

BOOK REVIEW: RELIGION AGAINST THE SELF
ISABELLE NABOKOV
(RELIGION AND SOCIETY SSA18)

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The book *Religion Against the Self* by Isabelle Nabokov delves into the intricate realm of Tamil rituals, particularly focusing on the practice of exorcism and possession among Tamil women. Nabokov challenges the notion that women are empowered in these rituals, highlighting the coercive nature of exorcisms that aim to resocialize women within patriarchal structures. She discusses how possession offers women a platform to voice feelings of loneliness and disappointment but ultimately serves to reinforce societal norms and suppress individual agency. Nabokov's ethnographic study sheds light on the complexities of religious practices and their impact on gender dynamics within Tamil culture.

The main argument of *Religion Against the Self* by Isabelle Nabokov is that Tamil rituals, particularly exorcism and possession, do not empower women as is often believed. Instead, these rituals serve to reinforce societal norms and suppress individual agency. Nabokov argues that women are coerced into these rituals and are subjected to extreme forms of pressure to conform to patriarchal expectations. While possession may offer women a platform to voice feelings of loneliness and disappointment, the overall function of these rituals is to eradicate any desires or thoughts that deviate from the traditional role of women within the patriarchal family fold. Nabokov emphasizes that women are not passive or voiceless victims, but the ritual itself is coercive and operates as an assertive pedagogy, silencing women through interrogation, symbolic decapitation, and invasive practices that imprint societal expectations on their bodies.

The introduction of *Religion Against the Self* by Isabelle Nabokov reveals a significant shift in the author's research focus. Initially intending to investigate the meanings attributed to the past by Tamil people, Nabokov's direction changed dramatically after witnessing seances at the Mel

Religion Against The Self

AW Rasmussen



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