

explored in the course of the novel: the Islamised modern woman is represented by Natasha's hijab-wearing Tayi. Hailing from the rare species of Pakistani women

of Farida Hashmi-like Islam, according to which mehndis are considered haram and mourning the dead for more than three days is unacceptable. However, at

jig on the dance floor. The novel, though light-hearted, examines many issues of universal political and social interest. The characters and

“When 9/11 happened, I wanted to comment on what was going on”

– Ayesha Ijaz Khan

Q: Is your book autobiographical in any sense?

A: No, it's not. It's more the result of observation and experience. And the way I framed it, in my opinion at least, I think it could be anybody's life. It's very typical Pakistan. So many people in Pakistan now have one or two family members living abroad. Then, some people will be more religiously inclined than others. Stuff like that. It was a reflection of many different Pakistani lives, not necessarily my own.

Q: What kind of a readership are you aiming at?

A: Well, the wider the better, obviously. But I think women primarily, and then also Pakistanis who have either lived abroad or lived in Pakistan. But I also wanted people in the West to read it so that they can get a sense, from a different



aspect, of what we are really like. Also, the whole post-9/11 scenario and the political undertones – I kind of wanted to put that message across. Another type of audience I had in mind was children being brought up abroad. Parents struggle to pass on their cultural identity to them – it's not easy. That, to some extent, I faced as well. Although I was living in Saudi Arabia, my parents were very concerned that we know how to speak in Urdu, and my mother even wanted us to learn to write Urdu. But a lot of parents

Q: What genre does your book belong to?

A: The publisher grouped it as historical fiction. You can view it as women's fiction. You can view it as something else.

Q: Would you say the book is a light read?

A: Yes, absolutely. That was very deliberate. Although I touched upon terrorism and 9/11, I wanted to keep it light-hearted. I didn't want to go into the heavy-duty aspects.

Q: Do you have any plans to do any “heavy-duty” writing? Or is this the kind of writing that you aim to continue to do in the future?

A: Actually, even before I wrote the book, I toyed with the idea of fiction and non-fiction, because I am kind of inclined towards both. When 9/11 happened, I wanted to comment on what was going on. As time passed by and more and more things started to take shape, and it seemed like the environment was really changing especially for the Muslims, I decided to write a book about it. And I thought if I write fiction, I could probably touch a wider audience. Most children would not really read non-fiction. Now that that's done, maybe I will go for non-fiction.

Q: But you haven't thought of maybe exploring fiction in a different way?

A: Maybe, I will. I don't know. I haven't really thought about

Lawyer-turned-novelist Ayesha Ijaz Khan recently launched her first novel, *Rodeo Drive to Raja Bazaar*, in London where she is currently based. Khan was born in Pakistan, raised in Saudi Arabia and educated in the US. Her novel is set in modern Pakistan and encompasses issues relevant to the world since 9/11.

don't do that or can't do that and it's very difficult for them. Also, I wanted to write something that kids could read, especially those kids who were growing up abroad so that they could get a sense of Pakistan's history and politics at the same time.

superb depictions of weddings and wedding wear, and alternately a discussion of strained familial and gender relationships, the novel promises to be a delicious read for Pakistani women of all ages. ■

it. My book has only just come out and I want to try to promote this before starting something else.

Q: In retrospect, do you feel there are any weaknesses in the novel?

A: I haven't really thought about that. I don't know if this is a weakness, but the hardest part of writing the novel was coming up with a plot. And maybe it's a very normal plot. In fact, some people could perhaps critique it by saying that nothing really happens, you just have these weddings and funerals. But I was just writing a human drama, so I wanted to make it a normal life. There was one person who told me that she felt all my characters were too normal. She thought it would have been better if I had included at least one crazy character. I guess when I read my reviews, I'll find out what other people are thinking. That's more important than what I think.

Q: Who are your favourite authors?

A: Well, I have quite a few. When I was growing up, I read a lot of Judy Blume. I also liked Bapsi Sidhwa a lot. She was a great pioneer for Pakistani English writing. Other than that, I've read various authors, and recently I read a book by Ghada Karmi, which was non-fiction, but it reads very much like a story. It's about the issue of Palestine, and at the same time, it's her personal story. I read a lot of women authors.

I speak French, and there's this French author, Albert Camus, whose work I like a lot, as it has this Algerian side to it as well. I like writings with an international flavour, mainstream sort of work doesn't appeal to me. I like to explore different kinds of writing. ■

– H.Y.