

(Download) The Land of the Invisible Women

## The Land of the Invisible Women

*Qanta Ahmed*

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**Qanta Ahmed : The Land of the Invisible Women** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Land of the Invisible Women:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting StoryBy Charlottekrn BookfairIn Dr. Qanta Ahmeds memoir, the doctor describes the two years she spent practicing medicine at the National Guard Hospital, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Dr. Ahmed relates her experiences while living in the Kingdom. Dr. Qanta Ahmed is British born and educated, of Pakistani Muslim heritage, and was practicing medicine in the USA when her visa was not extended. Dr. Ahmed decided to take a lucrative position offered in Saudi Arabia. Upon landing in the desert Kingdom, Dr. Ahmed felt the first insult to her gender, after her passport was confiscated by her male guide. Dr. Ahmed explains the origins of Wahabiism, a movement founded by Mohammed bin Abdul Wahad, who died in 1792. Dr. Ahmed reiterates throughout the book that Wahabiism, protected and promoted by the Saudis is a distortion of Islam. Dr Qanta is clear and concise in the defense of her religion while denouncing the subjugation of women, anti-Semitism, and terrorism.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A few memorable scenes--book wants for editing and concisionBy Roberta ProctorThis is a book that seems to attempt two things. First, it is a memoir of one female doctor's experience working in Saudi Arabia for two years. Although Muslim, she is Western born and educated which makes Saudi Arabia in many ways a culture shock for her, as it probably would for any Westerner. Secondly, it describes what life is like for women in Saudi Arabia. Each purpose, unfortunately, seems to get in the way of the other. It is not written well enough to be a superior memoir, and because it is a memoir, it offers less information that one would wish for from a nonfiction study about an unfamiliar country. In fairness to this author, however, she is a medical doctor

licensed in four specialties: internal medicine, pulmonary disease, critical care, and sleep disorders. It would be a miracle if she also were a wonderful writer. Don't get me wrong--she does not write badly, but has a frustrating tendency of overusing adjectives and stretching out a story until it snaps. Less is more sometimes and an editor should have helped her trim out some of the fat here. In short, read this book for its content, not for the writing (although you might find yourself wishing for more of the former than the book actually delivers). Capitalizing on a key tension in the book, the author does a good job of presenting her love of Islam and her dislike of many aspects of the Islamic STATE. She loves the people, the food, and so on. It was hard at times, however, to square her intense love of some elements of this society with her intense loathing of others. Not everyone could compartmentalize things as much as she is able to do, which makes her perspective compelling. One can learn some fascinating things about Saudi Arabia here; it's odd, for instance, that a country can be so advanced in some ways but so primitive in others. The author does a good job of highlighting its contrasts in many areas of life. Less fascinating, and somewhat disappointing, is a plot line that the author draws out (and this is a memoir, so I don't use the word plot to mean fiction, here) and that ends up being kind of a tease. It is elongated and seems as if it is headed in a particular direction but ends up falling flat, which I found to be a complete letdown. If she intended to string the reader along, then she succeeded. A long series of chapters about the Hajj may or may not appeal to some readers, but this section for me seemed way too long. Essentially, what interested me most about "In the Land of Invisible Women" was the information about Saudis and Saudi life rather than this one doctor's personal experiences in Saudi Arabia.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting most of the time...By I  
It's definitely an interesting book told from an interesting perspective: that of a Westerner for all intents and purposes, living in the Middle East with limited understanding of the culture. Dr. Ahmed's fears and bewilderments as she encounters this new world are eye opening to any woman from the western culture. I was in horror as I read about an incident where she and some friends feared for their lives as they were pursued by young Saudi men in another car after a party. Dr. Ahmed does a great job conveying the situation and the fear they must have felt. Other people she met were gracious and lovely helping her to learn her way in a strict Muslim setting. The only thing that I found off-putting about the book was her focus on material \*things\* and brand-names. From what she drove in New York City (her beloved Mercedes-Benz) to what wealthy Saudi women were wearing (Gucci, etc.). I am still unsure as to why she needed to be so heavily focused on this, and it made me wonder about her own priorities. It's a good book club book, as there is a lot that can be discussed.

Ahmed, a young British Muslim doctor, becomes an outcast in motion. On a whim, she accepts an exciting position in Saudi Arabia. This is not just a new job; this is a chance at adventure in an exotic land she thinks she understands, a place she hopes she will belong.

From Publishers Weekly  
This memoir is a journey into a complex world readers will find fascinating and at times repugnant. After being denied a visa to remain in the U.S., British-born Ahmed, a Muslim woman of Pakistani origin, takes advantage of an opportunity, before 9/11, to practice medicine in Saudi Arabia. She discovers her new environment is defined by schizophrenic contrasts that create an absurd clamorous clash of modern and medieval... It never became less arresting to behold. Ahmed's introduction to her new environment is shocking. Her first patient is an elderly Bedouin woman. Though naked on the operating table, she still is required by custom to have her face concealed with a veil under which numerous hoses snake their way to hissing machines. Everyday life is laced with bizarre situations created by the rabid puritanical orthodoxy that among other requirements forbids women to wear seat belts because it results in their breasts being more defined, and oppresses Saudi men as much as women by its archaic rules. At times the narrative is burdened with Ahmed's descriptions of the physical characteristics of individuals and the luxurious adornments of their homes but this minor flaw is easily overlooked in exchange for the intimate introduction to a world most readers will never know. (Sept.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist  
Denied visa renewal in America, British-born Pakistani physician Ahmed, 31, leaves New York for a job in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where she celebrates her Muslim faith on an exciting Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca even as she encounters rabid oppression from the state-sanctioned religious extremist police. She is licensed to operate ICU machines in the emergency ward, but as a woman, she is forbidden to drive, and she must veil every inch of herself. Her witty insider-outsider commentary as a Muslim and feminist, both reverent and highly critical, provides rare insight into the upper-class Saudi scene today, including the roles of women and men in romance, weddings, parenting, divorce, work, and friendship. After 9/11, she is shocked at the widespread anti-Americanism. The details of consumerism, complete with Western brand names, get a bit tiresome, but they are central to this honest memoir about connections and conflicts, and especially the clamorous clash of modern and medieval, . . . Cadillac and camel. --Hazel Rochman  
"Despite the restrictive customs of Saudi's religious rule, Ahmed found a vibrancy that left her hopeful. 'Saudi is much more heterogeneous than one would expect,' she says. 'Muslims themselves feel fairly lost in a country so caricatured and vilified for its severe austerity and Wahhabi theocracy, but it's also the cradle of Islam and the site of the Hajj--a symbol of what Islam could be.'" - Kirkus  
Ahmed still beautifully asserts her arguments and confronts the anti-Semitism, the sexism, and the anti-western

attitudes she experienced... In the Land of Invisible Women gave me a lot to think about, and just not about the complexities of Saudi Arabia but also my country's, the U.S.A., interactions within the Middle East. " - Adventures in Reading "Ahmed was saddened, distressed, and taken aback by her colleagues' excitement in reaction to the 9/11 attacks. Her friends talked about how America "deserved" this tragedy because of its support of Israel." - ForeWord "Denied visa renewal in America, British-born Pakistani physician Ahmed, 31, leaves New York for a job in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where she celebrates her Muslim faith on an exciting Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca...After 9/11, she is shocked at the widespread anti-Americanism. The details of consumerism, complete with Western brand names .... are central to this honest memoir about connections and conflicts, and especially the clamorous clash of "modern and medieval, . . . Cadillac and camel." - Booklist "A female doctor provides a uniquely revealing look at the hidden world of Saudi Arabian women. Denied a renewal of her visa in the United States, British-born, American-educated pulmonologist Ahmed accepted a position at a hospital in Riyadh. On rounds, the male residents she supervised would interrupt her, and female residents (what few there were) would cluster silently at the back of the group. All female doctors were required to be completely veiled. In surgeries, sons would supervise unconscious mothers, not to ensure the quality of their medical care, but to ensure that no parts of their faces were revealed by slipping veils. With such evidence around her, Ahmed began to think of these women as the wretched of the Earth. "I wouldn't be corrected in my simplistic views," she writes, "until much later, when I had befriended more Saudi women." When she did, she learned that the lives of these women under veils were no less complex and rich for being largely unseen. At her first party, she was astounded by the elegance and confidence exuded by professional women who had struggled immensely to achieve their positions. She began to understand how respect and love for women were expressed in her adopted society. Despite the strict monitoring of their clothing and behavior and the edicts against showing even the smallest scrap of skin in public, the Saudi women she met were neither so silent nor so helpless as their formless presence suggested. However, her friends were wealthy and educated; the vast impoverished majority could not even afford to visit doctors, let alone become one. Though never ceasing to be dismayed by the uglier aspects of regressive Saudi orthodoxy, Ahmed also found her own Muslim faith deepened and her conception of Islam broadened by her sojourn there. If she never learned to love the veil, she at least learned to understand it. A big-hearted examination of the extreme contradictions in a society very different-yet not so different-from our own." - Kirkus "In the Land of Invisible Women is a must read for everyone. Why? People must find out how Dr. Ahmed dared to cope with radical Islamic fundamentalism. Rather than misery and despair, her story is one of brightness and optimism for Saudi women. But equally vital, it is a tale of expectation, a hope that brave Saudi men, who dare read her story, might have a jolt of conscience over unjustified cowardly feelings they hold toward women." - Blog Critics "This book is a well-written and fascinating insider's look into life in Saudi Arabia and the challenges that women and sometimes even men must face in their daily lives." - Bookopolis