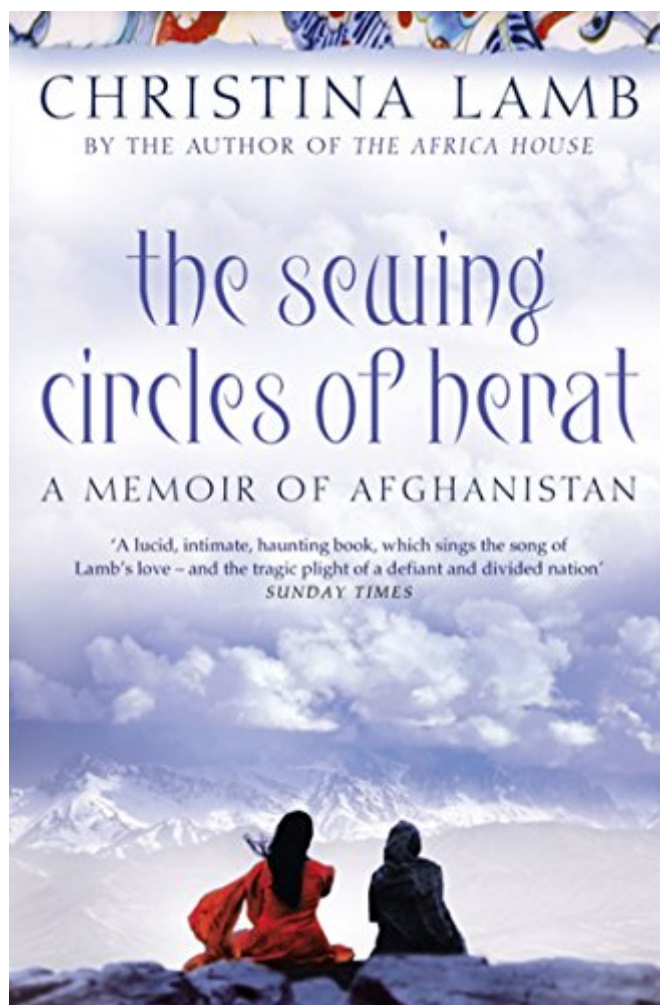


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The Sewing Circles Of Herat: My Afghan Years



Synopsis

In 1992 Christina Lamb reported on the war the Afghan people were fighting against the Soviet Union. Now, back in Afghanistan, she has written an extraordinary memoir of her love affair with the country and its people. Long haunted by her experiences in Afghanistan, Lamb returned there after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre to find out what had become of the people and places that had marked her life as a young graduate. This time seeing the land through the eyes of a mother and experienced foreign correspondent, Lamb's journey brings her in touch with the people no one else is writing about: the abandoned victims of almost a quarter century of war. "Of all books about Afghanistan, Christina Lamb's is the most revealing and rewarding" a personal, perceptive and moving account of bravery in the face of staggering difficulties. "Anthony Sattin, Sunday Times" "As an account of how Afghanistan got into its present state, and of the making of the grotesque regime of the Taliban, this book could not possibly be bettered. Brilliant." Matthew Leeming, Spectator "Lamb's book combines a love of Afghanistan with a fearless search for the human stories behind the past twenty-three years of war" Her book is not only a necessary education for the Western reader in the political warring that generated the torture, murder and poverty, but also a stirring lament for the country of ruins that was once better known for its poetry and mosques. "James Hopkin, The Times"

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Customer Reviews

An excellent book by someone very familiar with Afghanistan and the Afghan people. Having lived and travelled in the country in the 1960's, this account of contemporary Afghanistan, in the light of the horrific past thirty years, affected me deeply. All I can repeat is why, why, why? A really good book.

So the most popular elementary school primer teaches students, post-Taliban, how to count. In this war torn country, murder and torture provide more common shared experiences than going out for pizza. Lamb intersperses her passion for education, with stories about dozens of Afghans, creating a mosaic of a culture where people fight for fun, or vengeance or for any number of reasons, but whatever, violence seems to be in the dna of the people of this land. So does a desire to learn, no matter how much danger one faces to attend or to teach a clandestine class. A good editor would have caught many grammatical errors. That said, the writer put her life on the line to show Afghans that the West hasn't forgotten them, and that some people do care. After reading this book, I strongly would recommend "Three Cups Of Tea" by Greg Mortenson. As depressing as this book is, his is uplifting.

Christina Lamb is a journalist who spent several years in Afghanistan in the 1980s and then returned after the US-led invasion in 2001. She is clearly an adventurous type, and ended up hiding in ditches with mujaheddin under fire, among other things. Some of her friends ended up in the Taliban, while another (Hamid Karzai) is now the post-Taliban president of the country. The book combines stories from both periods, as well as stories from friends about life under the Taliban. You'll meet a torturer for the Taliban, women who organized secret schools, mullahs who use motorbikes to scoot around the country because Soviet soldiers can't spot bikes easily, and a lot of Afghans trying to live their lives in a war-torn country. Lamb's experiences in the country over several decades make this book stand out among the many other Western accounts. No matter how many books about Afghanistan I read, I continue to be amazed by how violent this society is, especially Pashtun society. Violence and brutality begin in the household and continues into public spaces and up into the political system. As a middle-class Brit, you'd expect Lamb to be highly

critical - - and she is, in a way, but she prefers to take on the role of a reporter with many Afghan friends and a lot of sympathy for the people of the country. Some people will find these stories depressing, and of course many of them are. Some stories will be hard for people to read. But I think it's ultimately an optimistic book, grounded in a love of the country and its people despite the horrors that insiders and outsiders have inflicted upon it. Highly recommended.

Lamb's title is misleading. The sewing circles which hid clandestine education for women forbidden by the Taliban, are but a minor part of the author's travels in Afghanistan in two main periods, the war against the Russians and just after the defeat of the Taliban. This is a terrible account of what war does to destroy a land and of the inhumanity of life under the strict Islam of the Taliban. Who can imagine what it must have been like to live under a regime where all picture, music and even laughter were banned. So what is related here is often ugly, violent and cruel. Lamb writes well but one cannot help wondering what was the mother of a young child thinking of to put her life at risk as she did. This is not a pleasant read but there is something of happiness before the end and now life in Kabul is, I can say from personal experience, much better than when Lamb wrote. Afghanistan though sadly remains a land of violence still in danger from oppressive Islamists

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