

Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies Vol. 3, No. 2 (2011)

Statements in Support of Fawzia Afzal-Khan's *Lahore with Love*

Fawzia Afzal-Khan's memoir, *Lahore With Love: Growing Up With Girlfriends Pakistani Style*, was published in March 2010 by Syracuse University Press. Those of us who read and assigned it for our classes were shocked to learn that Syracuse University Press had canceled the memoir shortly after its publication for fear of a lawsuit.

The book has now been published independently through Amazon.com. This republished volume will also include an appendix explaining the entire controversy.

To support the memoir and to protest against the cancelation decision made by the Syracuse University Press we sought statements of support from readers. Provided below (in the order they were received) are the statements of those who were kind enough to share their thoughts with us. We are grateful for your support.

(Note: Some of these statements were also published in *Pakistaniaat* Vol. 2, No. 3 (2010) This version includes the statements included in that issue and those received since then.

Margaux Frago
Sunday, Jun 12 20:42 PM

“Lahore with Love: Growing Up with Girlfriends Pakistani Style” is like *The Joy Luck Club* meets *David Copperfield* meets *Beloved*. Horrors such as honor killing and suicide are counterbalanced by the playful, vivacious bonds between close girlfriends. Though this rich, panoramic memoir explores social injustices and the resulting personal tragedies that such oppressions engender, the book itself is neither depressing nor didactic. The witty young narrator deemed “Madame Sin” by her vibrant female companions vacillates between giddy colloquialisms and mature political observations and insights, seamlessly merging the thoughts and ideas of two distinct narrators—one a fresh-eyed girl and the other a fully grounded PhD-educated mother and teacher. Chapters that succinctly capture the lives and personalities of the narrator’s childhood companions also weave for the readers a thoughtful and abundant

portrait of the socially-minded narrator herself as well as her native Lahore. Some characters like “Sam” embody ideals of femininity and prettiness that tend to cross cultures, while the tough, abject sensuality and forthrightness of “Madina” challenge all cultural definitions of what it means to be a Muslim woman or a woman in any patriarchal culture. Structurally tight, poetic, funny, and completely lacking any sentimental impulses, it is nonetheless poignant— mostly because it resists the urge to be so.

Nyla Ali Khan
University of Oklahoma, Norman
<http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/K/Nyla.A.Khan-1/ind>
Wednesday, Jan 12 15:05 PM

Fawzia Afzal-Khan engages in reflective action in her memoir to examine her own locations of privilege. Afzal-Khan tries to self-actualize and intervene in patriarchal national history by seeking in the interaction of modernity and communal memory not a vertical relationship producing totalized notions of nation, gender, class, race, ethnicity but intersectionalities between different cultural times, spaces, and ways of knowing the self in relation to the family, society, and the cosmos. She speaks from her location about the political realities that have woven the web of social relations she inhabits or has inhabited. Like feminist scholars Hazel Carby, Valeri Smith, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Barbara Smith, Afzal-Khan considers how race, nationality, class, religion, and gender intersect in the social construction of subjectivity. Fawzia Afzal-Khan’s work gives the clarion call for an increasingly materially grounded, historically aware, and yet also theoretically sophisticated feminism. It must be read and widely disseminated.

Junaid Ahmad, LUMS
PK
Sunday, Jan 9 21:48 PM

I just heard about this travesty and I support mentor and colleague Fawzia's brilliant intervention here wholeheartedly. And I am totally appalled at this heavy-handedness of the publisher, which is just shameful.

But Fawzia's voice will not be silenced; neither she nor her supporters and fans will allow it!

Dr. Sam Shihada
Southern Methdoist University
Wednesday, Jan 5 21:50 PM

Dear Dr. Fawzia,

I just lend my strong support for Lahore With Love to be republished. Working on gender and cultural studies for years, I understand the important message conveyed in Lahore With Love which is "breaking silence , unveiling minds and speaking truth to power." . I must say that I feel so sad to know how freedom of speech is not respected through the the way Syracuse publishing house acted, in a way that gives support to dark forces which, in vain, try to gag the true voices of public intellectuals like Dr, Fawzia Khan, to please certain social and political structures. Finally, I would also like to sum up by quoting Edward Said and Nawal El Saadawi respectively in their defense of public intellectuals.

"Thank god , we have internet nowadays so the truth can spread in one second to millions of people .(lecture at UCLA 2003)

"The truth sometimes shocks, or shakes the tranquility of set ideas. But sometimes a good shake can awaken minds that rest in slumber, and open eyes to see what is really happening around them." (Introduction to the Hidden Face of Eve.)

Dr. Isam Shihada
Associate Professor of Gender Studies
Scholar in Residence , SMU, Dallas , Texas
Sehba Sarwar
Wednesday, Dec 22 21:46 PM

I'm glad to know that you're going forward with re-publishing your memoir. Your story deserves to be published and read.

Jim Nash
Bloomfield, NJ
Monday, Dec 6 20:37 PM

Fawzia, I hope this ugly incident will result in your beautiful memoir becoming immensely popular. Jim

Shreerexha Subramanian
University of Houston-Clear Lake
Saturday, Nov 27 18:45 PM

Dear Fawzia,

What a gift it has been to spend time with you and know you at the latest NWSA (National Women's Studies Conference). Your determined and eloquent articulation of the book's heart inspired me to purchase one of the last available copies of *Lahore with Love* in its current form. I have decided to go ahead and assign it in my spring WMST seminar. It is a most gorgeous, powerful, and enlightening account of growing up "Pakistani Style" - I feel really fortunate to have had such a personal introduction to this text, you, and all the gifts you have to share with the world at NWSA. I was impressed with the multiplicity of voices inside you - the scholar, the poet, the playwright, the sufi singer, the academic, the critic, the interviewer, the feminist/activist - I think this dazzling array inside you is the very richness that proliferate the pages of this powerful memoir. Thank you! We support you!

Rekha

Sajid Iqbal
Desk Editor, BBC World Service, London
<http://www.bbcurdu.com>
Saturday, Nov 27 15:43 PM

I fully support Fawzia in getting the book re-published after a rather cowardly act by the Syracuse University Press which, in my view, amounts to gagging a writer and denying him the right of freedom of expression. Myself and many others in media were dismayed when the SUP had stopped the distribution of the book. I shall look forward to the publication of the book and hope that it will be received well by all those who have interest in Pakistan.

Carole Stone
East Hampton, NY
Saturday, Nov 27 03:10 AM

Dear Fawzia,

You have my complete support for the continued publication of your book. As I wrote in its foreword, "We have this deeply layered, wondrous story." It must be read.

Richard Schechner
Professor, New York University
Tuesday, Nov 16 18:33 PM

Dear Ms. Pfeiffer,

When I learned that you/Syracuse University Press, was going to withdraw pulled Fawzia Afzal-Khan's memoir, *Lahore With Love: Growing Up With Girl friends, Pakistani-Style* (2010), I was – to put it mildly – shocked. I was shocked by your disrespect for freedom of expression; I was shocked by the apparent cowardice of the Press in refusing to defend one of its authors under attack; I was shocked by the fact that without a thorough investigation of all the circumstances involved, you/The Press would take such an action.

I am personally and professionally concerned because as editor of TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies and as a University Professor at New York University's Department of Performance Studies, I know well Professor Afzal-Khan and her work. She is a Contributing editor to TDR and TDR has published her writing. I also know *Lahore With Love*. In my opinion it is an important, excellent book.

From discussions with Professor Afzal-Khan I know what the issues are from the Press's point of view: fear of a lawsuit brought by Madeeha Gauhar alleging slander from a piece of sardonic and parodic fiction that is part of *Lahore With Love*. Although I agree with Professor Afzal-Khan that character of Madina in Chapter 4 is not provably based on Ms. Gauhar; and I agree that the "portrayal is not offensive and damaging to her reputation," the question from my point of view is about whether or not a major university press will stand by its authors or not.

After all, you read and accepted Professor Afzal-Khan's manuscript; published her book; and were, I suppose, happy to find out that the book has been well received by both academics and scholars.

Lahore with Love

Waseem Anwar
Dean, Forman Christian College, Lahore
Tuesday, Nov 16 18:28 PM

Dear Fawzia,

You remember the launch ceremony of your book at Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore, where I moderated the event; this being part of the Special Seminar on Post-post-colonial Studies at Punjab University Lahore that I conducted with full support from all those interested in learning the local in connection with the global, or the post with reference to the colonial. And you also know how lovingly the Seminar became a SUCCESS, and how well received your book was. You then also visited the Punjab University on special invitation by the Chairperson, English Department to give your special talk on your book, the memoir. We, the Po-Co students at Lahore, started loving Lahore all the more after reading your book because it connects to us in soul and spirit. We support your democratic voice that opens up opportunities for a constructive debate on issues that we mostly hush-up.

Sincerely and friendly,
Waseem Anwar, Dean of Humanities, Forman Christian College, Lahore

Pervez Hoodbhoy
Quaid-e-Azam University
Tuesday, Nov 16 17:35 PM

Hi Fawzia, Am glad to see your fighting spirit is strong. Be well. Pervez

Shailaja Valdiya
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Tuesday, Nov 16 17:04 PM

I hope Syracuse University sends the right kind of social message by lifting its freeze on the publication of this obviously timely book about the lives of women in Pakistan. Universities are one of our last standing bastions of intellectual honesty, free speech, and social emancipation. Please let us not erode the historic foundations of this institution by preventing our academics from expressing their ideas with impunity.

David Lee Keiser

New York City

Tuesday, Nov 16 14:54 PM

Lahore with Love is not only manna for our minds, but water for our throats.

The memoir is beautiful, evocative, and singular.

Let us not bow in the face of petty antipathy or envy, and keep it in the forefront of university courses and bookstores.

Censorship is not only wrong and unconstitutional, but craven--surely in this supposed beacon of democracy a university press could show the way.

Surely, a school as resource-rich as Syracuse has staff on retainers for such publishing splinters.

Surely, we can see our way clearly. We need the oxygen!

Keep Lahore with Love in print and distribute it widely!!!!

In love and faith,

David Lee Keiser

Kathleen Foster

Filmmaker and Photojournalist, New York

Tuesday, Nov 16 04:03 AM

Now your important book which demolishes stereotypes about Pakistani women and gives a much needed complexity to Pakistan's political past and present will get the circulation it merits.

I will do my part to publicize it.

Pramilavenkatswaran

New York

Tuesday, Nov 16 01:39 AM

It takes courage to write at all. And it takes even more courage to write despite the threats. I would love to review your book.

Edvige Giunta

New Jersey

Tuesday, Nov 16 01:13 AM

Memoirists, and all writers, need to pay attention to what is happening to this remarkable memoir. It should be a source of concern for anyone who cares about intellectual and creative freedom. I applaud Fawzia Afzal-Khan for pushing forward and making sure her voice is heard.

Margot Badran
Georgetown University
Tuesday, Nov 16 00:08 AM

Fawzia I am delighted you are sailing forth with this wonderful book and not letting anyone stop it and in so doing defending freedom of speech for us all!

Sivan Grunfeld
United States
Sunday, Nov 14 15:26 PM

Fear is the first step in censorship. No book should be recalled for such a reason. Good luck.

Zafar Rao
Abbottabad, Pakistan
Friday, Nov 12 16:18 PM

Justification given by Alice Pfeiffer, Dir. of SU Press in an earlier post is a admirable to inform the readers about the reason behind the whole issue which says “a character in Lahore with Love very closely resembled, by name and description, an individual citizen in Pakistan”.

Obviously there must be many more people in Pakistan with whom the character must be resembling because the book has been written in that background. To depict a society, a writer has to select/pick characters from that particular society. I am sure she could not, even if she wished to, choose a character from New York for her book written about Lahore.

I fully support the author and request SU Press to lift the ban on this book to afford the reading opportunity to all those who wish to benefit from her book.

Swaralipi Nandi

Kent State University

Friday, Nov 12 15:43 PM

I have been fortunate to post a review of the book and been appreciated by the author herself, for “getting the book at so many levels”. Indeed the book itself is so intricately written that it will be unfair to call it just a memoir. It is at once the story of an evolving nation and its people, of a simple tale of friendships as well as the complexities of a metropolitan postcolonial critic. Her girlfriends thus cease to be reminiscences of actual persons, they embody the multiple facets of Pakistani womanhood. To ban the book for slandering real people is a gross misreading of the book itself--for it never claims to re-create those real people in the first place!

I strongly condemn this ban, not only as a believer of artistic license, but also because it overlooks the larger picture that the book so artfully creates.

Bina Sharif/

New York City

Friday, Nov 12 03:08 AM

Nothing should be banned especially books. Does any one who ban books understand the word,”IQRA” ?

“READ” “RECITE” Who will be able to read or recite if the word is not printed controversy or no controversy.

Imagine how powerful the written word is!

Every one is threatened by it. For God’s sake it’s 21st Century.

Lubna Sheikh

California

Thursday, Nov 11 23:36 PM

Enjoyed reading your memoir.

Thanks to Mad and Syracuse it has brought more publicity to your Great Book!

Sarah White

University of North Texas

Thursday, Nov 11 17:09 PM

I have been one of the lucky ones who were able to obtain a copy of *Lahore With Love* before Syracuse Press pulled it from the shelves. Not only is this book a wonderful read but I found it to be very politically informative for a sadly under-educated westerner such as myself. Fawzia Afzal-Khan supplies a feminist voice for thousands who cannot utter such sentiments for themselves while providing a testament to the integrality of the bonds that women forge as they come of age. The news of the decision to remove the book from publication deeply saddened me; the justifications for that action that the director of Syracuse Press has offered on this blog angers me. At the very opening of her text Fawzia Afzal-Khan offers the readers the explanation that no given character is any one person but a conglomerate of remembrances. The requirements to satisfy a libel suit include that the document in question be a false statement of fact about the defamed and must be understood to be of and concerning the “defamed” and intended to harm their reputation. Additionally, it is difficult to put stock into there being a strong basis for a libel/character defamation lawsuit in light that Ms. Afzal-Khan will apparently be able to recommence the publication efforts on her own; indicating that a legally valid cease-and desist order has not yet been produced. I appreciate Director Pfeiffer’s attempt to shed some perspective on this situation but Syracuse’s decision still reeks of cowardice. Find this book and read it a million times over, it is worth the effort.

George F Roberson

Amherst, Denver, Tangier

<http://collaborativemedia.blogspot.com/>

Thursday, Nov 11 16:22 PM

This is an unfortunate set-back, but Fawzia is a pioneer who will not be stifled. Even as ‘traditional’ publishing withers (for a variety of reasons), voices like Fawzia’s must rise from the ashes harnessing new methods: congratulations to Fawzia for finding ways forward through community and new media.

Zahra Ali

Thursday, Nov 11 14:06 PM

I am sad to hear about Fawzia Afzal-Khan's book being banned from the Syracuse press. It upsets me that I can't get a copy to read, but from what I have heard it is a great book. I hope that it becomes available again soon.

Shakil Ahmed

Lahore

Thursday, Nov 11 06:58 AM

I really enjoyed reading this book. It is certainly a good addition in a new style of writing a memoir. Actually Fawzia Khan is a rebel from the traditional way of thinking so she reflects all her rebellious ideas in this masterpiece. I am reading this book repeatedly and increasing my knowledge about women issues as well.

Read it at all costs!

Sarah Singh

New York

<http://www.theskybelow.com>

Wednesday, Nov 10 23:42 PM

Isn't it the expected structure of a memoir to reflect one's experience/personal history? I look forward to giving "Lahore with Love" as gifts in the new year!

Alice Pfeiffer, Dir. of SU Press
Syracuse University
Wednesday, Nov 10 19:48 PM

I understand that the book *Lahore with Love* has been a topic of discussion on this blog. As Director of the SU Press, I want to offer some perspective on this topic.

Several months ago, the SU Press became aware that a character in *Lahore with Love* very closely resembled, by name and description, an individual citizen in Pakistan. Upon review, the Press found the representation of the character in the book was virtually identical to this citizen, and that the portrayal raised very serious concerns of libel and defamation of character.

The Press discussed these concerns with Dr. Afzal-Khan. She initially offered to revise the book, but later withdrew that offer. After ongoing discussions, both parties ultimately chose to end the contract, as often happens when authors and publishers have issues that cannot be resolved.

SU Press very much recognizes Dr. Afzal-Khan's right to publish her book and the effort she undertook in authoring it. Indeed, SU Press offered to transfer full rights to the book, without cost, to her should she wish to obtain a new publisher. It is our understanding that Dr. Afzal-Khan has done that, and we wish her well moving forward.

Sincerely,
Alice Pfeiffer
Director, SU Press

Magid Shihade
Birzeit, Palestine
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:53 PM

Of course, will support you on this. Just curious to know what the controversy/legal case is about?

Nawal El Saadawi
Cairo, Egypt
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:49 PM

Please add my name to people supporting you.

Robert JC Young
New York University
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:47 PM

Coraggio Fawzia! As always, attempts to ban books only lead to their wider circulation.

K. D. Verma
Editor, South Asian Review
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:45 PM

You have my full support in your fight for freedom of expression. I am very puzzled by the untoward actions of those who want to suppress a writer's freedom. Undoubtedly, you have written a very good book and it has received excellent reviews.

Amritjit Singh
Ohio University, United States
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:44 PM

You have our full support and we hope the book will march to success despite this bump in the road.

Khurram Khiraam Siddiqui
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:42 PM

It's really disappointing to know about the behaviour of a press in the most developed country of the world. A book of memoir may contain many things which may cause displeasure to others but it does not lessen its literary worth and artistic value. Once the press had published that book it should have stood by you. It will cause no harm to you as we all support you as an excellent and bold writer. We hope that you will continue writing with same strength and vitality. Regards,

Farida Saeed
New York
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:38 PM

Please support Fawzia in defending her book. All of us here revere the value of free speech -- which is under threat for Fawzia's book!
(former President, Kinnaird College Old Girls association, USA NY chapter)

Imran
Wednesday, Nov 10 16:36 PM

Really sorry to hear about this really unfortunate and bizarre situation regarding your book Fawzia. We luckily have 3 signed copies of the book and really enjoyed it. I hope your publisher reconsiders their decision. I read the article you had attached—a really super article. What has become of our lovely Pakistan. What a tragedy.

Afshan Qureshi

NY

Wednesday, Nov 10 15:41 PM

It's interesting what a smart way to get more attention and prominence too. It's too bad that if the person who is suing wanted to remain anonymous they should not have brought out the fact so publicly either and in this manner confirming that it definitely was them and so removing any shadow of doubt about who it could be as the whole world is not aware of it. Maybe Pakistani' and a few others. She could have utilized this book as a venue for stepping up the pressure to be able to perform in more places. Definitely sad it's from a person who take real live situations in drama form to get message across to the people via her theater format. Does this mean she will not take situations and recreate them in her shows; so someone who has gone thro exact situation would stand up and say she did it on them and therefore want to sue her?

I do say you should stand up to it and in fact too bad that Syracuse finds her a threat to contend. On the other hand if she considers that she is a public figure and as such should be aware of consequences for having made that choice. Of all people she should encourage openness and freedom of speech in books as much as she wants freedom to show via theater.

I for one got the book via amazon and as painful as parts are to read it is definitely what the times were and are from transplanted Pakistanis from that era in Lahore as I knew it and lived it then.

Marvin Carlson

Graduate Center, CUNY

Wednesday, Nov 10 14:27 PM

I am astonished and saddened by the actions of the Syracuse University Press, which betray the basic obligations of university publishing houses and I hope Fawzia's important work will be quickly made available by from some more responsible source.

SHEMEEM ABBAS
SUNY/Purchase College
<http://www.shemeem.com>
Wednesday, Nov 10 14:21 PM

Dear Fawzia:

I attended your reading of *Lahore, With Love* at the Hudson Valley Writers' Workshop. I loved the humor and will use the book for my courses at SUNY/Purchase beginning spring 2011.

Shemeem Burney Abbas
Juanita and Joseph Leff Distinguished Professor
Department of Political Science
SUNY/Purchase

MAHMOOD MAMDANI
Columbia University
Wednesday, Nov 10 11:15 AM

It is appalling that a university press would negate the results of its own peer review process in the face of external political pressure.

PIYA CHATTERJEE
Riverside, CA
Wednesday, Nov 10 05:03 AM

What a bizarre, yet familiar, theatre of the absurd--desi-amriki-style. I am appalled at the way that Syracuse University Press buckled under this kind of crude blackmail, and extortion drama. What does this say about US academic publishers and their capacities--or incapacities--to stand up to such egregious and dangerous attacks on both academic and creative freedom? Something needs to be written about that. It is this kind of work--of longing and loss-- of stories that expose the sexual/gendered/religious and class hypocrisies of our societies that need to be told--to be shouted from the rooftops. I hope the book finds another publisher--and is read widely.

Faegheh Shirazi
University of Texas at Austin
Wednesday, Nov 10 04:13 AM

Last Spring Dr. Afzal Khan was a guest in my class reading a chapter from her book. I heard so many positive words from my students about what they heard.

I have read the book and I feel that if we talk about the freedom of speech it really has to be practiced and not to be hushed or halted if we hear things that we personally do not like. I hope this madness stops soon.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Harvard University
Wednesday, Nov 10 03:21 AM

Of course we will support you, dear Fawzia. How horrendously you have been treated.

Hasnain Khan
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
<http://hasnainkhan.wordpress.com/>
Wednesday, Nov 10 01:47 AM

Immigrating to Canada as a twelve year old in 2000 was a shocking experience. The new culture wasn't to blame. Rather, the shock was due to the hypocrisy and the untruths peddled by the Pakistani public education system that now lay open before me. Reading was, is, and will remain my first love - since as long as I can remember! But even this obsession with reading did not reveal the truth to me so long as I remained enveloped by Zia's legacy in the Pakistani public school system, its textbooks, newspapers, and almost all other cultural products. Having read the 'offending chapter,' I am confident that what Dr. Fawzia Afzal-Khan has written must be made available, at all costs. An entire generation's social and political beliefs and values are founded upon lies and deceit in Pakistan.

Preventing this book from being published and widely read would only add to the sanitization of history that has already occurred in Pakistan and with devastating impacts.