



Manzoor, Nida. "We are Lady Parts." 21 May. 2021.

We are Lady Parts (2021), written by the hilarious Nida Manzoor, is a series about a Muslim all-female punk band struggling to get recognition for their talents.

When I was first introduced to this show, I was excited. I mean, an all-female punk rock group formed entirely of Muslim women? I was intrigued. Nida Manzoor has made a name for herself with *Polite Society* (2023), writing comedy films and TV shows that centre around POC (people of colour) women who are not afraid of who they are and use their culture and their heritage as means of self-identification rather than as something to hide.

Giving voices to people with different perspectives on the world is invigorating. Diversity in our entertainment means having a platform where people can share their individual and unique stories.

"The idea for the show I think came about because I was feeling a sense of frustration with the kinds of representation of Muslim women that I was seeing. And also that I was being asked to [...] look at the tragedies of being a Muslim woman [...] things about honour killing and forced marriages as though that was the norm of experience..." Nida Manzoor (MPAC National)

She goes on to express how she was lucky that she was able to express through her writing how she wanted to write something that reflected on herself and the women that she knew, this is what drove her to come up with the show. She wanted to show how diverse Muslim women are and could be, how each of the characters is comfortable with how they express themselves but none of them are having a crisis of faith or identity, instead showing them with joy and humour but also with complexity.

I wanted to review this show after learning more about Muslim culture and realising that the way most Western Media portrays this complex and diverse culture is not only wrong but very misguided. *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) is a breath of fresh air in the realm of TV shows, not only is the main cast all female characters but they are independent, strong-minded, loyal and deep individuals.

The story follows Amina, played by Anjana Vasan, a PhD student looking for marriage, feeling inadequate because all of her friends are already married or getting engaged. Amina is an excellent guitarist who loves “old, white men music” as Saira would say, but poor Amina struggles with stage fright. Usually, when in front of a stage she ends up puking on stage, this stage fright has stopped Amina from playing her music for any audience but she revels in teaching guitar to underprivileged youths.

After a meeting with a potential candidate for marriage that goes... poorly, Amina sees Ahsan, the cool, handsome and aloof anthropology student she has seen around her campus. He is handing out flyers in the park, she is stunned by his beauty, wrapped up in her internal monologue to notice that he has handed her said flyer.

Lady Parts is looking for a lead guitarist.

Saira, played by Sarah Kameela Impey, is the fierce and charismatic leader of Lady Parts. With her bold attitude and unapologetic demeanour, Saira is the driving force behind the band. Saira is the one who decided that Lady Parts needed a new guitarist, as soon as she met Amina she knew. She was the one.

Saira might seem like a mean, scary person on the outside, but her passion for the music makes her terrifying. As we watch, we see how caring she is, and she has trouble expressing her softer side. To help Amina overcome her stage fright, she takes her to a spoken word night and encourages her to perform a poem on stage. She truly believes Amina can do great things if she gains a little courage.

Bisma, played by Faith Omole, is the sweet and laid-back bassist, Earth mother and actual mother. Instead of being the mom of the group though, she revels in the opportunity to take her ideals of feminism and self-love and put it in their songs. Bisma also takes great strides in keeping her family as one of her top priorities, not sacrificing her home life for her band life. She has an excellent relationship with her husband and daughter, teaching her daughter about toxic masculinity and how to stand up for herself as a black, Muslim woman.

Ayesha, played by Juliette Motamed, is the cool and unapproachable drummer. Unlike Saira's fiery personality, Ayesha is cold as ice and quick to judge Amina when she arrives. Still, underneath it all is a loyal friend who will do everything for her people. Ayesha takes no shit from anyone, she says what she wants, does what she wants and she will crush anyone who gets in her way. Throughout the show Ayesha struggles with her identity as a queer woman, she is pretty open about it with Lady Parts. Still, she is afraid of coming out to her parents, which puts her relationships under strain.

Momtaz, played by Lucie Shorthouse, is the rock of the band, she is their band manager. Momtaz works day and night to try to help her friends succeed and get

recognised for their talents. Her loyalty and her hustling spirit are the key to their success. Many times she has had to hold back her more hot-headed bandmates from throwing hands at anyone who questions them.

I love this fucking show. It's funny, it uses editing and camera movements to punctuate the inner monologue and thoughts of its characters. There are some surreal moments when a scene's editing and VFX design seem more magical and supernatural than I would expect in a TV show like this. Bisma picks up a TV remote and pauses her daughter when she feels too flustered to argue with her.

This show tackles a lot of problems...

The band wants to gain recognition online and turn to an influencer with an online magazine publication for some acceptance. Still, instead of a heartwarming and thoughtful article, they are snaked and are portrayed as Anti-Muslim propaganda, leading them to be hated by their community. They struggle with a conservative faith-based community, seeing them as sinners when in fact they uphold their faith by praying together during band practice. Most of them wear head coverings and go to their local mosques.

Lady Parts wants to fight against patriarchy and white supremacy but not against their core beliefs.

Amina struggles with her best friend, who is a devout Muslim woman and condemns her most of the time for participating in activities Noor deems as Haram. This volatile friendship leads Amina to hide things she thinks are shameful from her friend, she feels like she has to live a double life, being the sweet little Muslim girl that her best friend expects her to be and following her passion as the lead guitarist for Lady Parts.

Amina struggles with finding a husband, she has this huge crush on Ahsan but he friendzoned her hard. Leaving her feeling undesirable. Eventually, she finds chemistry with this white guy, Billy. Ugh. Billy. After their first date, Billy takes it upon himself to be the whitest, dumbest man in the world and kisses Amina. IN. THE. STREETS. I mean, Jesus Christ. Amina quickly runs away from this interaction as she should. She does not believe or want that to happen, not only is she currently struggling with Noor thinking her band is haram, she doesn't want to do anything that goes against her beliefs.

Anyways, Ahsan warns Amina about how Billy has been saying things that sound like he is exoticising her, Amina is offended, enraged! She has this huge blowout with Ahsan. But later she asks Billy about it, and all of his answers seem to point to what Ahsan was truly saying. She was excited to be *seen with*. Talk about an asshole.

Well, Amina isn't the only one struggling with relationships at the moment because Ayesha is caught between not wanting her parents to find out she is queer and her white girlfriend, Laura, who wants to meet them. There is some hellish kind of struggle here, torn between a conservative family that she doesn't want to disappoint and a girlfriend who doesn't understand that kind of torment.

In season two, the band is approached by an agent wanting to take them to the next level, but that means leaving Momtaz and taking their band elsewhere. At first, everyone thought it was a great idea. Even Momtaz is keen, although inside she is heartbroken about not being able to provide enough for Lady Parts. During their time at this new agency, Lady Parts gets to work with their hero and favourite producer Dirty Mahmood. It's exhilarating! It's magical! Lady Parts finally has the money and the means to produce their first album. But nothing lasts.

As they move forward, Saira gets a chance to meet with her hero, Sister Squire, the first female Muslim alternative lead singer. Excited by this opportunity to have tea with her shatters almost immediately, as Sister Squire calls Lady Part's songs "Funny Muslims songs". Sister Squire tears Saira a new one by telling her that she needs to make music that brings a voice to the voiceless, and exposes how Muslim communities are being treated all around the world.

Saira tries to bring this up with the label but she is shut down. She is told that the label will hold the album hostage if they feel that Lady Parts will bring them scrutiny. Feeling helpless and crushed under the restraints that the label is putting on her, Saira retreats into herself and gives up.

There are so many things that these women are dealing with that I can't understand but I sympathise with them. This show is delightful, funny, entertaining and most of all impeccably written. There are things that I can identify with as a woman and there are things I learn from.

I think this show might be one of the best-written shows I have seen in a long time. It's about time that POC women have the ability and platform to write about what they want and have a voice to explore the lives they live. These kinds of shows and movies should be explored more to bring awareness.

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