



Zafar, Samra (with Meg Masters). (2019). A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose - A Memoir. Toronto: Harper Collins.

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Samra Zafar's book, "A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose", is a memoir of her experiences entering into an arranged marriage from her teenage to adult years. Zafar explains her struggles with equality as a strong woman who wants an education and freedom. She is promised those two things when she agrees to her marriage with Ahmed but was lied too and had to overcome many challenges to achieve her goals. Many major themes such as religion, culture, gender roles and abuse are spoken about in Zafar's memoir and how they affected her daily life. In the end she shows how her struggles made her a stronger woman and gave her the opportunity to help other women experiencing the same abuse she had. She was not given any help when working towards her degree and in the end achieved far more than she thought possible while raising two wonderful children.

The Islamic culture and religion were largely significant and repeatedly referenced throughout the memoir. Arranged marriages are common and usually aren't set up because the two individuals are in love. Zafar had agreed to marry Ahmed before meeting him but felt pressured that she had to because these marriages are normal and if she waited too long and got older, no one would want to marry her. The norm for them was women getting married younger and if they got older, they were less likely to be proposed to. When comforting Zafar, her mother told her "Just be patient... Husbands get nicer as they get older" (p. 126), it showed how women were supposed to go through with these marriages even if they were treated poorly. At many points in

the memoir people had told Zafar she was lucky to be married and to have a husband. The image of being married is so important to this culture that the state of the marriage didn't matter. Divorce was seen as very taboo in their culture and women would rather be emotionally and physically abused than divorce their husbands because it would bring shame to them and their families. There were multiple times that Zafar thought about separation from Ahmed but ultimately didn't go through with it because of the shame on her family and herself. Allah the Islamic god in their religion was mentioned numerous times as well. Allah and their religion guided many of their decisions and was so important to them. When Ahmed said talaq three times and divorced Zafar, this was a religious rule. Zafar stating in the memoir "we were no longer married in the eyes of Allah" (p. 264), because they took these rules so seriously. Ahmed immediately knew what he had done and though he tried to find a way to undo it, he accepted their divorce in the end because of Allah. In their culture, hijabs were worn by many women because husbands didn't want other men looking at their wives. Ahmed wanted Zafar to wear one and this was one of the first signs from him that showed the unequal roles of men and women in their culture.

The role of women in Islamic culture was an important theme in Zafar's memoir. She continuously struggled with equality and freedom issues growing up as well as in her marriage. Zafar was a big fan of sports and her education growing up, but this was frowned upon when becoming a woman. They were not supposed to spend time with these hobbies or even her schooling and this can be seen when Amma said "Enough about school. Tell me, what dishes do you like to cook?" (p. 42) Amma goes on further to explain that Zafar won't be able to do sports and school much longer and implies that her role as a woman is household chores such as cooking. It is mentioned multiple times throughout Zafar's memoir that she must spend lots of time with

Amma around the house doing the tasks that fall under the roles of being women in the household. Even when money in the household was running low, Ahmed was very hesitant in letting Zafar get a job because that would have meant too much freedom for her as a woman. When he finally let her get a job, he had all the money she made come directly to him. Women are seen as property of their husbands and there are numerous occasions in Zafar's marriage where her freedoms are restricted. In one instance, Ahmed was angry that Zafar's cousin spoke to her first about arranging dinner plans and not with Ahmed. Ahmed stated that her cousin should have "Asked permission. [because] You're *my* wife." (p.131). He speaks about Zafar as if she is his property and has no freedom interacting with other males without permission. Women are expected to fully join the family of their husband and leave behind their own immediate family. Zafar left her family and came to Canada to live in the same residence as her husband, but also her husband's parents. After Zafar's father passed away, she was depressed and wanted to spend time with her mother in her home country to help but Ahmed disapproved and said "This isn't your home. That isn't your family anymore." (p.198). As the wife she is supposed to put her husband's family first and leave behind their own family in which she had grown up with.

Another common theme in Zafar's memoir is abuse and some of the characteristics. In her marriage, Ahmed emotionally and physically abused her. For emotional abuse he would shout at her, call her names, and manipulate her. Not only was there abuse with her husband but also emotional abuse caused by Amma. Amma listened to Zafar's concerns about her relationship with Ahmed and turned it around on her to make Ahmed angry at Zafar. This emotionally effected Zafar when Amma and Ahmed would manipulate her and could be seen when Zafar said "if I had managed things better, been a good wife, a better daughter-in-law, a more compliant women, I

could have prevented her husband's outbursts and tempered his anger" (p. 230). They played mind games with Zafar and tricked her into thinking she deserved the abuse. Zafar was hesitant to speak up about the abuse or report her husband because she wanted to protect their image. However, in some instances the abuse escalated to being physical and Ahmed would throw things, hit her or one time he began to choke her. This led Zafar to tell authorities and put an action plan into place so he wouldn't get away with what he had done to her through the years. A lot of women in this culture that have arranged marriages experience abuse because "It is perfectly permissible in Islam for a man to hit his wife. It is written in Koran. And other women have it much worse than you do, but they still stay. It is a good wife's duty to make things better" (p.127). Their culture justifies abuse but, in the memoir, Zafar said that "victims and abusers come from all cultures, all races, all religions, all socio-economic backgrounds and all walks of life (p. 326). Zafar is open to share her experiences in order to help other people, no matter who they are or where they are from to be open about their own experiences and that reaching out for help is ok.

The intentions of Samra Zafar, when writing this book was to bring to light the struggles she faced and how common abuse can be. She also wanted to bring the readers through all parts of her journey to show how bad things can get but to keep pushing forward. Completing her degree took longer than she would've thought when she was still in high school but shows that age didn't matter, and she was still very successful. Zafar wanted to show women that it is alright to seek help when in abusive situations and even went on to help women herself. This memoir was well written and leaves an enormous impact on readers. Being able to see Zafar's daily struggles when it came to her education, work and relationships really makes readers think and imagine themselves in her shoes. Academic audiences that would find this book interesting could be anything involving

gender roles and inequality as well as jobs like schools, authorities, psychologists or anywhere that would benefit from understanding the point of view of someone struggling with the issues Zafar faced. As well, women everywhere are the largest audience because Zafar's daughter explains that no women are ever going to speak up on abuse if all women think it's shameful. This book really puts that into perspective.