The Dancing Courtesans of Old Lahore

There are noises in dark rooms
who can build a house without din
wooden stairs without creaking
and a veranda without creepers
crookedly ajar doors scandalize
gahzals escape gramophone
like a royal an ageing raqasa* shows up
on a murky balcony

arabesque alleys continue
under bras messages hibernate
ogling in the The Dancing Girls’ Bazaar
nights reveal in sitar and anklets
hennaed-feet agile dancers
exude intricate bodily expressions
those who lack skills are desires
growing on audience

body encores mystical whirls
asking fresh piece of betel-leaf
poems in courtesans’ hands
endure a legitimate munch

over rickshaws and donkey carts
a dim moon smudges the songs
sung by the concubine Anarkali
planted alive in bricks by the Emperor –

azan form The Royal Mosque tempers
sweating bodies
ablutions flow on white ponds
pigeons land like souls wanting modest bribes.

*RizwanAkhtar

*raqasa is an Urdu word for dancer.