

## **Being Young and a “Muslim Woman” in Post-liberalization India: Reflexive Documentary Films as Media Spaces for New Conversations**

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### **Summary**

The Indian documentary film landscape is currently expanding with exceptional dynamism, despite the fact that structural problems such as insufficient funding and distribution mechanisms are still prevalent. The number of film festivals organized in this vein in the country has also increased, allowing documentary films and directors from India to gain a new global visibility, which in turn makes the industry increasingly interesting and relevant for academic discussion. In this article, I focus on three reflexive documentary films by Fathima Nizaruddin that could be considered a trilogy and in which the director has sought to deal with the different points of view of Muslim women on the questions of gender, identity and religion. I argue that a growing interest in these new articulations and critical reflections on the prevailing discourses and visual regimes about Muslim women is discernible in India and is likely to expand in the next couple of years.

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### **Introduction: Moving from the representation of “fixed” to “fluid” identities of Muslim women?**

Starting with the Orientalist production of knowledge and continuing until the present day, the category “Muslim woman” has been constructed and perpetuated through very diverse discursive streams and channels, at local, national, regional and also translocal levels. These discursive channels include, among others, media, states, science and the fine arts as well as the discourses of religious agents and transnational women’s organizations. Given the politics of visual and textual representation, as well as the deep polarization, the competing agendas and the specific constellations and contexts in which recurring conversations about “women in Islam/women and Islam” take place, there can be no doubt that the category “Muslim woman” is a particularly essentialized category (Sharify-Funk 2008;

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