

Chapter IV

Echoes of Silence: Unravelling Trauma in Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*

“The Arab world is a vibrant tapestry of cultures, histories, and traditions that offers a wealth of stories waiting to be shared”

– Ahdaf Soueif

In recent years, contemporary Arab women writers have emerged as powerful voices in literature, navigating the complexities of identity, culture, and trauma through their works. Building on Edward Said's critiques of *Orientalism*, which expose the reductive and often harmful Western perceptions of the East, these writers challenge stereotypes and assert their narratives in a global literary landscape. Through a rich tapestry of storytelling, they illuminate the multifaceted experiences of Arab women, drawing attention to the lingering effects of historical trauma, including the transgenerational scars of the slave trade and the psychological burdens stemming from political and social upheavals.

These writers challenge stereotypes and assert their narratives in a global literary landscape. The new-age Arab women writers not only reclaim their stories but also offer profound insights into their resilience and creativity, reshaping the discourse around their identities and experiences in a way that transcends both cultural boundaries and historical narratives.

While *The Queue* unveils the crushing weight of collective trauma imposed by an oppressive political regime, *Celestial Bodies* delves into the quieter yet equally profound fissures of personal and familial histories. Both narratives, though set against different backdrops, reflect the enduring human struggle to navigate the scars of power and the longing for agency amidst inherited and lived traumas. Oman, while depicted as a less politically volatile nation, holds its own emotional terrain scarred by

the legacies of patriarchy, slavery, and evolving cultural norms. Here, the source of trauma is not the state but the intimate spaces of family and relationships. Alharthi's work explores how the unspoken and inherited burdens of the past reiterate identities, desires, and the capacity for liberation within the bounds of a changing society. The researcher emphasises that in Alharthi's narrative, the source of trauma is not the state but the intimate spaces of family and relationships. This work explores how the unspoken and inherited burdens of the past reiterate identities, desires, and the capacity for liberation within the bounds of a changing society. The novel is a classic in its representation of individual trauma and transgenerational trauma which, in the context of the Middle Eastern slave trade, refers to the psychological and emotional effects of slavery experienced by earlier generations and passed down through families.

The book centres around the stories of three sisters, Mayya, Asma and Khawla; their forefathers and the political history of Oman. Jokha Alharthi exhibits her mastery through the novel's innovative narrative style, magical realism and the picturisation of trauma-ridden lives of the characters. The researcher observes that she delineates the life of the common man with all its nuances and gives glimpses of the political turmoil in the region through deeply intimate familial portraits. Miriam Cooke, in her book *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* emphasises that "Breaking out of their silence, female Arab writers grapple with intense, traumatic experiences, using their narratives to give voice to the unspeakable realities of war, exile, and identity loss" (35).

Marilyn Booth, the translator of *Celestial Bodies*, studies the Contemporary Arab World at Oxford University. The novel *Celestial Bodies* was first published in Arabic as *Sayyidat al-quamar* meaning 'Ladies of the Moon.' The novel is written in

a historical perspective, like many other fictions of the Arabic world. Historical novels have developed as a major sub-genre in Arab-Anglophone literature. The renowned critic Munir Utaybah commenting on *Celestial Bodies*, remarked in his article “The allure of storytelling; the pain of remembering” in the book *On Narration and Critical Practice: Readings in Arabic and World Literature* that:

A complete world of societal relations, practices and customary usages is collapsing, sending the novel’s characters to the very edge, the border between two worlds, one of them a suffocating, rigid yet now fragile world and the other one mysterious, ambiguous, full of tensions and anxiety, of uneasy surveillance and fear of what will come. It is a precarious edge between one era and another, the border between the world of masters and that of slaves, between the worlds of human beings and of supernatural jinn, between living reality and nightmares, between genuine love and imagined love, between the society’s idea of a person and a person’s sense of self. (183)

Munir Utaybah’s comment, originally written in Arabic and later translated into English, serves as a profound expression on *Celestial Bodies*, reflecting on the novel’s portrayal of collapsing societal structures and the precarious borders between contrasting worlds. *Celestial Bodies* is about the fast changing political, social, economic and cultural life of Oman. The novel is a masterpiece, in its representation of individual trauma and transgenerational trauma which in the context of the Middle Eastern slave trade, refers to the psychological and emotional effects of slavery, experienced by earlier generations and passed down through families. Jokha Alharthi exhibits her mastery by the novel’s innovative narrative style, magical realism and the picturisation of trauma-ridden lives of the characters. She delineates the life of the

common man with all its nuances and gives glimpses of the political turmoil in the region.

Patricia Risso in her work, *Oman and Muscat: An Early Modern History* extrapolates the Sultanate's rise as a political and economic power during the early modern period holding a key position in the indigenous trade routes of the Indian Ocean (125). She explores the historical and geopolitical significance of Oman and its capital, Muscat, as pivotal points in the Indian Ocean trade network during the early modern period. Oman was a strategic location, which positioned it as a key player in facilitating the exchange of goods, cultures, and ideas with Africa, Asia and the Middle-East. A significant aspect of this was the spread of the slave trade, with Oman serving as a major transit point. Enslaved individuals were transported from the African mainland, particularly from regions such as Zanzibar and the Swahili Coast, to the Arabian Peninsula, South Asia, and beyond. The text also sheds light on the socio-political dynamics that fuelled the slave trade, detailing the interactions between Omani rulers and colonial powers such as the Portuguese and British. These interactions shaped the flow of trade and the expansion of Omani influence into East Africa, particularly Zanzibar, which became a significant centre for the slave trade under Omani control. The study argues that Jokha Alharthi lays the groundwork of her story at that point, making use of the history of slave trade and its repercussions, paying a significant tribute to the political and cultural history of Oman.

The novel traces an Omani family over three generations, shaped by the rapid social changes and consequent shifts in outlook since Oman's emergence as an oil-rich nation in the 1960s. The book provides a richly imagined, engaging and poetic insight into a society in transition and represents previously obscured societies with all their vulnerabilities. The novel explores the experiences of three generations of two

families, beginning in the 20th century and extending to contemporary times, an era of extraordinary social and geopolitical change. Though focused on three sisters, the researcher emphasises, that the book explores the broad picture of domestic life in the Middle East, including rich details of traditional customs. This study contends that it is not a mere domestic narrative but ensembles the lives and trauma of the characters in all its clarity, demonstrating how personal suffering connects to collective historical memory.

Set in the village of al-Awafi just outside the capital city of Muscat, the story gives an expansive view of a culture unknown to the West and to certain other parts of the globe. It pictures the experiences of everyone – from the poorest servants to the wealthiest merchants. The researcher emphasises that women characters in the novel are portrayed as strong individuals and not as stereotypes. Alharthi reveals the intricacies of domestic life as they follow traditional practices. She also shows how their expectations get torpedoed, despite the earnest efforts they make in life, highlighting the tension between personal agency and societal constraint.

The researcher analyses how the story develops in a typical style, with the main focus on marriage and childbirth. The matchmaking of Mayya, the seamstress; Asma the reader and Khawla the beauty, become the crux of the novel. However, finding appropriate husbands for the ladies forms only a small framework of the book. The author spans generations and moves from one city to another in Muscat. The researcher emphasises that the notable feature of the book lies in its presentation.

The structure of the novel consists of a number of chapters that are haphazardly told, but can be divided into definite sections of third-person narratives and several first-person narratives by Abdallah, the central character, which are quite unique, emotional and self-containing traumatic experiences of childhood that keep

haunting him throughout his life. The researcher observes that by choosing his own words and style, Abdallah reveals his vulnerability as he struggles with memories of his childhood. He is torn between his memories of an abusive father and a wife whom he feared did not love him. As Abdallah travels to Frankfurt, he delves into his past memories and as he remembers his unpleasant experiences that pop up and choke him, he is transported across years of the past, reducing himself to a ten-year-old boy. His insecurities haunt him as he is torn between his love for his father and also resentment at him for inflicting corporal punishments on him when he was a boy. He experiences severe identity crisis as he fails to connect emotionally with his wife.

In *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writings*, Brinda Mehta endorses that these writers use literary strategies to reclaim their histories and navigate the complexities of postcolonial identity (159). The researcher notes that Mehta discusses how these writers blend personal and collective memories, employing rituals, myths, and storytelling to challenge dominant narratives and assert their own cultural identities (160). All the chapters entitled 'Abdallah' are marked by a unique font style indicative of his uniqueness, and as a trauma marker, when he shares his past memories that lie embedded in his mind and exposes his experiences to the readers. This stylistic choice, the researcher contends, signals the disruption of linear time characteristic of traumatic memory.

The novel highlights an upper-class Omani family keen on maintaining the traditions and customs with a little acceptance of modified social behaviour. Even though they try to accept the fast-changing social world, the researcher observes that they cannot shake themselves free from the unacceptable liaisons and entanglements of master-slave relationships of the past. The impact of an all-powerful patriarchal

system on dependents, especially women, is distinct, and the sufferings and confrontations surface as it tries to usurp different generations and individuals.

In the novel, Azzan is a patriarch whose love for a Bedouin woman tears apart his marital relationship. His wife Salima adheres strictly to the patriarchal norms even though she suffers under them. She denies her granddaughter London's challenge to inherited values through an unacceptable linkage to a man of lower social status than her. London grows up as a woman aware of her rights, and the researcher emphasises that the society's attempts to normalise her are fiercely resisted by her.

The three daughters exemplify the society's reaction and notions of ideal womanhood in a time of rapid socio-economic transition. Mayya, the eldest daughter, prefers not to challenge her family and accepts the marriage proposal of the son of a rich merchant. She burns with pain as she voluntarily gives up her love for a boy in the neighbourhood and marries Abdallah, son of merchant Sulayman. The second daughter Asma, a voracious reader of classics and religious texts, seeks education, then marries an artist who is the son of emigrated Issa, a relative of theirs. Issa has emigrated to Egypt and sets up his family at Cairo. However, he cannot continue to live in Egypt for long due to his identity crisis in a foreign nation and returns to Oman. Therefore, the researcher observes that, that relationship too is acceptable as per social norms.

The researcher analyses how the youngest daughter Khawla insists on waiting for her cousin who has proclaimed that he would marry only her during their childhood. She too marries him satisfying societal norms and quenches the questions of the society. However, all their lives become turbulent, without much peace at heart, conveying the message of impermanence of social institutions like marriages. Khawla experiences an identity crisis as she realises that she is being victimised by her

husband. This victimisation is emblematic of how patriarchal structures perpetuate themselves through emotional violence even when physical violence is absent.

The women characters in the novel experience pain and existential conflicts in their family and society, and they become the representative women of a nation undergoing transition. However, the researcher observes that they are more resilient in the face of adversity and face the multiple traumas they are subjected to when compared to their male counterparts. Even though there are prominent male characters seen as the story develops, women remain as the pivotal characters encountering trauma with resilience. The story develops through the narration of the inner struggles of Abdallah, yet the researcher emphasises that it simultaneously projects the multitude of traumas that women are constantly subjected to in their lives. This dual focus, the study argues, creates a complex portrait of gendered suffering and endurance and analyses how trauma is handled by both genders.

The novel's structure, though intricate, is engaging. Abdallah's father was a very rich man; his business was of dates. However, his riches were hoarded not through date business but via slave trade, which was in vogue, surpassing all legalities. Merchant Sulayman's father was engaged in the sales of arms and ammunition and slave trade with countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the researcher observes that arms sales stopped with his generation.

The story of Abdallah's life is overcast by the death of his mother Fathima, which was interpreted as mysterious. Some said it was by a Jinn, an evil spirit, and some others said she was poisoned. A few others said that she was killed by the basil bush in the courtyard that attracted vipers. Nobody knew the exact reason of her death. After the incident, Abdallah was raised by Zarifa, his father's slave. Thus, Zarifa becomes a maternal figure in Abdallah's life. Zarifa, goes through her own

trauma and abandonments, revealing an intricate plot of love and hate. Abdallah never gets emotional contentment from Mayya, his wife, as his love for her is not reciprocated.

The world of Oman as presented through the novel of Jokha Alharthi can be assimilated well if one takes a peek at the political history of the Sultanate. The Sultanate of Oman navigated the waves of the Arab Spring with a focus on economic concessions and promises of reform, mitigating the risks of widespread unrest by addressing localised grievances (Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State*, 243–245).

The researcher analyses how, unlike other Middle Eastern nations that swerved under the waves of the Arab Spring of 2011, Oman remained relatively peaceful. Though absolute monarchy prevails in the Islamic state, the parliament is constituted by the elected members from the people, who are keen on maintaining peace and harmony in the region. Moreover, the Sultan shuns all terrorist activities and takes stringent steps to stop Omani citizens from entering the terrorist factions of the Arab World. The Sultanate has the final say in deciding the trade of petroleum with foreign nations and does not support Western hegemony.

The Sultanate maintains healthy relations with the United Nations Organization and supports the UN in nuclear disarmament for world peace. Even though there were protests in Muscat, Dhofar, Salalah and other cities in support of the Arab Spring demanding more jobs for its citizens, they were peaceful. The researcher notes that unstable economy and unemployment were the issues put forward by the protesters. The Sultan took immediate measures to create more employment opportunities for the natives. More than sixty percent of jobs at the government sector was reserved for Omani nationals, thus fulfilling the demand of the

protesters. Hence, Oman remained a peaceful nation during the Arab Spring Movement even though the country was being ruled by a monarch. The researcher contends that unlike Egypt or Iran, the living conditions of the people were not compromised in Oman.

However, Oman has its own share of cultural backlog that transcends generations despite the developments in the society, modern and accommodative in outlook. Oman may be free perhaps from holocaust or war trauma, trauma due to civil war or repressive forces of the government – those external factors that contribute to the production of trauma – but the researcher argues that citizens were not devoid of psychological trauma that haunted them because of social practices, superstitious beliefs and patriarchy. This study contends that it is this world of the psyche, the troubled areas, the rough patches that are being explored by Jokha Alharthi in her novel.

The researcher interprets how, through this tracing of intimate family relationships against a changing socio-geopolitical background, Alharthi delineates a gripping story that announces Oman's metamorphosis into a complex nation with a culture of its own, with transitions of societies faced with new opportunities and pressures. The researcher emphasises that the innovative literary style, which helps to interpret the trauma of individual life, proves to be subtle and experimental, employing fragmented narration and stream-of-consciousness technique.

The researcher analyses how *Celestial Bodies* begins from the vantage point of Mayya, where she is praying to God just to give her a glimpse of the boy whom she loves so dearly. It is a single-sided love, not reciprocated, not even communicated to the boy for that matter. Mayya burns in her desire to see him, but she gets engaged to Abdallah, the son of merchant Sulayman. Abdallah is ready to do anything to please

her, but the researcher identifies that Mayya is detached from him emotionally, and hence he could never feel her love or care towards him. This emotional distance, the study contends, becomes the source of Abdallah's deepest trauma in adulthood.

Abdallah had many unpleasant memories which haunted him for life. Even while he was dozing off on his flight to Frankfurt, he had a nightmare. The whole thread of the novel develops through the thoughts of Abdallah in his wakefulness or in his dreams. During his nap in the flight, the researcher notes, that he woke up half talking: "Don't hang me upside down in the well, don't. Please, no! Don't" (153).

Abdallah was a victim of severe mental trauma. The researcher notes that psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies. Psychoanalytical theories of trauma paired with additional theoretical frameworks such as post-structural, socio-cultural and post-colonial theory form the basis of criticism that interpret representations of an extreme experience and its effect upon identity and memory.

Abdallah was constantly haunted by an experience of his childhood. Even though many years had passed after the incident, the researcher observes, that he was still unable to overcome that trauma. He was married to Mayya, he had a newborn baby, yet he got memories of that particular day in which he was subjected to an experience that ultimately broke him down, shaking away his self-confidence and trust in his parents. The researcher notes that trauma studies explore the impact of trauma in literature and society by analysing its psychological and cultural significance. It studies how such an experience shapes an individual, his identity and memory.

Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) dominates trauma's conceptual employment by literary trauma theorists today. Trauma studies were first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. The researcher observes that this model of trauma advocates that suffering is unrepresentable. This traditional model is followed by a pluralistic model of trauma that suggests the assumed unspeakability of trauma as one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature.

In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), written in collaboration with Josef Breuer, Sigmund Freud argues that “traumatic hysteria develops from a repressed earlier experience of assault.” The original event, they explain, “was not in itself traumatic but became so only by its subsequent reproduction.” As the earlier event continues to inflict harm through repression, the talking cure or *abreaction* becomes essential for understanding the lingering effects of the past and gaining freedom from its symptom-causing grasp. Moreover, Freud and Breuer emphasise that the traumatic event is comprehended only after a period of latency or “deferred action” (*Nachträglichkeit*) that delays both its effects and its meaning (192).

The researcher interprets how it is only after a contemporary event that brings forth the previously repressed event that the past event can become known in the process of remembering. When Abdallah was hurt by Mayya’s actions and words, he reminisces about it in his solitude and the pain of his past experience returns to him in its full vigour. The researcher contends that Mayya's insults become a trigger that accentuate his forgotten pain and preoccupies his mind, reducing him to a ten-year-old boy experiencing severe trauma. This regression, the study emphasises, demonstrates the timelessness of traumatic memory.

Freud and Breuer argue that the dictum “cause ceases when effect ceases” (6) is to be reversed. They conclude from their observations that the recollection process of traumatic events operates for years indirectly seeking out intermediate causal links. The researcher emphasises that the physical and mental pain totally unrelated to previous traumatic incidents would still provoke painful memories, long after the event. The Freudian idea that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning altogether becomes applicable to all the traumatised characters in Jokha Alharthi's novel.

Zarifa, the slave of Merchant Sulayman, had a son named Sanjar. Being a slave child, life was not easy for him. When they were playing away from the attention of elders, Sanjar and his friend Marhun, treated Abdallah like a slave. One day they instigated Abdallah to steal his father's rifle. They said they would consider him a man only if he stole the rifle and added that if he did not bring the rifle, they would roast him instead of the magpies. The boys wanted the rifle to shoot the magpies. The researcher observes that Abdallah was subjugated from a very early age by Sanjar. One day Abdallah stole the rifle and took it to his friends.

When Merchant Sulayman came to know about it, he became furious and gave Abdallah corporal punishment. He was hung, head down into a well and made to remain so for a couple of hours and Abdallah was extremely scared by the act, but his father did not relent. The researcher analyses how the ill-treatment that he received from Sanjar and Marhun and the rebuke and the beating he received from his father made him scalded forever. “Later when Zarifa was angry at him, she used the same method to horrify him. When he disobeyed, Zarifa said she would complain to his father and he would hang him head down into the well once again, thus scarring the boy's soul. This experience made him quiver and he would withdraw into himself”

(Alharthi 166). Even though Abdallah was a successful merchant and a family man, the researcher contends that he was traumatised by the childhood experience. This lifelong suffering, the study argues, exemplifies the persistence of childhood trauma into adulthood.

When Mayya delivered their first child, Abdallah fawned over her, giving her all his attention and care. He satisfied every demand of Salima, Mayya's mother, to do the birth-care for the mother. Salima ordered twenty chickens for Mayya to recover from the pangs of childbirth. She also asked Abdallah to slaughter a cow for the sake of the newborn and distribute it among the poor. He had already ordered thirty chickens and an ewe, much beyond the expectation of Mayya or Salima. Abdallah's earnestness in looking after his wife in fact reflected his yearning for love and care. When Abdallah asked Mayya whether she loved him, she laughed at him mockingly. She laughed and laughed, and he feared that her laugh would shatter every wall in their new house at Muscat (11). Mayya's callousness towards Abdallah made him feel insecure and accentuates his trauma.

Abdallah was exposed to trauma from the early years of life. He saw slaves being beaten up, ill-treated and abused by the people in his house. When his father merchant Sulayman had become old and lost his senses, he called out to Abdallah "Boy! Boy! Tie Sanjar up, tie him to the column on the east side of the courtyard, out there, in front of the house. Anyone who gives that slave water or shade has to answer to me" (13). The delirious merchant Sulayman went on shouting. Abdallah took his hand in his and told him that the government had freed the slaves a long time ago and that Sanjar had gone to Kuwait. Merchant Sulayman would argue. "The government can't free my slaves. I bought his mama Zarifa for twenty silver thalers! I fed her

when a sack of rice cost a hundred pure good silver coins. My slave, mine. How could he travel anyway without getting permission from me?" (14).

Bhacker M. Reda explains in her book *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: The Roots of British Domination*, that the spread of slave trade was so obnoxious that it could not be eradicated even though the League of Nations officially outlawed slavery in the year 1926 and Oman's slave trade itself outlawed in 1970. Her book examines the historical context of Muscat and Zanzibar's involvement in the Indian Ocean's slave trade as part of Oman's economic and political activities during the 18th and 19th centuries (25–56). Rich merchants like Sulayman ill-treated slaves subjecting them to intensive physical pain and trauma when they failed to obey them. Merchant Sulayman was generally abusive in nature, and he even ill-treated his son even though he loved and cared for him.

The researcher interprets how Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narration and History* speak about the "belatedness" of trauma (15). She concludes that an incident becomes traumatic not when it is happening, but after many years. The researcher emphasises that this is the belatedness of trauma that Sigmund Freud explains in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud states: "events in our childhood have a great influence on our adult lives, thus shaping our personalities – for example, anxiety originating from painful experience is hidden from consciousness and may cause problems during adulthood" (7). The researcher notes that traumatic events create conflicts in the ego which "split off" from the unity of the ego and are repressed but return later, often in dreams (8). The researcher contends that the conflicts caused by trauma create traumatic neurosis, which is "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (35). Abdallah is tormented by his childhood memories even during his

adulthood. The researcher emphasises that every time he thought about the incident, he was traumatised. It was more painful in his memories than at the time it actually occurred. Abdallah was also haunted by the obscurity regarding his mother's death. Abdallah's mother had died soon after giving birth to him.

The researcher analyses why Abdallah could not find anyone to ask how his mother died. No one ever told him how she died. The researcher notes that when he got older, he asked his aunt. She said that it was the basil bush that killed her. Zarifa, the maternal figure in his life, also told him that the basil bush killed his mother. The researcher emphasises that Abdallah was perturbed by these replies. When Abdallah was tied up and hung head down into the well, he had many wounds on his body. When he reached home, Zarifa dressed up his wounds, which were pretty bad, with salt and turmeric. The researcher notes that that day Abdallah asked a single question over and over: he wanted to know how his Mama died (Alharthi 30). This obsessive questioning, the study contends, reveals the unresolved grief underlying his traumatic condition.

The researcher interprets how Abdallah is presented by Jokha Alharthi as a sensitive boy who repressed his feelings of trauma and grew up carrying his mental burden. The researcher notes that a reader comes across several traumatic narrations in the novel. Abdallah's daughter London's friend, Hanan, who was a teacher at an elementary school in Salalah Town, south of Oman, was brutally raped by a group of teenage boys who attacked the teachers' dormitory in the middle of the night. The researcher emphasises that people remained silent about it. Hanan had a nervous breakdown and London stayed in the hospital with her (60). This incident, demonstrates how trauma reverberates through communities and generations. The pain of Hanan and her trauma affected Abdallah too as he was reminded of his own

pain. The researcher notes that Abdallah met his bedridden father at the hospital and recounted the incident. He said that his head and body were colliding against the edges of the stone walls of the well as he was hanging upside down in the total blackness of the well, tied up in palm fibres with no idea when he might be untied. "As the hand of his father, who did all this, no longer moved, stayed passive and fused to the feeding tubes, completely motionless, Abdallah seized it and moved it along the bumpy traces of his wounds. He pressed it hard into his flesh and burst into hopeless, desperate tears" (32). The researcher contends that Abdallah struggled incessantly to get out of his pain, but every painful incident, even when he was not personally involved, filled him with anguish and trauma. This pattern, the study observes, reveals the contagious nature of traumatic experience.

The researcher interprets how the mind as an organism, according to Freud, as expressed in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, contains outer and inner layers with the outer layer having a "protective shield" against harmful external stimuli (25). However, the researcher notes that when "fright" occurs, that is, "the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it" – the lack of anxiety coupled with the external stimuli causes neurosis (32). The researcher emphasises that anxiety acts as a protection mechanism against traumatic neurosis, but unexpected fright carries no defence. The external stimuli rupture the barrier and enter the inner psyche without adequate internal defence. The researcher analyses how Freud writes: "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield . . . with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (33). The researcher contends that trauma is imagined as both an external agent that shocks the unprepared system and an internal action of defence against overstimulation.

Traumatic neurosis is marked by the "compulsion to repeat" the memory of the painful event with the hopes of mastering the unpleasant feeling (18). The dreams of the traumatised patient repeat the experience to "master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of traumatic neurosis" (37). Freud writes that "the patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it." Hence the patient "is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary event instead of remembering it as something belonging to the past" (18-19). The researcher contends that Abdallah was a victim of traumatic neurosis, and his condition worsened as he lingered in the memory of the traumatic event. This compulsive return, the study argues, characterises the circular nature of unresolved trauma.

The researcher notes how the narrative of the event is crucial to recovery. According to Freud, the self does not remember the actual event but only the "reproductions" of the traumatic experience that arise in dreams (19). The researcher emphasises that traumatic memory is abnormal and lacks the narrative necessary to integrate it into the psyche. The emphasis on narrative recall for normal integration of memory and the general idea of memory as a storehouse of experience helps in the literary conceptualisation of trauma. The researcher contends that Abdallah is unable to recover from his trauma as he does not have an empathetic listener. This absence of witness, the study observes, perpetuates his suffering across decades.

The researcher interprets how *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of Sigmund Freud serves as a seminal work in the interpretation of trauma experienced by people at various junctures of life. Literary critics like Cathy Caruth, Shoshanna Felman and others followed his lead. The researcher emphasises that Abdallah's experience of trauma can be effectively analysed through the lens of Freud's theories on the mind's

protective mechanisms and the psychological impacts of unexpected stimuli, as outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The researcher analyses how Abdallah, the motherless child was very much influenced by Zarifa, the slave woman who brought him up with good care. Moreover, Zarifa was Merchant Sulayman's beloved and looked after his household after his wife's death.

The researcher emphasises that Zarifa had a traumatic life herself while taking care of Abdallah, but her interferences made permanent marks on his character. Her plans often wounded him during his adolescence. The researcher observes that Zarifa tried to force Abdallah into having sex with one or another daughter of slave families that had long inhabited his father's household. These forays were sudden and rude, and completely without emotion. The researcher notes that most of these girls were either afraid to say no, or they were bent on acquiring some gifts. The whole thing just made him turn more strongly inward. The researcher contends that it drove Zarifa mad as she thought he was an easy target for men's wayward desires, especially boys older than him (Alharthi 48). This misguided protection, the study argues, constitutes a form of secondary trauma inflicted with the intention of preventing harm.

Zarifa was trying to protect Abdallah with whatever wiles she knew, but it shattered him and intensified his traumatic psychic state. Kalí Tal in her book *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* presents a coherent reading of the relationships between individual trauma and its cultural interpretation using as its focus the phenomenon of sexual violence. She says: "They obviously shatter the individuals and lead them to trauma. Such experiences scar them for life, but they try to survive the trauma in later life by trying to articulate their pain to people around them" (136). She adds that such experiences scar them for life, but they try to survive the trauma in later life by trying to articulate their pain.

Abdallah, who grew up with his trauma, tried to convey his plight several times to Mayya, his wife. He did not even get a good listener in his wife, and he felt insecure in his own house. This failure of communication, the study emphasises, demonstrates the isolation inherent in traumatic experience. The researcher analyses how Abdallah's family could never give him emotional security. During childhood, memories of the severe punishments given to him by his father made him turn towards Zarifa for support. But as he grew up, the researcher notes that Zarifa's abandonment by her husband Habib, his own mother's death caused by an alleged basil bush made him an emotional wreck, a weakling who had not much contact with the people around. When he got married, the researcher emphasises that Mayya, his wife too seemed distant to him, unable to emotionally connect with him. Abdallah lacked self-confidence in his adult life even though he flourished in his business. The researcher observes that his son Muhammed was autistic and Mayya spent all her time and energy caring for him. The condition of Muhammed too increased the psychological trauma Abdallah was subjected to. The researcher contends that he frequently dreamt of his dead mother and Zarifa. Even in his dreams his father seemed angry with him and behaved rudely. This multi-layered trauma, the study argues, illustrates how successive losses compound psychological suffering.

The researcher interprets how Sigmund Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* says: “the repressed memories in the conscious mind manifest as dreams” (78). When a person falls asleep, his conscious mind will become dormant but the subconscious mind will be active. The anxieties, fears, frustrations and pain that were suppressed will reappear in the form of dreams. The researcher emphasises that during sleep, the unconscious condenses, displaces and forms representations of the dream content, the latent content of which is often unrecognisable to the individual upon

waking. Abdallah's predicament of life was of insecurity and loneliness and consequently, the dreams he had at night tortured him mentally. He feared that his father was angry with him, and even after his father's death, he got recurrent dreams of an angry father who refused to pull him up from the well. This perpetual punishment in dreams, the study emphasises, represents the internalisation of paternal authority as superior to others.

The researcher analyses how Abdallah relived his experience even in his adulthood and was unable to narrate the whole incident in the order it happened. The reader who bears witness to his narration would understand that he was deviating from what really happened that day. The researcher notes that he would speak about being hung upside down inside the well. As the related happenings are stored in the sub-consciousness, Abdallah revealed his trauma here and there. As per Cathy Caruth's theory: "acute trauma is unspeakable" (4), the researcher contends that Abdallah's trauma lay at a point where he had not named or mentioned it before. But his trauma resurfaced even when he fell into a slumber on the flight. Moreover, the researcher observes that every death reminded Abdallah of his upside-down position. This associative memory, the study argues, demonstrates how trauma creates networks of triggering stimuli.

Alharthi tries to convey Abdallah's traumatic experience by depicting his confusions about that event. The author uses narrative techniques like broken sentences, illusions and illogical unrelated statements to connect his sub-conscious to conscious. "From my underwater head pour the many-coloured plastic blocks that Muhammed plays with. He has to have them lined up, no gaps. If there is any alteration to the way they were arranged, even one block, he screams and screams, no pause, screaming, Muhammed screaming" (Alharthi 148). The researcher interprets

the hallucinations of Abdallah as a consequence of the trauma he experienced. Here the author brings in an image of Muhammed, his son, through Abdallah's speech about unrelated things and connects it to him through his usage of the phrase 'underwater head'. The researcher notes that the author also connects the screams of Muhammed to the screams of Abdallah when he was hung upside down in the well. His stream of consciousness is narrated here by the author to indicate imminent symptoms of trauma using broken images, voices and related speech content. This stylistic fragmentation, the study emphasises, mirrors the psychological fragmentation of traumatic memory.

The researcher analyses how the trauma experienced by Abdallah at a very young age made him fear his father with a potential to inflict death upon him. When Abdallah became an adult and his father was bedridden, there was a mixed feeling of love and hate in him. Abdallah could never overcome the death image his father had in his mind. That's why "When his father died in Nahda Hospital and Zarifa screamed and screamed, he was immediately reminded of his screams in the well. He had screamed that way only when he was hung head down in the well, not even when his father died" (32). The researcher observes that he remembered how his father loved and cared for him when he was a child. His father once took him out for dinner at a shaykh's house. It was a splendid one, but he did not overeat or misbehave as he desperately wanted his father's approval (148). This ambivalence, the study contends, typifies the confused attachment patterns resulting from parental abuse.

The researcher interprets how there was an instance when a desert viper was about to bite Abdallah, and his father saved him immediately, beating it with a cane. "He remembered how his father hugged him so tightly that he was overwhelmed at his love" (149). The incidence of Abdallah stealing his father's gun to shoot magpies

with his friends, infuriated his father so much. Young Abdallah could never take the intensity of the punishment and the scar it left on his mind which damaged his soul, alienating him from his father forever. He took care of him in the hospital; but as he saw his father suffering, Abdallah was reminded of his own traumatic experience which haunted him day and night. This juxtaposition of tenderness and violence, the study argues, creates irresolvable psychological conflict.

When Zarifa died, Abdallah did not go for her funeral though she was the mother-figure in his life. Zarifa died many years after his father's death, but on hearing the news, Abdallah shivered. It was a peaceful death, but he feared that his father would come out of the grave and question him for letting her die. Abdallah immediately lapsed into his trauma and asked Zarifa if she remembered the day, he was hung head down in the dark well. Abdallah felt himself shouting from the bottom of the well to his father that Zarifa died a peaceful death. Abdallah felt that he was still stuck in that well and his father did not approve of him. Abdallah experienced this trauma throughout his life, never achieving the narrative closure necessary for healing, which is described by Alharthi in the following manner:

Pull. Father! Haul up the rope. Tug hard on the end you are holding until the other end tightens around my waist enough that I come up. The well is dark, Father, and snakes live in here. Lift me out, I won't steal your rifle. I won't go off with Marhun and Sanjar, anyway. Sanjar is working as a porter in the Saudi now, Father and Shanna works as a school janitor. Zarifa is the one who left them; she couldn't stand life in Kuwait. Get me out of this well, Father . . .

Hoist me up, Father. Zarifa, bring me up from this well. I'm afraid. I am so, so afraid. (168)

The author follows a definite pattern to express the mental state of Abdallah by giving sentences like 'I'm afraid' as a single line. 'I am so, so afraid' in yet another single line. The illogically connected sentences, the broken syntax and certain words are used by the author to convey the psychological trauma experienced by Abdallah.

The researcher analyses how Zarifa, a slave-girl, was purchased for twenty silver thalers during her childhood by Merchant Sulayman (13). The family of Zarifa, once proud owners of a khanjar and rifle, the researcher notes, went through hard times and had no choice but to sell her off as a slave. She came from a very large family, with about nineteen brothers and sisters. The researcher emphasises that her mother gave birth every year, and each time added to the already crushing burden of hunger. She remembered only beatings and hunger. One day her mother told her, "Come, Riyfa" she said. That was Zarifa's name at that time. Her mother told her that they were going somewhere where she would have good things to eat, meat and ghee and dates and rice. The researcher observes that she felt happy that no longer would she experience hunger, finally she would eat well (16). This commodification of the child, the study contends, illustrates the intergenerational trauma embedded in systems of slavery.

The researcher interprets how Zarifa's parents took her to a market where slave trade was in vogue, and they sold her to Merchant Sulayman. Zarifa got a new identity there. The researcher emphasises that as Zarifa stepped forward, the merchant Sulayman called out "Come here, little girl!" She came forward. The merchant felt the flesh of her arms and thighs as if she were a sheep, and he said to Zarifa's mother, "Does she know how to work?" The researcher notes that her mother said that she was hardworking. He peered into Zarifa's eyes and said, "Raise your dishdasha," so he could see her legs. The researcher observes that when he said, "twenty silver thalers,"

her mama quickly took out a knotted cloth into which he counted the money. Zarifa's parents swiftly went off and she was left alone there (16–17). The researcher contends that she did not even get a chance to bid goodbye to her parents who sold her for money to save the rest of the family. This traumatic separation, the study argues, constitutes a foundational wound that shapes Zarifa's subsequent relationships.

The researcher analyses how at the merchant's house, there were already a few slaves and many others too who were bought the same day as Zarifa. Some of them looked frightened. The researcher notes that a man peered into each of their faces and said, "You, al-Mas'udi, you al-Balushi, you al-Harhi, and you, you're Zarifa" (17). The researcher emphasises that as there were four slaves bought on that day, only one could get the merchant's family name. Zarifa was renamed, and it was a source of pride for her. Being born a slave was worse than being sold into slavery, the shame was twice over. She tried to endure being a slave at least with dignity by taking on the master's name, as did those born into slavery in the household. The researcher contends that being fatherless, being nameless, a man with no origin, was the worst possible outcome. This naming trauma, the study emphasises, reflects the erasure of identity central to enslavement.

The researcher interprets how Zarifa tried hard to be a good slave at the house and pleased the merchant. She started loving him as years passed. The merchant too loved her. "Zarifa liked being called Zarifa bint Sulayman at-Tartariyya, it was a sign of security like a cosy house or a blanket. But her pride was stripped off by Merchant Sulayman's first wife, who called her Riyfa and her son Sanjar as the slave woman's bastard." (18) She also abused Merchant Sulayman calling him names as he pampered Zarifa more than her. The researcher contends that Zarifa returned to Sanjar, her son, after many rounds of this abuse from the merchant's first wife, and cried. The cruel

treatment of the master's wives on slaves like her and the difficulty she faced as a slave, the researcher notes, were manifold. The trauma of slavery, the study argues, exemplifies the intersection of gender and servitude.

Zarifa was not only a slave but also a concubine. When the wife of Merchant Sulayman died, Zarifa became the lady of the house. The researcher emphasises that slaves were subjected to various forms of trauma. When one of the slaves named Halima became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl, the slave owner Sulayman began to visit her often. The researcher notes that Zarifa could not tolerate it. She went on to torture the slave-girl and her child by beating them for silly reasons and deliberately starving them. The researcher observes that Sanjar, Zarifa's son, also abused the slave-girl and her child mercilessly. She endured all this insult and torture quietly for some time and one day, when she got a chance, she escaped during the night. Slave ownership, rape and the torture inflicted on the slaves by the owners were very common during those days. This cycle of abuse, the study emphasises, demonstrates how trauma perpetuates itself through hierarchies of power.

The researcher interprets how even though Zarifa was tormented by Merchant Sulayman's wife, she took revenge on the slave-girls who entered the household. These were the reverberations of trauma she experienced. The researcher notes that even though she was aware of being abused, her position made her commit serious acts of indiscretion. Jokha Alharthi does not support the acts of Zarifa, but the researcher emphasises that the author is not judging her morally or proclaiming her to be selfish and insensitive. She is merely exposing a traumatic society where Zarifa once was a slave and later became the wife of her owner. The researcher observes that Zarifa had undergone trauma as a child which shaped her worldview and defined her choices. Later, Zarifa tried to narrate her history to Abdallah. Thus, her stories helped

Abdallah to comprehend his past. This intergenerational testimony, the study argues, represents the transmission of collective memory through oral narrative.

The researcher analyses how Zarifa opened up herself to Abdallah and he became a listener to her traumatic history. Since Abdallah was a victim of trauma himself, he was able to understand Zarifa's pain. His sufferings were caused by his own father, his wife and the people around him. Zarifa and her husband Habib were forced to lead a life of subjugation and alienation, lacking identity. The researcher emphasises that Habib, Zarifa's husband, was a black slave belonging to Zanzibar. He was captured in a slave raid and taken from his homeland in the interior of Africa. Habib was tormented by the memory of the slave-ship experience where he was transported after his capture like cattle without any consideration for basic human dignity.

Alharthi deftly portrays the trauma of slavery and its impact through Habib, Merchant Sulayman's young slave. Habib, was eccentric and aggressive and ten years younger to Zarifa. It was really tough for Habib to adjust himself to his life in al-Awafi. Habib did not want to banish the memory of his homeland. He could not forget the terrifying journey that ended his calm, pleasant days in Africa. He remembered the filthy crammed ships those merchants packed them into. He remembered his mother's wails when other children were shoved into other boats and the nursing baby who died of smallpox while on her breast. The slave traders snatched him away and threw him into the sea.

Habib could never reconcile with his masters who did them wrong and destroyed them. He would scream in the middle of the night or dawn distressed by their plight. He could never understand why Zarifa was so condescending to Merchant Sulayman and his family. Habib was an intense trauma victim who screamed from the

depths of his sleep saying, “we are free people” (191). He used to lament about his journey as a captured slave, being leashed out into the slave market.

He remembered how corpses of slave men were thrown into the seas when they died of torture at the hands of white men who captured them. He remembered the pirates and the nasty eye disease he contracted during the journey. He was barely twenty when he was caught by them. He wanted to run away from al-Awafi and return to his native place. He wanted Sanjar, his son, too to escape from there and stop living there as a slave man, when he grew up. (123–124)

Habib could barely get over the trauma he experienced after becoming a slave. It was a three-day voyage through a ship to Zanzibar, but there was nothing to eat or drink. Those who died were thrown overboard. He experienced hallucinations due to his weakness, sea sickness and lack of food and water. Then there was the slave market, where slaves like him were sold like cattle. The trauma made them forget their past or the future. He wanted to sleep on firm land, for once. Habib had lost his siblings and his mother always cried for her lost children.

Rothna Begum in her work, *I was sold: Abuse and Exploitation of Migrant Domestic Workers in Oman* states: “Many migrant domestic workers in Oman face serious abuses, including confinement, overwork, unpaid wages, and physical and sexual abuse. Oman’s legal framework leaves them unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation and makes it difficult for them to escape abusive situations” (204). Habib and his people were abused, tortured and were treated like cattle. They became victims of transgenerational trauma of captivity and slavery. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a scholar in Native American studies, defines Transgenerational trauma as “Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, emanating from massive group trauma” (15). The tribals of African countries were caught,

separated from their families, homes and hopes and transported to Europe and Arabia as slaves. Their collective trauma was passed from generation to generation scalding their memories becoming transgenerational trauma of identity. They could never adjust themselves with the living conditions of other continents like climate, food and society. With their intense longing for their homeland, they continued perpetually in a state of trauma, unhealed forever. Though a pact was signed between the United Nations and the slave trading countries, slavery continued illegally for a few more decades.

Sanjar, Habib's son when he grew up married Shanna, and decided to move to Kuwait away from Merchant Sulayman's family as he wanted to break away from the shackles of slavery, but his mother Zarifa was not ready to let Sanjar leave her master even though they were legally free to move. Her years of slavery had turned her into a shadow of Merchant Sulayman. It was Habib who instigated his son to move away from their master. Their stress response is passed down to their children and subsequently to future generations. Kai Erikson in his essay "Notes on Trauma and Community" discusses collective trauma and its impact on communities.

By collective trauma, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, and it can produce a form of social fragmentation that few individual traumas can match. (185)

Erikson explains that trauma is not confined to individuals alone but extends to entire communities, especially those who share a common traumatic experience. Habib and the other slaves transported on that particular ship underwent a terrible traumatic experience. The researcher emphasises that they had lost everything - their home,

their land, their loved ones, their country and identity – and were forcibly taken from the continent of Africa to Arabia, to become slaves and to endure the taunts and torture of their masters. The experiences they had on the ship during the perilous journey were horrendous. The researcher observes that Habib remembered that journey until his death and narrated it to Zarifa:

They sank, down and down and down until they reached the bottom. The fish came up to them and they heard terrifying sounds and felt cold, so cold. All of them were chilled and terrified. They grabbed hold of each other, but there was such total darkness that each man felt an overwhelming loneliness as he could not see his brothers. Suddenly Habib said to the others, ‘We need fire’ and he struck his flint. But the ocean swallowed the light. (Alharthi 94)

Traumatic incidents leave a permanent mark on the human psyche. The researcher contends that the scars were too deep on Habib's psyche that he never healed from the trauma he experienced on the ship. He, along with many others, remained in the perpetual trauma of losing their nation, culture and language, being sold off like cattle and being subjected to humiliation, insult, brutality and torture at the hands of their masters. This oceanic trauma, the study argues, becomes a metaphor for the gruesome life of slaves at their masters' place.

Clara Mucci's book *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma:*

Intergenerational Transmission, Psychoanalytic Treatment and the Dynamics of Forgiveness explores the complexities of trauma that extend beyond the individual, encompassing collective and intergenerational dimensions. Mucci asserts that trauma is not confined to a single generation. The psychological wounds inflicted by extreme events can be transmitted across generations, affecting descendants who may not have directly experienced the original trauma. This intergenerational transmission

manifests in various forms, including unconscious behaviours, relational patterns, and even physiological responses, as descendants inherit the unresolved grief and pain of their ancestors. (5-8)

The researcher notes that Mucci also discusses how trauma can permeate entire communities or groups, creating a shared narrative of suffering. Mucci points out: “collective trauma disrupts social cohesion and cultural identity, leading to a fragmented sense of belonging among members of the affected community” (25). The researcher contends that the slave community in the novel represents precisely this dynamic of collective wounding. Psychological trauma experienced by communities and identity group’s collective memory and shared identity is called collective trauma. Mucci observes that trauma becomes collective by the shared emotional and psychological distress experienced by a group or community and can shape individual and collective identity leading to cultural and social fragmentation due to anxiety, depression and PTSD. When the collective trauma affects subsequent generations, it becomes transgenerational trauma (10-20).

Kai T. Erikson in his foundational work *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* defines collective trauma as: “A blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs their prevailing sense of community” (187). The transgenerational effects are not only psychological, but familial, social and cultural. Habib, wanted to overcome transgenerational trauma of which he was a victim. Unlike other slaves who devoted their entire lifetime to serving their masters, Habib wanted to break away from the chain of slavery and reclaim his freedom. Even though slave trade had come to an end legally, illegal merchants still continued to capture black men from Africa as slaves and sold them in American, Middle East and certain parts of Europe.

The slave progeny who had no idea about their motherland, were perturbed by their parent's narration of their displacement, trauma and difficulties they had endured in life. Even their children's lives were that of slaves facing discriminations of all kinds. Habib, even though was married to Zarifa, had to face continuous forays of disruption of his self-respect as he had witnessed that his wife was the beloved of his master and she fulfilled his desires with pleasure. There was nothing left in al-Awafi to bind him, as he felt estranged even from his wife and son Sanjar. Hence Habib, a victim of psychological and transgenerational trauma, left his master Merchant Sulayman for Africa.

The researcher analyses how the history of the slave trade in Oman is horrible, which included the Africans brought as slaves and their children born as slaves. These children inherited the trauma from their parents who were slaves and had lost their identity, homeland and culture. The researcher emphasises that they grew up among these traumatised souls who had lost themselves in the alien land and had to serve under heartless masters who mistreated and tortured them. Stayed within the walls of their masters' houses, they had no exposure to the outside world. Some of them did not even know that the government officially declared them free citizens of the country. This ignorance, the study contends, demonstrates how systemic oppression operates through the control of information and mobility.

The researcher points how Zarifa was curious to know what existed beyond the walls of the merchant's house. When Zarifa asked a slave-girl named Azayza if she had ventured out, she replied that she did not. She said, "You know Sulayman the merchant won't let us go out of this house." Zarifa said, "But doesn't he want to see beyond the market? Like us, doesn't he ever have the desire to see beyond this place?" Azayza replied, "Zarifa, your problem is that you're not satisfied with what God gives

you . . . No one goes out, Zarifa. We are servants in this house and in this house, we stay" (Alharthi 21). The researcher observes that here, Jokha Alharthi gives a picture of the abysmal conditions of slaves, who were scared to come out of their comfort zones. The researcher contends that they had been brainwashed into accepting the state of subjugation as their lot and did not even intend to venture out for a peek at the outside world. This internalised oppression, the study argues, constitutes a form of psychological enslavement that persists beyond legal emancipation.

The novel *Celestial Bodies* has several characters who experience trauma. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman states that "traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life. Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless, as at the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by an overwhelming force" (25–26). When the force is that of nature, people speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, people speak of atrocities. Traumatic events, the researcher observes, are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, the researcher contends that traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. "They confront human beings with extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe" (Herman 33). This framework, the study emphasises, illuminates the spectrum of trauma experienced across Alharthi's characters.

Herman in her book gives instances of trauma by war experience, disasters, terrorist attacks and concentration camps. However, trauma emanates from other sources as well, like the trauma of Zarifa and Habib caused by the intergenerational effects of slavery. The researcher emphasises that Zarifa's biological mother

Ankarbuta underwent terrible trauma and became insane. The immediate circumstances that led to her severe trauma were the brutal murder of her lover by her brother. Ankarbuta is then married to a man against her wishes, and he was very cruel that he raped her continually. This extreme state of helplessness – of physical torture and loss of love – the study contends, creates compounded trauma. The nameless death, epitomises the absolute erasure of identity, characteristic of slavery. The researcher contends that witnessing a loved one go through trauma is itself traumatic. This secondary trauma, the study emphasises, demonstrates how suffering radiates outward through intimate relationships.

Masouda, the old slave woman is yet another character in the novel who had been confined in a tiny room furnished only with a reed mat covering the pebbles. She had been stamped mad by her own daughter Shanna who came to her twice a day with food. There was nothing in the room other than the column to which Masouda was tied. Whenever she heard the screech of the door, she would grip the window bars desperately and shout “I’m here! I’m Masouda and I’m here” (Alharthi 75). Masouda’s screams were so loud, revealing the extent of her frustration and pain. Masouda was a slave at Merchant Sulayman’s house earlier. Masouda only knew how she became mad, who confined her in that room and what secret she carried in her heart. Her trauma surpassed her levels of endurance, and she became insane. The psychological state at which one loses his/her mind is not pathological.

Modernist trauma fiction quite often portrays the manifestation of trauma and madness. Slave women were often exposed to extreme conditions like torture and rape. If a slave woman unwittingly happened to hear or witness a crucial or critical situation, there would be no hesitation from her master’s side to silence her forever or push her to the extreme so that she becomes insane. Alharthi does not mention the

cause of madness of Masouda and even pictures her as a normal slave woman who did every household work. Nevertheless, Alharthi reveals the biggest secret regarding the death of Abdallah's mother, Fathima, Merchant Sulayman's wife through Masouda. She happened to overhear Abdallah's aunt's complaint to Merchant Sulayman about his wife, of having illicit relationship with a slave man and she asserted that she had witnessed their union. The infuriated Merchant Sulayman, vowed to kill Fathima and her paramour. Abdallah's aunt consoled him stating that she would take care of the situation. "The next day Merchant Sulayman went on a business trip which was scheduled earlier. But when he returned after three months, he came to know that his wife had died by the basil bush" (228).

Abdallah's aunt said that basil plant attracted vipers to it. Though Alharthi does not go into the specifics of the death of Fathima, everyone concluded that the basil bush killed Fathima. Shortly afterwards people heard about Masouda's madness. Masouda might have faced severe torture when the master of the house and his sister realised that Masouda knew about their shame. Moreover, Masouda might have witnessed, how Fathima was poisoned to death. Masouda was condemned to confinement and no one went near her. She was not allowed to speak about her trauma. Her experience, loneliness and broken psyche made her mad. Masouda kept screaming and shouting that "I'm here. I'm Masouda and I'm here" (75). She was trying to get the attention of others to give her testimony of trauma, but because she was stamped as insane, even her daughter kept a distance from her.

The hysteria of Masouda is a manifestation of extreme trauma she was subjected to after being witness to a secret of the family. *In Studies on Hysteria*, Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud say that the "hysteric suffers mainly from

reminiscences” (7). Masouda suffered trauma due to her experiences as a slave woman under dubious circumstances.

Modernist fiction narratives represent trauma, considering first the struggle between the need to speak about one’s trauma and the equally powerful impulse to keep silent. It is a reaction to events so terrible, so painful that victims cannot properly understand or incorporate the events into their normal existence. Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* says that domestic trauma often leads to disruption of psyche which at times manifest in the form of madness: “The result of prolonged, repeated trauma is a profound alteration in the character of the victim. The identity that is destroyed in captivity is replaced by another that permits the survival of the self in an environment of coercive control. The hysterical symptoms of the survivor represent the fragmented components of a self-held captive” (121).

Critics point out that contemporary trauma fiction is written with an intent of transmitting the trauma of its characters to readers while representing visuals, motives and repercussions of cultural oppression. Anne Whitehead, in her book, *Trauma Fiction* describes that the desire to tell us is a critical aspect of trauma fiction in which the authors are compelled to represent not only the systems of suffering that cause trauma but the after effects of trauma on individuals. She states: “In testing formal boundaries, trauma fiction seeks to foreground the nature and limitations of narratives and to convey the damaging and distorting impact of traumatic event” (82). The madness of Masouda though visible to readers, does not explicitly reveal the cause of it. The readers experience her trauma, when their hearts are filled with doubts, and they begin to crosscheck as to what could be the reason that made Masouda begin to scream.

Another character in the novel who experiences trauma of a different nature is Maneen. Maneen always sat on a large rock in front of the opening to his mud house. Maneen was in a bad shape and when someone passed by his house, he used to moan. "Give Maneen a few grains of rice, just a little handful! Pass him a bite of something sweet!" (Alharthi 68). Maneen's son Zayid studied in Abdallah's class. Maneen never budged from his spot on the boulder and kept crying, asking them to give him some Vimto to wet his throat (68). His son Zayid never laughed at school. Whenever Maneen caught sight of Abdallah, he would ask what trifle of food he had brought for him. Abdallah felt these questions were unnecessary. But Maneen had had a rough patch of life earlier and he repeated that story whenever some memories haunted him.

Once al-Awafi had to face a great flood. The water went down hard for ten whole days. Maneen's house melted into the rainwater. The rich and the poor were equally affected by the flood. They were dying of hunger as no food was available. The rain had completely destroyed all their dates. Everyone in al-Awafi faced that traumatic experience of hunger and they had nothing to eat. Many of them were mentally derailed as they could not find a remedy for the problem. Later, Merchant Sulayman opened his house for them, and they all could eat and drink at his house. Soon they realised that there was nothing in his storeroom. Together they all faced poverty and lack of food. From then on Maneen became a little delirious and food became an obsession for him. He went on begging for food at the top of his voice, much to the disgust of others.

Maneen's son Zayid grew up with Abdallah and later he joined the army. In a few years Maneen's crumbling mudbrick house disappeared from the roadside to be replaced by a reinforced concrete house, with three bedrooms and a sitting room. Zayid was doing good in the army and had moved up rapidly through the ranks. He

rebuilt the house and filled it with large sacks of rice and sugar and sealed tins of the best local sweets. Though he came back to al-Awafi less frequently, he always brought crates of fruit and bottles of Vimto. He always had workers at home to build another addition or to replace the wood door with a fancier one. However, Maneen never abandoned the small rock on which he always sat.

Maneen's eyesight had completely faded, and his hair had gone completely white. He was still in his tattered clothes and cried out to the passersby for food. This infuriated the army officer son and he was not happy about Maneen still sitting out in the cold, on the small rock with tattered clothes and the way he was still begging for food though he had enough food at home. People could hear Maneen protesting that he could not see any longer and that he liked sitting by the roadside. He said he did not want to be shut up inside the house. He also said he was asking for food because it was an amusement for him and that he could start a conversation that way. He was only teasing people. He also said that there was no one to cook the rice in the house. He wanted to communicate with his neighbours and see the children playing their games. His son could not understand him and kept on shouting at Maneen.

Zayid had arranged an Indian woman whom he brought to the house to help Maneen undress and clean himself. But she did not stay for long. Maneen returned to his old ways and began to sit again on the stone boulder. He had become weak and his voice calling out to strangers for food had become feeble. When Zayid was in al-Awafi he was silent and never came out of the house. Zayid forbade Maneen from begging for food from passersby. Maneen later joined zar exorcisms, walking over hot coals and screaming as he pleased. He also started drinking to escape the trauma he experienced at home. He kept shouting standing at his door: "Poor Maneen! Wretched Maneen! Give him a bite of bread, give him half a cigarette! Give him a woman even

if it's only filthy Hafiza" (72). One day he was found dead with a bullet shot at his head.

Maneen was scarred for life after the deluge. The horrific natural disaster took a toll on his life and property. People had lost their homes and sought shelters in a tent built by Merchant Sulayman. There was practically no food for days together. They survived eating a ration of dates and dried fish and after some time that too stopped. Women were ready to sell themselves even for a penny to buy food to feed their children. It was hard for Maneen to stay alive with hunger and the pangs related to starvation. It had affected his character and behaviour. Memories of food are not only associated with nostalgia but are highly traumatising. Maneen had to live with hunger all his life, being a slave. The floods accentuated it and created famine. The memories haunted him and the trauma he experienced manifested in the form of begging for food even when he had plenty at home.

Much has been written about the multifaceted significance of food and eating from an anthropological and sociological perspective and trauma from post memory. Food becomes a memory work and then memories of eating adversely affect an individual who has been deprived of food. He would carry the resultant trauma as personal or transgenerational as the depravity passes over to the next generation. A similar dynamic is evident in the portrayal of Maneen and Salima, Mayya's mother as both characters endured the devastating effects of extreme hunger, a profound form of food trauma that significantly shaped their lived experiences. This connection underscores the critical role of food scarcity in trauma studies, highlighting how deprivation and hunger profoundly impact psychological and emotional well-being.

Mattias Strand in his article, "Food and Traumas: Anthropologies of Memory and post memory" and anthropologist Jon Holzman in "Food and Memory" outline

the various strands of research on food as a means of remembering or making sense of the past. Food is a highly politicised and exploited commodity like weapons. The dreadful hunger experienced during war and the camaraderie associated with it and finally having a chance to eat with peers may become entangled in memory. The sharing of food with loved ones becomes a source of happiness here. Strand says, “The terrible hunger experienced during times of conflict, juxtaposed with the simple act of sharing a meal with comrades, becomes a powerful locus of memory, embodying both survival and solidarity” (476).

Jon Holtzman comments in his article “Food and Memory” that “Food serves not only as sustenance but also as a profound medium of memory and identity, bridging personal and collective experiences of trauma and survival” (363). Similarly, Maneen too seeks the pleasure of companionship while he begs for food, cigarettes or soft drinks from passersby. It is his method of overcoming the trauma that lies dormant in his mind. Holocaust survivors, who had to face starvation never wasted food. Here Maneen, after the dreadful famine and flood, sought to procure every morsel he could get by begging, even though he had stacks of rice in his house. The begging is a result of psychological trauma that he was going through.

The researcher analyses how Maneen experienced trauma from childhood. He remembered everyone around him as being hungry, and he remembered nothing in his life other than the hunger that clawed at him. The researcher notes that all the slaves in the house, it seemed, were constantly hungry. Hunger possessed and obsessed them. Slaves were always hungry as the master saw to it that they ate minimally. The researcher observes that they even fought among themselves for a little bit of food. As Maneen grew up in that household, hunger became his trauma and it never left his memory. Even in his old age, he would eat food keeping aside some for future

consumption as hunger had traumatised him so much in his youth. This somatic memory, the study argues, illustrates how bodily deprivation inscribes itself permanently in the psyche.

The researcher interprets how Jason Crouthamel's book *Trauma, Religion and Spirituality in Germany during the First World War* examines the intersection of trauma, memory, and religion. Crouthamel explores how individuals and communities grapple with traumatic experiences through religious frameworks and practices (6-12). He says “The war became a laboratory for religion, where soldiers reformed their faith to confront industrialized slaughter and mass death” (6). The researcher emphasises that in many cultures, religion provides narratives, rituals, and communal support that help people make sense of suffering and loss. In the context of the novel, the researcher notes that characters often resort to religious or superstitious explanations for trauma, such as attributing Masouda's madness to jinn possession. These frameworks offer a way to externalize and understand suffering within a culturally coherent system. The researcher contends that while modern psychological frameworks might diagnose Masouda's condition differently, within the novel's cultural context, the attribution to jinn represents a legitimate attempt to comprehend and address inexplicable suffering. This cultural specificity, the study emphasises, must be understood on its own terms rather than dismissed as primitive belief.

The researcher analyses that while the novel portrays multiple layers of trauma, it equally emphasises the resilience and agency of women characters who navigate oppressive structures. Alharthi's portrayal is nuanced, refusing to depict Arab women merely as victims. Instead, the researcher emphasises that she presents them as complex individuals who negotiate, resist, and sometimes perpetuate the systems that

constrain them. This complexity, distinguishes Alharthi's work from orientalist narratives that flatten Arab women into passive stereotypes.

Khawla, the youngest sister of Mayya, initially appears to conform to traditional expectations by waiting for her cousin to marry her. However, when her marriage becomes unbearable due to her husband's emotional neglect and his obsession with a colleague of his, Khawla makes the difficult decision to divorce. The researcher emphasises that in the conservative context of Omani society, this decision represents significant agency and resistance. Khawla's choice demonstrates how women in the novel exercise power within constrained circumstances, making choices that assert their dignity even at social cost. The eventual divorce and establishment of an independent life illustrate the possibility of breaking intergenerational patterns of endurance without reciprocity.

The researcher analyses how Asma, the second sister of Mayya, pursues education and marries an artist, choosing a path that diverges from pure pragmatism toward intellectual and creative fulfilment. Her character represents the transitional generation that begins to access new forms of capital – educational, cultural, and intellectual – that were unavailable to previous generations of women. Through Asma, Alharthi shows how structural changes in society (such as increased access to education) create opportunities for women to redefine their roles and relationships. Asma's relatively successful marriage to Khalid, built on shared intellectual interests, offers a counterpoint to the more troubled unions in the novel. The researcher contends that this suggests that compatibility and mutual respect can create more equitable partnerships, even within traditional frameworks.

London, of the granddaughter generation, represents the most explicit form of resistance. She challenges family authority by pursuing a relationship with a man of

lower social status and refuses to internalise the class hierarchies that structured her grandmother's generation. The researcher emphasises that her grandmother Salima's rejection of London's choice demonstrates the persistence of social hierarchies across generations, but London's refusal to comply indicates their weakening hold. London's character embodies the aspirations and contradictions of contemporary Omani youth who navigate between tradition and modernity, familial obligation and individual desire. The researcher contends that her story remains unfinished in the novel, suggesting that the negotiation between heritage and autonomy continues as an open question for future generations.

Mayya, the eldest, who appears most constrained by her inability to love Abdallah, exercises forms of quiet resistance. The researcher notes that her devotion to her autistic son Muhammed, while exhausting, represents a choice to direct her emotional energy according to her values rather than social expectations. Her refusal to show wifely affection that she does not feel, while painful to Abdallah, maintains a form of emotional honesty and integrity. Mayya's character raises complex questions about the ethics of emotional availability and the extent to which affection can be willed or performed. The researcher contends that her situation illustrates how arranged marriages, while socially functional, can create profound suffering when emotional compatibility is absent.

Salima, the mother of the three sisters, represents the generation that most fully internalises patriarchal norms yet suffers most visibly under them. The researcher notes that her husband Azzan's enduring love for his Bedouin lover creates a lifelong wound that Salima carries with dignity but also with bitterness. In her scholarly work, *Introduction to Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth extrapolates that trauma subjects one to a historic phenomenon called "Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder” (PTSD) in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, intrusive images and thoughts. The memories not only serve as a testimony to an event, but also bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. She writes:

C4 . . . trauma is an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. The historical power of trauma, then, may lie not only in its symptomatology, but in the structure of its experience of temporality: the event is not experienced as it occurs, but it is fully evident only in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. (4–5)

Salima reminisces into her past very often as she faced pain and joy in her life and also relived the past experiences whenever she dwelled into her memories. Salima's strict adherence to social hierarchies and her rejection of London's relationship can be understood as a defence mechanism – if she sacrificed her happiness for propriety, she expects others to do the same. The researcher observes that even in Salima's conservatism, there is resilience. She maintains her household, raises her daughters, and survives her husband's emotional betrayal without collapse. The researcher contends that her strength, though channelled into maintaining rather than challenging structures, is nonetheless considerable and represents a form of survival under constraint.

The researcher analyses how the novel also portrays solidarity among women, particularly between generations. Zarifa's act of storytelling to Abdallah not only transmits memory but also creates understanding and connection. Azza's care for her

mad daughter-in-law Masouda, demonstrates compassion across the bounds of direct kinship. The researcher observes that these moments of connection suggest that while patriarchal and hierarchical structures create suffering, they do not entirely erase the capacity for empathy and mutual support among women. Alharthi depicts women's relationships as complex – sometimes marked by cruelty (as when Zarifa abuses Halima), and at other times by care and transmission of wisdom.

Azzan, Salima's husband led a double life. He was romantically in love with a Bedouin woman named Najiya. She was called Qamar, meaning the moon. She was such a tantalising beauty that Azzan found a spiritual entanglement with her and considered their relationship sacred. It was to Qamar that he opened up his heart and always found solace speaking to her. Azzan fulfilled his responsibilities to his wife and his three girls and took care of all of them. However, he felt, that it was only Qamar, who could bring out the real man in him.

One day Azzan lay in Qamar's lap and told her about a long ago wound, that was still alive. It was about his son, Hamad. From birth, Hamad had been a weak baby. Salima, his mother had Hamad wearing every kind of amulet to save him from all evil spirits. He had lost all hopes for the boy. Despite their fears and anxieties Hamad lived. His tiny body fought hard to live, resisting fate with all his might. But when he reached the age of eight, he died. Death gave their hearts time to swell, years enough to grow heavy with love for him and then took him away. (Alharthi 114)

Azzan, had a terrible experience before his son's death. When Hamad was struck down by fever, Salima went to her uncle, her father's brother Shaykh Said with a request to take her son out of al-Awafi to a better hospital in the city. He had a Range Rover at his porch and both Azzan and Salima felt that they could save their

little child, if taken to hospital. But her uncle said that the Range Rover will not leave al-Awafi without him. Hapless Azzan literally pleaded with him to save his son, but in vain. With his pride and ego hurt, Azzan took a vow that he too would buy a car for the sake of his son. However, Hamad died in a few days (115). They buried Hamad but never spoke about him again. Azzan carried the trauma of his son's death until he spoke about it to Qamar. He had never talked about Hamad to Salima after his death. The mental anguish of the wound lay hidden in his heart taking away happiness from him.

Cathy Caruth articulates in *Explorations in Memory* that trauma is a paradoxical affliction that wounds the mind while compelling a voice to emerge from the injury itself, thereby voicing truths muted by the event's intensity (4) Azzan shared his pain with Qamar, as he relived those days. This belated voice of trauma of Azzan, became evident here, as he tried to uncover the cause of his child's death after many years of its occurrence. The extreme pain was not perceived at the time of the event but on retelling the trauma. Some traumatic events choke the individual that his words get dried up with his tears leading to an unspeakability of traumatic experience. The unspeakable prevails as a preoccupation in literary trauma theory.

Judith Herman says in her work *Trauma and Recovery* that the unspeakable operates on two levels: for survivors, it is the "conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (1). According to the American Psychiatric Association journal, trauma is not measured by an event. Rather trauma relates to an individual's experience of an event, and any post traumatic symptoms consequently experienced (271). Trauma is an utterly unique and isolating experience, and one experience of trauma is never the same as another. Interpersonal trauma is often literally

unspeakable, because of post-traumatic stress disorder and/or because victims are disempowered. The unspeakable in narrative can be literal, when the survivor tries to overcome his inner pain without opening up to anyone.

Unable to reveal his mental agony to his wife Salima, Azzan makes Qamar his lady love a witness to the trauma of his child's death. In literary trauma theory put forward by Caruth, trauma is framed as a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world, that constitutes a wound (Caruth 3). Caruth asserts that massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily destroyed, and the traumatic event is dissociated from normal mental processes of cognition and only returns belatedly in the form of post-traumatic symptoms (266).

For Azzan, his inability to speak about his trauma is mainly because no amount of telling seemed to do justice to the inner compulsion of speaking. There were never enough words, or right words, enough time or the right time and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the pain he experienced. Once he opened up to Qamar defying all blocks, he experienced a relaxation. He felt that he bonded well with Qamar as he was able to share his mental anguish, which he could never share with his family. Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst and holocaust survivor, emphasises in the book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, which he co-authored with Soshanna Felman, another trauma specialist, that the role of the listener in the process of testimony is the most crucial. He argues that bearing witness is a relational act that requires an active and empathetic listener to facilitate the survivor's articulation of trauma. He says: "The listener, therefore, is a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself" (57).

Another remarkable character in the story who faced the turmoil of trauma is Marwan, Abdallah's cousin. Marwan's mother had had a dream when she was pregnant with him and Judge Yusuf had given interpretation of the dream. He said that she would deliver a boy who would be righteous and pure, and important. The boy was brought up with such a zest that he was a chosen one. She gave him a second name 'Pure', which everyone else began to use too. Marwan's mother worked hard to develop a love for knowledge and a devotion to the faith in him from his early days itself. She pushed him to the Shaykh at the mosque wanting Marwan to follow him. Thus, Marwan grew with his heart attached to the mosque. He could recite the entire Hadith and was committed to reciting it often. Since his heart was so attached to the mosque, he did not play any games and had no interest in trivial things. He found nothing to admire about the people who wasted their time in pleasures. Marwan, thus grew up cutting himself from all worldly joys and was devoted to God unconditionally.

Marwan was aware of the pride his parents took in him. When they left al-Awafi to settle at Wadi Aday, they chose a house near the mosque so that Marwan would benefit by its proximity. He always stayed away from the crowd and people, refusing to play with his brothers or even exchange much conversation with them. But one day, Marwan snuck in the night to his parent's room and stole all the money he found in his father's wallet. The next day he was remorse-stricken and punished himself by beating himself with his father's cane. It hurt him so much and he vowed to fast for two weeks. However, after three months he did the same thing. He snuck into his brother's room and stole the money in his wallet. He continued his thefts and penances simultaneously. By the time Marwan had completed his sixteenth year, he had fasted a total of eight months and fourteen days as his penance for thefts.

Marwan's popularity as an austere youth spread and people began to say that light poured from his eyes and girls adored his grave eyes that never met the gaze of any girl. No one ever saw the wound marks on his back caused by self-inflicted blows as penance to his habit of kleptomania. He was mentally torn between his habit and the image of purity thrust upon him by the people. He was anxious and restless about his parents as he realised that he was their pride. By the time he was sixteen, he had stolen the things which were not of any consequence to him, like his mother's earrings or her shoes. He dressed up himself only in white and rarely spoke. Some people looked upon him as a saint, pious person, who was keen on fasting. He was himself into an identity crisis as he spent all day in prayers and at night stole worthless objects. It ripped him apart; he could feel his body splitting and shredding. Every night as he thought about his parents dream and his own sense of himself as pure, it contradicted with his real self as a thief. The pure Marwan who never left the mosque to play outside with children of his own age stole things at night.

Marwan scorned and hated himself to the measure that he valued himself. He was subjected to severe trauma as he experienced the pain and shame each time he stole. He couldn't control himself at any point of thoughts on stealing. The closed circle of his life tightened around him and he dedicated himself to fasting and isolation and worship as his heart fractured in agonising pain. He did not reveal his secret to anyone. Marwan knew that people called him the pure one and he must remain thus. He thought of his mother and vowed to himself that he would cut off his hand if it returned to the same habit. He thought about amputating his hand, seriously as he wanted to overcome that habit of his. After his father's death and when his mother came out of her mourning period, he snuck into her room one night and stole her perfume, some money found on the table and his father's silver dagger but no

sooner than he left that room he was overcome with remorse and grief at his inability to control the urge to steal. He realised that he can never get rid of that habit. He was experiencing severe trauma going through the same psychotic experience over and over again. Moments before dawn he cut the veins in his thieving hand with the sharp dagger blade and committed suicide.

Marwan carried the weight of penance and despised himself for such a psychological condition called kleptomania, where the victim began to steal small and inconsequential things, but later became a thief. He was shocked by his own self and the trauma instilled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), that he underwent every time after a theft burned and scalded his soul; and after one such episode he decided to take his life. The trauma he experienced was uncontrollable and the stress disorder led to disaster. Each character carried at their heart, pain and trauma and Alharthi delves through its mazes diligently.

The researcher emphasises that in analysing *Celestial Bodies* through the framework of trauma studies, several theoretical perspectives converge to illuminate the novel's complexity. Freudian psychoanalysis provides tools for understanding individual trauma, particularly Abdallah's compulsive return to his childhood experience and his inability to integrate this memory into coherent narrative. Caruth's concept of belatedness helps explain why trauma's effects intensify over time rather than diminishing, as Abdallah's adult suffering exceeds his childhood pain. The researcher contends that Erikson's work on collective trauma illuminates how entire communities – such as the enslaved African population in Oman – share wounds that transcend individual experience and create collective identity around suffering.

Herman's framework for understanding trauma and recovery emphasises the importance of testimony and witness. The researcher notes that Abdallah's inability to

find an empathetic listener – neither in Mayya nor in his father – perpetuates his suffering and prevents healing. In contrast, Zarifa's storytelling to Abdallah, while not healing her own wounds, creates a space of shared understanding that partially fulfils the witness function. This suggests that the presence of an empathetic listener is crucial for transforming traumatic memory into an integrated narrative, which is necessary for recovery. The researcher contends that the novel thus enacts the very problem it depicts: readers become the witnesses that characters within the text lack, creating a vicarious testimony function.

Mucci's concept of intergenerational transmission helps explain patterns that repeat across generations in the novel. The researcher notes that Abdallah's trauma, though originating in his individual experience, shapes his parenting and his marriage, transmitting effects to his son Muhammed and his wife Mayya. Similarly, the trauma of slavery persists in generations born after legal emancipation, as children of slaves inherit not the direct experience but its psychological aftermath – shame, namelessness, and social subordination. The intergenerational perspective reveals that trauma is not contained within individual psyches but circulates through families and communities across time. The researcher contends that healing, then, must also occur at multiple levels – individual, familial, and collective – for cycles to break.

Postcolonial and feminist frameworks add essential dimensions to trauma analysis in *Celestial Bodies*. The researcher notes that Edward Said's *Orientalism* provides a critical perspective on Western representations of Arab identity, and Alharthi's novel can be read as a counter-narrative that asserts Arab women's complexity against reductive stereotypes. The researcher emphasises that Miriam Cooke's work on Arab women's war writing and Brinda Mehta's analysis of memory rituals in Arab women's literature contextualise Alharthi within a tradition of

Arab women writers who use literature to reclaim narrative authority over their own experiences. The feminist frameworks reveal how gender shapes vulnerability to trauma – women in the novel experience specific forms of suffering related to arranged marriage, sexual violence, restricted mobility, and emotional labour. The researcher contends that yet these frameworks also highlight women's agency and resistance, refusing victimisation narratives that deny women's capacity for action.

Alharthi's narrative technique – particularly her use of fragmentation, multiple perspectives, and non-linear time – formally enacts the characteristics of traumatic memory. The researcher notes that the novel's structure mirrors the way trauma disrupts chronology and coherence, with Abdallah's sections distinguished by different typography to signal their status as intrusive memories. The researcher emphasises that this formal innovation is not merely aesthetic but epistemological, suggesting that certain experiences cannot be conveyed through conventional linear narrative. The novel thus makes a claim about the relationship between form and content in representing trauma: the form itself must be disrupted to convey disrupted experience. This aligns with broader trends in trauma literature that question whether conventional realism can adequately represent extremity.

The novel's treatment of supernatural elements – jinn possession, prophetic dreams, ritual healing – raises important questions about cultural specificity in trauma interpretation. Western psychological frameworks may pathologise what local frameworks understand as spiritual affliction, and vice versa. The researcher emphasises that Alharthi does not resolve this tension but allows multiple interpretive frameworks to coexist. Masouda's madness can be read simultaneously as PTSD resulting from witnessing confession of murder, as jinn possession, or as a form of protest and testimony that uses madness as the only available language. This

multiplicity respects the cultural context while remaining legible to readers from different traditions. Trauma interpretation is culturally mediated and that universal frameworks must be adapted to particular contexts.

Celestial Bodies ultimately presents trauma as simultaneously individual and collective, psychological and social, historical and contemporary. The researcher emphasises that Abdallah's personal suffering connects to the broader history of slavery, patriarchal violence, and rapid social change in Oman. His inability to heal mirrors Oman's incomplete reckoning with its past – the official end of slavery did not erase its psychological and social effects. The novel suggests that healing requires not just individual therapy but collective acknowledgment, social transformation, and the creation of new narratives that honour suffering without being consumed by it. The researcher contends that London's generation may represent the possibility of such transformation, though the novel remains ambiguous about whether they will succeed in breaking inherited patterns.

The researcher interprets how the novel's acclaim – including the Man Booker International Prize – testifies to its ability to speak across cultural boundaries while remaining rooted in Omani specificity. Alharthi achieves universality not by obscuring particularity but by rendering it with such depth and nuance that readers from different contexts can recognise shared human experiences of suffering, love, and resilience. The translation by Marilyn Booth plays a crucial role in this accessibility, maintaining the novel's linguistic richness while making it available to Anglophone readers. The researcher observes that this successful translation demonstrates that Arab women's literature, when given proper attention and skilled mediation, can achieve global recognition without sacrificing its cultural integrity.

Alharthi's achievement opens space for other Arab women writers and challenges the marginalisation of non-Western literatures in global literary markets.

The researcher concludes that *Celestial Bodies* stands as a profound meditation on trauma's persistence, its transmission across generations, and the possibility of resilience despite overwhelming constraint. Through Abdallah's haunted consciousness, Zarifa's painful testimony, Masouda's mad proclamations, and the three sisters' varied negotiations with tradition, Alharthi creates a polyphonic narrative that honours the complexity of human suffering and survival. The novel refuses easy resolution, leaving many wounds unhealed and many questions unanswered, which reflects the reality that trauma's effects are lasting and that social transformation is gradual and incomplete. The novel also testifies to the human capacity to endure, to tell stories, to witness each other's pain and to overcome hardships with resilience. In this balance between acknowledging suffering and affirming resilience, *Celestial Bodies* achieves a profound insight into the human condition under constraint and the possibilities for agency within limitation. Alharthi depicts the trauma of individuals founded on their own lives and experiences, opening it to new interpretations and expositions. The resilience of Arab women is a testament to their strength and determination, despite facing numerous forms of trauma, including war, displacement, and societal constraints. They continue to advocate for their rights, challenge oppressive systems, and preserve cultural heritage with unwavering resolve. This resilience is not just about survival but also about thriving and transforming their communities, showcasing a powerful spirit that refuses to be subdued by adversity. Their ability to endure and push forward is an inspiring example of courage and perseverance.

The book holds a mirror to contemporary Arab's social and cultural life. Soshanna Felman and Dauri Laub endorse that literature serves as a testimony of the trauma experienced by the people of that geo-political zone in the book, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Felman and Laub argue that literature functions as testimonial literature, where narrative voices bear witness to collective crises, enabling survivors/communities to articulate unspeakable geopolitical wounds through relational witnessing (204–16). Alharthi provides a richly imagined and poetic insight into a society in transition and sheds light on the lives of previously obscured sections of society. The novel unravels the history and people of modern Oman, their perplexities and responses to life in a poignant canvas. In the novel, both male and female characters endure profound trauma, yet it is the women who consistently demonstrate greater resilience in the face of adversity. While the male characters often succumb to their struggles or become trapped in cycles of despair, the female characters find ways to navigate their hardships with strength and determination. Their resilience is evident in their ability to adapt, nurture, and rebuild despite the psychological and emotional scars they bear. This contrast underscores the unique ways in which women confront trauma, often drawing on inner fortitude and a sense of community to endure and transcend their suffering.

The comparative framework established in this study positions *Celestial Bodies* alongside other works by Arab and Iranian women writers who address trauma. What distinguishes Alharthi's approach, is her focus on intimate, familial trauma rather than spectacular political violence. The researcher emphasises that while Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* depicts state oppression and Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* addresses ideological repression, Alharthi explores the quieter violence of family life, patriarchy, and social hierarchy. This focus reveals

that trauma is not limited to extraordinary events like war or revolution but permeates ordinary life under unjust social structures. The researcher contends that Alharthi's work thus expands the scope of what counts as traumatic and worthy of literary attention, insisting that domestic and intimate suffering deserve the same serious engagement as public and political trauma.