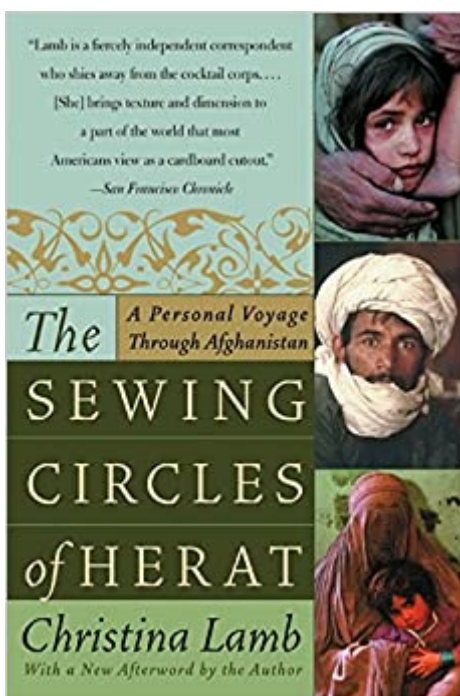


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# The Sewing Circles Of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan



## Synopsis

Twenty-one-year-old Christina Lamb left suburban England for Peshawar on the frontier of the Afghan war. Captivated, she spent two years tracking the final stages of the mujaheddin victory over the Soviets, as Afghan friends smuggled her in and out of their country in a variety of guises. Returning to Afghanistan after the attacks on the World Trade Center to report for Britain's Sunday Telegraph, Lamb discovered the people no one else had written about: the abandoned victims of almost a quarter century of war. Among them, the brave women writers of Herat who risked their lives to carry on a literary tradition under the guise of sewing circles; the princess whose palace was surrounded by tanks on the eve of her wedding; the artist who painted out all the people in his works to prevent them from being destroyed by the Taliban; and Khalil Ahmed Hassani, a former Taliban torturer who admitted to breaking the spines of men and then making them stand on their heads. Christina Lamb's evocative reporting brings to life these stories. Her unique perspective on Afghanistan and deep passion for the people she writes about make this the definitive account of the tragic plight of a proud nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Expelled from Afghanistan by the Taliban for her reporting, award-winning British journalist Lamb returned after the September 11 attacks to observe the land and its people firsthand. Through interviews with locals, Lamb paints a vivid picture of Taliban rule and offers a broader sense of life devastated by two decades of war. Her well-written and moving account also reveals the heroism of

the Afghans, who not only survived but also resisted their Soviet occupiers; clandestine literary circles and art preservation techniques, for example, helped Afghans salvage their education and history from total destruction. Yet this is more than a chronicle of everyday Afghan life. Lamb's probing interviews with Afghan warlords, former members of the Taliban and other influential personalities ignored by the Western media fill a gaping hole in research on the ideologies and perspectives of these actors. Her encounters with Pakistani Taliban patrons Sami-ul-Haq and Hamid Gul shed light on Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Lamb could have strengthened her account by utilizing her impressive research to further explain Afghanistan's poorly understood local rulers. Moreover, her occasional use of sensationalist language to describe Afghan suffering belittles the gravity of the situation, and her attempts to intersperse the country's complicated history with the present situation may also confuse unfamiliar readers. Nevertheless, her work leaves one with a powerful sense of what the Afghan people have endured and sheds light on the local leaders who have shaped Afghanistan's recent history. Illus. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a journalist covering Afghanistan during the end of the war with the Soviet Union, Lamb has a unique perspective. Observing that country after the fall of the Taliban, Lamb looks back on her days reporting on the war and is deeply unsettled to learn that the rebellious "mullahs on motorbikes" who took her to the warfront became the cruel and unbending Taliban soldiers who repressed the people of Afghanistan by perverting the ideals of Islam. "Nowhere does it say men must have beards or women can not be educated," one Afghani friend of Lamb laments, "in fact on the contrary the Koran says people must seek education." Lamb speaks to the head of the most prestigious Taliban school, a princess in exile, and women who risked everything to hold classes in their houses. She also receives letters from Marri, a young woman who barely dares to hope that the Americans will liberate the Afghan people. The scope of Lamb's book sets it apart from similar works; readers will find it both comprehensive and absorbing. Kristine Huntley Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a young woman, Christina Lamb traveled to Afghanistan, and through a mix of persistence, courage, connections, and writing talent managed to document the final two years of the struggle for Afghan freedom against the Soviets. Over the years she kept her finger on the pulse of the region, wrote a couple of books, and ultimately returned again at be on the ground as the Taliban breathed

its last in the early months of 2002. Christina Lamb is a wonderful writer with a knack for interweaving just the right amount of her own personal narrative in with the current events about which she is writing. In addition, she casts back into the past and gives a whole lot of background information on Afghan history, politics, monarchy, trade, and agriculture. I especially loved sections of the book where she discussed the architecture of the city of Herat during the height of its beauty, juxtaposing it against its current state. While Herat may be in the title of the book, many cities are given equal coverage, among them the more conservative stronghold of Kandahar and the capital city of Kabul. The book is fairly accurately titled in that women's issues are very prominently featured in the narrative, and she discusses the history of different areas of Afghanistan with regards to women, education, and the arts, both before and after the Taliban. Lamb does an excellent job bringing the reader's senses to life and into her environment; readers feel the ruts beneath the airplane wheels and the grit of the dust storms—you smell the pine trees and taste the mutton. Hearts ache for the children who lack for the most basic things—she heads one of her chapters with a quote that I love from the Persian poet Rumi: "Look at your eyes. They are small but they see enormous things." The things that these children have seen and survived defy comprehension. Indeed, the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Photography was awarded to Massoud Hossaini for his horrific shot of a twelve year old girl screaming in fear amidst a mass of bodies moments after a suicide bomb detonated in Kabul. That same sense of place and culture comes through in the tenor of Christina Lamb's writing; she spent a lot of time among the people, not sitting in the hotel with her western journalist coworkers, and it shows. My one complaint, and the single factor that kept me from giving the book a fifth star, is that at times her timeline can get rather discombobulated as she tries to focus on specific people or places. I would have preferred that she take a more chronological approach; obviously those places where she goes back to the Mongols that is not possible, but a stricter chronology from the late 1970's to the 2000s would have made for a much tighter narrative. My preference would have been to provide a listing of people at the beginning of the book, to help readers to have difficulty keeping all of the similar sounding Middle Eastern names straight, and then travel chronologically through the story, letting readers refer back to the list to refresh their memories as players come up again. There are a lot of books out there on this topic. This is a very good one for people without a lot of background, as the author does an excellent job giving the reader everything needed. It was published in 2002, so many of the players have since been apprehended, but that doesn't in any way take away from the history of it. Overall, I highly recommend this energetically written, informative account.

There are many good books now offering us insight into Afghanistan and Pakistan, but even the best of them -- like *Carpet Wars* -- are by men and almost all the people they meet and talk about are men -- not surprisingly, given where they are. Christina Lamb has been in Afghanistan and nearby Pakistan over a period of decades. Her writing is clear, direct, and sympathetic to the people she's known there for many years, including Hamid Karzai. The people she meets -- and re-meets -- along the way become part of her story which humanizes the the local situations she describes. Top notch!

This account speaks eloquently of the need/desire for education by women in Afghanistan. Also discloses quirks in the culture that we need to understand in order to be effective collaborators.

The author spent time in Afghanistan during the time of the Soviet invasion and expulsion. She went back right after 9/11. The narrative moves from past to present, to past, from Islamabad to Herat to Kandahar, from war stories, to politics, to art. It is worth the time it takes to read, and adds to one's understanding of the region. The title and jacket descriptions made me think that this might be an Afghan version of Azar Nafisi's amazing book. It wasn't. It took me a little while to get over that and look at the book on its own merits. Its not bad, but a better title would have been "My Motorcycle Mullahs". The subtitle, *A Personal Voyage Through Afganistan*, does describe the contents. It doesn't have the richness or depth of Nafisi's work, and I wouldn't have made the comparison if not for the less than apt title. I have a vision of the marketing people, looking at the numbers on "reading *Lolita* in Tehran", noting the bit about the poetry group hiding in the sewing circle, and coming up with the title. That probably did a lot for sales.

A very well written and fascinating book which anyone interested in Afghanistan and the Taliban will find helpful and enjoyable. I highly recommend it for both male and female readers.

Ms. Lamb is very brave to have gone to the belly of the beast, so to speak. She has given us a personal inside look at how the Afghani muslim, al quaeda, taliban, you name it, really operate. She is bravely exposing the evil for what it is, but also shows how the everyday people live their lives despite that evil around them.

I got this Used but it was described as being almost New and guess what, it was very New like. I also got it at a very low price!!!!

Couldn't read it.

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