WRITERS MOSAIC

Tahmima Anam

In Conversation with Mirza Waheed

> 'That's why I read novels, because I want to think that big things can happen. And often in novels, big things happen. People who have lived the same way for generations suddenly don't live that way anymore. That's the purpose of a novel.'
>
> — Tahmima Anam

[Music]

Presenter: This is *WritersMosaic*, *In Conversation*. Mirza Waheed talks to Tahmima Anam about her latest novel, *Uprising*, and the reason she felt compelled to write it.

[Music]

Mirza Waheed (MW): Hello, and welcome to *In Conversation* for *WritersMosaic*. I am Mirza Waheed, and I am talking to the brilliant, brilliant novelist and my friend, Tamima Anam, today about her extraordinary new novel called *Uprising*. Hello, Tamima, how are you?

Tahmima Anam (TA): Hello, Waheed. How lovely to see you in person.

MW: Very good to see you. And thank you so much for agreeing to join this conversation. I think I wanted to start at the inception of *Uprising*. For those of us who haven't read this extraordinary novel, *Uprising* is set in a desolate, sinking island, which is inspired by, based on, a real place in Bangladesh, where it's a small island off the coast, where a woman, a madam named Amma, keeps women in servitude while their children watch, wait, and live this strange life, terrified about their future and their dream of escape. And into this world comes Kusum Khan, who is obviously brought against her will, but she's educated, and—but she has different plans. She refuses to bend and becomes this spark force for something bigger, a rebellion, an uprising. So, it's an extraordinary, unflinching novel. I loved it. I read it twice. And I recommend. I ask everyone to read this. So, yeah, coming to the question, Tamima, can you tell us when does the novel begin for you?

TA: Well, that's such an interesting—I don't think anyone's ever asked me that. So, the novel began for me many years ago when I was taken—I was on a trip in Southern Bangladesh, and someone pointed to this little strip of land and said, 'That is the island brothel.' And I thought, *how can there be an island brothel? Surely this is a work of fiction*. But it is in fact a real place. And then I thought, *if I was ever to write a novel about an uprising, this would be the place to do it*. Because I imagined a place where women are kept in servitude, where they're trapped, and where the only thought, the change, the revolution is the release, is to be able to escape.

So, this was the real island, and I had this idea of a rebellion. And it took me a long time to write because I felt, *who wants to read a novel about an island of trapped women?* But it just stayed with me. And I think in these times, we want, or at least I wanted, to think about what would a revolution look like. I don't know about your parents, but my parents were very much of a generation of people who lived through many revolutions. They were born just after the Partition of India, and many countries were decolonised after World War II, right?

MW: True.

TA: And so, when I was growing up, the dinner table talk was so much about what is a revolution, why do people rebel, what is a world that we want to imagine? And we don't really do that anymore. We talk—our dinner table conversation is about technology and about climate crisis. We don't talk so much about institutional change. So, I found it very energizing to spend some years of my life thinking about what would it look like for people who were the least likely people to rebel, who had the least opportunity to revolt, for those people to be liberated, what would that look like? And that is what the book is about.

MW: So, that's where the impulse came from. Can I—I wanted to interrogate this further because—this moment, because for me, it's fascinating how this novel was born. There's a real life world out there. This place is real. It happens. It sounds and seems dystopian, but it's so very real. I hadn't known of this place.

TA: Yes, well, I hadn't known of it either, but then when I looked into it, as it turned out, this island was the subject of much fascination in the Western press. So, a lot of—many photojournalists had gone there and taken pictures of the women. A celebrity had taken a seaplane and visited the island. There's a video of it on YouTube, like saying where the climate crisis and oppression and the terribleness of capitalism and the wretched of the Earth live.

And I have to say that I became aware of the island, but I decided not to visit the island until after I had finished the book. And the reason is that I knew that if I visited the island, the novel's characters would be based on some of those women. And I really didn't want that because they're not going to read this book and argue back with me and say, 'That's not right.' So, I wanted to say, *okay, this is a work entirely of the imagination. It's just inspired by a real place*, because there are places in the world that we cannot imagine actually exist, but really do. And I don't think I could have made this story up. I don't think I could have made up the story of an island brothel where the women are trafficked. Now, when I finished the book, I then went and visited the island, and I befriended the women, and I'm still in touch with them, and I have an ongoing relationship with them. But it wasn't until the book was finished that I was able to do that.

MW: There was a moment, you wrote about it at some length in one of these newspapers, where you had decided—not decided, but you did not want to write about this place initially. And you say, 'When I went home,' can I quote you? Is that okay?

TA: Sure.

MW: ‘When I went home, I didn't want to think about Banishanta because if I did, I would have to imagine the terrible things the women there were enduring while I lived a life of casual entitlements many thousands of miles away. Yet, the women squatted in my imagination, refusing to leave. I resolved to never write about them because it would say things about the world I didn't want to know.’

TA: That's right.

MW: So then, can you take us back to the moment then, at some point, the novel happened?

TA: Yes. So, I didn't want—the thing is, and I know you do this too in your writing, you have to ask yourself, *why are we here? Why are we doing this job?* And telling people things about places they will never see in real life is the thing that people expect us to do, which is, *give me a window into the world*. And I do do that. We do do that. Making people uncomfortable about the circumstances of their privilege is also something that we do. So, I decided to lean into that discomfort. And I have to say, it wasn't until I realised the novel would be about their escape that I felt okay to write it, that it wouldn't be about the circumstances or just the existence of that form of oppression

or that repeatedly saying, ‘Okay, this is how many people in the world live,’ but to say, ‘Okay, I'm going to take the situation, and I'm going to turn it into something that can feel a sort of exhilarating sense of release for all of us.’ And that's when I felt like it's a novel that I could write.

MW: During my second reading, I got the sense that when you read novels and you read them for the sure joy and pleasure and pain of it as well, apart from seeing a writer at work, but I did get a sense that you couldn't step away from it.

TA: Definitely. I mean, it had to be done. In fact, I was in the middle of writing a different novel when I decided I had to write this one, because I felt this overwhelming sense of rage about the world and things that we're seeing and experiencing the situation where we're almost numb, where one terrible thing after another happens, where fascist regimes become more fascist or take different inventive new turns, the handshake between fascism and technology. I was just experiencing this bubbling rage about all those things, and so I thought, *okay this is what I have to do now*. So yes, it was in my mind I was gonna write a totally different book that was funny and satirical and gave me some escape from the world, and then I couldn't help it. And actually, once I came to that realisation, then I wrote the book quite quickly. And on the day that my other novel was due, I sent my publishers this novel.

MW: [Laughs] How did they react to this?

TA: I mean, so to their credit, they were so nice about it. And it's really rare to have partners in publishing where they embrace the whole you. And they took it in their stride. They said, 'Well, if this is the book that you need to publish next, then that's great, and we will support you.' And they have.

MW: Oh, well done to them. And now the novel, people are reading it. I know, of course, you know. And it's been received very, very well. It's been acclaimed. It was a finalist for the Oval Prize. How do you feel about it now? [TA laughs] I just want to jump to this.

TA: I mean, it's very difficult to say how one feels about a book. I think the important thing is to say I'm so grateful that I have a publisher who was willing to publish this book; I'm so grateful to all the people who are reading it, and especially who write to me and tell me that it meant something to them; I'm grateful for the people who are able to live with the discomfort of reading a book like this one. And sometimes—there was this one reader who was messaging me as she was reading, and I kept saying, 'It's

okay. Just keep going. It's all gonna end well.' People nowadays talk about triggers, and I'm really fascinated by that because people are afraid to be triggered.

MW: Can you tell us a little more about what do you mean?

TA: Oh, like trigger warnings, where they say, 'Oh', a lot of times when people will mention my book, they'll say, 'Oh, trigger warning: sexual violence, death,' or what—all the things that might trigger you. And I read books to be triggered because I want to feel things.

MW: It's a new thing, because we've always read books.

TA: I know, I know. This is—you're talking—we're the same age, this is why we're so fascinated by this. So, I think people want to be aware of the ways in which they will be triggered before they read something so that they don't feel a surprise trigger or they're unaware and then somehow it unlocks something in them that they're not ready to unlock, okay? And I respect that, I do. I read to be triggered because I want to feel things, I want to be uncomfortable, I want to—I want to experience intense emotions when I read or have political insights or have some kind of spiritual experience, that's why I read. But—so, I would say that that has been a thing, that

people are like, 'Oh,' when they recommend the book, they'll say, 'Well, this is a book I recommend, but you should be warned there are all these triggers.' So, I guess what I'm saying is I appreciate that it's not an escapist novel, and I am grateful for people who are willing to go on that journey, and I do believe that people who do go on that journey will ultimately feel a sense of of release because it's no secret, you know from the very beginning that the story is about how the women escape the island. So, that's how I feel. I feel like it was always my dream to be a writer, and the fact that I get to do it is kind of amazing.

MW: And you get to write what you want to write.

TA: I do, I get to write what I want. And you and I have the freedom to say things, which in other contexts, would not be the case. So, that's how I feel. And obviously, I have times when I'm like, *oh, was this the right book? Should I have written something else?* And we all have our moments of doubt. And, *did I do a good job? Did I take this subject, did I take these characters and do right by them?* But that's something that we always have to interrogate.

MW: On the trigger thing, I think obviously people are entitled to protect their sense of well-being, but the whole joy of reading was to be surprised by a book. And when you

came upon a book back in the day – and we're not that old – but when you get—find a book, and then you discover the book.

TA: Or you just go over the triggers rather.

MW: Or whatever's inside that book.

TA: Yes.

MW: That was part of the reading experience.

TA: It's true.

MW: But then I guess we know we live in a different time, and it's a much more intense time.

TA: I think it's a—I think for a young person, there is a culture of trying to protect oneself against—but I think that we didn't protect young people enough before, in many, many ways, and this is part of that. I do hope that the pendulum will swing back, and that we will be able to say, 'It's okay to feel things or to be uncomfortable. We can't

just live in a comfort bubble. That's not what reading is. That's not gonna help us to develop our brains and to become mature adults.' We have to be—novels help us to have a robust understanding of the world and of human life and of experience. I love reading a book that crushes me. I want to feel like I just had an intense experience when I read. I don't want to take that away from my children. So yes, we do live in a different time, and I think it's a little bit more about protecting people's sensitivities and being aware of them. And I think this book is part of that. I think that's been part of the conversation.

MW: Yes, I mean, these days I know we can—I have children. And the world does press on people's minds a bit too intensely and in many, many more ways than it used to when we were growing up. But reading is reading. It's joy.

And I wanted to ask you, this is also a departure from your previous work. I don't know if you agree, to what extent you agree. Artistically and politically, your previous four novels, including the *Bangla Desh* trilogy, as it's been called in the literary press, *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim*, *The Bones of Grace*, they were engaged with history, with the history of Bangladesh, with the history of the subcontinent, as you said earlier, and the history of the world as we know it, and as you mentioned earlier, the moment of decolonisation and what that means to the fractures, the splinters that it caused. And

those three novels deal with that, with a country being born, and then its journey, and done wonderfully, of course. But this is in a different key. This is political as well in many ways, in some ways, but it's in a different key. This feels more—it's very intensely directed, is one of the impressions I had when I read them all. It's like a laser beam. It's more urgent, and it's more—and it's also artistically more compressed work. Do you want to say a little more about that?

TA: Well, it's hard to reflect on that as you're writing, because as you know, if you sat down and you're like, *I'm going to write a more compressed—artistically compressed work*, it doesn't quite work that way. I will say that one way in which this book felt different from the other books is that I felt that I was finally—we were just talking about the freedom to speak. I've always—we don't live in repressive regimes, so I've, in theory, always had the ability to say what I wanted to say, but I felt very—I didn't realise that I was—that maybe I was not going as far as I could when I was writing. And now that I'm a little bit older, I'm less concerned about propriety, and this book is kind of about that because these women live outside of the bounds of society. So, on the one hand, they're marooned and they're trapped on an island, which means that their oppression and their subjugation is very intense. On the other hand, they live on an island where there are no men, there's no police, there are no fathers, there are no religious leaders, right? So sometimes, they say to themselves, *wow, this is great. We*

can do whatever we want. Nobody is ashamed of me because everybody is the same. We're all on this island, all doing the same thing. And the things that are unspoken, sex work, desire, the whole conversation about purity and shame, it doesn't exist because everybody is the same.

And that was not only an opportunity for me to write about things that are less talked about, but it was also an opportunity to use language that is maybe language that I wouldn't have used 10 years ago. The women are very crass; they say things out loud; they also talk about their bodies in ways that I know women sometimes talk about and think about, but would rarely say in polite society. And I found that experience to be a categorically different experience than the books I had written before. And I felt hugely liberated by that. I thought, *wow, being in the minds and voices of these women allows me to say things out loud that I couldn't say in polite society*. And I think that was a really, really different experience.

MW: And that was fascinating, the jewels of the language.

TA: Exactly. There was a reader who came to one of my events, and he said, 'Did you have to describe genitalia so many times?' And I could tell that he was—that it made him very uncomfortable. And I said, 'Well, I didn't have to, but I chose to do that

because it's jarring to you, and that's part of the point. But this is—these people don't speak like you and I do because they don't have the privilege of having the same sort of expectations around consent and about their bodies that we do, so they just say things, they name things that we wouldn't name.' So yeah, that was a really interesting experience for me to try to inhabit that language.

MW: Very well said. I have a different question, but I want to digress a little bit, because you mentioned language, the crassness of the language, the words you chose deliberately to have there in the book, in these voices. One of the things I found in the book [that] was wonderful and amazing was so there is Bangladesh, obviously this is a real place, and it doesn't exist in an entire vacuum. It does; it's been made to exist in a vacuum so that people just go there for their momentary pleasures, and then they can leave without carrying anything to do with that place with them. But it still exists in a country, in a society which is religious, and religion is policed and managed by men mostly, in many places, as with Bangladesh. So, you don't do that overtly in the book. You don't bring the religious figures of authority into this conversation. You keep them at this oblique place. Because there is obviously this massive contradiction between religiosity, between piety, between following codes of being a Muslim in Bangladesh or other places and the existence of this place at the same time. And you don't get into it

directly, you just let it stay there. One of the ways that language worked for me was that it was a challenge.

TA: Yes, I mean, it's a place that has the absence of religious leaders, authority. There is the absence of the state. So, the state is not there in terms of the authority of the state, but it's also not there in terms of the things you get from the state, like an education or any rights.

MW: Protection.

TA: No protection. So, you have none of the things that are there as part—the scaffolding of your life. But it means that it's also not there to be a form of oppression or to be a form of authority. And Amma, who is the cruel madam, is all of those things. She's the authority, she's the moral authority, she's the state, she dispenses medicine, she dispenses money, she takes—she extracts things from the people who are belonging to her. And I really deliberately wanted that to be a woman. I didn't want them to be owned by a cruel pimp because to me it would be too easy. And Amma is created by the same system that she then becomes a part of perpetuating, and that really is about the cycle of violence and the cycle of oppression.

MW: And she's very vividly portrayed, terrifying in her ordinariness. As you said, it's not this massive, larger than life villainous figure, who sits in this place. She's part of the whole.

TA: She is, and she has a backstory, which is that she herself was sold into this life. And then she, in order to survive, she decides that the only way she can survive is by becoming the ruler of the system. And then Kusum arrives. And Kusum is only 15, and she comes from the city, and she believes that she's been brought to the island by accident. And her first goal is just to try to get away. She says, 'I'm not like the rest of you. I'm out of here. I'm going to buy myself, bargain myself. I'm going to cajole and somehow use my superiorness to get out.' And then she realises she's not going to escape, and so she decides to bring everyone with her. And that's when she becomes the revolutionary figure.

MW: Coming back to the novel, the shape of the novel, there is a certain form of this novel. I felt the composition of *Uprising*, of the novel, is very closely tied to its themes, to what it does. It's poetic, it's like a song. It's part lament, part—I felt it was a collective song, people chanting, in a way. So, did that happen by itself? I guess what I'm going to ask is, when you were writing, it didn't seem to me that you chose a certain register. It was as if that was the only way it would have been. Was that something?

TA: Yeah. I mean, does that ever happen to you where you finish a book, and then you think, *I don't know who wrote this book? I was just the conduit*. And I think the reason is that I made one choice, and that was to write the book in a collective 'we' voice, which is an unusual choice. And there are few modern novels that are written in that way. There's Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, there's Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the [Attic]*, and not that many other examples. Greek tragedy, almost always written in a collective 'we' voice, right? So, it just has a—when I made that decision, it became—it really had the biggest influence on the story. And from that point until the end of the book, I felt that I was merely transcribing the voices that were passed to me in a sort of a spirit medium. And then when I sent it to my editor, she said to me, 'This book was sent to you by the ancestors.' That's what she said. So, I really like that.

MW: It doesn't happen very often, you know? [Laughs]

TA: Maybe once or twice.

MW: That when you hit upon that—

TA: Have you felt that way about any of your books?

MW: Not a lot, I have to be honest. Not—sometimes, you know how it is.

TA: Sometimes there's a voice, like one character.

MW: Once or twice, then you—it was clear that you ran with it.

TA: Yes.

MW: And that makes things easier, but also difficult because then you got this precious thing.

TA: Yeah, well, like I said, I think to myself, *did I do right by these women? Did I do right by these characters?* And I think keeping the novel short was part of that, because I don't think that we want to live in that world for a huge amount of time. It has a very specific focus, which is what is the path to revolution? what is that revolutionary moment? And we want—we're waiting in the book for that moment to arrive, and when it does, that has to be the end. You don't—it has a very, like you said, it has a quite a narrow focus.

MW: No, I think the writing gave me the clear impression that it had the charge of a Greek tragedy. And that was a lot to do with the way it's written, the way it's narrated, the way it's told. Can you read a little bit?

TA: Oh, sure. Yes. I will read from the beginning. So, this is the children. So, the novel is narrated by the children of the sex workers on the island.

[TA reads from *Uprising*]

> 'And then, even though we already knew, they told us how they came to be here. They told us about the men who arrived at their villages with the promise of a job. They said it was their cousin or brother or uncle. They told us about the backs of trucks and rickshaws and finally the small boat that sputtered across the river and banked at the jetty. They told us about the cheap wedding saris they had worn because the men had promised to marry them. They told us they had left their villages with smiles, hoping for a life of rice and shoes. They told us they were brought with their hands tied behind their backs, blindfolded, drowsy with pills. And though they had arrived by accident, by misunderstanding, by sheer ignorance, or by an abundance of optimism, they had never gone home.

They had allowed their mothers and fathers to search for them forever, imagining them dead, because that would be better.

By the time we were born, their memories had faded like paint in the sun, and they lived here, tied to us.

We were the children of the island. They called us chorer-bacha. Only briefly the children, because any moment now, we would grow up, and we would become them, waking late and hungry and with a job that had no name.'

MZ: It was a very powerful reading, thank you. Writing the children, it's a difficult thing to do, difficult device, and not easy to get it right. There's plenty in literature where things are told from the child's point of view: war novels, many war novels, novels about strife and conflict tragedy written and told from the point of view of a child. And you have many children in this novel. So, how was that? How was it to write those sections, especially given how precarious their lives are, and while being aware, both from the point of view of the children, the characters themselves, and from the POV of the novelist, the narrator, writing that being aware of the fate that we dread for them, that may await them?

TA: So, the reason it's told from the point of view of the children is that I couldn't tell the story from the point of view of the women. I wanted to have a little bit of distance from what was happening on the island. And not only are—the children know what's going on, but they're not in the room when it's happening. And they have a fantasy about escape. And so, they live in their harsh reality, but they also live in their own fantasies. And that allows you as a reader to slightly float a few inches above the surface of the island, where you're not fully in the experience. And then there are some backstories where you go into some of the histories of four of the women, how they came to be there. And that really are—those really are the moments when the brutal reality of the violence really hits you because you're seeing it through the eyes of the people experiencing it.

But for the rest of the time, it's these children, all they want is to be mothered. That's all they want. They want to be mothered. And because their mothers live such harsh lives, they can be quite cruel to their children. And they say, the children say, 'Well, on the island, everybody wants to get lice.' Because if you get lice, then your mother puts you on her lap, and she picks the nits out of your hair, and it takes a really long time. And she has to touch you for that time. She has to hold—you can feel her body against your back. That's all they want. They want to be mothered. And so you just can give

the—I was able to give the novel a slightly more tender—and made it a little bit less hard to be there because you were in the minds of people who still had hopes of escape, right? And that's what happens. They almost will it into being. They say, 'We're going to get out of here.' And their mothers are like, 'Oh, you're never going to leave here. What are you talking about?' So, that's why I did it.

MW: It was, yeah, I think it's one of the most captivating and hard at the same time things to read because you're aware that these children know, even when they're small, they know, as you said, the kind of fate that may befall them as well because they know what's, as you said, what's happening inside the rooms. So, it was hard, captivating, compelling, all these things at the same time. So, when you write novels like this, and this is your fifth novel, it's probably a hard question, and you may not have—but I had to ask this, what would you like this novel to mean, to do, in the context of places like Banishanta or that entire framework where such a place exists, is made to exist, is allowed to exist?

TA: Well, I would like this novel to give people the visceral feeling of what it means to radically change the circumstances of your life. Because it feels so much like the world as we are given it is unchangeable, that we don't wake up in the morning and think, *I'm going to change the world today*. But stories like that make you feel like that might be

possible. And I kind of grew up on stories like that because I—my parents were born in colonial India, and then they were born in East Pakistan, which was also a colonial construct. And then they were like, *okay, we want our own country*. And then some years later, after a lot of bloodshed and trauma, it happened.

So, why can't we do that? Why can't we wake up in the morning and say, *this is not okay with me, this life, this world, this capitalist construct*. We just—somehow, our dreams have shrunk, our privileges have expanded, our daily comforts, our material potential has expanded, but our imaginations have shrunk. And I want—that's why I read novels because I want to think that big things can happen. And often in novels, big things happen. Big changes happen. People who have lived the same way for generations suddenly don't live that way anymore. That's the purpose of a novel. And so, I want people to read it. And even if that is maybe in your— in this season of your life, the only time you experience that, let it be in the pages of a book. And then maybe it's going to bleed into something else. That's not up to me, I can only pose the question. But I want to pose the question. I want to pose the question, which is: can we imagine a world that is radically different from the one we live in?

MW: In the artistic sense, in the sense of you're writing, you're making art, you're in that framework, do you feel that you must throw in a little bomb, a detonation?

TA: Isn't that what we do?

MW: Yeah. I mean, because there are people who think maybe it's not the job of the artist.

TA: No, I definitely don't think that. I mean, why would I do it if I wasn't blowing things up? That is the entire purpose. And I really hate that we have come to privilege the aesthetics of writing over the politics of it, as if saying you're a political writer is somehow asking less of yourself as an artist, and I don't believe that's true. I think there was a time when all the novels were political, when it was criminal to read, when women were told that too many novels would send them to the psychiatric institutions, when reading Tagore was banned in East Pakistan. So, novels have always been political because they do strange and magical things to you. Why would we diminish that power that we have in whatever measure, in whatever tiny way we might have it? Why would we deny that? It's so—it's somehow spite-ing something that's been given to you. So, I always want to plant little bombs.

MW: No, no, I agree.

TA: I think that's my job.

MW: Yeah, I mean—

TA: And I know you're with me on this.

MW: Yeah, I just want—but I just wanted to address that question, when people say that, 'I want to stay away from politics,' or that, 'I'm not political, my art is separate, and it exists for itself, and it's [inaudible],' and all those.

TA: Yes. I don't think that this is the moment for that. I don't think we have the luxury. of saying that. I think we live in a time when we have to use the powers that we have. And some people have incredible powers of political mobilisation and organisation, like the Mamdanis of the world. And imagine saying to yourself, *well, I just want to be an artist and live in—and have a nice life*. It's—we expect that of community organisers and politicians that they will move—they will use their innate abilities to change things. Why don't we expect that of artists? I think we should.

MW: Yeah, of course we should, but we also want a nice life [laughs].

TA: It's true. Everyone wants a nice life, but I'm sorry, it's too late for that [MW laughs].

MW: I wanted to—have you heard about has the novel been read in Bangladesh?

TA: That's a great question. I don't know yet. It only recently arrived there. People—a lot of Western audience members said, 'Oh, aren't you worried that people in Bangladesh will respond to it in a slightly—in a more shocked way?' And actually, Waheed, I don't know if this is true for you, but in the newspaper in Bangladesh, there are more stories of terrible things happening to people. It's somehow because it's a country in which there's the lack of resource all around, and that causes problems throughout society because we maybe don't have the legal structures to protect women because we—whatever it is, it means that people are slightly more used to reading stories that other audiences might find shocking. And so I don't know that people are going to read this and say, 'Oh, my goodness, this is really telling me something that I had never heard of or shocking me or making me uncomfortable.' At least I haven't heard it yet. I'm waiting. It's early days.

MW: People are more, in my experience, with regard to the place I've written about, people are more eager to read it. They are happy. My assumption would be they're happier to have someone like you write about it in this form as well.

TA: Well, I don't know. I mean, am I casting—am I saying things about my country that people don't want me to say? I don't know. I haven't heard it. I haven't heard it.

MW: But you will take the novel there.

TA: Yes. It's in the bookshops there now, but only recently arrived, so I haven't had a full review yet.

MW: Okay, okay. And a related question, what about a translation?

TA: Oh, into Bengali?

MW: Yes, for sure. I'm working on that now. Yes, that's definitely something that's really hugely important to me.

MW: So, this is one of the questions I immediately thought of, this has to be—exist in—

TA: Got to exist in Bengali. Yes, of course. Of course it will. And I already know who I want to do it. So, working on that.

MW: What's next for you, Tamima?

TA: Well, I am going to try to find my funny bone, which I burnt and then buried deep 10 feet under, and maybe write another satirical novel.

MW: Before *Uprising*, you wrote *The Startup*—

TA: I did. I wrote *The Startup Wife*, and then I was in the middle of another book that was in that vein because we need to laugh. Speaking of a nice life. Sometimes we need to laugh. And I spent the last few years really in a dark place writing this book, so, maybe a few years in the—

MW: It's fantastic, phenomenal, and brilliantly written.

TA: Thank you.

MW: I know people say important novel, but it is an important novel. [Music] But along with being important, it's a brilliant read.

[Music]

TA: Thank you.

[Music]

MW: It's a great novel, apart from the things it does. So, congratulations.

[Music]

TA: Thank you. I appreciate you.

[Music]

MW: Thank you for coming. Thank you for discussing.

[Music]

TA: My pleasure.

[Music]

Presenter: Mirza Waheed was in conversation with Tamima Anam. To hear more writers, go to writersmosaic.org.uk

[Music]

Tamima Anam was in conversation with Mirza Waheed

A recording of this interview can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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