

## ***Book Review***

**Qadeer, M. A.** (2023). *Lahore in the 21st Century: The functioning and development of a megacity in the global south*. Routledge.

In the world of urban studies and history, it is not uncommon for researchers and writers to draw from established frameworks as points of inquiry. However, in “Lahore in the 21st Century,” Qadeer presents a refreshing departure from this norm. What sets this book apart is its original analytical framework, one specifically tailored to the vibrant city of Lahore. Qadeer’s work is an exploration of the internal dynamics of urban development in Lahore, and it offers readers a unique perspective on how the city functions.

At the core of Qadeer’s argument is the notion that Lahore’s social and physical development can be attributed to its internal dynamics. He uses the metaphors of software and hardware to convey this concept. He argues that the indigenous society played a pivotal role in adapting, resisting, and reshaping the initiatives brought by the external forces and dynamics. Qadeer supports his claims with examples of physical and social transformations in Lahore. Qadeer also emphasises the intricate interplay between the city’s internal dynamics and national-scale circumstances. He links Lahore’s evolution to Pakistan’s shifting political landscape and international relations.

One of the book’s strengths is the author’s personal connection to the city. As someone who experienced Lahore’s transitions in the aftermath of significant out-migration by Hindu and Sikh communities in 1947, Qadeer combines his lived experiences with scholarly analysis. His memoirs are seamlessly woven into the book and meticulously corroborated with cited works. This blending of personal history and academic endeavor adds depth and authenticity to the narrative.

Part of the book also serves as a historical account of Lahore. What distinguishes it from previous works is a fresh perspective on the city’s history, showing how it influences the city’s form and function. A distinctive feature of the book is Qadeer’s limited reliance on other scholars to develop an argument. While this might make it less appealing to those seeking an exhaustive review of literature on Lahore, the author’s diversity of sources is truly impressive. He offers key sources in notes, allowing interested readers to explore them independently. This approach not only keeps the book accessible but also underscores that most of the ideas presented are the author’s own, derived from his thoughtful analysis of the city.

While the author does not categorically limit the audience, I think the book caters to two types of readers. First, it offers a valuable overview of contemporary Lahore to readers who are not familiar with Lahore or Pakistan, providing essential information about the city’s history and development. Second, it appeals to Lahore residents and Pakistanis already well-acquainted with the city, offering a fresh and original perspective on why Lahore functions the way it does. Qadeer’s explanations can serve as a springboard for future scholarly debates, as his arguments often raise thought-provoking questions.

My review of this book is not affected by my assistance to the author in preparing two maps for this book.

Qadeer's perspective is interesting and at times it amazed me. For example, I have lived in Lahore for many years myself and I have been a part of ordain Lahori life. But Qadeer's analysis made me re-think the part of my personality that emanates from my Lahori experiences. While I appreciated the originality of Qadeer's perspectives in this book, there is, however, one caveat to Qadeer's explanations. These are more of his opinions, though often supported by other sources and facts to support his point of view. But these still feel like opinions because he often suggests an analytical perspective or a possible solution to a problem (for example in the last chapter) without providing evidence or a process of forming that opinion.

In terms of writing style, Qadeer's prose is exceptionally accessible. The text flows smoothly, keeping the reader engaged throughout. It has a natural, unobtrusive quality that makes it a pleasure to read. It is worth noting that Qadeer occasionally touches on complex ideas such as "enlightened moderation" by Musharraf or Max Weber's "protestant ethic" without delving deeply into them. This choice likely stems from the author's intention to keep the book accessible to entry-level readers while offering tantalising mentions for those interested in exploring these topics further in other sources.

In conclusion, "Lahore in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" is an original exploration of Lahore's internal dynamics and its connection to the broader context of Pakistan's history and global relations. It offers a unique lens through which to view the city and is a valuable addition to the fields of anthropology, social economy, political economy, and urban planning.

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