

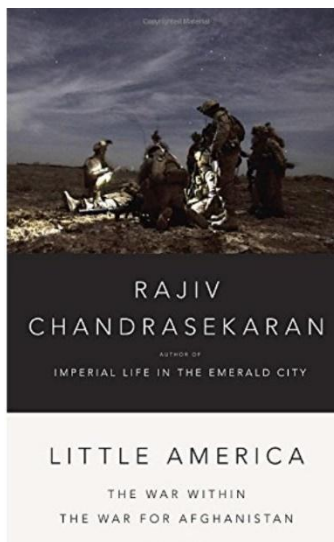
# COUNTRY INSIGHTS

From Inga Aksamit, author of *Between Worlds, An Expat's Quest for Belonging*

*These 15 books provide some context about the geopolitical landscape and cultural context of the times when the Aksamit family lived in Asia and South America, through fiction, non-fiction, memoirs, and biographies.*

## Afghanistan

*Carroll Aksamit's first irrigation engineering job was with Morrison Knudsen in the Helmand Valley of Afghanistan, before he was married.*



### [Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan](#)

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran (non-fiction)

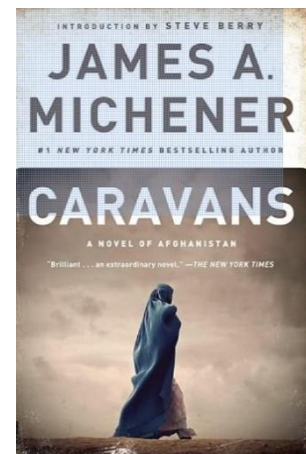
In *Little America*, Rajiv Chandrasekaran delivers a gripping account of the U.S.'s troubled mission in Afghanistan during President Obama's surge. Chandrasekaran takes his title from an earlier effort to help Afghanistan. In the 1950s the Afghan king set out to bring prosperity to the rural southern region of his country through a huge development project supported by Afghan and American money. The construction giant Morrison Knudsen built a Little America enclave for engineers, workers and their families, complete with a swimming pool and card parties.

### [Caravans: A Novel of Afghanistan](#)

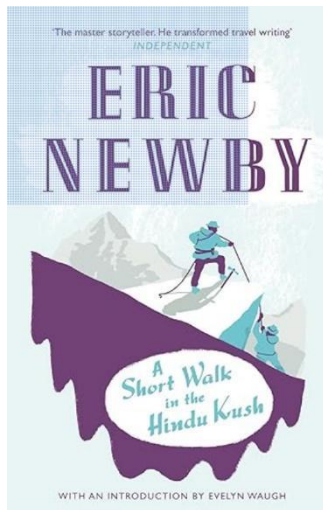
*Carroll Aksamit met Michener in Afghanistan and the engineer portrayed in the novel shares some biographical details with Carroll.*

By James Michener (novel)

First published in 1963, James A. Michener's *Caravans* is a gripping tale of adventure, intrigue, and cultural exploration. Set in post-World War II Afghanistan, it follows a military man on a mission to find a young American woman who mysteriously vanished. Combining historical insight with emotional drama, *Caravans* captures the tension of the postwar period, the sweep of Afghanistan's remarkable history, and the inescapable allure of the past.



*Disclaimer: As an Amazon Associate, I earn a small commission from qualifying purchases.*



## [A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush](#)

By Eric Newby (memoir)

Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* is a classic travel memoir of his 1956 journey through the remote mountains of Afghanistan. Leaving behind his London haute couture job, Newby invited his friend Hugh Carless on an impromptu adventure to the Hindu Kush, northeast of Kabul. Inexperienced and ill-prepared (their preparations involved nothing more than some tips from a Welsh waitress), the amateurish rogues embark on a month of adventure and hardship in one of the most beautiful wildernesses on earth – a journey that adventurers with more experience and sense may never have undertaken. Despite this, they braved hardship and beauty with humor and wit.

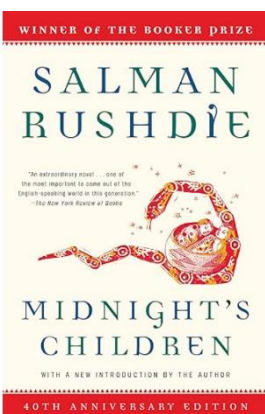
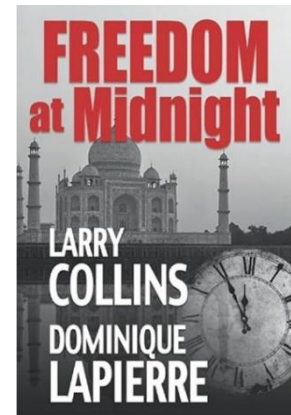
## Pakistan

*Carroll, Dorothy and Inga Aksamit moved to Lahore, West Pakistan in 1962, just fourteen years after Partition.*

## [Freedom at Midnight](#)

By Dominique Lapierre, Larry Collins (non-fiction)

*Freedom at Midnight* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre is a gripping account of India's independence in 1947. Beginning with Lord Mountbatten's appointment as the last Viceroy of British India, the book chronicles the end of British rule, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Praised for its vivid storytelling and meticulous research, it captures the drama, heroism, and tragedy of this historic moment. An international bestseller, it's a compelling blend of history and human drama.



## [Midnight's Children](#)

By Salman Rushdie (novel)

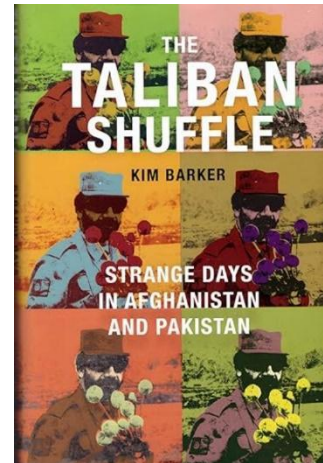
Winner of the 1981 Booker Prize and the 2008 "Best of the Booker," Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a towering literary classic. It follows Saleem Sinai, born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, as his life intertwines with India's independence and his nation's destiny. Combining fairy tale, political satire, and epic storytelling, the novel explores themes of identity, displacement, and modernity. With its innovative style and rich cultural fusion, *Midnight's Children* redefined contemporary literature and remains a masterpiece of international fiction.

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## [The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan](#)

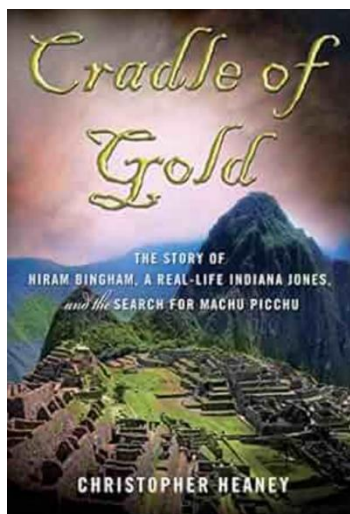
By Kim Barker (memoir)

In *The Taliban Shuffle*, Kim Barker offers a candid, humorous, and insightful account of her years as a journalist in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the early 2000s. Initially an awkward newcomer, she becomes a seasoned reporter, chronicling the "forgotten war" and the region's dysfunction. From observing chaotic police drills to romantic pursuits by a Pakistani prime minister, Barker captures the absurdities and tragedies of war. Swift, funny and original, this memoir highlights the struggles of rebuilding a region plagued by instability and missed opportunities.



## Peru

*The Aksamits land in Piura, Peru in 1967, a time when few tourists visited the country.*



## [Cradle of Gold: The Story of Hiram Bingham, a Real-Life Indiana Jones, and the Search for Machu Picchu](#)

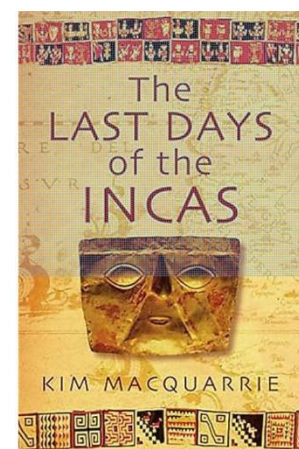
By Christopher Heaney (non-fiction)

In *Cradle of Gold*, Christopher Heaney recounts Hiram Bingham's 1911 discovery of Machu Picchu, an ancient Incan citadel hidden in Peru's Andes. Bingham's excavation brought global fame but sparked controversy over conquest, plunder, and indigenous rights. As Bingham sent artifacts to Yale, disputes over ownership ignited tensions that persist today. Heaney blends history and adventure, exploring the Incan Empire's final years, the rediscovery of its cities, and the ongoing fight over cultural heritage in this sweeping narrative.

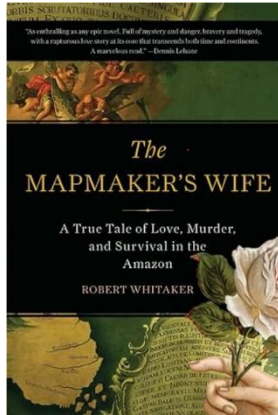
## [The Last Days of the Incas](#)

By Kim MacQuarrie (non-fiction)

In *The Last Days of the Incas*, Kim MacQuarrie recounts the dramatic Spanish conquest of Peru. In 1532, Francisco Pizarro and 167 men defeated the vast Inca Empire, capturing Emperor Atahualpa and seizing Cuzco. Despite fierce Inca resistance, including a 36-year guerrilla war led by a new emperor, the Spanish prevailed. MacQuarrie explores the savagery of the conquest, the search for the hidden capital of Vilcabamba, and the discovery of Machu Picchu, offering a vivid and authoritative history of this pivotal era.



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## [The Mapmakers Wife: A True Tale of Love, Murder, and Survival In The Amazon](#)

By Robert Whitaker (non-fiction)

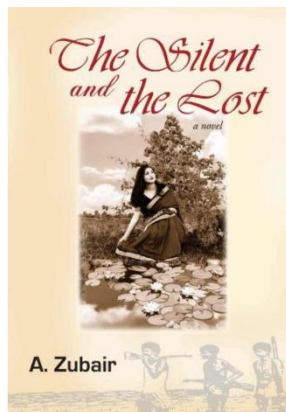
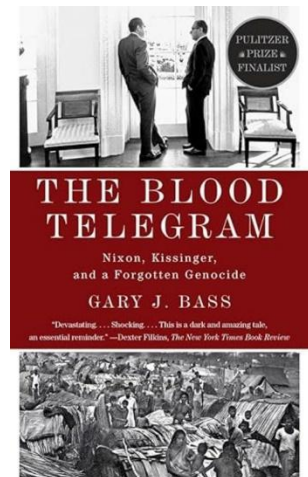
In *The Mapmaker's Wife*, Robert Whitaker recounts an 18th-century French expedition to South America to measure Earth's shape. The scientists faced deadly challenges in the Andes and Amazon, with some perishing during the mission. Jean Godin became separated from his wife, Isabel Gramesen, for 20 years due to political turmoil. Isabel's solo journey through the Amazon to reunite with Jean captivated Europe, showcasing her endurance and devotion. Whitaker blends adventure, science, and love in this extraordinary, true story.

## Bangladesh

### [The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide](#)

By Gary J. Bass (non-fiction)

This is the first full account of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's secret support for Pakistan in 1971 as it committed shocking atrocities in Bangladesh—which led to war between India and Pakistan, shaped the fate of Asia, and left major strategic consequences for the world today. Drawing on previously unheard White House tapes, recently declassified documents, and his own extensive investigative reporting, Gary Bass uncovers an unknown story of superpower brinkmanship, war, scandal, and conscience. Revelatory, authoritative, and compulsively readable, *The Blood Telegram* is a thrilling chronicle of a pivotal chapter in American foreign policy.



### [The Silent and the Lost](#)

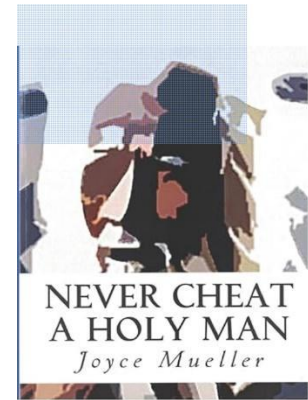
By Abu Zubair (novel)

*The Silent and the Lost* follows a war baby from the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence. The story flashes back to the revolution in East Pakistan, where we witness the chaos of Operation Searchlight, guerrilla warfare, and betrayal. *The Silent and the Lost* chronicles the history of change in the socio-political landscape of the sub-continent, and takes us on a journey into a breathtaking account of heroism and betrayal, family and friendship, love and anguish through the lives of the characters swept up in the unfolding unrest, mayhem and suppressed genocide.

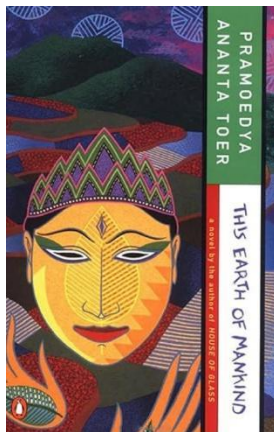
## Never Cheat a Holy Man

By Joyce Mueller (Memoir)

*Never Cheat a Holy Man* recounts three adventure-filled years in the mid-60s when the author lived with her family in East Pakistan. As a "mehsahib," she supervised a Muslim all-male household staff, navigating challenges like a cook warming toast in his armpits and mediating disputes between servants. During the 1965 India-Pakistan conflict, she and friends were held at gunpoint, accused of spying. Cultural misadventures, such as a sari mishap at a fair, provided insight into a world marked by humor, beauty, and resilience.



## Indonesia



## This Earth of Mankind

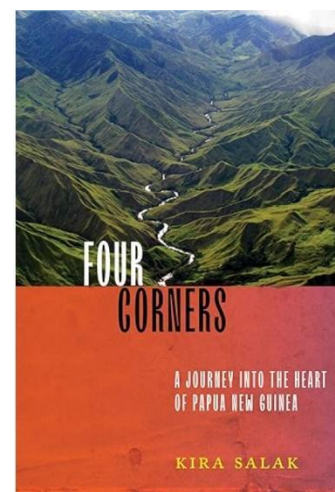
By Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Novel)

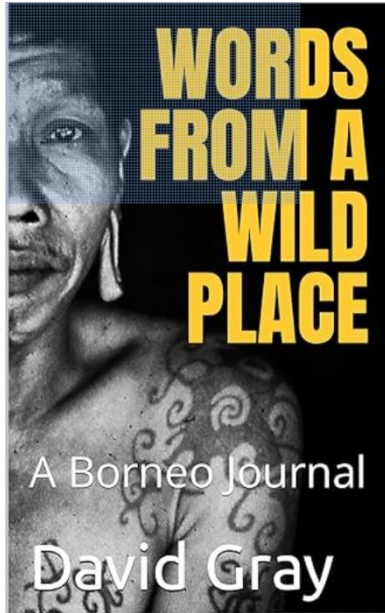
Set in the Dutch East Indies at the end of the 19th century, the story highlights the corruption and systemic inequality of the Dutch colonial system through the narrative of Minke, a Javanese boy. Minke is a young Javanese student of great intelligence and ambition. Living equally among the colonists and colonized of 19th-century Java, he battles against the confines of colonial strictures. It is his love for Annelies that enables him to find the strength to embrace his world.

## Four Corners: A Journey into the Heart of Papua New Guinea

By Kira Salak (memoir)

Kira Salak undertook an epic, solo jungle trek across the remote Pacific island nation of Papua New Guinea—often called the last frontier of adventure travel. Traveling by dugout canoe and on foot, confronting the dangers and wonders of a largely untouched world, she became the first woman to traverse PNG. Salak stayed in villages where cannibalism was still practiced behind the backs of the missionaries, meeting mysterious witch doctors and befriending the leader of the Free Papua guerrilla movement (OPM), who fought against the Indonesian occupation of Western New Guinea.





## Words From a Wild Place

By David Gray (memoir)

In 1977, a young man from Northern Ireland takes his first tentative steps into the legendary rainforests of Borneo. With his flimsy sandals and total lack of jungle experience he could hardly be worse equipped for the undertaking, but he has a good knowledge of the Indonesian language, a raging curiosity and a handful of rousing Irish folksongs which will serve him surprisingly well. *Words from a Wild Place* is travel writing as it should be. Gray carries us along in easy companionship as his extraordinary adventure unfolds. Fresh and direct, the book is witness to the magical power of the rainforest and a tribute to the Dayak people who call it home. He did not know it at the time, but Gray's account and his observations now serve as a powerful epitaph for a world that would soon be lost forever.