



# The Taliban Cricket Club

*Timeri N. Murari*

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Rukhsana is a spirited young journalist working for the *Kabul Daily* in Afghanistan. She takes care of her ill, widowed mother and her younger brother, Jahan. With the arrival of a summons for Rukhsana to appear before the infamous Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, the family's world is shattered. The Minister, zorak Wahidi, has two goals in mind: to threaten the anti-Taliban news reporters and to announce the Taliban's intention to hold a cricket tournament, the winner of which will represent Afghanistan in international cricket and give the brutal regime a cloak of respectability in the world.

Rukhsana knows this is a ludicrous idea—the Taliban could never embrace a game rooted in civility, fair play and equality. And no one in Afghanistan even plays cricket—no one, that is, except Rukhsana.

This could be, however, a way to get her male cousins and her brother out of Afghanistan for good. But Wahidi has a third goal in mind—to marry Rukhsana. The union would be her death sentence, wrenching her away from her family and placing her under Wahidi's complete control. Forced into hiding and desperate to escape the country, Rukhsana realizes that Wahidi may have given her a way out, too. When her loyal, beloved cousins ask for her help, she sets about teaching them how to win their own freedom—with a bat and a ball.

## The Taliban Cricket Club Details

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Author : Timeri N. Murari

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## From Reader Review The Taliban Cricket Club for online ebook

### Natalie says

Maybe I've read too many novels that take place in Afghanistan or Iran because this book was just too predictable. It had a different twist to it that made it different than the other books, that being the sport Cricket. But the same story line that I see in all of these books is: Woman betrothed to someone she doesn't love or forced to marry a bad man but is really in love with someone else. This book still had an interesting story but I prefer the writing style I've read in some other Middle Eastern historical fiction novels better. This book really was just too predictable. I still had to finish to confirm my predictions.

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### Shannon White says

The Taliban Cricket Club is a fictional novel based on an obscure historical truth -- the Taliban briefly promoted cricket in Afghanistan. However despite the seemingly dire subject, the Taliban Cricket Club maintains a light-hearted feel throughout the book. The main character, Rukhsana, is a spirited young lady that seeks to take action where she can to defy the Taliban regime. She gathers a motley crew of cousins to participate in a state sponsored cricket tournament where the first prize is training abroad. The family team is hopeful that the tournament will be their ticket out of the country.

The Taliban Cricket Club slowly evolves as the reader progresses from the usual story of Taliban tyranny to the most unusual stories of ways to defy it. The first half and second half of the novel have two distinct feels with the latter half being a more entertaining read. Although predictable, The Taliban Cricket Club has something for everyone -- from tales of living under the Taliban to action packed sporting passages to hopeful romance. It is an enjoyable and light-hearted read. Had the flow of the novel been more consistent and the story been slightly less predictable, it would have received 4 stars. Recommended for those who enjoy chick lit but are looking to diversify into books with cross-cultural themes.

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### Sam Still Reading says

When I first read the title of this book, I wondered what on earth it could be about. From what I knew about the Taliban, they didn't appear to have time to play cricket! But as you read this book, with its equal measures of repression, love, humour and intense sadness, you will understand exactly why this name is the perfect title. Murari writes a sensitive book that will have you laughing, crying and cheering in equal measures.

The main character of the novel is Rukshana, a former journalist who is now forced to write undercover using pseudonyms after not being allowed to work under the Taliban regime. Strangely, she is called to a press conference where it announced that Afghanistan will be holding a cricket tournament and the winners are allowed to travel out of the country – unheard of. Rukshana's cousins decide to form a team for the ultimate prize – and if they win, they're not coming back. One problem though: Rukshana's the only person who knows how to play cricket. Enter watching banned cricket videos under the cover of darkness, some daring disguises and the boys begin to learn their new sport. However, the minister for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has now decided he wishes to marry Rukshana, putting her life at risk. How

can Rukshana teach the team to win and evade a forced marriage?

If you loved A Thousand Splendid Suns, you'll adore this book. Murari balances the descriptions of the severe restrictions forced on the women of Kabul with funny stories of the boys playing cricket and Rukshana's happier days at university in India. I did have to put down the book several times to compose myself – the injustices that Rukshana faces just because of her sex are difficult to comprehend. Not being allowed to go to the letterbox without an escort is a small but essential freedom denied to her. (Would you rely on your younger brother to post your letters?) What is happier and more amusing, is the ways that the team try to thwart the tyrannies to achieve their freedom – from costumes to fake cousins to practising in the basement.

I don't want to spoil the ending for you, but please allow yourself adequate time to read and read because you won't be able to put this down!

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### **Pamela Detlor says**

The Taliban Cricket Club is a moving story of family, friendship, honor, and courage in the face of the horrors of war.

In a world where women are no longer permitted to have rights and freedoms, Rukhsana continues to risk her life by writing stories about the cruelty of the Taliban. She along with other journalists, are summoned to appear before the "Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice." They stand in line, expecting to meet their end in front of a firing squad; but are spared after being informed that they will write what they are told to write in order to remain among the living. Rukhsana is violently reminded that if she is caught writing anything it will bring her death.

The journalists are informed that the Taliban (which banned sports of all kinds) intends to hold a cricket tournament and become part of the world cricket organization, creating an air of respectability and sportsmanship to their regime. The winners will be flown from Kabul to Afghanistan to train and compete. Rukhsana sees this farce as an opportunity to get her brother and her male cousins out of Kabul to a place where they can escape to freedom more easily. She uses her cricket experience from university (and the days where women had rights) to secretly train her team to win; while also planning her own escape from the hell they live in under Taliban rule.

Murari's story grabbed my attention immediately. The heartlessness and brutality of war is present throughout the book, as are lighthearted and moving moments. The writing is fast paced. The characters are well written. It was a difficult book to set aside. I found myself drawn into the story and wanting to know the outcome: wanting fellowship to defeat tyranny. The Taliban Cricket Club was a fantastic read! It's not the sort of book I would have gravitated to, but I'm glad it landed in my hands. I highly recommend this one!

Special thanks to HarperCollins Canada and goodreads, for an advance reader's copy!

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## Tazeen says

Life in Kabul has become a sellable literary genre of its own. The success of hauntingly beautiful The Kite Runner opened the flood gates and there is no stopping since then. From fiction to nonfiction to memoirs, if the book mentions Kabul, women abuse and Taliban, chances are that it will get a publisher or two with some decent marketing budget. If a book as shoddily written as Kabul Beauty School can triumph at international best seller lists, then The Taliban Cricket Club should be considered a master piece but boy, is it a bad book or what!

I generally have no love lost for all things Afghanistan and Kabul, probably because I have lived too close to most things described in those books and also because I have been to Afghanistan and I always find the book version of Kabul very unreal and caricature like. I picked up The Taliban Cricket Club at the local library during the T20 World Cup when I was feeling homesick and missing cricket and live tweeting and cursing with my friends and fellow compatriots because that's always so much fun (and heartache when your team lose). The book, however, turned out to be a major disappointment.

For starters, the introduction of Rukhsana as a spirited young journalist ticked just about every cliché that ever existed about spirited young femalejournalist ever. As a person who has been that spirited young female journalist, it was major yawn fest. When we are young and spirited, we do not think everything through like Rukhsana, we do things because we believe in ourselves and the power of written word and the naivety that it can bring about the desired change, but I digress.

The plot is simple. Taliban are ruling Afghanistan and things are awful. One day, they call all journalists, including our spirited protagonist Rukhsana, to announce that they are keen on developing an Afghan cricket team. There would be a local tournament with local teams and the best of the best would make up for a national team which will first travel to Pakistan to get trained and would then tour the rest of the world.

According to the book, no one in Kabul knew how to play cricket except for Rukhsana, which is the biggest bull shit ever because Pathans from both sides of the border have been mingling each other to not know about cricket.

How does our heroine know so much about cricket if she grew up in Afghanistan and living under Taliban? Well, for starters, her childhood friend and betrothed had friends in Lahore who taught him how to play cricket and he in turn taught Rukhsana and then played with her in their compound. Secondly, she went to college in India and played for her college team in Delhi which apparently made her an expert in the game. Rukhsana comes up with the plan to teach her teenage brother and her cousins to play cricket so that they can escape Afghanistan and brutal Taliban regime.

Apart from the rather weak story line, there are things that irritated me to no end about the book. One was this four page long tirade about how cricket is a genteel game that epitomizes fair play and equality. I wondered if the writer was not familiar with competitive sport that is cricket these days. What he wrote about was an afternoon friendly match in a rural England after Sunday lunch where everyone was bit mellow after food and a pint or two of beer. It is not the game where Hansie Cronje lost his life, Mohammed Azharuddin lost his reputation and young Mohammed Amir lost his career.

The other thing that got my beef (no pun intended) was Rukhsana's mother asking her to get vegetables for 'quorma'. As a person who has cooked 'quorma' innumerable times, the only vegetable used in that dish is onion and that too to make gravy. The writer should've checked quorma recipe if he really wanted to include that in his book, it would've been better if he had not named the dish or just called it a stew. I know it has absolutely nothing to do with the plot I do get irritated with lazy writing like that. Is it too much to run a google search when you are writing a book?

If there is a protagonist in the story, there has got to be an antagonist. Zorak Wahidi was that villain – at times so cartoonish that I ended up picturing Teja and Crime Master Gogo instead of this fearsome bearded

Taliban minister. When summoned, Rukhsana went to see this minister of vice and virtue with her teenage brother and a couple of cousins. The whole scene where he killed a couple for adultery in front of them and how some other Taliban dudes ogled at her brother had me rolling my eyes instead of feeling the terror and muster sympathy for them. As if random killing was not enough, the villain had to seek our heroine's hand in marriage because that's what evil villains do, seek hand of fair maidens in marriage when they get a break from killing random people.

Like a true heroine, Rukhsana is not without her share of better suitors. There is Shaheen, her well mannered, well educated, banker childhood betrothed living in USA. He is perfect on paper and Shaheen kind of knew that she would end up with him but she declined a formal engagement not one but four times because her heart belonged to someone else – an Indian dude – a documentary film maker named Veer. I mean seriously? Have we not all seen Veer Zara already?

The chapters about her learning cricket and them dating in India were meh! Their first kiss was bleh! There was a page long text about Rukhsana's awaked sexuality and maturity with that one single kiss in the back seat of a cinema in Delhi at the ripe old age of 17 was so corny that I wanted to scream like a banshee. I mean Hello! If that Veer character's kiss was so magical, he should have started bottling and selling it to become the next Ambani.

Among other things, the book tells us that Pakistanis are generally bad people. I know that there is not a lot of love lost between Afghans and Pakistanis but the way it was written, it was clear that it was not written with an Afghan perspective but an obviously Indian one. A good writer needs to find a voice for his or her characters, not force his own voice onto them. Mr Murari – the writer – obviously failed to do that.

In the end, it was the Indian love interest Veer – the man with magical kisses – who came to Kabul to save the day and win Rukhsana's team the cricket tournament which enabled them to get to Pakistan and then run away to other parts of the world. As he was an NRI, he had a wad of Benjamins to help the Afghan cousins of the heroine to get them to their desired parts of the world. The fact that the captain of the opposing cricket team was named Waseem (the bad guy of course) and had played for a club in Rawalpindi was not lost on the readers.

The writer Timeri N. Murari is apparently a big writer in India but this book was absolute shit. I can totally picture how he came about the plot. It must have been one long weekend when he watched both Lagaan and Veer Zara on TV and then some news about Taliban and had some bad idli and sambar and thought, I too can write a saga comprising of various countries and escape from Afghanistan and become next Khaled Hosseini. I mean it has cricket, inter faith cross border romance and a feisty heroine, what else would the public want? Errr how about some originality, research and some heart. Honestly, it was one of those stories where you end up rooting for the villain which in this case was the Taliban minister for vice and virtue. Yes, this book made me root for a Taliban and that is quite a feat.

I would give this book half a star for the effort it must have taken the writer to sit down and write all 336 pages. The story is clichéd and predictable with boring uni dimensional characters ad really bad narrative. You want to slap the hell outta the protagonist by the end of it.

<http://tazeen.net/2014/04/22/the-tali...>

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### **Michelle Sibley says**

This book is set in Afghanistan during the rein of the Taliban, having read all of Khaled Hosseini's books I am very interested in both this country and the rein of these monsters. This book is horrific and you just can't imagine the circumstances in which these people lived. I feel the author described it well and sensitively. I couldn't help but bond with these characters. Having lived in the Middle East for 9 years now these stories will always touch my heart.

Throughly recommend, its harrowing but needs to be read to promote awareness of the issues still faced in some parts of the world.

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## **Helmut says**

### **Die unsichtbare Frau**

Immer wieder sieht man auch hier in Saarbrücken vollverschleierte Frauen mit Burka herumlaufen. Obwohl ich leider im Ruf der Toleranz stehe, halte ich das für eine verbietenswürdige Praxis - deutlicher, als eine Frau in ein Stoffgefängnis mit Sichtschlitz zu stecken, kann man seine Misogynie ja gar nicht ausdrücken. Die Quälerei, ein Leben mit solch einer Burka als "unsichtbare Frau" leben zu müssen, wird der eigentlich freigeistig erzogenen, die Welt liebenden Rukhsana (ein schöner Name, der uns in der gräzisierten Fassung *Roxane* im Zusammenhang mit Alexander dem Großen besser bekannt ist) unerträglich. Nicht allein die nicht unerheblichen körperlichen Einschränkungen belasten die junge Frau - das Wegschließen der Frauen vom sozialen und kulturellen Leben, die Einstufung als minderwertiges, die Männer verderbendes Wesen, das man ohne Probleme in ein Bordell verkaufen darf, vergewaltigen oder totschlagen, ist noch viel schlimmer. Ein Hund wird besser behandelt.

Die Taliban, die ein islamisches Emirat in Afghanistan errichten wollten, sehen Frauen also eh nur als Sklaven, und als dann ein Talib noch Rukhsana zur Ehe zwingen will, braucht sie einen Plan zur Flucht. Und plötzlich bietet sich die Gelegenheit in Form eines Cricket-Spiels...

Wenn mich nicht schon Fußballspiele, die ohne Zweifel dann doch noch rasanter sind als ein Cricket-Spiel, zu Tode langweilen würden, könnte ich mich vielleicht sogar mit diesem Sport anfreunden. Wer könnte nicht einen Sport lieben, in dem es Teepausen und eine "Der Geist des Spiels"-Auffassung gibt? Sehr gelungen finde ich daher genau diese Gegenüberstellung - das sehr auf gerechtes Verhalten und eine "Gentlemen"-Kultur ausgelegte Cricket-Spiel in einem von unglaublich beschränkten, brutalen, rückwärtsgewandten, menschenhassenden Menschen geführten Regime. Wie Rukhsana, ihr Bruder Jahan und die ganzen Cousins trotz dieser scheinreligiösen Fanatiker an ihrer eigenen, echten Religion festhalten, und den sich für so edel haltenden, arroganten Taliban ein Schnippchen schlagen, ist ein Plädoyer dafür, selbst in schwierigsten Umständen nie aufzugeben, und den vielleicht etwas kitschigen Glauben daran aufrechtzuerhalten, dass es doch so etwas wie Gerechtigkeit auch in dieser Welt gibt.

Ein toller Roman, unterhaltsam, informativ, spannend bis zur letzten Seite und die Aufforderung, alles zu tun, um zu verhindern, dass mittelalterliches und steinzeitliches Gedankengut, wie das der Taliban, in einer falsch verstandenen Toleranz akzeptiert werden könnte.

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## **dely says**

This book has nothing of what I'm looking for while reading: it doesn't teach me something new, I couldn't relate to any of the characters and wasn't involved emotionally. It also wasn't entertaining: the events are predictable, the story line is clichéd and not believable; there are also a lot of details that aren't accurate. For example the fake beard: I don't think it can be made of female hair because a beard has frizzy hair so everybody would see the difference. Also, this fake beard was attached with Velcro but how was the other part of the Velcro attached to the skin? The character that uses this fake beard puts it on and takes it away too easily. It's full of such strange details and this made the story even less credible.

The characters aren't well defined and they have no nuances. Though there are some bad happenings for which the reader should feel for the characters, I couldn't relate to their feelings because I already knew that the story would have a happy end. This because despite the sad happenings the characters had always a lot of luck so every bad happening was followed by a good one. This too made the story not credible. It seemed that the author wanted the reader to feel for them but he didn't succeed. Also the dialogues weren't good: too short, cold and detached. Also this didn't make the characters look real.

There was too much Cricket in it. I don't know anything about this game and though I've looked for it on the internet I'm not able to understand the rules. This made the reading experience even worse because the pages about Cricket were for me incomprehensible so I couldn't feel the excitement for the game.

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### **Amy says**

The year is 2000. Rukhsana is 24. She has returned to Kabul from Delhi, where her father was a diplomat and where she played cricket in college. Rukhsana's mother is dying of cancer. Although Rukhsana was working as a journalist, the Taliban takeover means the end of her work and brutalities to witness every time she leaves the house. Rukhsana and her brother Jahan think only of how to leave Afghanistan.

A very long-shot opportunity comes along when the Taliban-led government decides to improve its image by holding a cricket tournament. Jahan and several cousins form a team. Rukhsana coaches them in a game they've never seen before. Meanwhile, an evil Talib leader has become obsessed with Rukhsana. He and his brother stalk Rukhsana's house to force her to marry him.

This is an escape novel--not escapist, but a book about people who are being hunted as they try to escape. Deadlines imposed by the evil Talib leader add the pressure of a shot-clock ticking down. Rukhsana masquerades as a man, hides in a secret room built into her house (apparently not an unusual feature in Kabul houses). The plot was pure tension and kept me reading along. This book feels like a silent movie--do the sweethearts defeat the cackling villain?

This isn't a book with complex characters or a deep sense of place. For all the terrible things it describes, it manages to keep the tone on the light side, like a sports movie. Rukhsana's family is still fairly privileged and probably don't represent most Afghans. But it's a good story.

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### **Rosanne Hawke says**

I loved The Taliban Cricket Club and so did my husband. I was impressed at how author Timeri n Murari managed to use humour (or should I say satire) with such dangerous, dark and sad content. The mismatch of cricket with its peaceful laws and the Taliban was amusing to start with and yet the story is a well written thriller as well. Five stars for the truth, lightly and beautifully told in a memorable way.

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### **Jo says**

Amazing book- absolutely loved it. Well written, heart breaking, engaging, humour and tears. There are so many issues raised by this book (not it's primary aim) it would make a great book club book. The heroine,

Rukhsana is an incredible woman, brave, feisty and passionate. The book doesn't dwell on atrocities but they are there in the background. A story of courage and hope in the face of the most oppressive adversity. It says it all that I picked it up on a whim and have sat and read the whole thing in a matter of hours

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### **Anne Hamilton says**

What an exquisitely fine balancing act Timeri Murari pulls off in this delightful, different book. The dark brutality of rule under the Taliban contrasts with the genuine integrity and honour of Rukhsana's brother and cousins who all want to escape the country.

Rukhsana is a journalist who has come back to Kabul to honour her own obligation to care for her dying mother, as well as marry her betrothed. Left behind at university in Delhi is the man she loves. In the meantime, she has attracted the obsessive attention of Zorak Wahidi, a murderous government official in charge of the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

In a bid to change its international image, the government decides to sponsor a cricket competition - the winning team to go to Pakistan and be coached in the finer points of the game. Rukhsana's brother Jahan and her cousins are inspired: here might be a legitimate way out of the country. But who in Afghanistan knows how to play cricket?

As it transpires, Rukhsana does. At university in cricket-mad India, she was part of a team. And she's still got the gear. And the rule book. More importantly, she has a vision of the philosophy behind cricket: its idealism, democracy, team-work, initiative. The cousins are sure the Taliban do not grasp Rukhsana's vision.

There's a big problem: playing cricket in a burkha is all but impossible. How can Rukhsana coach the family team, 'The Taliban Cricket Club', to win as well as save her brother and cousins while stuck behind a vision-obscuring veil?

If that wasn't enough, can she trust her cousins? Her brother? In a world influenced by the Taliban, how does a male now think about the honour of his female relatives? What about her dying mother? What about her betrothed? What about the man she loves? What about the Minister for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice whose brother is making increasingly savage threats?

A beautifully composed book, deftly laced with humour and light, in which love, hope and genuine honour triumph in the darkest of places.

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### **Kat Ward says**

Ever go online and watch the execution back in 1999 of the woman covered in a burqa as she knelt down on the field at Kabul's Olympic Stadium? For some reason, I did. Maybe because I needed to see it to believe it.

I remember after 9/11 when suddenly the Bush administration jumped on the bandwagon, speaking out about how atrociously the Taliban treated women—like they hadn't been for some time already—using this as another reason to convince the American people of the "right" for an American invasion. I remember my liberal feminism flaring, incensed that this issue was being used for political reasons, even while I was happy

that the plight of Afghan women was finally getting more publicity.

The reality of life under the Taliban, especially for women, is at the heart of "The Taliban Cricket Club." In regard to the title, the Taliban actually did apply to become a part of the International Cricket Council in 2000, but the application was declined. But author Murari takes this premise and follows through with the "what if" via her main character Rukhsana. She feels crushed, smothered, and in a constant state of fear by life under that Taliban, especially after having the joy and freedom of working at a local newspaper and living for a time in India.

I found Murari quite successful in describing the aura of life for people under the Taliban. Just the scene of women in the family having to learn how to wear and walk in a burqa was staggering. It's a world of which we have no idea, thank god.

In the end, this is a feel good book for the characters involved, but for me there was a lingering ache knowing that in reality, life in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls, is still a struggle, the Taliban still striving to force their rigid beliefs and way of life on this highly troubled land.

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### **Bridget says**

I thought this book was non-fiction when I started it, it seemed so realistic. It is a really good book. A look at life under the Taliban in Afghanistan from a woman's perspective. As she chafes against the oppression of the regime and resents the limits placed upon her life, Rukhsana pines for her previous freedom. She is a journalist who must now practise her profession by working under a pen name and is unable to publish her work in her own country. There can be no criticism of the Taliban and she cannot leave the house unaccompanied or uncovered. Then, there is the opportunity to escape and the unlikely vehicle for this escape is cricket. This is a clever story and I enjoyed every part of it.

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### **Cat says**

I'll begin with my conclusion: READ THIS BOOK :)

That said, why the lukewarm rating? This book was captivating to say the least. In a world of rampant Islamophobia, more people need to understand the rise of the Taliban. The best way to overcome irrational, ignorant fear is to walk a mile in the shoes of a stranger. In this novel, this stranger happens to be Rukhsana, a strikingly likable girl.

Murari was an expert at building tension and handling the most frightening scenes. I would give five stars to the beginning and early middle of this story. However, the ending read like a Hollywood movie.

Which takes me back to my conclusion, once again. Regardless of the slightly unbelievable ending, READ THIS BOOK.

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