

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

### *The Book of Fate* by Parinoush Saniee

1. How do the novel's opening sentences, "I was always surprised by the things my friend Parvaneh did. She never gave a thought to her father's honour and reputation," set up one of the central themes of the book? Why do you think Saniee chose to begin like this?
2. Saniee presents a very narrow image of traditional femininity in Iranian society. Massoumeh's struggles with her brothers and parents are caused by their adherence to a strict version of female purity, and yet we see a number of women in her life that do not conform to this ideal in various ways. How do Parvaneh, Mrs. Parvin, and Shahrzhad influence Massoumeh's concept of femininity?
3. Massoumeh fantasizes about committing suicide twice in novel: first in the days leading up to her arranged marriage, and then later when she finds herself alone in an unfamiliar home. Why do you think she ultimately decides not to take her own life?
4. Massoumeh's marriage to Hamid goes through many ups and downs, and at times she seems happy. What does the Caspian coast represent for their relationship? Do you believe that Massoumeh truly loves Hamid? Does he love her?

5. This book is a rich document of one woman's private life, and images of interior spaces recur throughout the book. Windows, courtyards, and domestic spaces are some examples of symbols that highlight the divide between Massoumeh's interior life and the outside world. What are some other ways that Saniee depicts Massoumeh's private life?
  
6. In her darkest times, Massoumeh often turns to poetry. She especially finds solace in the poems of Forough Farrokhzad, one of Iran's most influential twentieth-century female poets. A divorcée whose works focused on the female experience, Farrokhzad was a controversial figure, and her works were banned for a decade following the 1979 revolution. What role does poetry play in the novel, and what does Farrokhzad, specifically, mean to Massoumeh?
  
7. Mirrors have a prominent place in the novel's imagery: Massoumeh often seems only to really *see* herself when looking into mirrors, and when she moves to Hamid's home she restarts her childhood habit of talking to her reflection. At Mahmoud's wedding, she refers to a conversation with her aunt as "the merciless mirror she held up to my life." Why do you think mirrors are so significant, and what does this say about Massoumeh's self-knowledge?
  
8. When Massoumeh gives birth to Siamak, she feels that her life finally has purpose, and this feeling only intensifies with the births of Massoud and then Shirin. Yet as her children grow older, motherhood becomes less of an

escape for her. In what ways do we see the traces of Massoumeh's earlier disappointments and anxieties in her relationships with her children?

9. Although Massoumeh has long felt abandoned, ignored, and unloved by Hamid, she nonetheless fights tirelessly to bring him home from prison. Do you think this is motivated by love, or something else?
10. Both Massoumeh's and Hamid's fathers die as a result of heart attacks brought on by painful family events, and there are numerous incidents of characters fainting or having otherwise physical reactions to distressing news. What do you make of this close relationship between tragedy and the body? What does it say about the culture the novel is set in?
11. Betrayal is a pervasive theme throughout the novel. Of the many betrayals Massoumeh experiences at the hands of her family, coworkers, and government, which do you think is the hardest for her to accept?
12. Four generations of women are represented in the novel, from Massoumah's maternal and paternal grandmothers to her daughter Shirin. How do changing roles for women in society play out from one generation to the next?
13. How does the title *The Book of Fate* affect your reading of the novel?
14. Were you surprised by the book's ending? What was your reaction to Massoumeh's final decision?

15. The novel has been banned twice in its native Iran. Given that it does not linger on the details of the political situation in Iran, but is instead a highly personal story of one woman's private life, why do you think it has been so inflammatory?