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# The Almond Garden of Kabul

By Mandana Hendessi

*They called it Badam Bagh – the Almond Garden. But inside Kabul’s central women’s prison, nothing bloomed. Nothing except rage.*

## Description

*The Almond Garden of Kabul* is a tale of courage, resistance and survival that lingers beyond the final page. It is about a group of women prisoners who risk everything to expose a network of abuse and corruption that reaches the highest levels of power in Afghanistan. Unlike many novels set in Afghanistan, which often focus on war, foreign intervention and women as passive victims, *The Almond Garden of Kabul* brings to light untold stories from a hidden world, where survival is a battle of wits, resilience and defiance. Rather than centring on external conflicts, it exposes systemic corruption, state-sponsored abuse, and the high-stakes risks of uncovering the truth from within.

## Synopsis

When Niloofar, a teenage inmate, sets herself on fire, the authorities call it a suicide attempt. But two women – Sultan, a feared inmate who once killed her abusive husband, and Setara, a teacher and gifted artist imprisoned for a crime she did not commit – begin to suspect that the fire was not just a tragedy, but a protest. As they uncover a web of abuse and corruption, they draw in fellow inmates Sheyda and Geisha along the way. Together, they risk everything to expose a sinister secret that stretches far beyond the prison walls. In a land where fire once symbolised truth and divine power, their silence becomes the flame that sets the system ablaze. Set against a brutal system built to erase them, *The Almond Garden of Kabul* is a haunting story of resistance, remembrance, and the fire women carry within them.

## Keynote

- The author’s first novel.
- Inspired by true stories from Kabul’s women’s prison, Badam Bagh (Almond Garden). LGBTQ protagonist.
- It carries the raw intensity of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, the haunting persistence of memory and injustice of Elif Shafak’s *10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, the slow-burning psychological tension of Patrica Highsmith’s *The Glass Cell* and the haunting silence of erasure and violence of Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail*.
- Non-fiction book by the author: *The Kurds: The Struggle for National Identity and Statehood* (Agenda Publishing, 2024).

## Author Biography

Mandana Hendessi brings firsthand experience to *The Almond Garden of Kabul*, having worked on women’s rights and access to justice in Afghanistan from 2008 to 2011 and again from 2013 to 2016. During her time with a women’s charity in Kabul, she visited women’s prisons and juvenile detention centres in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kabul.

For over four months, Badam Bagh became her stomping ground – every weekend, she sat cross-legged in dimly lit cells, listening to women’s stories of resilience and quiet rebellion against injustice over endless cups of tea.

In addition to Afghanistan, her overseas aid work has taken her to Iraq (including the Kurdish region) for which she was awarded an OBE in 2004, as well as Syria, where she has encountered similarly harrowing yet inspiring stories that she aims to explore in future novels.

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