


MUSLIM WOMEN NEGOTIATING REPRESENTATION, REGION, AND RELIGION

SHAMSHAD HUSSAIN'S AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF THE LIVES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MALAPPURAM, KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Malappuram Penninte Aathmakatha [Autobiography of a Malappuram Woman] (2024), a memoir by Shamshad Hussain, an acclaimed writer and academic from Kerala, reflects on the personal and collective experiences of Muslim women in and around the Malappuram region, Kerala. Shamshad Hussain challenges the hegemonic, monolithic representations of Muslim women and puts forward a counternarrative about a meagrely represented group of Muslim women, critiquing the overarching orientalist and fundamentalist narratives. She documents the invisible Muslim women from an inadequately represented location in South Asia, that is, the South Indian state of Kerala. The memoir examines the crossroads of intersection of religion, region, family, and gender. Employing the tool of memory, Hussain upends preconceived notions and does not fit into compartments made by both religion and secular liberals. Hussain looks into the agency exercised by the Muslim women of the region in producing, disseminating, and conserving alternative forms of knowledge. The memoir examines the crossroads of intersection of religion, region, family, and gender. The memoir shares the glimpses of the Muslim 'everyday' in the region, drawing attention to its nuances. Here, the autoethnographic account of a Muslim woman academic intersects with the collective ethnography of women, the region, its culture, and politics, as well as how Muslim women navigate institutions such as family, marriage, religion, and academia.

Keywords: Kerala Muslim Women, Memoir, Autoethnography, Lived Islam, Malabar, South Asian Islam

INTRODUCTION

The category of "South Asian Muslim women" encompasses diverse women across South Asia, each with distinct and unique identities and perspectives. The tool of self-narration has empowered South Asian Muslim Women in contesting the misrepresentations and in constructing a narrative of their own. The category of South Asian Muslim women accommodating an extensive range of voices has been exclusionary to certain frameworks and positionalities. Shamshad Hussain, writing from an inadequately represented location in South Asia, uses her memoir to deconstruct and reconstruct a distinctive narrative of her own about the lives of Muslim women in her region.

THIS IS A LIMITED PREVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.

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