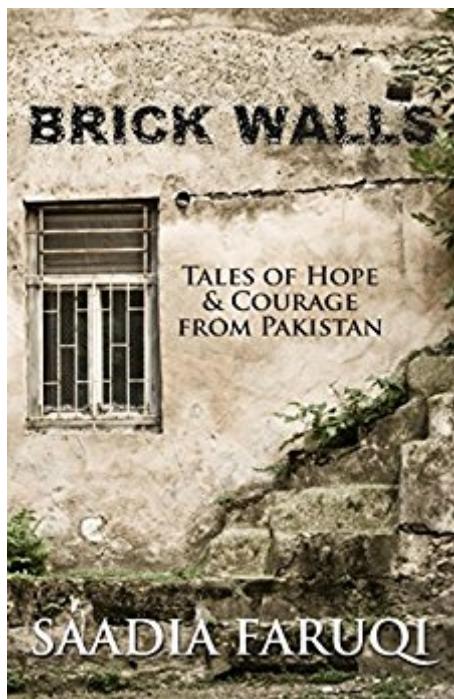


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Brick Walls



Synopsis

Brick Walls: Tales of Hope and Courage from Pakistan is a heartwarming collection of short stories filled with larger-than-life characters and the seemingly impossible challenges they face. You will be captivated by these fictional depictions of everyday Pakistanis who struggle with poverty, violence, corruption and abuse, yet rise from the ashes stronger and more enduring. There is Asma the lackluster seamstress, Faisal the would-be terrorist, Javed Gul the Pushto rock singer, Farzana the cantankerous grandmother, Nida the ten-year-old girl with a cricket obsession, and many more. Together they form a rich mosaic that showcases the beauty of Pakistan, her culture and her people.

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Customer Reviews

The stories in this book filled me with so many emotions, but I mainly came away with optimism and hope. The characters and their situations, in many ways, are universal. That they are Pakistanis dealing with a world turned upside-down by religious extremism, political corruption, war, poverty or violence makes me think twice about my preconceptions. Most of the stories were gut-wrenching or

heartbreaking from my Western perspective, but they all expanded my Weltanschauung in some way. Each story is completely different, but each illustrates a facet of Pakistani life and the good and bad of the people who live there. Each story ends in hope, whether for a better life, a better understanding, a new start--the characters find a new path. The writing is wonderful and evocative of life in that part of the world. I know I will be re-reading these stories over time, even though they are unforgettable.

I like that Saadia takes risks. She offers an eye-opening perspective of a young man recruited to become a suicide bomber; a vivacious girl determined to play the male-dominated sport of cricket; and a revolutionary musician who performs to spite the Taliban. Every viewpoint this book puts forth is fresh, different, and worth knowing. Saadia's most compelling writing technique is her knack for tension. She has this way of slipping in little hints - a detail that you might overlook or think nothing of - then wrapping everything back full circle. There were times I gasped, "No!" as I realized the foreshadowing from three pages ago had come back, and something terrible was about to happen. She pulls you in consciously and meticulously - with every detail, she gets you to love or sympathize with her characters and feel invested in their futures, fragile as they are. If I have one wish for this book, it's that I want it to show more than explain, especially when it comes to the deep emotions each protagonist experiences. Saadia sets up each story with so much excellent tension, and I want to see the characters react instead of being told how they feel - then again, I'm an analytical reader and prefer to read between the lines, which isn't the case for everyone. Style preferences aside, there is much depth here to dissect. As an American reader, I was grateful for the opportunity to explore these perspectives and learn more about a place that US news typically doesn't empathize with. Yet it's critical to acknowledge how many of our problems, hopes, dreams, loves, and passions parallel each other. That is the importance of world literature and this book: to let us hear these voices and feel their existence, no matter what physical distance separates us. Beyond the political critiques, Saadia hits on something even more important and memorable, at least for me: the shared beauty and common kindness of humanity.

"Brick Walls" is a beautifully written collection of seven short stories about people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds in Pakistan. The characters in the stories come alive and the reader can enter into their perceptions of the world they inhabit. While the situations they find themselves in are common in Pakistan, they are not in most of the Western countries; the way the characters behave, however, clearly brings out Ms. Faruqi's message that we are all essentially the same.

Each of the stories takes on a separate current issue; through the characters the reader can begin to see facets of the problems that the media does not convey. It is an important book to read for anyone who is seeking to understand the way the people of Pakistan feel about what is happening in their country. While the stories are fictional, the emotional context of living in the various situations, is quite real. The stories cover topics as diverse as the recruitment of terrorists, musicians under the Taliban, the falsely imprisoned, girls playing sports, and the socio-economic divides in urban areas among others. I read the book in December and felt it was important enough for my students to have Ms. Faruqi's insights that I immediately added it to the required reading for one of my Humanities classes.

Saadia has beautifully recreated a collection of memories that will undoubtedly evoke serious homesickness in the hearts of many Pakistani Americans. Her narrative is not only original, it is elaborate, descriptive and eloquent. The many characters leap off the pages mesmerizing the reader and holding the imagination captive till the very end. Faruqi gained my respect primarily due to her unique style of leading a sedentary theme into a story of unbridled hope and revival. It is incredibly difficult to find a source of hope in so many hopeless lives, especially in a country such as Pakistan. Yet, she finds a ray of sunshine that illuminates the lives of the lead characters and makes their sacrifices worth the effort. A thoroughly enjoyable read, full of surprises and an unparalleled, truthful rendition of her own homeland.

I loved these stories. I love how Saadia Faruqi portrayed so many diverse characters, yet how they all hailed from Pakistan. If you've been to Pakistan, you know how many different social circles, classes, and people they are. Her writing is honest and thought-provoking. Emotional and touching. (I especially loved Nida's story and Farzana's and Lubna's story) A must-read for anyone! Gives a good insight into the subtleties and resilience of Pakistani society. Great read!

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