

It was November 2015 when I came across this quote from Ashes Wine and Dust on facebook

“Lahore is real Lahore burns with memories Lahore is a storyteller. Lahore breathes and lives inside him sometimes like a friend and sometimes like a bitter enemy”

I looked up the book online and ordered it right away. Exactly a week later I received it from Tara publishers India, I started it then and there and this book got me hooked the entire next week. Ashes Wine and Dust is a kind of book you don't swallow immediately, It's the kind you properly taste, chew and digest slowly.

Ashes Wine and Dust is a tale of tribulations of growing up, the impacts of the change in geographical spaces, childhood tragedies and wrecked family relationships and a child's acquaintance to grown up pains. The book is divided in three parts first being The Ashes.

Ashes begin with a simple story of a middle class family residing in Lahore in the time period of 1994. Its narrated by an 11-year-old girl Mariam Ameen. Being an introvert and a sensitive middle child she absorbs and records everything from her surroundings and holds judgment for the acts of grownups she witnesses. “What happens when two introverts collide? Do they dissolve completely in each other's patience and silence, or do they break their glass shells and become new people?”

Ashes is a story of children and how they deal with the ever evolving damaged world of adults. Focusing on major losses in the main character's life the book deals with the battles of childhood and understated traumas of adolescence. The Ashes part is in the tone of nostalgia and yearning with the perfectly relatable images of one's childhood and Mariam is a kind of child everyone can relate to, she's a kind of character that will be embedded to your mind not only we get to see her emotional turmoil but also how social and political changes of the place you reside in effect you.

As an unusual child grown into an unusual adult Mariam decides to take the rope of her identity in her own hands and decides to challenge the definition of a woman in the contemporary Pakistani society. In the second part Wine the novel enters the part of her life where she's studying abroad and is on a journey of self-

exploration. Wine is written in the tone of displacement and disorientation where a mature Mariam battles with loss of identity and relations left behind. In this part what struck me the most is usually in South Asian fiction if a character travels abroad and especially United states there is always this feeling of self-doubt and a certain inferiority complex present and I couldn't see any of it in this book and that's something I really appreciate about it that the immigrant experience doesn't take over the story. Because usually the concepts of double consciousness and identity crises and the emotional baggage they carry ends up taking over their everyday lives.

In the third part the Dust she faces the biggest tragedy of her life which makes her move back to Lahore and this part of the novel deals with how Lahore has changed its meaning for her and how the contemporary Lahore she lived in is inflicted by hatred, politics and violence. And that is where the novel takes a drastic shift and ends.

When you read a debut novel and that too from a younger writer you expect a certain flaws and loose ends as for me I just read it to taste Lahore captured from Kanza's magical prose as I was promised in the blurb that the story is a love affair with Lahore. But to my amazement I found absolutely no plot holes and I fell in love with the characters and I loved them as my own family members because I could see a typical Lahori middle class family throughout the novel and I could relate to each one of the characters. The way she narrated a tragic tale is amazing, its literary its imaginative and flowery as well. It deals with the most tangled of topics yet it is so simple and beautiful and it feels like you're reading urdu poetry, simple yet it leaves you with a void and tragedy you feel right within.

Hauntingly beautiful, emotional and so sensitive in each page. This is the kind of books that stay in your heart and keep you company for a long time after you are finished. I have a special place for this book, its characters and the city of Lahore. In so many ways I felt sadder for the bittersweet, loose ends. Life isn't black and white ever, nor is this book.