



## Discussion Questions

### The Bookseller of Kabul by Asne Seierstad

Source: Madison Public Library

1. This narrative, which begins with a proposal of marriage, describes many different unions. Discuss the ways in which marriages are agreed upon and carried out in the Afghan society. What are the roles of husband and wife as depicted in *The Bookseller of Kabul*?
2. The Taliban instituted many restrictions on books and printed materials. How did these policies affect Sultan Khan? What impact did they have on education in Afghanistan? How were things changing during the time the author spent with the bookseller's family?
3. How do female roles in Afghanistan differ? Discuss how a woman's stage in life (girlhood, adulthood, old age) or her position in the family (daughter, sister, mother) helps determine her role. Which women have the most influence in the family and in society?
4. Clothing is particularly significant in Seierstad's account. What are some instances in which clothing is a key detail? How does fashion reflect the social changes in Afghanistan?
5. As the bookseller's first son, Mansur has a special position within the family hierarchy. How does his interaction with various family members reflect this? The author also focuses on Sultan Kahn's youngest sister, Leila. How does Leila's position compare to her nephew's?
6. The reader travels through Afghanistan with Mansur as he makes his pilgrimage. In what ways does the landscape reflect the social and political circumstances in the country? The author says of the Taliban that "they might have mad it had September 11 not happened and the world started to care about Afghanistan" (p. 138). Discuss the implications of this statement.

7. Mansur, who is extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to make his pilgrimage, almost misses the chance to go. What does his experience tell us about the social and emotional outlets currently available to young men in Afghanistan?
8. Sultan Khan has been on both sides of the judicial system – as a prisoner and as an accuser. How, in each case, was truth pursued and justice handled? What can the reader learn from the bookseller's experience about crime and punishment in Afghan society?
9. What kind of man is Sultan Khan? The author contrasts the bookseller's behavior at home with his behavior at work. How do his private and professional identities differ?
10. How do Sultan Khan and his acquaintances view the changes in government in their country? Does Sultan's perspective evolve in the course of the book?
11. Seierstad explains that she had a rare opportunity to observe Afghan family life. How did the fact that she is a woman affect her access to Sultan Khan's relatives? How might her background as a European woman have affected her interpretation of the people and events she observed?
12. Seierstad describes how women's access to education, work outside the home, and social freedom changed in Afghanistan immediately after the fall of the Taliban. How have the years of Taliban rule affected women in Afghanistan today? What do you believe are the prospects for the future?