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The Bookseller Of Kabul



Synopsis

This mesmerizing portrait of a proud man who, through three decades and successive repressive regimes, heroically braved persecution to bring books to the people of Kabul has elicited extraordinary praise throughout the world and become a phenomenal international bestseller. The Bookseller of Kabul is startling in its intimacy and its details - a revelation of the plight of Afghan women and a window into the surprising realities of daily life in today's Afghanistan.

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Customer Reviews

After living for three months with the Kabul bookseller Sultan Khan in the spring of 2002, Norwegian journalist Seierstad penned this astounding portrait of a nation recovering from war, undergoing political flux and mired in misogyny and poverty. As a Westerner, she has the privilege of traveling between the worlds of men and women, and though the book is ostensibly a portrait of Khan, its real strength is the intimacy and brutal honesty with which it portrays the lives of Afghani living under fundamentalist Islam. Seierstad also expertly outlines Sultan's fight to preserve whatever he can of the literary life of the capital during its numerous decades of warfare (he stashed some 10,000 books in attics around town). Seierstad, though only 31, is a veteran war reporter and a skilled observer; as she hides behind her burqa, the men in the Sultan's family become so comfortable with her presence that she accompanies one of Sultan's sons on a religious pilgrimage and witnesses another buy sex from a beggar girl-then offer her to his brother. This is only one of many equally shocking stories Seierstad uncovers. In another, an adulteress is suffocated by her three brothers as ordered by their mother. Seierstad's visceral account is equally seductive and repulsive and

resembles the work of Martha Gellhorn. An international bestseller, it will likely stand as one of the best books of reportage of Afghan life after the fall of the Taliban. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Adult/High School — A female journalist from Norway moved in with the Khan family in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. Disguised as she was behind the bulky, shapeless burka and escorted always by a man and even in Western dress, she was somehow anonymous and accepted readily into the bookseller's large extended family. Her account is of the tragedy, contradictions, rivalries, and daily frustrations of a middle-class Afghan family. She accompanied the women as they shopped and dressed for a wedding and was privy to the negotiations for the marriage. She tells of the death by suffocation of a young woman who met her lover in secret, the bored meanderings of a 12-year-old boy forced to work 12-hour days selling candy in a hotel lobby, and of going on a religious pilgrimage with a restless, frustrated teen. All this is recounted with journalistic objectivity in spite of her close ties to the Khans. Events that the author doesn't actually witness or participate in, she recounts from conversations with members of the family, primarily Sultan Khan's sister. There is much irony here — Sultan, who has risked his life to protect and disseminate books with diverse points of view, denies his sons the right to pursue an education and subjects his female relatives to drudgery and humiliation. — Jackie Gropman, Chantilly Regional Library, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

This is a well written book but the material is very very sad, after reading a few chapters each night I would have to go online and find something funny to watch just to get disturbing images from the book out of my head. It is not violent but the oppression of women, the poor, the helpless, its just too depressing. The story revolves around this one gentleman who sells books in Kabul, what quickly comes across is that even though he sells books, that doesn't make him more enlightened or open-minded. Instead he rules his home like a dictator, gets a young wife because he is a disgusting old man (though no one in the family says that), allows his first wife and children to treat his mother and sisters like slaves, denies his sons education. Its just terrible and yet so indicative of what we hear about life in Afghanistan. This awful meanness seems to spread from father to son and no one has the courage or thinking to break the cycle. I believe its a book people should read (wonderful for book clubs), but be aware, its not easy reading this tale.

I read this book many years ago and bought it as an e-book only recently because I wish to re-read it-I liked it that much. It is a very descriptive portrayal of the life of one Afghani woman. As I recall, originally the author was focusing on the father, who is the bookseller and stumbled on the much more interesting (but sad) life of his daughter. The author takes you into the very private world of females in an Islamic country, something often not easily accomplished. I believe one can learn a great deal about a country/ culture by looking at individuals in it and if we wish to understand why Afghanistan is the way it is, it would behoove us to read books like this.

Great intro to daily life in an afghan family. Each person has his or her role which is never changing. Seierstad eloquently and simply displays the inner and outer lives of these family members with a bit of history and wider geopolitics thrown in. Every one of her books is a fascinating glimpse into another society and its people.

A friend of mine lent me her copy of this book and the first question I asked her was, was it good? She said, yes, and it is definitely thought-provoking. As soon as I finished reading another book for a book club, I picked this one up and finished it in two days. I literally could not put the book down. It is very well-written and tells a story of a man and his family in Afghanistan just after 9/11, during the Taliban times and after the fall of the Taliban. She claims she wrote it in a novel form based on true stories of what she heard told to her while visiting Afghanistan. It definitely read as a novel, but I knew that it wasn't fiction. I also knew that it's a very small representation of what goes on in Afghanistan as it is just one man and his family's story. It is also not a very flattering picture of that man's life and as for accuracy, I am assuming that it is accurate for that family, but not necessarily accurate for the entire society as a whole. This book literally gave me the goosebumps. Here is an educated man who loves his books more than anything in the world and he has high dreams of printing books and selling them to everyone. He is also the head of his family, one of thirteen children. His mother, three younger sisters, two wives, children all live with him in a tiny flat that used to be in middle class district of Kabul before it was destroyed by the Taliban. He puts his two sons to work instead of allowing them to go to school. Before 9/11 happened, all the women and kids were in school. After 9/11, they went into hiding. Before 9/11, the women didn't have to wear the stifling burkas. After 9/11, they did. (This author gave such explicit descriptions of what it was like to wear the burka, that I could actually visualize it.) Life has changed but despotism still reigns, even if it's just in one man's family. Women literally have no voice ~~ they cannot speak up and choose the man they might want to marry; they cannot resume their education or go back to work;

they cannot walk freely in the marketplace without another woman or a male relative chaperoning her. The children are not better off either. They are at the mercy of their father's wishes. What really broke my heart in this book is the youngest sister's story. She is an attractive and intelligent girl, but since she is the youngest, she is practically the family's slave ~~ always tending to the laundry, the cooking and serving the guests. She longs nothing more than to break away and maybe get a job as a teacher. She meets a man but her family told her to marry someone else. Even if she resisted and put up a fight, she would be killed like another friend of hers, whose brothers smothered her because supposedly "she wasn't pure and had a boyfriend while married to another guy". Women really aren't valued in that society other than to have children. It is shocking to read that even in an educated man's family, old tribal customs are still the norm. It is something that being a Westerner, I cannot grasp nor understand. This is a thought-provoking book and one that will linger after the last page has been turned. It will definitely make you take notice of your life and the lives around you. It will definitely remind you that even though we are struggling with different issues in America, there are other women of other countries fighting for their basic survival. 5-20-07

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