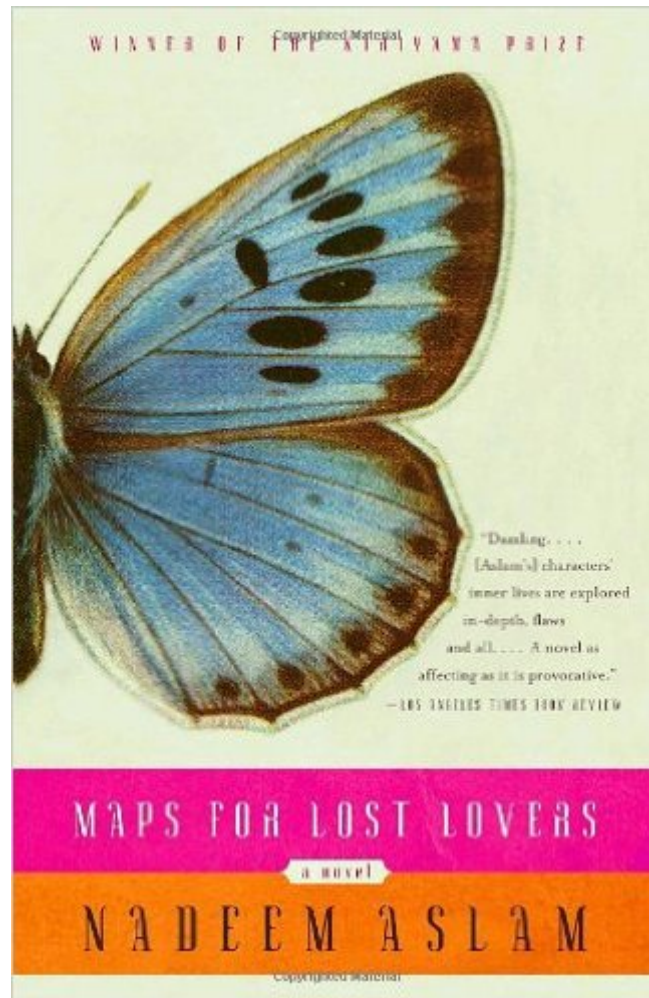


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Maps For Lost Lovers



Synopsis

If Gabriel García Márquez had chosen to write about Pakistani immigrants in England, he might have produced a novel as beautiful and devastating as *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Jugnu and Chanda have disappeared. Like thousands of people all over England, they were lovers and living together out of wedlock. To Chanda's family, however, the disgrace was unforgivable. Perhaps enough so as to warrant murder. As he explores the disappearance and its aftermath through the eyes of Jugnu's worldly older brother, Shamas, and his devout wife, Kaukab, Nadeem Aslam creates a closely observed and affecting portrait of people whose traditions threaten to bury them alive. The result is a tour de force, intimate, affecting, tragic and suspenseful.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Maps for Lost Lovers takes place in 1997 and is set over the course of a year in an unnamed community in England with a large Muslim population. Its primary focus is a married couple, Shamas, a non-believer and Kaukab, his pious wife. There are many mysteries threaded throughout this beautifully written novel, but the central one focuses on the disappearance of Shamas' brother Jugnu and the woman he was living with, Chanda. The two were not married and therefore were perceived to be living in a state of sin according to Muslim belief. Chanda's two brothers have been accused of murdering the couple. Over the course of the year, the trial over their suspected murder unfolds and many hidden secrets of the community are brought to light. It's a story of great suspense, giving precious insight into a very closed community that is struggling to maintain the beliefs of the country they left and the religion which is in many ways antithetical to modern English

life. It took Aslam over ten years to write this novel, working largely in solitude and subsisting on a very humble income. The beautifully wrought passages attest to the concentrated labour used to create them and the vast amount of time he spent with these characters shows in the penetrating insight he gives to their individual minds and hearts. The lyrical style of the novel which uses metaphor upon metaphor might at first be a distraction to the reader. However, this persistent way of likening one thing to another reflects the attitudes of people in this community who persistently compare things in England to their home country. It's a device by the author to show how they are in some ways unable to see things in England as they really are.

As Asian literature, Aslam Nadeem's "Maps For Lost Lovers" is a vastly superior piece of fiction and far more engaging and enjoyable than Monica Ali's overpraised "Brick Lane". The story of Kaukab, her husband Shamas, their three British-born children and extended family of relatives is simply heartbreaking in its exposition of the trauma of immigration and how failure of assimilation into a culturally alien environment can tear even the closest family apart. Other than her physical person, Kaukab never left Pakistan. Her stubborn refusal to accept even the tiniest aspect of her host society's mores and steadfast attachment to her own religious way of life only finds her increasingly stranded from the rest of her family who - must needs - move on. Even Shamas, her husband, is driven into the arms of a divorced Muslim woman who, trapped by the dictates of her religion, has her own agenda and axe to grind. Her children flees from her clutches in desperation to find their own place in a new society. The murder mystery surrounding Jugnu's & Chanda's disappearance and various other subplots are nothing more than plot devices to show the wickedness of an old society out of step with the rest of the modern world. Here, Nadeem's demonisation of his ancestors' old world values unsettles the nice balance he could have achieved with a more even handed approach. He even, subconsciously perhaps, forgets to paint in a personality for the white daughter-in-law Stella who remains a curiously unwritten minor character in the family saga. And I'm not sure he doesn't condone the monstrous behaviour of the westernised younger son. I certainly don't. Nadeem's prose is both beautifully lyrical and overwrought, depending on one's own taste.

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