



## **The Good Muslim**

*Tahmima Anam*

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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 loyalties 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.

## The Good Muslim Details

Date : Published August 2nd 2011 by Harper

ISBN : 9780061478765

Author : Tahmima Anam

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Bangladesh, Historical, Historical Fiction, Asia, Religion, War

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## From Reader Review *The Good Muslim* for online ebook

### Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

I thoroughly enjoyed *A Golden Age*, so I had high hopes for this book. Sadly, like many sequels, it just isn't as good as its predecessor.

*The Good Muslim* picks up in 1984, over a decade after the end of *A Golden Age*, which chronicled the experiences of a family during Bangladesh's war for independence. Now the country is ruled by the unnamed Dictator, religious extremism is on the rise, and the Haque family is divided by the son Sohail's adopting such an extreme version of Islam that even toothbrushes are forbidden.

Anam is a good storyteller, and I still found the characters interesting here. Again, I learned something about Bangladeshi history. And the sense of place is stronger in *The Good Muslim* than *A Golden Age*. The novel's biggest weakness is that the pacing doesn't match the story. At under 300 pages, this is a very quick read, and made more so by the short scenes, jumping back and forth between past and present and among point-of-view characters. The problem is that this is ultimately a story about family relationships, and it doesn't benefit from so much jumping around; in *A Golden Age*, Anam let scenes and relationships develop more slowly, and it worked better. Other reviewers have criticized the more dramatic scenes here for being melodramatic, and I can see where they're coming from; everything happens so fast that there's little buildup.

And then there's Anam's treatment of Maya, the main character here. In *A Golden Age*, there's a certain ambivalence toward Maya, which I put down to seeing her through Rehana's eyes, where Rehana is ambivalent about her daughter. Here, though, even from Maya's own point-of-view, there seemed to be a certain authorial discomfort with her determined, nonreligious, childfree, single-professional-woman ways, and she's rather heavily criticized for "causing" a couple of terrible events by meddling--where while that didn't help any, Sohail's conscious (and in my view, very poor) decisions are the direct causes of those events. Maybe Anam was just trying to be balanced or something, but even there, I could do without another book where a woman not previously interested in these things suddenly decides she needs a husband and babies to be happy after all--and the romance was weak and uninteresting, although fortunately it doesn't take up much time.

Despite the criticism, though, this isn't a bad book; Anam does write well. And she has some interesting things to say about why people turn to extremism. But if you're only going to read one, go with *A Golden Age* instead.

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### Shannon (*Giraffe Days*) says

Alternating between 1971 and 1984 *The Good Muslim* tells the story of Maya, a doctor who has spent seven years in self-imposed exile travelling the country, helping women and children survive childbirth and common illnesses, and her brother, Sohail, a freedom fighter in the war against Pakistan that ended in 1971. In the 70s, the young country was embracing a constitution and finding its feet, but Sohail is tormented by a girl he rescued from a barracks, Piya, and a man he killed on the road home. In his search for meaning he discovers the Book, and god, in a way he never had before. Maya, an independent young woman who helped in the war and spent her time afterwards helping women get rid of the babies of rape by enemy soldiers, struggles with this new Sohail. She's determined to bring back the brother she knew, a serious but loving

brother who read Rilke and collected books. She blames his marriage to Silvi for turning her brother into a religious fanatic, and after Sohail burns all his books she leaves her home and her city for the countryside.

Fast forward to 1984 and Maya has received a telegram informing her of Silvi's death. Now, she feels, she can return to her mother and the life she left behind. But things have changed even more in Dhaka, and with Sohail. He's now considered a holy man, and people - especially women - arrive from all over the world, climbing the ladder to the tin shack he built on top of her mother's house to hear him speak. He has a son, eight-year-old Zaid, who looks like a servant boy in tattered clothing, too-small sandals and grimy hands. He lies and steals but desperately wants to go to school.

Picking up her life in Dhaka, Maya is confronted by the new Bangladesh in a different way from the country, where little much has changed. An old friend, Joy, returns from America and Maya resists his quiet determination to marry her. She struggles to unite the different sides of herself, between the old, fierce Maya who performed so many abortions for her country, and this new Bangladesh where everyone wants to forget what happened in the war, and what happened to the countless women who were raped and then shunned by their families. She sees Sohail as an embodiment of this determination to forget, and his seeming lack of interest in his son becomes yet another obstacle between him and Maya.

I didn't know much about Bangladesh before starting this, and to be honest I still feel like I don't, even though this book is rich in Bangladeshi history and culture. All I knew about it before I learned from year 11 geography class, in which we used Bangladesh as a topic country - so my understanding of the country is one of high infant mortality rates, poor standard of living, low GDP, and rivers that flood routinely, depositing nutrient-rich sediment in which they plant their rice crops. That was back in 1996. In terms of history, I only learned when recently reading *Tropic of Chaos* that Bangladesh is a really new country, relatively, separated from India like Pakistan was. But that's about it, and sadly I think I'm even more confused now.

This book is rich in history, as I said before, but it either assumes readers will come to the book with a lot of knowledge, or it thought it was doing a better job of narrating events than it does, or Anam wasn't trying to teach us the details through this narrative. Whichever it is, I felt more confused than anything else. I understand that they were fighting the Pakistani army and that they won, but that's all. Several different religious and military leaders were named, but I couldn't follow who they were or what happened to them. And why Pakistan was fighting there I wasn't sure about - I couldn't remember from *Tropic of Chaos* but I had thought that Pakistan was an ally - two muslim countries on either side of India...

When I'm confused about what's going on - especially when it's context like this - it really does detract from the story. I did my best to piece together what I could and ignore the rest, or just glide over it, but I always feel like I'm doing a book a disservice when I do that.

The war is important to the story. There's so much conflict between Maya and Sohail, and the war is at the heart of it. It's rather like a third character - a hazy, ill-defined character that wields enormous power over the others but never comes into the foreground where it can be faced. Like a monster that remains in the shadows, in the guilt-ridden spots of the heart. That it changed Maya and Sohail, and everyone else too, is undeniable and a strong theme in the book. I liked that it didn't overshadow the human story, and it was present very much as an influence and a stage for some horrible, horrible stories, but I would have liked to have understood the scope of it better.

Like the war, the landscape too was described in brief brush strokes, like random jigsaw puzzle pieces that turn up, giving you glimpses but not the full picture. I struggled with this less than the war but I still had a hard time picturing the different places in Bangladesh Maya travels to. In contrast, the people are quite vivid,

and very much alive in the quick descriptions of stained teeth, or a heaviness of the body, or the narrowed, disapproving eyes of religious men, seeing Maya's uncovered face.

Which brings us to religion. It's another strong presence in the novel, but like the war and the landscape and even the characters, it's not the in-your-face issue you'd expect from the title and the premise. Maya is not very religious, and feels betrayed when Sohail essentially leaves her for god. She wants him back, she wants him to be the young man he was before the war, without understanding what he faced or what he did during that time that changed him. Maya can be wilfully blind and definitely selfish, but she's familiar and relatable because of her independent and modern she is, especially in comparison to many other characters.

In contrast, it's hard to care for Sohail until the very end, when we finally learn exactly what happened that made him feel lost, and made him turn to god at the exception of all else. Only at the end did I feel something more for him than Maya's anger and frustration, though I pretty much hated him for the way he treated his son, and I disagree with Maya that it was her fault, what happened to Zaid. But both of them were selfish. Both were caught up in their own wants, in their own ways.

I didn't understand some of Maya's actions or motivations, especially around Zaid. When she goes to buy him new sandals and the shopkeeper thinks he is a servant, Maya becomes angry and doesn't buy the shoes. But what confused and bothered me was how she took it out on Zaid. The more pathetic he became, the more dismissively cruel she treated him. And yet, she tried to save him too. If she couldn't have Sohail, she'd take Zaid, but it was more than that: somewhere along the way, Maya had to deal with her own past, her own role in the war and her own guilt over all those abortions. It's complex but feels simple as you read it.

Overall, I'm not sure how I feel about this one. As a story, I liked it and yet wasn't very satisfied by it. As a voice for Bangladesh, I liked it and yet was frustrated and confused by it. Maya is a strong character, but I'm not sure I ever really understood her. My emotions were engaged as much as my head was, but it mostly left me wanting more: a deeper story, a more engaged story, a clearer sense of being present rather than watching through a grimy window.

[After writing this review, I discovered that this book actually follows on from Anam's previous novel, *Golden Age*, mostly centred on Maya and Sohail's mother and set before and during the war. It would probably give better background and context for Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan.]

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### **Kim says**

So unfortunately I didn't find this story interesting until the last few pages. I hate when that happens. Just couldn't get into it until the very end.

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### **Aditi says**

*“Suffering is a gift. In it is hidden mercy.”*

----Rumi

Tahmima Anam, an award-winning Bangladeshi author, has penned a soul touching and a highly poignant historical fiction surrounding a family torn between the after-effects of war, politics and family love in her book, *The Good Muslim* which is the second book in her *Bangladesh* series. This story opens with the daughter who goes into exile for seven long years to study medicine and to open up her own practice as a doctor, returning back to her hometown where her old mother is still waiting for her and her ex-soldier brother is vouching towards the narrow philosophy of his religion's preaching, thereby creating a gap stronger than their years of distance between the brother and the sister.

### **Synopsis:**

*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.*

Maya has just returned back from the city after seven long years serving as a war doctor, only to find out that the war has changed so much in her family, despite of her brother's wife's death. Her mother has been waiting for her daughter for the past seven years is finally happy to have her daughter back. Whereas Sohail, Maya's brother has changed a lot, as he has become more of a religious man and finds almost no time for his little son, Zaid. Unfortunately Maya fails to reconnect with her ex-soldier brother who has found solace in the fundamentals of Islam, on other hand, Maya develops a bond of friendship with the little child who is hungry for a bit of love for his parents or from his elders. Maya also reconnects with her brother's long time ago friend, Joy, who used to live in the US during the war, and with the help of Joy, Maya reunites with all her friends. Little did Maya knew that she has to pay a heavy price for a grave mistake that will put a never-ending gap between her and her brother, when Sohail sends away his son to a madrasa in an isolated island, run by some religious fundamentalists. Although, in the mean time, during Maya's mother's sudden illness, it forces her to find peace in the beliefs and comfort of the holy book and its teachings, and also serving as an activist for all those who have suffered from the war.

After reading this book that is midway between a family sag trilogy, I'm desperately vouching to get my hands on the first and the third book, as this book brought tears to my eyes. The author has penned the story with utmost brilliance and vividness and with such depth, that it opened my eyes, my mind and my heart towards a forgotten era and the pain of the people in those times. Even though this is a fictional story, but it is very much inspired from the real-life stories and it has left my heart bleeding from the pain that I felt after reading this book. In short, I call this type of books as "masterpiece" where the author serves as the lord, showing her readers, who are the shepherds, the right way back into the past.

The author's writing is emphatic and extremely eloquent and it is laced with strong, heart felt emotions that will move the readers deeply. The narrative is inspired from the local dialect but that is easy to comprehend with for the readers of any mother tongue. Also the dialogues are catchy, engaging and free flowing. Right from the very first page, the story is so compelling that it will suck the readers into its deepest, darkest depth of the story line. The pacing is smooth and moderate, as there are so many events that unfold strikingly with careful descriptions that will help the readers to visualize and feel, right from the scenes to the emotions behind it.

The author arrests the backdrop of Bangladesh and its landscape quite evocatively through her poetic prose and exquisite words. The readers are in here for a treat, if they have never before visited this simple yet fascinating land in their life, and will make nostalgic to those who live or used to lived there once upon a time. I think this book is strongly recommended to those whose mother land or the roots of heritage lies in Bangladesh, but had to leave this land after the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh partition. The author here paints a vivid and a charming portrait of Bangladesh during the late 20th century when it was under a dictatorship rule, with its rugged terrain, green flora, the grayish rivers that smell like home and its warm and homely people, with the then culture and religious limitations.

The characters in this book are like diamonds in the rough, ordinary but shine with their uniqueness, honesty and realism. The main character, Maya, is a sad yet brave woman who during the 80s and in a land dominated by Islamic preaching, managed to live by her own rules by becoming a doctor and not settling down to the domestic responsibilities by becoming someone's wife. Maya's quest to befriend and find support in her brother is a journey with challenges, sorrow and grief, and her determination will keep the readers rooting for her till the very heartbreaking end. The rest of the supporting characters reflect their brilliance through their authentic and interesting demeanor. And the readers will find a strong connection to each and every character present in the book as their stories are real and extremely relatable.

In a nutshell, this is an intriguing, enlightening yet painful story that will make the readers ache for the characters in the end, and will also fill their hearts with a sense of respect and love for their families, as the author strongly portrays the meaning of having a family through this story.

**Verdict:** *A must read novel for one and all.*

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## **Paul says**

This is the second in a trilogy, the first being “A Golden Age” and continues the story of the Haque family and is again set in Bangladesh. It can be read as a stand-alone, but it does help to have read the first one. This part of the trilogy focusses on Rehanna’s two children, Maya and Sohail. It switches from just after the war and independence to ten years later. It charts the very different directions the siblings take as a result of their experiences during the war. Maya becomes a doctor and helps women traumatised during the war, performing abortions for many who were raped; she then spends time in a village as a medic, having left her home. She returns at the death of her brother’s wife and the switching backwards and forwards gradually fills the gaps. Sohail has become religious; Islam is now his focus and he is a charismatic teacher and preacher. He has followers and sometimes travels to spread the message. Their very different takes on life creates tension between the two and their mother Rehana is often caught between the two. Sohail has a son, Zaid, who also plays a significant role.

The story is told from Maya’s perspective. She is essentially a non-believer. There are no purely good characters and some difficult topics are covered including child abuse, torture and cancer. Anam is not afraid to chart her way through chaos and crisis. I think this is a more complex work than the first in the trilogy. During the civil war there was a goal and those with differing opinions could work together. Now the war is over there are different directions that can be taken, upholding the old maxim that war is easier than peace. Maya has learnt a good deal about her country’s patriarchal mind-set in her work as a village doctor and so she finds her brother’s solace in religion very difficult. Anam manages to be fair to both siblings and resists the temptation to go for easy answers and solutions; although her heart clearly lies with Maya.

The whole is well written and I will certainly look out for the third in the series.

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### **Marieke says**

I was right to wait to finish this. I could have finished it before bed last night, but I had a feeling that the ending should wait until morning. I was right. The end was magnificent and difficult. I needed the night of sleep and the strong coffee to fortify me against the heartache at the conclusion. Tears at 6:30am from a book? Yep. Tahmima Anam is quite possibly the greatest of my reading "discoveries." I'm so thankful that my MENA reading group decided to branch out one year and dip our toes into some countries and cultures just outside the borders of our region. I might never have learned about this Bangladeshi writer...if you haven't read her, do! A GOLDEN AGE is the first in this trilogy, this is the second, and the third was just released. I must order it now....

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### **Diana says**

I want to tread lightly with my review, mainly because I don't want to offend anyone who is Muslim. The Muslim culture has always been a mystery to me and I always wondered about the complexities of the culture, as well as the every day life things. I felt like this book gave me a tiny glimpse into the culture, and I mean tiny, but it was significant all the same. This book really blew my mind. I had no idea it was a sequel but it reads like a stand alone book. Maya is a character that I found very difficult because I liked her, rooted for her, but at times found myself very exasperated with her. I found myself feeling so many emotions at once that I couldn't put the book down, and when I had to sleep, I thought about and picked it back up as soon as I awoke this morning. The ending is haunting and I liked that. I know this a book I will not soon forget.

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### **Beverly says**

Heading: Peace Is Harder Than War

The Good Muslim by Tahmina Anam is the story of two siblings, sister Maya Haque and brother Sohail Haque. Both have survived the 1971 Bangladesh War for Independence, yet are haunted by the things they did and saw. Before the war, Maya and Sohail were inseparable, but chose different roles during the war, Sohail was a guerilla fighter and Maya worked in a refugee camp. Now that the revolution was successful, brother and sister struggle on how to cope in this budding time of peace. Maya chooses to connect to her country by working as a "crusading" doctor in the rural villages and Sohail chooses his faith. It is these moral choices that cause a conflict between them. But soon things will escalate that will either allow them to accept each other choices or become a permanent barrier.

The story unfurls gently from the intimate details in two main switching storylines; Sohail's return from fighting in 1971, and Maya's return from a northern village in 1984 to provide a full picture on how each of the characters evolve from the dark inner impulses of their souls. This format works well as the reader is privy to the building suspense of how this family will face some of their toughest struggles together. While there are brief attempts for Sohail to narrate the story, this is Maya's story and it is her voice that informs the









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## Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

*A Golden Age* introduced the widow Rehana Haque and her two teenagers, Sohail and Maya, as they participated in the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence.

*The Good Muslim* is the second book in the Haque family trilogy. It begins in 1984, thirteen years after the war. Bangladeshis are not necessarily much better off than before the war. The country has had two presidents assassinated and is now living under the thumb of the Dictator. Martial law is in effect, war criminals still have not been prosecuted, and religious extremism is building.

Once inseparable, Sohail and his sister Maya were driven apart following the war. Sohail felt the need to atone for his part in the war by gradually falling into an extreme practice of Islam. Maya became a doctor and shunned religion. The two have had no contact since 1977, when Maya fled from Dhaka in anger at her brother's complete renunciation of all the worldly things he once treasured. She felt she had lost the brother she loved, her heart's companion.

Maya returns to Dhaka in 1984. She is distressed at her brother's continued religiosity, yet she is seduced by its promises when disease threatens her mother's life. She quickly forges a strong bond with her motherless nephew Zaid. Sohail has other plans for the boy, deepening the rift between brother and sister. Maya finds it impossible to connect with her brother. His religious devotion is so intense that he neglects his son's needs and turns his back on old friends. As in the old days, Maya can't help finding ways of getting herself in hot water. She's an intelligent, bold, outspoken woman in a country that favors female submission.

Tahmima Anam's strength lies in writing about the intricacies of familial love and loyalty. The political and religious climates aren't neglected by any means, but the real beauty here is in Maya's struggle to find a new way of loving her brother. Eventually she has to let go of her need to bring back the old Sohail, and love him from a distance for the good he has done.

*The Good Muslim* stands strongly on its own, but it will have a lot more depth if you've first read *A Golden Age*. It helps to know the Haque family history, and to know the characters as they were in 1971---so hopeful and militant and in love with the idea of freedom for Bangladesh. It's interesting to note that the character of Rehana is based on the author's grandmother.

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## Lara Zuberi says

*The Good Muslim* is a very touching sequel to Anam's first novel, *A Golden Age*. It takes the reader on a journey to post-war Bangladesh. Though the backdrop is political, it is woven into a very personal and real story of a family, and how they struggle, in their own ways to make sense of all the sacrifices they made. Rehana was the protagonist in *The Golden Age*, and *The Good Muslim* is written from the perspective of her daughter Maya. Since Rehana's character was based on Anam's grandmother, Maya's is likely based on her mother.

The author has raised many relevant issues: the atrocities of war; the injustices that went unpunished and unrecognized; the radicalization that many freedom fighters fell prey to; the inevitable guilt a person must live with if they are responsible for someone's death; the way a daughter fears the loss of her mother; women's rights in the third world, minor subplot with a love story--but mainly it is a brother-sister story, and

how the war took them in two very different directions, and how Maya struggles to rebuild this relationship which is so dear to her.

The pace was slow at times, but the detailed descriptions of scenes made the story and the setting very real. I do worry that some readers may generalize the portrayal of religious Muslims in a negative way, specially in today's times. I hope they will read it with objectivity, and not forget that the story is fictional. Many lines were beautifully written, and managed to pierce the heart with their power.

I enjoyed this book as much as the first one, and am looking forward to the next one, since we've seen a glimpse of the third generation. Tahmima Anam is an eloquent voice in the world of contemporary fiction.

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## Claire McAlpine says

In *A Golden Age*, **Tahmima Anam's** first book in this Bangladesh trilogy the focus is on Rehana, the mother of Maya and Sohail and most of the book takes place from March to December 1971, during the Bangladesh War of Independence. It shows how families, neighbours, ordinary citizens coped with war, how they got involved and the effect it had on them all.

Now, in *The Good Muslim* it is some years after the war and Maya has just returned to Dhaka, to the family home and over the course of the novel we discover her reasons for leaving, her disenchantment with how the war has affected her brother, who is not the same person as he was before. He becomes religious and inaccessible to her, any attempt to influence him, futile.

It is the same family, but Rehana is more of a background figure, the home has been taken over by women wearing the *bhurka*, there are sermons on the roof and Sohail's son Ziad running around the place looking and acting more like the son of a servant boy (there is one scene where Maya takes him shopping for sandals and though his neglect is obvious, she is insulted when the shoemaker assumes he is the child of a house servant).

Once she had given everything for her children. Now she was in retreat from them, passively accepting whatever it was they chose to do: turning to God, running away, refusing to send their children to school. There was nothing of the struggle in her any more.

They are living in the newly independent Bangladesh, now under a Dictator and the shadow of war hasn't left them. There are men living among them who the population wants tried for war crimes, there are all the young women, shamed by having been made one of the spoils of war, viciously raped, many of them pregnant and unwanted, being put on flights to Pakistan.

Bangabandhu had promised to take care of the women; he had even given them a name - *Birangona*, *heroines* - and asked their husbands and fathers to welcome them home, as they would their sons. But the children, he had said he didn't want the children of war.

Maya has become a doctor and put her own personal life on hold, she has seen too much and doesn't feel capable of fulfilling any other role.

She had told herself many times that marriage could not be for her. Or children. She saw them comin into the world every day, selfish and lonely and powerful; she watched as they devoured

those around them, and then witnessed the slow sapping of their strength as the world showed itself to be far poorer than it had once promised to be.

It's a sad picture of post-war trauma and the difficulties people have in returning to family life and love after all that they have experienced. It's not quite as engaging as *A Golden Age*, which was the novel of action, this is the novel of aftermath, a much more sombre undertaking.

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### **Tas says**

I had high expectations from Tahmima Anam when I very randomly came across her second book tucked away in the corners of a bookstore in the Bangladesh airport. I thoroughly enjoyed *Golden Age* and had recommended it to many non-Bangladeshi friends.

Imagine my surprise at finding out a quarter of the way through that this book is a sequel to *Golden Age*! I kept my frustrations at check about the glacial pace and the jumpy narrative and breezed through the pages. At the end, as much as it pains me, I have to say this is not a good book.

With '*Golden Age*' you got the sense that Anam was able to look inside the mind of Ammoo. But with this one, I never got a sense of why Maya does what she does and I don't think Anam did either. I wonder if that is why she (unsuccessfully) shifts her narrative voice in the middle.

Other than a few sound bites about the dichotomy of culture and religion among Bangladeshis, it falls short in writing, editing and finally saddens with a climax that could be foreseen a mile away.

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### **edj says**

The book opens with Maya preparing to return to the home she had fled 9 years previously. She has been working as a doctor in a small traditional village, delivering babies and trying to educate the community. They turn against her after a woman delivers a Down's Syndrome child, and her husband assumes his wife has had an affair with a Chinese man. The wife is beaten to the point of requiring 3 months of hospitalization, and Maya, after receiving some very definite threats, decides to return home. Her arrival coincides with the funeral of her sister-in-law.

Maya and her brother fought in Bangladesh's brutal war of independence from Pakistan, both strong believers in their revolutionary cause and both returning with their idealism shattered. Maya became a doctor; her brother Sohail is unable to make peace with certain war events. He falls in love with a young woman he rescues from sexual servitude in an army barracks. When she, unable to bear her own burdens, flees, Sohail flounders. His teenage crush from across the street, a rigidly devout Muslim, decides to marry him. Sohail moves further and further into a very extreme form of Islam, one that forbids books and even toothbrushes.

Maya's return home is painful in many ways as she struggles with her memories and the lack of interest from her once-close brother. She is drawn to Zaid, her 5-year-old nephew, now cast adrift by the loss of his mother, but Sohail doesn't allow her to truly mother him as she would like and he runs wild, a thieving and lying little charmer. When Zaid is sent to a madressa, where he is abused, Maya has to act to save him, but her actions will have ramifications far beyond what she imagines.

The *Good Muslim* is beautifully written, with layers and nuances that develop the characters. Although a

typical American reader will spend most of the book very angry at Sohail and his cold, detached and even cruel religion, by the end the reader comes to understand at least in part what has motivated him. The story moves back and forth between the time immediately after the war and the “current” time of the early 80s. It offers a thoughtful look at war and revolution and religion and Islamic fundamentalism in the lives of a few specific people, characters you’ll come to love. I highly recommend this book.

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