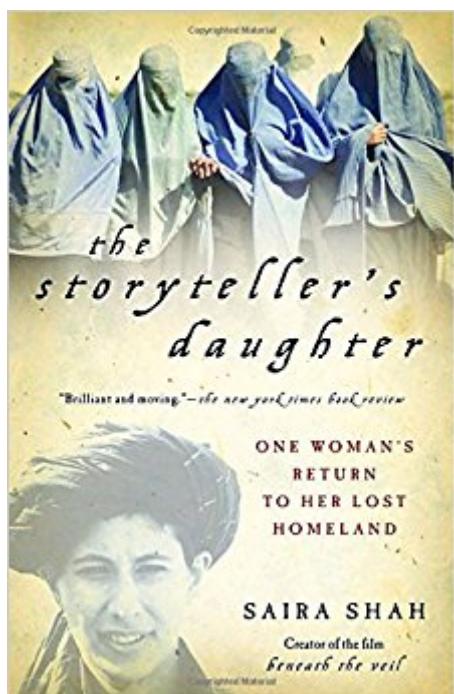


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# The Storyteller's Daughter: One Woman's Return To Her Lost Homeland



## Synopsis

Imagine that a jewel-like garden overlooking Kabul is your ancestral home. Imagine a kitchen made fragrant with saffron strands and cardamom pods simmering in an authentic pilau. Now remember that you were born in London, your family in exile, and that you have never seen Afghanistan in peacetime. These are but the starting points of Saira Shah's memoir, by turns inevitably exotic and unavoidably heartbreaking, in which she explores her family's history in and out of Afghanistan. As an accomplished journalist and documentarian, Shah returned to her homeland cloaked in the burqa to witness the pungent and shocking realities of Afghan life. As the daughter of the Sufi fabulist Idries Shah, primed by a lifetime of listening to her father's stories, she eagerly sought out, from the mouths of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the rich and living myths that still sustain this battered culture of warriors. And she discovered that in Afghanistan all the storytellers have been men until now.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Born in England and raised on her father's fantastic stories of an Afghanistan she had never known, Shah spends her adult life searching for a mythic place of beauty. "Any Western adult might have told me that this was an exile's tale of a lost Eden: the place you dream about, to which you can never return. But even then, I wasn't going to accept that." What she finds is a place ravaged by decades of war, poverty and, later, religious puritanism. Shah first visits Afghanistan in 1986 as a

war correspondent at the remarkable age of 21 and later returns as the documentary producer of *Beneath the Veil*, an exposé of life under the Taliban that predated the national interest in the embattled country. Her journey forces her to reconcile the vast disparities between fact and fiction, the world she has pieced together from her father's tales and the reality she glimpses from behind the grille of the Taliban-imposed burqa. Shah weaves legends and traditional sayings into her text, lending a greater context to her expectations and experiences. She also offers a piecemeal history of Afghanistan to accompany the accounts of her travels, but for readers unfamiliar with the many years of political tumult Afghanistan has suffered, the history may not be thorough enough. Most compelling are the characters she encounters and their indomitable spirit, including a woman with 10 children who asks her about a "magic" pill to prevent pregnancy, and her husband, whose intense machismo is not enough to save him from the war. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In April 2001, Shah, a journalist, traveled to Kabul to secretly document Taliban atrocities in Afghanistan. The result was the documentary film *Beneath the Veil*. But this was not Shah's first visit. Raised in England, her vision of her father's homeland was nurtured by romantic legends of pleasure gardens and noble mujahideen. When she made her first trip in 1986, a harrowing journey from Peshawar through the Hindu Kush to the front lines in the war with the Soviet Union, she was "chasing a myth." But by the time the Taliban took over in 1996, the disintegration of the myth was almost complete. *Beneath the Veil* shows the suffering, in particular, of three young sisters, and Shah's trip to do a follow-up report after U.S. air strikes began was also a personal mission to rescue the girls--efforts defeated as much by domestic exigency and centuries-old habits of mind as by larger forces: "Afghanistan had confounded me, just as it has always confounded the West." In this very personal inside-outside account, Shah is our eye on a culture and set of conditions that are much more complex than what we see on the nightly news. Mary Ellen Quinn Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It seems quite appropriate to have read this engaging work in the year 2014, the year the NATO forces are disengaging from Afghanistan, when once again, eventually, the literacy programmes, the education of children and the safety of women and children will no doubt be under the threat of the Taliban and their obnoxious policies. This book is like a wondrous tapestry, multi-threaded with the author's childhood impressions of Afghanistan, bequeathed to her by way of her famous father,

the Sayed Idries Shah and other family members, her experiences in the war-ravaged country, the interesting people she met, the humour and tragedy, all interspersed with some of the wonderful stories that were part of her father's bequest to her and her siblings and the beautiful Sufi sayings of the great mystics, like Rumi. When I first started reading this book, I was marking pages that I thought contained useful information and insights that I would certainly re-read and ponder on; I soon gave this up as I realised that I might just as well mark the whole book! Much more than a personal narrative this book encompasses many themes and observations on the nature of war, culture, religion and survival under tyranny. It is filled with ruthless honesty and wisdom: not just a storyteller's daughter, Saira Shah is also a Master Storyteller herself. I absolutely recommend this book.

It helps to have read author Idries Shah's (1926-1996) material in order to understand what his daughter, Saira is dealing with. Shah is of ancient Afghan lineage and renown largely for his Sufi tales of ancient Eastern wisdom. Yet, Saira, sister and brother were raised in England. East meets West. This is not unlike the general struggle of Westerners today; why are the two peoples so different? This book provides the inside, hands-on reality of the present Afghan culture with insight into its long history. Written in the period of the Russian occupation, Saira travels to Afghanistan and mixes with freedom fighters as well as everyday Afghan citizens (horseback, the back of a pick-up truck, on foot in freezing weather at 17,000 ft) on a quest to discover who the Afghans are and their relationship to her personal identity. That she survived is amazing. She discovers that Westerners have created a fairy tale re the nature of the Afghans; assuming that they are "just like old day Americans on a quest for freedom." Not! It is a primitive culture based in unique historical millennia that has few common links to the West. Latter day American troops got a taste of this but they need to read this book. "Reality" is all about human conditioning, indoctrination; adapting to the specific environment at hand. Survival. Every culture/society creates its own. Important read, especially for social science, psychology workers, teachers. Eye opener.

This was recommended to me by a junior high English teacher. I never read it until a few years later I found it and read it and fell in love with it. It is the one that got me into the Once Upon a Time Series. It is also my most favorite. I have read it over six times. I always just get into this mood where I want to read Shazarad and Shahayer so I would go check it out from the library. A lot of times it was already checked out and so I would have to put it on hold. I finally decided to purchase it so that I can read it over and over to my heart's content whenever I want.

I like the author and esp. enjoyed the Sleeping Beauty book in this series. She has a lovely style of writing and Shaharazad's storytelling is wonderfully done. But I felt the big flaw with this one was that the king's heart melted too quickly; it took away a lot of the tension that should have been building. Part of the problem may be that these books are so short. But I just wasn't feeling the fairy tale magic with this one.

Item came as described

I like the author's way of telling a story and this was an entetaining story suuitable for young readers as well as adults

As an American curious as to what exactly is going on "over there" where our boys (and girls) are fighting, THIS book has helped me most, with insights not just into the facts of the centuries-long fighting in Afghanistan, but also insight into Afghan culture--heart understanding. The author writes a narrative, but skillfully weaves in Afghani tales of old that help to clarify the viewpoint of those of a culture foreign to most Americans....foreign to most of the West. The author is the daughter of an Afghani father and Indonesian mother, and was raised in England. It is apparent, as she reveals to us her own struggle of East versus West, that she is attempting to be as fair as she can to both viewpoints, and even more than that...she is trying to carve out the truth between the two. Sometimes the truth hurts. The myth of the Afghani Mujahidin, the Northern Alliance, the "rescue" of the Afghani people by the West...all is revealed. It would seem that such a thing would leave the reader in dispair, but instead the author leaves the strand of hope for the future. Anyone who is interested in understanding Afghanistan or simply understanding other cultures will find some insight in this wonderfully written book.

This book is beautifully written combining the poetic and the philosophical with the terrible reality and consequences of the continuing wars upon the people and culture of Afghanistan.

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