



The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future

Fawzia Koofi , Nadene Ghouri

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The nineteenth daughter of a local village leader in rural Afghanistan, Fawzia Koofi was left to die in the sun after birth by her mother. But she survived, and perseverance in the face of extreme hardship has defined her life ever since. Despite the abuse of her family, the exploitative Russian and Taliban regimes, the murders of her father, brother, and husband, and numerous attempts on her life, she rose to become the first Afghani woman Parliament speaker. Here, she shares her amazing story, punctuated by a series of poignant letters she wrote to her two daughters before each political trip—letters describing the future and freedoms she dreamed of for them and for all the women of Afghanistan.

Her story movingly captures the political and cultural moment in Afghanistan, a country caught between the hope of progress and the bitter truth of history.

The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future Details

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From Reader Review The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future for online ebook

Cindy says

The daughter of a well-off and politically active father ... but still a daughter. Strong mother, strong family ties, a husband who was generally supportive of her ambitions and an education allowed Fawzia to overcome horrendous tragedies and rise into the family business of politics. Very hard to read at some points. At points hopeful, but Afghanistan has so far to go.

Jan Marquart says

I have been reading two to four books a month for two decades and my favorite genre is memoir. But The Favored Daughter, One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future has now become my favorite book of all the memoirs I have read. I received this book as a winner in Goodreads and no payment has been made for this review. I know little about the daily life of an Afghanistan woman despite all the publicity since America has been fighting the Taliban and I have to give this book a full five stars.

I don't know exactly where to begin to describe how this book touched my heart. It wasn't just a book about the hardships of a woman in Afghanistan. It was a book about family values, a country's dearest culture, a mother's love for her daughters, a wife's love for her husband, and the indomitable spirit of a woman who believes under all hardships that helping people is better than doing anything else with one's life. Fawzia Koofi's accomplishments, despite and because of her daily challenges which were life and death, will change your thinking about your own life and circumstances.

I was riveted to the words and messages in this book and the power of Fawzia Koofi's story will last with me forever. Her words and testament to how she lives her life should be read by everyone. Today American girls are too interested in being skinny and each one of them should read The Favored Daughter. If nothing else it will show them what they do not have to conquer because America has already given them the advantages to become whatever is in their hearts. This is a most powerful book. The sentences are rich and tight with action and suspense, heartache and heartwarming scenes.

Truly, I could write a book about how this book opened my heart and renewed my own spirit. It centered me in my own values and I will probably read it again as it also teaches much more about the Afghanistan culture than the American media.

This is definitely a must read.

Jessica O'Toole says

Not many spoilers...

This book is worth reading for the jigsaw puzzle that is Middle Eastern politics and the kinds of people who are involved or affected by it. It is difficult to understand exactly what life is like in that part of the world and

so drawing on direct experience is always welcome.

However, I do wonder how much the co-writer, a BBC journalist, had in 'livening up' the story and introducing such obvious propaganda. I enjoyed reading about Koofi's childhood, and how certain sections of Afghan society lived, about the different areas of geographical Afghanistan - before being subjected to the Taliban - and also the fact she seems to feel so much love for her country. The story of her experience of being attacked in her home district, fleeing to Kabul and starting off a better, more equal life (for example, being able to go to school), also, in my opinion, needed no extra fluff or attempts to make us 'feel' the emotional content. Readers tend to be good at connecting with stories such as Koofi's, but scraping barrels is too easily observed.

The problem is - and this is the unfortunate by-product, I think, of having a journalistic input in a biographical arena - that every time something comes up after the mention of Islam - even the regressive Islam of the Taliban that Koofi objected greatly to - and primarily the subjugation of women, there is a line or two of how these things form a heavy part of Afghan history and how Western people might not quite understand why these things are accepted. Certainly, Westerners may very well not understand why some actions were taken (or not taken), but when writing a biography there should be no need to justify every single thing that we Westerners might take exception to, nor indeed can both sides of different oppressive experiences (from a Western view) be defended at the same time, when the author herself is opposed to one of them. Indeed, this is why I believe it is more propaganda - the work is too forceful in its attempt to make us understand why women, who are very much aware that things are not right with their place in society, are treated so distastefully in Afghanistan under Islam. Koofi often mentions about the beatings of her mother by her father, wanting to find a man who respects her (more than other women in Afghanistan expect, it seems), and also the fact that when she was in Parliament the men treated her and the other women like second-class citizens. The problem is, that she has spent the whole book up to that point (parliament) defending the ways of Muslim men (and I purposefully point out the Islamic factor because she does so herself pointedly), and so when she is confronted by all these 'traditional' ideas in an arena such as politics she takes great offence to them, as if they should automatically accept her presence, ad against everything she has previously justified.

My respect is fully with her for carrying on and earning the votes that won her the seat, but either you believe in something or you don't. You cannot defend the use of the burqa in your own society and damn it when the Taliban enforces it on women. You cannot defend your father not ever speaking to you (but to tell you to go away once) and him beating your mother, but object to the way the Taliban treats you as a woman when under their regime, which is not so different. There are some horrific things, obviously, that the Taliban carried out, but she is very much concerned most of the time with making them - the followers of more conservative Islamism - as the wrong kind of Muslim.

It cannot be both ways, and I think that either the author was coached to push the emotional agenda or she is severely conflicted and refusing to accept the things she does not agree with because she does not want to betray what everyone expects of her as a good Muslim woman. It seems far too much like we are being subjected to some light emotional manipulation so as not see parts of her region and her country for what they are in comparison with our own, and indeed, what Koofi seems to be searching for - she was fighting for Afghanistan to become a democratic, and I would argue, more egalitarian country, after all. Change is very hard, especially the changing and challenging of opinions, however, she could learn something about politics, like her heroines Thatcher and Gandhi. Actions speak louder than gender.

It's extremely unfortunate that this was what I left this book with. Hardly anything of her political career was written about. I would have loved to have heard the kinds of things she was fighting for in that parliament and whether these people who looked down on her changed their views. It's likely I will look into her

interviews and appearances to find out a bit more, as I find her interesting, but whichever editor decided it was OK to push so much baseless padding (like the letters to loved ones at the beginning of each chapter, which personally gave nothing to the story and disrupted my interest quite a bit) on a story that seemed perfectly legitimate without, might leave Koofi needing a new one if literature is going to make up more of her future.

Jennie says

I saw Fawzia Koofi on a recent episode of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," and her brief interview made me rush out and buy this book as soon as I could.

This book should be required reading for high school students (boys and girls, but especially girls), as well as any adult who can be convinced to pick it up. Fawzia Koofi's life story is compelling and inspiring, and I find myself both inspired and embarrassed by her, mainly because I am a soft, middle-class American woman whose toughest struggles to date have consisted primarily in deciding what to wear to work.

Koofi was born just a few years before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In her lifetime, she has overcome her father's murder, the Soviet invasion, the ensuing power vacuum and civil war by mujahedeen, fighting for the right to a basic education, her beloved older brother's murder, her mother's death, Taliban rule, her husband's death, hardship, deprivation, fear, flight, the scattering of her family, death threats, and more war, to become Afghanistan's first (deputy) speaker of Parliament. And she's not even 40 years old yet.

Koofi's simple, matter-of-fact account of her life drew me in from page one and kept me riveted until the last sentence. I'm trying to think of some eloquent way to discuss this book but really, it's just such a compelling story that needs to be read without picking apart the tiny little details. Just read it.

For a brief introduction to her, check out her interview: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed...>

Mz. Diana Gagliardi says

Amazing book, amazing woman. I now have a much better and deeper understanding of Afghanistan and all it's been through. Seeing it through Afghani eyes and experience creates a much more compelling background for helping and assisting a country that has suffered from far too many people trying to claim it. We are lucky in our distance and in not having to know what the sounds of war are.

Fantastic book. Thank you Jon Stewart for making me get it.

Kelsey Hanson says

This is another book that makes me grateful that I was born in a country where women are allowed to receive an education and engage in politics. Fawzia's story covers her childhood growing up in Afghanistan and

living through the rise of the Taliban. I think this book showcases that the Taliban's views do not reflect the views of many of the Afghan people. Her story of survival and her pursuit of politics and gave me a new view of the country of Afghanistan.

Erin Herzog says

This book was outstanding! Fawzia Koofi is only a few years older than me but she has lived a life so far removed from that of mine. We learn about her upbringing as a young Afghanistan girl - one who listens and learns from her family elders. We learn about the change of leadership in her country – from a pristine countryside to one that is taken over by Taliban extremists. We watch as her father is murdered while trying to serve his village's constituents and we see how her family endures in not only his passing, but also in the destruction of the city in which they called home. We follow along as her family tries to survive in a post 9/11 world – one that is so different and yet so similar to the fears we faced as American's following that fateful September day.

Fawzia is determined to make a difference for the next generation of Afghanistan women and children and follows her father's footsteps into the local political scene despite being the target of multiple suicide bombers. Throughout the book, Fawzia writes letters to her young daughters, keeping them informed of her whereabouts and projects that will hopefully change the lives of young people and help build a better Afghanistan.

The book left me hopeful that Fawzia will succeed in building a better life for those that are suffering. She inspired me to reach out and do more – especially as we enter an election year – and encourage men and women to use their powerful vote and let their voice be heard. Fawzia taught me that I can and NEED to use my voice to make a difference.

VERY inspiring read!

Julie Dolcemaschio says

This book left a lot of unanswered questions for me, and I put the book down with perhaps three dozen pages left. The story is harrowing, as any story of a woman growing up and living in Afghanistan would be, but throughout the book I never felt as though Koofi understood life outside of Afghanistan enough to actually rule, or lead a country in such a condition as this one. In short, I didn't buy it, or her. While she said she was educated, I didn't see it in terms of her knowledge of how the rest of the world works, and that her very gender is not respected or hardly acknowledged at all left me cold and, frankly, skeptical of her powers to change things. I appreciated the beauty of the Afghanistan she loves, and I saw her strength shine through every word. I loved the sense of family she created, and that she was such a devoted wife and is still a devoted mother is noteworthy. However, as a UNICEF ambassador, I wonder what she has done, or will do as president, to eradicate Bacha Bazi (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a...>). She spoke nothing of this practice, and as a children's advocate, this heinous practice of the sexual abuse of boys is not news to her.

Overall, I felt that the author spent an inordinate amount of time trying to convince the west that we don't understand. We don't, but Ms. Koofi did little to enlighten us.

Debra says

As some other reviewers did, I saw Ms. Koofi on the Jon Stewart show and went right out and bought the book. I am in the middle of it, but inspired to write a review bc her story is educational, inspiring and worthwhile (also sometimes brutal). Many people-- women and men-- supported her in her efforts throughout her life which I probably shouldn't have found surprising, but I did. I seem to hear of so much of the brutality and of women as second class citizen's but it is a much more nuanced society. The book reminds me of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's life and her books *Infidel* and *Nomad* (which were better written and were two of my favorites). This book is an equally important read for me. I want to know about this country and its people that our country has helped, and a story of someone who has fought and overcome challenges is always inspiring to me. updated: now I have finished it and it did not disappoint. A lot of important information about Afghanistan that helps me understand it all better. She is an amazing person, and even if the book is not superbly written, it is well written, easy to read and interesting. Well worth the time.

Kelley says

Whenever I read a politician's book, I am skeptical. So I definitely could believe that some of Fawzia Koofi's memoir might turn out to be nothing but self promotion. And yet, it seems so genuine and humble. I love this story and I love the advice and messages scattered throughout about being a woman in a society that is makes it very hard to be one. A great read that makes me want to learn more about Afghanistan. It makes no apologies for the region or Islam, instead she has great insight as to how to being to "fix" things. I will be rooting for Ms Koofi.

Caroline says

A marvellous biography, by one of Afghanistan's foremost women politicians.

Not only is it a story following the fascinating life of Fawzia Koofi, from early childhood to her successes today, but it is soaked in Afghan culture. Koofi, whilst being intelligent and educated, is nevertheless Afghan to the core, and she shows us life through the eyes of an Afghan woman.

We follow her life during her childhood, then during the difficult times of the Russian invaders, then the civil war when Majahideen factions were fighting one another, and then the horrors of life under the Taliban. Finally there is the involvement of America and the UK in Afghanistan, after 9/11, when democracy was introduced to Afghanistan and the first elections held in 2005, when Koofi got a chance to stand as an MP - and won. All of this is pegged onto Koofi's life story - the experience of one woman and her family living through these different eras of Afghan history.

Even before the upheavals of recent years, life was incredibly tough. I found her writing about her father (a successful politician), and her mother (the favourite wife amongst seven wives), incredibly foreign to my sensibilities - but hugely interesting.

(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

Another issue in the book that really provoked my curiosity was Koofi's attitude towards the burqa. For much of her life she absolutely abhorred it, and describes eloquently the discomfort and limitations of wearing such restrictive garment - which she had to do under the Taliban. Then later, her attitude changed completely, and she felt comfortable wearing it. When she was campaigning to become an MP, the provincial governor of her province asked her to take it off. He said that people needed to see her face in order to communicate with her. Since then she has not worn one. Given all the contention that has surrounded the wearing of the burqa in Europe, I was most interested to her changing attitudes towards it. I personally would find it a horrible garment to have to wear - the restricted vision she describes, and how incredibly stifling it becomes in hot weather. She really made it sound claustrophobic and unpleasant.

Koofi's life story is fascinating - she must be an outstanding person to have achieved the successes that she has, add into that all the experiences that everyone in Afghanistan has endured in recent years, and finally add in a distinctly Afghan perspective....and you have a marvellous book. Highly recommended.

An inspiring TED lecture by Fawzia Koofi - a far better enticement to read the book than my review....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHKsV...>

Jenny Tipping says

Review written for <http://forbookssake.net/>

The Favored Daughter is the powerful memoir of Fawzia Koofi, the human rights campaigner and first female Speaker of the Afghan parliament. The story traces her life from her birth into a patriarchal society in Northern Afghanistan, through the death of her father, himself a prominent and respected politician and the turbulence caused by his assassination. Always ambitious, she goes to school in Kabul during the Soviet and civil war eras but her education is cut short in 1996 with the arrival of the Taliban and she returns to her home province of Badakhshan, which is under Northern Alliance control.

Fawzia's political awakening comes while working on a project to survey the health of the people of her region, where she meets villagers who knew and loved her father. From this point she knows her path is to help the people of her country and this leads on to her to work for UNICEF and eventually to becoming a Speaker of the parliament in 2005.

The main body of the text is first person narrative. It is both factual and emotional. The style is neither excessively arrogant nor annoyingly modest. She was ambitious, she worked hard, she achieved great success, she has received multiple death threats. She loved her family and her husband passionately and she grieved deeply when she lost them. These are the facts of her reality. She neither shies from them nor revels in them.

The chapters are divided by letters to her daughters to be read in the event of her death. Through these she is passing on to her daughters her values, her love of her country and of her Muslim faith, in case they have to grow up without her and without the loving family from whom Fawzia herself learned so much.

I thought initially that the divide between the main chapters and the letters to her daughters would signify the divide between her public persona and her family life. But actually there is no divide. She feels the same powerful maternal instinct towards Afghanistan as she does towards her daughters. Throughout the book she is saying to both “You are beautiful, you are wonderful, you are capable of achieving whatever you want in life. I love you, I would die for you and I probably will”.

What comes across is the strength and determination of Afghan women as they live at the mercy of the men in power. Although to Western readers the multiple wives, regular beatings and burqas of her mother’s generation appear horrific, we get a sense that women were also accorded great respect and dignity. From the Soviet invasion to the present day the circumstances of Afghan women have alternated between the freedom of the Soviet and post-Taliban eras and the total repression of the Taliban. Afghan society has historically been patriarchal, but the Taliban’s vicious lack of respect and sickening violence always felt alien to Koofi and it is so sad to hear that the Western-backed president Karzai is allowing a return to those values.

It’s not an easy read. She is clearly a serious woman and the stories are harrowing, but it is well written with the help of journalist, Nadene Ghouri and gives an insight into an inspiring woman and a remarkable country.

Fay says

This book was fascinating from a historical and cultural perspective. It presented the historical information clearly. I finished the book with a deep admiration of the author as well. She is a profoundly forgiving person. Her optimism is backed up by people she has seen open their minds after one of her speeches. She tells a story that is compelling in and of itself, but the writing style doesn't draw you in. I'm glad I read it; reading this book is worlds better than learning about this topic in the news. I hope she continues to write and develop her written "voice".

Ann says

This is not only a wonderful read, it is also a very important book. If she survives, Fawzia Koofi could easily become the next president of Afghanistan. She is now another hero of mine, someone whose life I plan to follow.

The nineteenth daughter of a local village leader in rural Afghanistan, Fawzia Koofi was left to die in the sun after birth by her mother. Somehow she survived and became a favorite daughter, the only girl in her family to get educated. She comes from a culture where women are barely second class citizens. Her father, who had 7 wives, only spoke to Fawzia once before he was assassinated. Her mother accepted physical abuse as a form of attention.

Somehow, Fawzia was able to escape rural Afghanistan and move to the city where she was working on her

medical degree. Then the Taliban arrived and she was forced to quit her studies. The Taliban allowed no female doctors and women couldn't be treated by a male doctor so, for many years, women had no health care.

While still a newlywed, her new husband was arrested and severely abused. He suffered and finally died from the untreated pneumonia he contacted in prison. One brother was murdered and another escaped. Of the 18 million people in Afghanistan, 6 million died and 6 million fled during the wars.

The Pashtanwali area between Pakistan and Afghanistan was open so Koofi's family escaped there for a while. People flowed freely through the open borders. The Pashtu people never accepted borders that were created by foreigners. That may be one of the great problems Americans have understanding our relationship with Pakistan. Osama Bin Laden hid for years in this area.

Koofi ran for office and is now the first female Speaker of Parliament. She is idealistic but fiercely realistic. To quote, "Afghanistan is awash with corruption, flawed religious extremism, and a river of money from the sea of opium poppies grown on our farmland." Her story and her philosophy give me great hope for the future of Afghanistan.

Joyce Scapicchio says

I am left humbled, horrified, aghast, anxious, dare I think even slightly hopeful after reading Koofi's life (so far) story... maybe she WILL one day be president of Afghanistan. Though the writing is not always the best, and the end a little preachy, her story is gripping. From abandonment at birth, through a lifetime of war and discrimination, Koofi persists, and somehow grows into an incredible woman. She has become not just a strong and educated woman, but also a mother and leader in her worn and torn country, a true achievement in spite of the country's historic repression of females. Not many would take the risks she took to get her education, or face the hatred and prejudice head-on to fight for a seat at the political table, but she does with grace, and determination, and hope for the future. Her story takes you inside the tumultuous country over the last few decades, and by the end, you understand the problems, the country and the people a lot more. And, I am sorry to say, it may also revive your fear of the Taliban and the dangers they may still pose.

Pwelle says

An excellent read

The author gives good insight into the Afghan culture. It is difficult to understand some of their customs - especially the treatment of women. The book also gives a good history of the power changes in recent years and how that has affected the people of Afghanistan.

India says

Like several other reviewers here, I was captivated by an interview with Fawzia Koofi and hurried to get hold of her book. Her story is at once deeply disturbing and inspirational, and the book is certainly thought-provoking. Moments of vivid detail (a prison guard notices her polished nails; she battles morning sickness wearing a burqa) are tremendously powerful. However, as a book it was disappointing; the editorial process did not serve her story well. The device of using letters to loved ones as chapter openers quickly becomes just that, a device; some important narrative threads are simply left hanging, for no apparent reason. More a worthy-read than a good-read, unfortunately.

Diane says

I loved this memoir of a woman who grew up in a remote village in Afghanistan. She was inspired by her father's leadership skills and decided to get an education and go into politics; now she is a member of Parliament, trying to improve the lives of her fellow Afghans, especially women. Fawzia's story is all the more amazing because after she was born, she was abandoned and left to die in the hot sun because her parents didn't want any more girls. Her mother eventually took pity and saved her, and the two shared a close bond after that.

Fawzia, who was born in 1975, has seen so much turmoil, war and death that I cannot comprehend it. First, her country was invaded by the Soviets, and then her father was killed by Afghan fighters because he had been working for the government. When the Soviets finally withdrew a decade later, a civil war broke out among different Islamic factions, and the Taliban eventually took control of much of the country.

Fawzia described the horrors that occurred as soon as the Taliban were in charge. They were barbaric toward women and tortured anyone who disagreed with their religious fundamentalism. Fawzia described the Taliban's actions as madness, and that their interpretation of Islam was so far removed from hers that it was as if it had come from another planet.

"The Taliban had banned women from working; a decree that completely depleted Afghanistan's medical staff. And then in a further twist of insane cruelty, they banned male doctors from treating women. Even for a common cold a male doctor was not allowed to prescribe a female so much as an aspirin. So women doctors weren't allowed to work and male doctors weren't allowed to treat females. The result? Hundreds of women died unnecessary deaths during Taliban rule. They died because they caught the flu, because they had an untreated bacterial infection, because they had blood poisoning, or a fever, or a broken bone, or because they were pregnant. They died for no sane reason, but simply because these brutal men who ran the country thought a woman's life was as worthless as a fly's. These men who claimed to be men of God had no sanctity for one of God's greatest creations -- woman."

The Taliban also had strict rules for how women should dress - no makeup, no nail polish, and they must wear the full burqa in public. However, the burqa couldn't be white, because that was the color of the Taliban flag. Fawzia witnessed the beating of women who weren't wearing burqas and also women who wore burqas that were white, which in some parts of the country, was the common color. As she said, it was madness.

After months of living in fear from the the Taliban, Fawzia despaired that her country was regressing into the Dark Ages. She and her husband decided to escape Kabul for a more remote part of the country where the

Taliban weren't in control.

"Life under the Taliban had changed me in ways I hadn't really understood until now. I wasn't the same person I had been -- my confidence had evaporated and the daily fear had exhausted my reserves of strength ... It saddened me to realize how much I had changed."

Even though this memoir sounds gut-wrenching, and parts of it are, I found it to be inspiring because Fawzia included numerous letters she wrote to her daughters about her hopes and dreams for them and for a new Afghanistan.

"Dear Shuhra and Shaharзад, It saddens me so much that many people in the world have a negative view of our country and our culture. The reality is there are many people who think all Afghans are terrorists or fundamentalists. They think this because our country has so often been at the heart of the world's strategic battles -- wars over oil, the cold war, the war on terror. But beneath this is a country of great history, of enlightenment, of culture ... It is a place where the people show hospitality and warmth like no others. It is also a nation where honor, faith, tradition and duty know no bounds. This, my dear girls, is a land to be proud of. Never deny your heritage. And never apologize for it. You are Afghans. Take pride in this. And make it your duty to restore our true Afghan pride to the world."

I highly recommend this book.

M.F. Moonzajer says

The favored daughter describes the life of an Afghan woman from many angles, which often has been ignored even by media and human rights institutions. The book went viral after Koofi attend Jon Stewart's show, the Daily Show, a satirical news program and talked about her life and works for the empowerment of women's rights in Afghanistan.

Visala says

Following her interview with Jon Stewart, I ordered the book on Amazon. I got it yesterday evening.....just finished reading it an hour ago...this is one amazing book!! One thing that stands out in the recent books that I have read - whether it is Fawzia Koofi or Sonia Sotomayor, this incredible human resilience, optimism and the instinct of survival in the worst of circumstances to hope for a better tomorrow, is fascinating!! These women are such inspiring role models, in front of us, in our own lifetime!! The next time we feel low, nurturing our petty FWPs as my daughter puts it (First World Problems) we just have to think of these women....to realize how good we have it and to introspect what we have done with our good fortune! Do go get a copy and read this one, if you can.
