

**Title of the Book: - *Istanbul: Memories and the City***

**Genre: Memoir.**

**Author: Orhan Pamuk.**

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**Reviewed By:**

**Syed Moniza Nizam Shah**

**Research Scholar**

**Department of English**

**University of Kashmir**

Turkey's only Nobel Prize laureate (till date) Orhan Pamuk is undoubtedly one of the most significant and a widely debated novelist of the contemporary world literature. Seldom does a novelist in his fifties merit and receive the kind of critical attention that has come to Orhan Pamuk. He is the bestselling novelist in contemporary Turkey. His novels have been studied meticulously by critics such as Maureen Freely, Mehnaz M. Afridi, Erdağ Gökner, Kader Konuk, Sibel Erol et al. Pamuk was born in a Muslim family in Nisantasi, a highly Westernized district in Istanbul. He was educated at Roberts College, the elite, secular American high school in Istanbul, a city which bifurcates or connects Asia and Europe. Presently, he is a professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, where he teaches comparative literature and writing. His upbringing and schooling in a highly secularized Istanbul made him a typical Istanbul like man who is torn between the traditional values of the city (century's old Ottoman culture) and Kemalist Cultural ideology/Kemalism. Pamuk is deeply attached to his city—Istanbul, where he was born and bred and continues to live in. Whether Pamuk is writing about the contemporary Turkey as in *The Museum of Innocence* or historical times as in *My Name is Red*, the city of Istanbul has almost been the main character/setting in his novels. He has never left Istanbul come what may—"I lost myself in Istanbul" (*Istanbul Memories and the City*, p.318). In other words, he has not adopted the citizenship of any other country like V. S. Naipaul, Conrad, Nabokov, and J. M. Coetzee. It is important to state that Pamuk faces life threats, constant attacks from secularists in Turkey since he had made a statement on the Armenian genocide. Despite this, he continues to live in Istanbul. He loves this city as was Dublin loved by James Joyce or St. Petersburg by Dostoevsky. Like Joyce and Dostoevsky Pamuk considers his birth city (Istanbul) as a constant source of inspiration for his works. His affection, honor and attachment towards his beloved city (Istanbul) are clearly noticeable in the following lines from *Istanbul: Memories and the City*:

Here we come to the heart of the matter: I have never left Istanbul, never left the houses, streets, and neighborhoods of my childhood... My imagination requires that I stay in the same city, on the same street, in the same house, gazing on the same view. Istanbul's fate is my fate. I am attached to this city because it made me who I am. (Pp.5-6)

His all major works are set in Istanbul. His characters are the true children of Istanbul. When he was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 2006, he was welcomed with these words at Stockholm Concert Hall: "Most honoured Orhan Pamuk! You have made your native city an indispensable literary territory, equal to Dostoyevsky's St. Petersburg, Joyce's Dublin or Proust's Paris – a place

where readers from all corners of the world can live another life, just as credible as their own, filled by an alien feeling that they immediately recognize as their own". The streets of Istanbul; its monumental buildings in Ottoman architecture; its vast cultural heritage; the Bosphorus Bridge which connects or separates Europe and Asia; the decay of Ottoman culture and the impact of Westernizing reforms, the quarrels between his father and mother and rapid urbanization in Nisantasi (Istanbul) stirred Orhan Pamuk's imagination and therefore, the result was *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. Pertinently, until the twentieth century the beauty, the spirit and the people of Istanbul were largely depicted by the Westerner writers. The western depiction of Istanbul persistently haunted Orhan Pamuk and he in his heart of hearts yearned to see the true portrait of his city through the writings of a native writer. He knew the western writers have not projected his city and its citizens truthfully. Therefore, in order to depict the city's past and contemporary situations realistically he decided to portray it himself. He penned down a memoir which he named *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. Orhan Pamuk asserts:

Istanbul itself wrote very little about their city until the beginning of the twentieth century. The living, breathing city – its streets its atmosphere, its smells, the rich variety of its everyday life – is something that only literature can convey, and for centuries the only literature our city inspired was penned by Westerners. (*Istanbul: Memories and the City*, p.310).

*Istanbul: Memories and the City* was originally published as *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* in Turkish language in 2003. It was translated into English language by Maureen Freely in 2005. The book contains thirty-seven chapters and an epigraph by Ahmet Rasim. Orhan Pamuk dedicated this autobiographical memoir to his father Gündüz Pamuk who died in 2002. While reading this book the readers come across various photographs which are rarely found in either fiction or non-fiction books. The photographs are both of the city and Orhan Pamuk with his other family members. These photographs are mainly taken by Ara Güler—"Photographs...were taken by Ara Güler" (*Istanbul: Memories and the City*, p.335). The book tells us the story of the first twenty-two years of the narrator's life in his native city—Istanbul, as well as depicts the city in different aspects. It is autobiographical in tone for it is written in the first-person singular.

Like, all other works of Pamuk *Istanbul: Memories and the City* explores the East-West dichotomy in the context of the Turkish modernization. The book is primarily concerned with the glorious Ottoman cultural heritage and the ramifications of the Atatürk's secularization project in Turkey. It is a melancholy of Istanbul—*hüzün* (a Turkish word for melancholy) for it mourns the loss of Ottoman cultural influence in Istanbul. It poignantly depicts the disintegration of joint family system in Turkey. While walking through the streets of Istanbul, the narrator is saddened to witness the changes brought out by the Turkish modernization process in his birth city. The narrator feels that it is due to the 1920s and 1930s reforms the city of Istanbul looks like monotonous and ugly. Meanwhile, on the one hand the narrator is pondering over the gloomy atmosphere of the city; which according to Pamuk is in ruins; whereas at the same time he memorizes the glorious days of Ottoman Empire. Pamuk points out: "As we in Nişantaşı saw it, the Republic had done away with the pashas, princes, and high officials, so the empty mansions they had left behind were only decrepit anomalies" (*Istanbul Memories and the City*, p.27).

*Istanbul: Memories and the City* is Orhan Pamuk's attempt to show a changing Istanbul through the eyes of one narrator, who is Pamuk himself. On the one hand the narrative is about, how the city street by street, building by building, shop by shop and window by window changes; on the other hand, it portrays how the collective conscience of people is pricked by the loss of erstwhile

glorious past. Throughout the narrative, the reader realizes that Pamuk's lamentation for the past intensifies with every new development he encounters in the city. He outspokenly denounces the post-republic idea of modernity. He strongly opines that Istanbul's architectural character is vastly dismembered by its elites or secularists. What Pamuk promotes through this memoir is that all the nations must preserve their cultural heritage come what may. So, the future generations would comprehend their tradition in totality and at the same time would feel highly privileged about the culture they come from. But, what has been happening in Pamuk's native city is very disturbing and painful. This is the same city which has remained at one point of time, for many Muslims, the cradle of civilization. It is through the black-and-white photographs Pamuk exhibits his yearning for the restoration of Islamic architecture and with it the restoration of an Ottoman culture as well as its spirit but, that he thinks that it has been deliberately erased by Modernization project in his nation. The intensity of *hüzün* can be seen in the following sentences from the book—"Still, the melancholy of this dying culture was all around us".

In *Istanbul: Memories and the City* Orhan Pamuk's purpose is not to oppose the Western mentality or culture in Turkey but to preserve one's own traditional heritage. The memoir pathetically explores how the political forces/state administration keep future generations at bay from their rich past. Throughout the text, it seems that Pamuk is grieving at the Westernization/Secularization project in his country, for which he strongly believes is responsible for the wiping out of the Ottoman/Islamic tradition from Turkey. The memoir is not only a narrative about Orhan Pamuk as a child in Istanbul but also a true picture of the contemporary Istanbul; a city whose millions of souls are caught between the past and present; between tradition and modernity; and surely between the East and West. It reveals brilliantly how the Ottoman culture and Westernization are often at odds in Turkey. The Istanbul described in the memoir is not very attractive and admirable for the rapid urbanization in the city has taken a great toll on the traditional Ottoman architecture. The symbol of architecture, according to Pamuk, stands for the revival of the glorious art of the bygone civilizations. But, unfortunately this architecture, Pamuk believes was erased by the century's secular reforms. And, it is due to these changes that Pamuk feels, Istanbul is not the same Istanbul anymore. *Istanbul: Memories and the City* expresses the eternal fight between the East and the West in the milieu of secularization project in Turkey. On the one hand, the narrator seeks to establish a personal identity while on the other hand; he tries to solve the paradox of a nation's identity. Pamuk's and Istanbul's dilemma manifests the inconsolable condition of those rootless individuals, who are eager to find their own identity in society under continuous socio-political changes. Pamuk's memoir presents Istanbul as a society which has not suffered from a prolonged subjection but from various reforms with the advent of Turkey as a republican country.

Orhan Pamuk mostly writes about the Ottoman heritage and the religion of Islam. He is born and brought up in a city which links or connects Europe and Asia. He is split between the fidelity to his Eastern roots and his Western upbringing. Pamuk, thus, characterizes the Turkish incongruity or enigma—on the one side they (Turkish people) are yearning for Western progress, scientific ambition, and democratic setup and on the other side, they are deeply attached to its Ottoman culture and tradition and its Islamic law or what is generally known in Islamic terminology as Shariah Law. The East-West antagonism, clash between secularists and Islamists, conflict between Ottoman tradition and foreign culture and so on (which is preponderant in the Turkish consciousness) is dexterously presented in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City*.