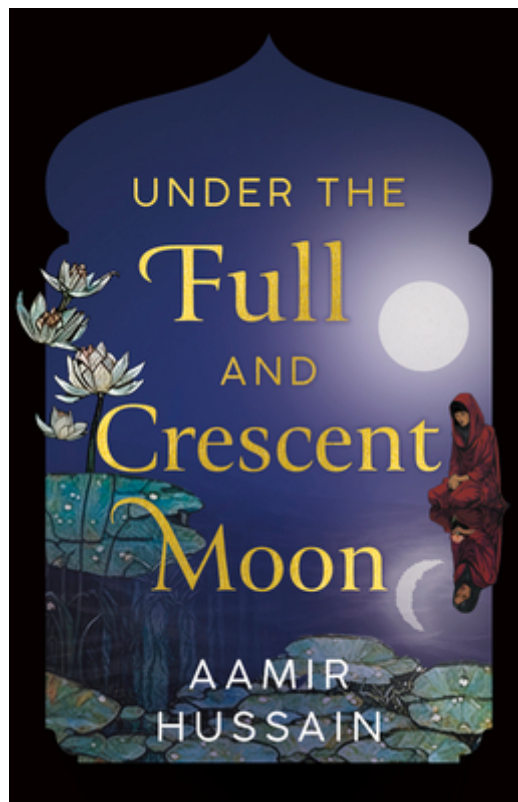


REVIEW

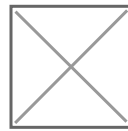
Faith, Power, and Women's Voices — A Review of “Under the Full and Crescent Moon” by Aamir Hussain

by Andrea Färber



Aamir Hussain's debut novel *Under the Full and Crescent Moon* (Dundurn Press, published September 23, 2025) takes readers into the fictional city of Medina'tul-Agham during the early Islamic Golden Age. The book blends history, religion, and women's voices into a narrative that is both engaging and thought-provoking. At its heart is Khadija, daughter of Fazlur, a respected mufti and Islamic scholar. Intelligent and well-read, Khadija is appointed as her father's scribe at the Grand Mosque. This position shifts her life dramatically from what it used to be: Once reserved and sheltered with no female role model to guide her way, she now finds herself stepping into the wider society of a bustling city, encountering new friendships and challenges that push her toward self-discovery.

Medina'tul-Agham itself is an interesting setting. Shaped by war, slavery, and resilience, it is a city where women lead. After the men were conscripted for battle and many never returned from war,



"Under the Full and Crescent Moon" by Aamir Hussain

women filled the vacuum of power. Their rule, symbolized by a female imam and the Circle of Mothers, which is a monthly gathering of women in the Grand Mosque where mothers vote on community matters, remained in place long after the war had ended. This is seen as not being true to Islam by many Muslim outsiders who practice the religion differently and they call for male leadership, despite the city flourishing as a trading hub for merchants under this matriarchal system. When a new mufti arrives and seeks to undermine both the authority of women and the equality extended to non-Muslims, Khadija finds herself caught between inherited tradition, her father's scholarship, and her loyalty to her city's unique values.

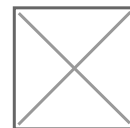
Religion is a central theme, and Hussain treats it with sensitivity. He doesn't shy away from complex questions that are still debated today, from interfaith marriage to the meaning of hijab. In one striking passage, Khadija carefully studies a Quran verse cited to her by a woman who has recently started wearing the hijab, something that at the beginning of the novel is not yet common in Medina'tul-Agham. The woman and a relative of hers are of different opinions on whether the hijab is Islamic or not and she asks Khadija, as a person well-read in the Quran, for her opinion:

“May I see?” Khadija requested, gesturing to the holy book. While she had the whole Quran memorized by heart, a common accomplishment for the well-educated children of Medina’tul-Agham, analyzing individual verses required careful reading. Khadija flipped through Hafsa’s copy of the Quran with care, but also with the critical eye that she had gained from her father. She read the verse Hafsa had brought up along with the verses before and after to get the needed context. “The verses in the Surah are referring to the wives of the Prophet specifically,” Khadija said. “Not to all women. Further here, hijab does not seem to refer to a head covering, but to a partition or barrier.” (p. 19)

This moment reflects the novel’s broader spirit: Religion here is not rigid but open to interpretation and lived experience. Hussain mentions in his author’s notes that many of these fictional debates echo real arguments that took place during the Islamic Golden Age, when core practices of the faith were still being shaped through discussions.

Beyond questions of law and theology, the novel is also about Khadija’s personal growth. Having lost her mother early, she grew up having a close and loving relationship with her father, spending much of her time in his study. Her new role at the Grand Mosque broadens her horizon, surrounding her with women who are confident and independent. These women run businesses, make political decisions, and offer Khadija a network of support. They help her step out of her shell, and through them she learns not just about society but about herself.

Hussain’s inspiration is rooted in his own background, as he grew up between Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and 90s, where women’s freedoms were tightly restricted, and Pakistan, where his female relatives achieved remarkable things and no such restrictions existed. These discrepancies between the two places he grew up in “were a large part of the inspiration for this work of fiction. I wondered if I could envision a society that followed Islamic law, or Sharia, and could still be ruled by women like the ones in my family” (p. 273). This novel is his imaginative attempt to answer that question, and a tribute to the strong women in his family.



Aamir Hussain (c) Kazmiimages

The writing itself is fluid and accessible, combining historical detail with vivid storytelling. Hussain doesn't overload the reader with research, but instead lets ideas unfold naturally through dialogue and character. His pacing is steady, so the political struggles of the city unfold alongside Khadija's personal journey, and neither overwhelms the other. The result is a book that feels both intimate and expansive, with characters who are memorable and alive.

Under the Full and Crescent Moon succeeds as both a coming-of-age story and a meditation on faith and power. It is a novel that respects the weight of history but also dares to reimagine it. Hussain emerges as a thoughtful and promising new voice among ESL writers, and this book is a moving tribute to the women who shaped him growing up.

Disclaimer: The author has received an advanced reader copy. The views and opinions of this review reflect their honest assessment of the book.