Gender, modernity & Indian delights: the women's cultural group of Durban, 1954-2010

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Abstract:
For decades, South Africans aspiring to make the perfect biryani have turned to Indian Delights, the best selling cookbook produced by Zuleikha Mayat and the Women's Cultural Group. This is the story of the women behind the recipes; it is an account that brings to life the changing, gendered worlds of Muslim women in 20th century Durban. Through a blend of scholarly rigour and compelling biography, this book reveals how a group of women, who were formally excluded from both political and customary power, nevertheless forged a vibrant citizenship and public life for themselves. In the midst of unfolding global and local transformation "apartheid, feminism, doctrinal shifts in Islam " the members of the Women's Cultural Group were themselves agents of change, not only within the local communities that benefited from their proficient and varied labours, but in the making of South African modernity. Academic historians Goolam Vahed and Thembisa Waetjen have constructed a multilayered narrative that captures the spirit and housewifey appeal of their subjects. A fascinating read for anyone interested in local history, gender identity, and Islam in the Indian-Ocean region.

Keywords:
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Women's exploitation is an age old cultural phenomenon of Indian society. The system of patriarchy finds its validity and sanction in our religious beliefs, whether it is Hindu, Muslim or any other religion. For instance, as per ancient Hindu law giver Manu: "Women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in old age or as widows. The unfortunate part of gender inequality in our society is that the women too, through, continued socio-cultural conditioning, have accepted their subordinate position to men. And they are also part and parcel of same patriarchal system. Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reasons for women's low status in society. Source for information on Gender and Religion: Gender and Hinduism: Encyclopedia of Religion dictionary. The battle between tradition and modernity continues to be fought over the bodies, minds, and images of women. Unsurprisingly the Indian response was to produce positive historical accounts of the position of women. By the 1980s the link between women's studies and the women's movement, and thus its feminist agenda, was firmly established. The author introduces the work of a selected group of Indian feminists, arguing that their insights should be taken on board by white Western feminisms to develop more sophisticated models of identity. Gold, Ann Grodzins, and Gloria Goodwin Deheja, eds. Listen to the Heron's Word: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India.