and personally invested in composing a thorough, yet stirring response to a specific postcolonial space. (Aslam, 2018) The poet, in his poem *Lahore Feasts* advocates his flâneurial practices in the streets of postcolonial Lahore by relating the architectural structures of the streets, encompassing rows of small houses, to the historical dynamics of the country:

I end in a cul-de-sac
 bandaged drains drip over patched curtains
 on roofs antennas like skewed histories
 are entangled by chords
 (Akhtar, 2017, p.86)

Frisby (1994) presents the contrapuntal reading of flâneur as "a producer of literary texts, a producer of narratives and reports, a producer of journalistic texts, a producer of sociological texts" (p. 83). Lahore, a postcolonial space, encapsulates a complex interplay of culture and history knitted together over the centuries of historical anecdotes of conquerors and diaspora. Akhtar (2017), through the postcolonial flâneur lens, introspectively strolls Old Lahore highlighting its significance through the ineradicable mark of dancing courtesans on the cultural and psychological fabric of the city of Lahore. The poet transverses through Old Lahore, depicting the city as a postcolonial space that once flourished with the artistic magnificence of dancing courtesans. Akhtar's (2017) poem *The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore* travels us back to that phase of the magnificent past when the alluring dance of the courtesans represented the city as a hub of artistry invention and passion. The essence of the city lies in the presence of dancing courtesans who are a testament to the city's gloried past, with roots extending back to the Mughal Empire. The courtesans' quarter featuring tales of painful and sweet memories, remains a vital component of the culturally rich landscape of Old Lahore. Similar to the complex and narrow alleys of Old Lahore, the lives of the dancing courtesans are also encased by mystery and mystique. (Rehman, 2020) The poet paying homage to the grandeur of courtesans, asserts :

hennaed-feet agile dancers
 exude intricate bodily expressions

those who lack skills have desires

growing on audience

(Akhtar, 2017, p.01)

Throughout the Mughal era, the dancing courtesans remain an important part of the royal courts with their celebrated grace and refinement. As they were trained in various disciplines like poetry and dance, they remained an integral part of Indian culture and art, having strong political ties with the monarchs and nawabs of the Mughal Empire. (Kumar, et al., 2023) Chambers (2014) asserts that “ghazals, [are] often composed, recited and sung in red light districts such as Heera Mandi.” (p.149) Thus, Akhtar (2017) reminisces about the courtesans of the Mughal era through the portrayal of concubine Anarkali whose refined dance and unsettling fate, even in the contemporary times, have captivated millions of people. The verses in the poem *The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore* transverse us back to that phase of the gloried past, with a sense of nostalgia, when courtesans, through their power and sensuality, used to dominate the cultural and social fabric of Lahore.

over rickshaws and donkey carts

a dim moon smudges the songs

sung by the concubine Anarkali

planted alive in bricks by the Emperor -

(Akhtar, 2017, p.01)

These verses represent the tragic yet alluring fate of the concubine Anarkali who was planted alive in the bricks by Emperor Akbar; a tale of alluring emotions of love and betrayal. Anarkali was the courtesan of Emperor Akbar. But, when Akbar’s son Saleem fell in love with the Emperor’s courtesan, Akbar entombed her alive behind the bricks of the wall. (Chambers, 2014) Hence, these verses highlight the tragic fate of the captivating courtesan as a myth of passion and tragedy, echoing through the corridors of time, that has an indelible mark on the psychological and cultural fabric of Old Lahore.

The gloried courtesan culture of the Mughal era met its end during the colonial invasion of Old Lahore that implemented strict Victorian rules resulting in the decline of the courtesan tradition. Consequently, the dancing courtesans faced ridicule and stigmatization from the intolerant colonizing nations. The British represented courtesans as sex workers, which fundamentally shifted their cultural power and role in Indian society. Courtesans lost their cultural and political influence as the sahib and memsahib ideals grew in significance, and the British no longer required the social validation of their political authority that natch-girls provided. (Nair, 2019) Even in the postcolonial State, the dancing courtesans faced stigmatization in society. But, irrespective of the stigmatization faced by the courtesans, they remained resilient and the tradition held on. The poem *The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore* captures the imagery of an ageing raqasa, thus demonstrating the persistent spirit of dancing courtesans in the face of disdain:

crookedly ajar doors scandalize

ghazals escape gramophone

like a royal an ageing raqasa shows up

on a murky balcony

(Akhtar, 2017, p.01)

As the flâneur adopts an image of the keen observant and self-conscious stroller. (Gandhi, 2017) The postcolonial flâneur through his subjective interpretations challenges the grand narratives of globalization. (Williams, 1997) Akhtar (2017) through the lens of postcolonial flâneur unmasks the true facets of colonialism that have resulted in the loss of glorified culture. Through his poetry, Akhtar (2017) brings to life the forgotten and abandoned memories of dancing courtesans by exploring through the hidden treasures of Old Lahore, that beholds an enchanting tale of elegance and resilience. Through the exploration of Old Lahore, the poet expresses the nostalgia of Old Lahore, by bringing to life the abandoned cracks of Old Lahore, where not only the architectural layout but also each brick beholds a tale to be told. Akhtar's (2017) poetry transverses us to that realm where history and myth collide, manifesting the glorified dance of courtesans as a revolt against the abandonment of time. Thereto, through the lens of postcolonial flâneur, the poet unearths the abandoned stories of glorified courtesans that evoke feelings of nostalgia and abandonment in the inhabitants of postcolonial Lahore.

Postcolonial Lahore is imbued with the rich historical legacy of the Mughal Empire and the British Raj, leaving indelible marks on its cultural landscape. La Rocca (2017) asserts that spatial-cultural representations of a specific landscape are portrayed through the disembodied eyes of a flâneur who "participates in the construction of a sensitive form that we can understand as technique, tactic and mode to operate a deep perception of the metropolis and its spaces". (p.09) The imago of the flâneur, generally confined to the Western landscapes, goes through a transformative radical modification through its correlation with the postcolonial space. As Williams (1997) remarks the turmoil of colonialism is essentially handed down, frequently confounding the tangible historical event of the termination of the colonial project in its capitalist embodiment with cultural superannuation. (Williams, 1997) Pakistan, being a postcolonial country, experiences cultural exchange and commodification of culture through the assimilation of Western cultural norms and ideals that have incorporated the fabric of the indigenous cultural landscape. For instance, Lahore's weddings employ flamboyant festivals encapsulating the distinct blend of traditions and customs as a result of the influences of Western, Mughal and Hindu rituals. Consequently, wedding functions showcase diverse cultural dynamics that manifest the city's multicultural landscape. The poetry collection in *Lahore, I Am Coming* lays forth the cultural prominence and dynamics of Lahore, as well as the detrimental effects of colonialism and pre-colonialism on the subcontinent's heritage and traditions. Akhtar (2017), being a postcolonial flâneur, portrays the cultural tapestry of weddings through the exploration of Lahore in the context of Lahore's vibrant weddings, demonstrating the city's distinctive mixture of cultural traditions and the impact of invasions on these customs and the psychology of its inhabitants. The poem *Brides from Lahore* portrays the assimilation of Mughal wedding traditions in the weddings of postcolonial Lahore :

Buffed with filigree

holding the rustling ghararah

ears and nose

reined in by golden trinkets

(Akhtar, 2017, p.125)

Thus, highlighting the intricate henna designs and intricately embellished ghararah worn at the wedding ceremonies, the poet epitomizes the blend of tradition and style that defines Lahore weddings. Likewise, in another poem *Winter-weddings of Lahore*, Akhtar (2017), alluring a relay of ceremonies incorporating diverse cultural legacies prevalent in postcolonial Lahore, states that: “The city runs a marathon of winter-weddings / a relay of dolhkis, barrats and nikkahs” (p.107) The poet argues that in the predominant wedding rituals of Lahore, people have overburdened themselves by immersing in the lavish showcase of wedding festivals by incorporating Western and Hindu cultural traditions to maintain a status in the society. These lavish expenditures are nothing more than a showcase to maintain the cheap superiority complex. As Williams (1997) argues the postcolonial subject is a diversified entity, a displaced psychic whole distinguished by varying colonial experience and a distinct postcolonial narrative. These flamboyant rituals are considered a status quo in the postcolonial space of Lahore which has endured invasions on not only the culture and traditions but has also endured mental breakdowns of its inhabitants. (Bibi, et al, 2020) It’s an emblem of prestige in the modern cultural landscape of Lahore, where not only arranging lavish festivals but also, attending these weddings in the most prestigious way and wearing embellished dresses are considered compulsory to save face in the society. Akhtar (2017), being a postcolonial flâneur portrays the ostentatious reality of the status quo through the exploration of winter weddings in Lahore. The poem *Winter-weddings of Lahore* portrays the psychology of women who, to save their face in society, have to wear heavily embellished clothes irrespective of their intolerance towards the season.

some hide their wardrobe crisis late

arrivals, but on a cold evening you have

no option but to stay cozy till everyone

sees through rituals,

(Akhtar, 2017, p.107)

As the interaction of different cultures in “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 1994, p.37) resulted in the ambivalent culture that lead to the mimicry of Western culture and failure to “radically question colonial culture” (Iqbal, 2020, p.41) The poem unmasks the true facet of wedding festivals that have resulted in the artificiality of society, swamping the true soul of marriage and celebrations. To adhere to the societal cheap standards and to mimic the colonizers’ cultures, many families go beyond what they can afford and suffer from fiscal stress only to avoid social stigmatization. Akhtar’s (2017) poetry gives insight into the intricate interplay of the status quo and the painstaking means that people would undergo to maintain their status in a society that prioritizes facades above all else. The post, through the eyes of postcolonial flâneur, explores the traditional fabric of Lahore to unmask the status quo and the societal pressure of being a commodity figure in the weddings of postcolonial Lahore. The poet in the poem *Bride From Lahore* states:

the bride steps out

from a glossy car

wobbling on pointed heels

smile-collector she walks

with a market-logic

(Akhtar, 2017, p.125)

Thus, the poem depicts that the extravagant expenditures are just flimsy constructs that only serve as means of reinforcement rather than attaining the true spirit of happiness. Akhtar (2017), through his postcolonial lens, provides an insightful indictment of the cultural adaptation that sustains the whole process of artificial grandiosity. Additionally, the poet also portrays the hideous reality of weddings where everything serves as a means of representation through photography. Being a postcolonial flâneur, the whole process of photo-session at the Lahore weddings evokes a sense of artificiality in the poet's psyche demonstrating the domination of the staged world over the natural lived experiences of people. Everything that has been previously experienced firsthand, has faded into representation, recording experiences that are meticulously planned and staged for the imago of an ideal image. The poet asserts realistically in the poem *Winter-weddings of Lahore* that:

ridiculously at every jolt on roads clogged

with traffic, there is a pause of horns as lines

and lines of guests pose to photographers

(Akhtar, 2017, p.107)

Akhtar's (2017) narrative uncovers the complexities of this whole process of staged representation by challenging the veracity of these visual sensations and ultimately their influence on our understanding of reality. As each facade tells a tale, the poet explores the artificial persona of weddings and the influence of photography in moulding our tales of everyday life. Moreover, the poet highlights the drastic effects of the status quo on the psyche of inhabitants who are unconsciously forced to go beyond their needs to save their face in postcolonial society. Thus, the introspective strolling of postcolonial flâneur portrays the feelings of artificiality and dejection as well as emphasizes the societal pressure deeply embedded within the psyche of its inhabitants.

Kuan-Hsing Chen (1996) uncovers the real facet of postcolonial discourse which "in effect obscures the faces of a neo-colonial structure in the process of reconstructing global capitalism, and potentially becomes the leading theory of the global hegemonic re-ordering". (p.43) Thus, postcolonialism is only a facade to obscure the true facets of colonial domination that remain prevalent even in the areas that have gained freedom from colonial rule. For instance, Pakistan is a society where religion is utilised to regulate people's behaviours and modes of living. In Pakistan, Islam is the predominant religion that acts as a unifying force, instilling shared identity, solidarity and social harmony among the inhabitants of Pakistan. But, to our dismay, colonialism has left impeding marks on the religion of the inhabitants of postcolonial city through the negation of inhabitants' values and customs.

Thus, postcolonial flâneur, a persona that connects analytically and introspectively with the environment, transverses the postcolonial landscape of Lahore to unearth the intricate interplay of colonialism and the city's contemporary challenges. For Akhtar (2017)

adopting the imago of postcolonial flâneur, the mosques of the postcolonial city exhibit the inclusion of assimilation of Western notions into the values and norms of religion. Mosques are hubs for cultural expression and transmission, where languages, rituals, and traditions are preserved and transmitted across generations. Thus the exploration of streets echoing with the sounds of supplications allows the postcolonial flâneur to witness firsthand the cultural exchange and how they have endured adaptations in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The poet in the poem *I Have a Faith Too* states:

the man who built the mosque withdrew to sands
of a distant glamour, his dazzling mausoleum
was somewhere beyond the language of finality
the new man stretched beard on a wooden cot
roped by in-canted phrases his retinue
whipped bodies refusing rites and graves
(Akhtar, 2017, p.175)

Akhtar (2017) in his poem *I Have a Faith Too* exhibits the Westernization of culture and religious values through the portrayal of the arrival of the white man who refused any kind of rites followed by the man who built the mosque. Alam (2015) asserts “The new cultural episteme that emerges under the dictates of colonization not only subverts the existing power structures but also redefines the practice of everyday life.” (p.347) Thus, when the British influenced the middle class through colonial education, there arose a wave of modernism that appeared to contradict the religious values of the city. Ultimately, as Imtiaz (2014) asserts, “there emerged a strong and unassailable desire to reform religion in accordance with the changing situation”. (p.136) Thus, the intuitive wanderings through the streets of postcolonial Lahore uncover the psychology of its inhabitants who endure the loss of religious values as an outcome of the colonial oppression and domination that didn’t even allow the inhabitants to worship according to their religious norms.

The Western European territory where consumer culture emerged as a structuring factor for the development of modern capitalism, embraced global principles of consumerism as an inevitable consequence of development. In contrast, throughout South Asia, consumer culture and commodification of culture are deemed as a byproduct of colonialism. (Alvi, et al. 2015) As postcolonialism is marked by ideological tear and cultural deprivation. (Williams, 1997) The lifestyle that colonizers accepted during the colonial era is the same norm that the most affluent people in the postcolonial space of Lahore follow now. (Saeed et al, 2019) It appears to be an erroneous belief that a culture which, at its core is something that creates a sense of belonging, is being torn away from its actual representation as a consequence of colonialism in the subcontinent. (Zafar & Rabeya, 2024) As Ferguson (2015) argues “Flânerie is just such a practice, a response to particular cultural and social conditions that allowed conception of the city simultaneously in terms of its parts and as a whole.” (p.39) While strolling through the streets of postcolonial Lahore rich in aroma and flavors, Akhtar (2017), being an inhabitant of Lahore and a prolific writer of 21st century, realistically uncovers commodification of culture in terms of brands and tags commercialized by the Westerns. The poet in the poem *Kitchen Cabinet* asserts that:

The aroma of mother’s pot colonizes

each nose, out of appetite

they make speculations

about brands and tags

(Akhtar, 2017, p.132)

The city's cuisine reflects a tapestry of cultural heritage as the consequences of the Mughal and British invasions. The amalgamation of colonial culture into the cuisine of postcolonial city has resulted in the overpowering of British ingredients in the kitchens of Lahore. British, being dependent for their food on the local servants, swayed the local chefs that, in return, colonized the flavors of the local Indian subcontinent cuisine (Usmani & Malik, 2021) Various Pakistani poets have utilised the space of the kitchen to highlight the invasion of colonizers on the cultural landscape of Pakistan. Taufiq Rafat (2004) in his poem "Kitchens" has also portrayed the kitchen as a site of cultural exchange by manifesting modern kitchens as "cramped spaces"(p. 44), where due to modern preoccupation, no one has time to discuss matters like birth, marriage and death etc. Thereto, the introspective exploration of the poet emphasizes the hazardous impact of colonialism on the contemporary postcolonial landscape of Lahore. The poet portrays the commodification of culture through the intuitive lens of postcolonial flâneur to uncover the distressing reality that even in the postcolonial era, we are still haunted by the charm of the colonizers who have deprived us of our cultural centrality. The poet states in his other poem *Diversion; a Day in The Lake District* that:

I lived with mixed odors

as the Empire intruded upon

our kitchen

the taste buds messed up

we cooked sentimental rhymes

English overtook the palates

(Akhtar, 2017, p.130)

Thus, the poem symbolizes that the aroma-filled streets of postcolonial Lahore are imbued with tales of domination and assimilation. From the culinary instruments and architectural layout to the scents of spices lingering in the air, each element evokes memories of the past and shapes the present. By immersing himself in these sensory experiences, Akhtar (2017) as a postcolonial flâneur highlights the psyche of inhabitants who, being the inhabitants of postcolonial space, are unconsciously conditioned to follow the Western cuisines to survive in this overcapitalizing world. Moreover, the exploration of the aroma-filled streets of postcolonial Lahore evokes feelings of loss, deprivation and dominance that prevail in the psychological fabric of its inhabitants.

Downing (2015) asserts that Ian Sinclair highlights flâneur as a persona whose strolling is "made with intent...walking with a thesis and with a prey" (p. 149) Strolling through the streets of postcolonial Lahore, Akhtar (2017), with an intent of uncovering the cultural dynamics, also portrays the loss of cultural values through the assimilation of English words in the postcolonial space of Lahore. Akhtar (2017) resonates with this

thematic undertone in his poem *Tree Busters* by asserting that “a noisy language burns in each pile/splintering and merging voices” (p.152) These verses underscore linguistic imperialism resulted in the sabotage of local languages even in the era of postcolonialism.

Anaya Ravishankar (2020) claims regarding the ever-lasting impact of linguistic violence that “persists long past the departure of the colonist, it is a violence committed against a very culture, one from which it may never fully recover.” (p.01) During the colonial era, the British promoted their language through colonial education, that has resulted in the loss of the language of the sub-continent. The British infused modernist values into the minds of the newly-educated middle class who are the future professionals and bureaucrats of the postcolonial Lahore. This newly-emerged elite, who has the mind of colonizers, but the blood of colonized, devised ways to adjust to the colonial agenda. Macaulay (1964) asserts in his literary essay that the agenda of colonial education is to “form a class who may be interpreters between us, with and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect.” (p.248) Akhtar (2017) in his poem *My languages* emphasizes the assimilation of English words into the language of the colonized by portraying the colonized as a prisoner who is not only forced to speak English, but is also the custodian of his local language:

so I am often
 prisoner and custodian
 straddles with its fortunes
 falling and running
 across the English Channel.
 (p.124)

Williams (1997) asserts “The postcolonial subject is a variegated entity, in short, a displaced psychic totality marked by... a differentiated postcolonial trajectory.” (p.834) Thus, even though colonizers left the Sub-continent, their signs and symbols are left behind in the form of assimilation of cultural values into the traditional and religious beliefs of the Sub-continent. Ultimately, as a result of overpowering of Western language in local language, the colonized inhabitants of the postcolonial space consider themselves as “inferior and debased creatures” (Iqbal, 2021, p.14), who have to mimic Western language to maintain a status quo in the capitalizing society. Consequently, the elites of postcolonial Lahore replaced colonizers by enforcing superiority through the English language. As, Imtiaz (2014) asserts that even though the British left the sub-continent after the partition, “ the Pakistani officials still feel very proud to mimic those white men of the yesterdays” (p.160) Thus, eventually, the English language became a symbol of prestige in the postcolonial Lahore.

The British considered their language as the only supreme language that had the power to turn the tables. Macaulay (1964) highlights the devaluation of other languages in the eyes of the British colonizers “We are a Board for wasting the public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank” (p.250). Akhtar (2017) remarks that, as a consequence of colonial repercussions on the language of the city, silence is the only way out that is yet to be contaminated. Akhtar (2017) in his poem *Subterranean Love* asserts that “There was no one

outside using language anymore / We chose a hole to keep silence uncontaminated" (p.122) The systematic promotion of English words resulted in the hybridization of language. Thus, in the postcolonial space of Lahore, the city encounters the loss of Persian and Urdu languages that were the legacy of Mughal Emperors. The poem *My Languages* asserts that the domination of the English language in the postcolonial space encapsulates tales of betrayal:

Now I struggle with another one
 one with which I swam all the oceans,
 has double-edge teeth
 it bites out of loyalty and betrayal
 (Akhtar, 2017, p.124)

Thus, the use of the metaphor "double-edged teeth" portrays the drastic consequences of the adaptation of the English language that has resulted in the betrayal of our linguistic heritage. Thus, Akhtar (2017) while strolling through the streets of postcolonial Lahore, underscores the assimilation of the English language in the linguistic landscape of Lahore that ultimately evokes feelings of loss and betrayal of our heritage. Akhtar (2017) depicts the adaptation of English words as a betrayal of our past and claims that now only silence is our last resort of loyalty towards our linguistic heritage.

Thus, through the lens of postcolonial flâneur, Akhtar (2017) in *Lahore, I Am Coming* explores the streets of Lahore to unearth the cultural narratives of postcolonial Lahore. Akhtar's (2017) poetry delves into the issues faced by the residents in light of the city's colonial and contemporary realities. Thus, the psychogeographic analysis of postcolonial Lahore has highlighted the emotional impacts of postcolonial space on the inhabitants' psyches who have endured cultural deprivation and assimilation of culture in their cultural heritage.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of this study synthesizes the findings from the critical analysis of Akhtar's (2017) poetry collection *Lahore, I Am Coming*, illustrating the spatial experiences of postcolonial flâneur in postcolonial Lahore. This study has elucidated how Lahore, as a postcolonial city, embodies rich cultural narratives that are deeply rooted in its colonial and pre-colonial past. By employing Williams's (1997) approach to the postcolonial flâneur, this research has provided a nuanced understanding of the spatial practices of postcolonial flâneur that shape the postcolonial identity and experiences of Lahore's inhabitants.

According to Williams (1997), postcolonialism is merely a facade behind which a more subtle and potentially catastrophic form of colonialism persists. Thereto, this study has explored the loss of cultural centrality, cultural adaptations, and the commodification of culture in postcolonial Lahore through the introspective lens of postcolonial flâneur. For instance, through a critical analysis of Akhtar's (2017) poem *The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore*, this study has demonstrated how postcolonial Lahore has endured the loss of the cultural tradition of dancing courtesans. The intuitive exploration of the streets of Old Lahore evokes feelings of nostalgia and distress, as this tradition ended during the colonial era, reducing the courtesans to mere sex workers. This research, therefore, highlights the

drastic impacts of Western influence on the mystique culture of dancing courtesans in Lahore.

In addition to the above, the flâneur also deciphers the postcolonial streets into an inquisitive narrative that underscores the rich dynamics of postcolonial space (Gandhi, 2017). Through the critical gaze of the postcolonial flâneur, this research has highlighted cultural adaptations in postcolonial Lahore. By investigating wedding festivals and the landscape of kitchens, the study has portrayed the feelings of loss aroused in the flâneur's mind due to the assimilation of Western values into Lahore's cultural landscape. For instance, the textual analysis of Akhtar's poem *Winter Weddings of Lahore* evokes feelings of loss and dejection as it uncovers the city's distinctive mixture of cultural traditions and the impact of invasions on these customs. Similarly, the analysis of Akhtar's (2017) poem *Kitchen Cabinet* portrays the amalgamation of colonial cultural influences into Lahore's cuisine, resulting in the dominance of British ingredients in local kitchens. The study has highlighted that the commercialization of Western brands has trespassed on inhabitants' traditional flavors arousing feelings of loss and a sense of control in the capitalized world. Additionally, the research demonstrates the incorporation of English words into the local language, which represents English as a status symbol in society. Akhtar's (2017) poem *My Languages* evokes feelings of betrayal and depression by highlighting the adaptation of English words as a betrayal of linguistic heritage, suggesting that silence is the last resort of loyalty to our past. Conclusively, this research thereby unmasks the hideous impact of colonialism on Lahore's postcolonial space, evoking feelings of grief and a sense of deprivation in the flâneur's psyche.

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