Fawzia Afzal-Khan, *Lahore with Love: Growing Up with Girlfriends, Pakistani Style*. USA: Insanity Ink Publications, 2010. 164 pp. ISBN 9781456462192.

Fawzia Afzal-Khan's *Lahore with Love: Growing Up with Girlfriends, Pakistani Style* is a coming-of-age memoir that blends the personal with the political, past with present, literature with history, fiction with fact etc. Importantly, it also shatters the homogenised, reductive images of Muslim women often pedalled by the media, apart from unveiling Pakistan as a land of contradictions.

Through the narratives of women, Fawzia underscores the causes of women's subjugated position in a male-dominated society such as Pakistan. To a large extent, it is patriarchy and the male interpretations of the holy Qur'an that oppress women and relegate them to an inferior and secondary status in this society. Women's rights and the rights of minorities were protected under Pakistan's secular laws. However, under the late General Zia-ul-Haq's military reign, these secular laws were replaced by strict Shari'a Islamic laws with disastrous consequences for women and religious minorities in the decades to come. With the implementation of such laws, Muslim women are denied their rights to marry men of their own choice; poor women are raped and then accused of fornication and adultery; Christians, Shias and Ahmadis are regarded as blasphemers and, as a result, they are killed and their mosques and churches are set on fire.

Islam is a religion that apportions equal rights for men and women. It is a religion that grants women the right to choose their own spouses. It acknowledges religious differences and exhorts its followers to treat people of other faiths with due respect for the betterment of humanity and society. As such, the memoir demonstrates the religious bigotry, fanaticism and extremism of Zia's Islamic regime, one which had systematically quashed all the hopes and aspirations of the Pakistani people, in particular women, and retarded their socio-economic and political development. The memoir interpolates literature with history in order to enable the reader to understand the effects of the changing political and religious landscape in Pakistan on women's psyche and their perspective of the world. The mixture of genres, of fiction and academic essay, is reflected in the use of extensive footnotes and the documentation of facts and figures in this memoir. With this, it injects an element of realism in the portrayal of abuse and atrocities committed against women and the religious minorities in Pakistan.

Moving back and forth in time, the story presents Fawzia's life as a middle-class Muslim teenager growing up with her close group of female friends in a secular and conservative Lahore in the sixties and seventies, and her life as a

graduate student and an academic in the United States of America. To Fawzia, these friends are her "sisters… in spirit if not in flesh" (xii). She shares a close bond with her girlfriends as in a patriarchal and segregated society such as Pakistan, "same-sex relationships, especially for women acquire deep, long lasting emotional resonance" (xii). It is these friends, apart from her family, that she longs to return to on her short trips home. Unfortunately, she feels alienated from her friends as she finds that the 1980s and 90s have altered their way of thinking and turned them into "religious zealots" (66). She finds herself an "inveterate outsider" as she is "no match for their newfound faith in Islam" (66). This is interesting as the memoir becomes a site for the articulation and interaction of dominant and dissenting voices and discourses. Fawzia's friends, namely, Nomi and Saira, echo the hegemonic discourse of Islamic Renaissance and revivalism propagated through Zia's regime. This need for establishing a true Islamic state as regurgitated by her friends is contested by Fawzia, who reveals the cracks and fissures in this homogenising discourse as it has curtailed woman's rights in every arena, especially her sexuality.

The stories of abused women such as Hajira, Saira, Samina and Samia provide testimony for this. For instance, the memoir recounts the story of the "talented, vivacious, sensitive" (52) Hajira who takes her own life as she was told by her fake communist husband, Sufi, to give up her art for him and to reserve her energies for their baby. Samina becomes the victim of suspected "honour killing" by her brothers because she falls in love with someone the family does not approve of, while Saira suffers a nervous breakdown after having three children and then finding out about her husband's extramarital affair with a "devilish white woman" (77). Samia, another "victim of honour killing," is shot dead by her uncle, and whose killing is abetted by her mother, a lady doctor, for trying to escape from an abusive ex-husband and wanting to marry another man of her choice. With these examples, Fawzia rightly notes that women's status in Pakistan "has devolved rather than evolved" (20) over the years.

The above stories which are told from a gendered perspective rupture the linear masculinist narrative of nation as it provides a space for women, who have been rendered inarticulate all this while, to recount their experiences of abuse, oppression and the impact of religious fanaticism and extremism on their lives. It is also, as Fawzia says, to provide an "understanding [of] who we were as a people and how we might have gotten from a historical moment which despite its conservatism held some promise, indicated some paths open for us to carve out or create a less restrictive, less sexist, more egalitarian society" (a-24). The latter as seen from counter hegemonic views and discourses offered by Fawzia and other women in this society.

The memoir also deconstructs the various stereotypes of Muslim women that are pedalled by the media. Muslim women tend to be portrayed as people

who are submissive, conservative, oppressed, uneducated and un-Western in their thinking and attire. They tend to be cast in stereotypical roles, as obedient wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. Interestingly, the Muslim women in this memoir, and this includes Fawzia and her circle of friends, challenge these images. For instance, Hajira's mother is educated and "cool" as she listens to western classical music, and talks about Eliot, Lawrence and Picasso. Hajira introduces western singers such as Leonard Cohen, Janice Ian, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Simon and Garfunkel to Fawzia. Boy cousins are invited to join family picnics and outings organised by Hajira's family which Fawzia is invited to attend. At such outings, the boys and girls mix freely and interact with one another. During Hajira's wedding to Sufi, her mother wears "a sleeveless blouse with her sari, while Sufi's mother is draped in a full-sleeved shalwar kameez, a large chador-like dupatta covering her head and ample bosom" (53). There are Muslim women like Sufi's mother who don strict Islamic attire but not all of them dress like that.

Perhaps women like Hajira and her mother are able to enjoy such freedom because they belong to a privileged class. This provides them the opportunity to receive western education which helps to further reinforce their privileged status in society. Madina, Fawzia's girlfriend, is not portrayed as a stereotypical submissive Muslim woman as she is "strong-willed, aggressive even, foul-mouthed, a steamroller who never bowed her head to man or God…" (a-25). The thrice-married Madina is also a husband abuser. To Fawzia, as "founder-director of a theatre group performing plays on contemporary issues of social and political relevance" (a-25), Madina is a "fearless contrast" to the "hypocritical grovelling of the ruling elite at the feet of the religious extremists" (a-25).

Through her memoir, Fawzia also unveils Pakistan as a land of paradox. It is a place where leaders are corrupt but its people are expected to adhere to a strict Islamic code of conduct. Woe betide those who dare transgress these laws. It is also a land where a greater number of women are donning the hijab while others are "dancing away almost naked at the most elite of clubs and homes" (xix). In this land of contradictions, alcohol which is banned in public is "consumed at an alarming rate in private" (xix). Here, in this very land, women are oppressed but they also resist. While some of the young take their own lives as they cannot find employment, there are those who shamelessly drive flashy imported cars and live in huge mansions.

On the whole, the memoir is a compelling read as it provides a candid portrayal of Pakistan, warts and all. Fawzia should be commended for carving a space for women to tell their own stories and to share her lived experiences with us. She narrates stories of courage and despair, love and hate, resentment and forgiveness which readers can easily relate to. The memoir dwells not only on sad memories but on happy ones as well, as it is clearly seen in Fawzia's

recollection of her *joie de vivre* days with her childhood friends. This helps to provide the much-needed balance to a memoir that can appear to be rather gloomy at times.

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