



# Afghan Rumour Bazaar: Secret Sub-Cultures, Hidden Worlds and the Everyday Life of the Absurd

By Nushin Arbabzadah

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Ironic and humorous, witty and self-deprecatory, The Afghan Rumour Bazaar reveals the quotidian absurdities of lives framed against the backdrop of a savage war. Offering daringly new perspectives on a country readers may erroneously assume they know, Nushin Arbabzadah delves into the unacknowledged but real secret sub-cultures and hidden worlds of Afghans, from underground converts to Christianity to mysterious male cross-dressers to tales of bacha-posh girlboys. Among the individuals, fables and dilemmas she confronts are 'Why are Imams Telling Us About Nail Polish?', 'Afghanistan's Rich Jewish Heritage,' 'Kabul Street Style,' 'The Resurgence of Afghanistan's Spiritual Bazaar,' and not forgetting Malalai of Maiwand, who turned her headscarf into a banner and led a successful rebellion against the British. Arbabzadah reveals for the first time Afghans own vibrant internal deliberations--on sex and soap operas; conspiracy theories; drugs and diplomacy; terrorism and the Taliban; and how a long-dead soothsayer from Bulgaria accidentally shut down a newspaper. Many different Afghan sensibilities are presented in her book, yet together they offer an unvarnished, at times heartwarming, at times tragic, insight into one of the most complex and fascinating countries on earth.

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*By Nushin Arbabzadah*

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"A fresh, funny, provocative voice. Arbabzadah's candid memories and comments are a timely reminder that Afghanistan is a country, not merely a conflict." --Jason Burke, author of *On The Road to Kandahar: Travels Through Conflict in the Islamic World and The 9/11 Wars*

"Part memoir, part journalism and part storytelling, the book is a heady ride into the craziness that is Afghan life [Arbabzadah's] deep affection for Afghanistan is as obvious as is her amusement about the absurdity of life there ... For a look into an often misunderstood country from a woman who is both an outsider and an insider, *Afghan Rumour Bazaar* is a must read." -- Jyotsna Nambiar, *PostNoon*

"Nushin Arbabzadah's Afghanistan is a wonderful and terrible place, a land of heart-stopping beauty and unspeakable horrors ... The book is chaotic, and wonderfully so. Its great strength as a national portrait is that the jumble of anecdote and analysis, with serious scholarship and pithy observation and trivial detail all thrown in together, feels three-dimensional and complete." -- Cordelia Jenkins, *Mint*

"*Afghan Rumour Bazaar* takes the reader deep into the Afghan culture ... The book offers an almost-irreverent, splendidly revealing take on Afghanistan." -- *The Telegraph* (Calcutta)

"*Afghan Rumour Bazaar* by Cambridge scholar Nushin Arbabzadah is a brilliant narrative of the often-overlooked emerging threads and subcultures in Afghanistan." -- *Outlook Magazine*

"...invaluable and ground-breaking. For the first time, an Afghan, and a woman at that, takes Westerners into the world(s) of her countrymen and gives them an insider's guide to these people who are all too often cast in simplistic, onedimensional terms." -- Brian Glyn Williams, *Central Asian Survey*

#### About the Author

**Nushin Arbabzadah** grew up in Kabul during the Soviet occupation, and as a teenager fled Afghanistan with her family. She later studied at Cambridge University and now writes a column in *The Guardian*.

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