



The Good Muslim

By Tahmima Anam
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Introduction

From prizewinning Bangladeshi novelist Tahmima Anam comes her deeply moving second novel about the rise of Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh, seen through the intimate lens of a family.

Pankaj Mishra praised *A Golden Age*, Tahmima Anam's debut novel, as a 'startlingly accomplished and gripping novel that describes not only the tumult of a great historical event . . . but also the small but heroic struggles of individuals living in the shadow of revolution and war.' In her new novel, *The Good Muslim*, Anam again deftly weaves the personal and the political, evoking with great skill and urgency the lasting ravages of war and the competing loyal ties of love and belief.

In the dying days of a brutal civil war, Sohail Haque stumbles upon an abandoned building. Inside he finds a young woman whose story will haunt him for a lifetime to come. . . . Almost a decade later, Sohail's sister, Maya, returns home after a long absence to find her beloved brother transformed. While Maya has stuck to her revolutionary ideals, Sohail has shunned his old life to become a charismatic religious leader. And when Sohail decides to send his son to a madrasa, the conflict between brother and sister comes to a devastating climax. Set in Bangladesh at a time when religious fundamentalism is on the rise, *The Good Muslim* is an epic story about faith, family, and the long shadow of war.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who is 'the good Muslim' of the title?
2. Maya and Sohail had dreams for their country, hopes that they risked their lives to achieve. What kind of country did they dream of and what kind of country are they living in fifteen years later? Was their sacrifice worth the cost?
3. How does the war affect Maya and Sohail and their relationship? How does each react to their experience, and how do their choices shape the people they have become and how they see one another? What keeps them from telling the whole truth about their experiences? How might their lives be different if they had?
4. At the novel's beginning, Maya runs a clinic in the countryside from which she is soon forced to flee. 'It's the doctor, she's the cause of all the trouble,' she overhears one of the village men say. What 'trouble' does Maya cause here and throughout the book? How culpable is she? Do you agree with her actions?
5. What does faith, piety, and religion mean to Maya and Sohail? What role does it play in their lives before and after the war? At the novel's end, Maya thinks that if their mother had given Sohail, 'The Book' sooner, it may have prevented the tragedy of his life. What do you think?
6. Why doesn't Sohail want to remember the past, and why does Maya refuse to forget it?
7. What is the significance of Piya in both Sohail and Maya's lives? Why did Piya choose to leave instead of staying with Sohail?
8. Describe Maya's relationship with her nephew, Zaid. Should she have intervened sooner? Should she not have gotten involved at all? What responsibility does she bear for his fate? What about Sohail? Why does he send his only son to a madrasa? Why does he think that by doing so, he will prevent Zaid from growing up to become like him?
9. Compare and contrast Joy and Sohail. What were these young men to each other before the war and what is their relationship now? Why is Maya so resistant to Joy? Is love always a form of submission? Are her fears justified? How can she hold on to herself, her independence, her beliefs while being married?
10. What is life like for women in the Bangladesh of *The Good Muslim*? Compare their lives with those of American women. What do these sisters of east and west share? How are they different? Think about non-Muslim religious fundamentalism in the West. How does it compare with that of Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh and Pakistan, especially in regard to women and their role in society?
11. Forgiveness is a major theme of *The Good Muslim*. Can forgiveness free us from the pain of the past? Why is it difficult for Maya and Sohail to forgive each other and themselves? How do they each use the pain of the past to create futures for themselves?
12. Do you think Sohail and Maya will ever truly reconcile?
13. Think about the structure of the novel. Tahmima Anam continually moves from past to present. How does this shape the narrative's impact on the reader?

About the Author

Tahmima Anam was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and grew up in Paris, Bangkok, and New York. She holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology from Harvard University. Her writing has been published in *Granta*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Financial Times*. *A Golden Age*, her first novel, was the winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. She lives in London and Dhaka.