

Lipstick in Afghanistan by Roberta Gately

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout the novel, Elsa is somewhat naive in her motivations and expectations. Is this a positive or negative quality. Does it help her embrace Bamiyan or blind her to danger.
2. Elsa says Mike will see her Afghanistan . . . good friends and gentle people. Can two people in the same place have such different experiences because of their roles.
3. The narration is third person limited through Elsa and at times Parween. Why does this perspective work. Is there another character you wanted centered.
4. Would Elsa and Mike's relationship have progressed so quickly elsewhere. Does Bamiyan give Elsa a courage Boston Elsa would not have had. Is their bond deep or circumstantial.
5. Elsa plans to go anywhere they need us. After the events here, will she continue in this work, perhaps with the UN. Was Aide du Monde warranted in replacing her.
6. Many strong women shape Elsa's life — Margaret, Maureen, Parween, Amina, Rahima, Laila. What does she learn from each. What might they learn from her.
7. Male characters are often clearly good or evil. Did this feel accurate or too simple. How does the book show men as both victims and perpetrators while women are almost solely victims.
8. Parween calls Elsa too rigid and asks only whether Mike would save Hamid. Do you agree with a single moral question, or with Elsa's desire to weigh complexity.
9. Parween risks everything when she jumps from the tree to surprise the Taliban. Was this selfish or selfless. How should she weigh duty to her daughter and mother.
10. The legend of the lady rebel recurs. What does it symbolize. How does Parween become its embodiment. Where else does rebellion surface.
11. Do karma or fate play significant roles. Share examples.
12. Does the ending leave you hopeful for the women of Bamiyan and for Elsa, or does futility linger. How do these themes connect to real world views on war and change.
13. The title centers lipstick. What does it mean to Elsa, Parween, and Mariam. If it symbolizes one core idea, what is it.