

Chapter V

Conclusion

“And yet she was like a rock in a riverbed, enduring without complaint, her grace not sullied but shaped by the turbulence that washed over her.”

– Khaled Hosseini

Gilligan expounds in his book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* that the paradoxical truth of the human experience is that “We know ourselves as separate only in so far as we live in connection with others and that we experience relationships only in so far as we differentiate other from self” (63).

The truth of this statement can be applied to the existence of traumatised people, in particular, the Arab Iranian women writers in the contemporary world, who claim their existence by portraying the lives of the traumatised, in the socio-political Arab Iranian context. Far from offering a study of Arab Iranian women's stories of repression related to veiling, these writers have translated their experiences into a productive and creative force. Writers like Azar Nafisi, Basma Abdel Aziz, and Jokha Alharthi articulate their experiences by revisiting forgotten territories, and by portraying the Iranian and the Arab world spanning over half a century and define the current status of these communities in transition. Exploring the journeys in time and space undertaken by these women writers, their fiction shares a light on the ways in which they themselves participate in their homeland's intellectual lives, relating both the traumatic and the triumphant aspects of Iranian and Arabic literature. The sophisticated Arabic woman writer thus celebrates her rootedness, autonomy and belonging.

Basma Abdel Aziz, Jokha Alharthi and Azar Nafisi talk about the trauma and memories of war and its atrocities in their works. Md. Abu Shahid Abdullah discusses

trauma as a universal phenomenon affecting individuals and groups, leading to memory distortion and identity crises while emphasizing the need for recognition and justice. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja highlight the shared responsibility of addressing trauma legacies, preventing the recurrence of past violence, and confronting inherited structural violence. Miller and Taugow describe the present era as the “age of trauma,” while Cathy Caruth refers to it as a “catastrophic age,” marked by widespread suffering at both the individual and collective levels. Mark Seltzer links modernity with trauma, describing it as inseparable from shock and the “sign of the wound.” Roger Lockhurst underscores how trauma has shaped cultural narratives surrounding identity, memory, and selfhood.

In the introductory chapter the researcher has analysed the socio-political background of Middle East nations like Egypt, Iran, Tunisia and Oman. Arab world spans over twenty-two nations apart from some countries that speak Arabic as a second language. The Western hegemony over oil reserves developed hostility among the Arab countries as they vied with each other to negotiate with them and most of the rulers in power began to suppress their citizens and gave more authority to their western counterparts resulting in the unrest of their people. Their frustrations due to unemployment and undemocratic approach of the rulers, made the youth to rise in revolt against their rulers who were autocratic and ruthless in suppressing the public revolt. Such revolts aimed to bring forth, like the Arab Spring, an awakening at all realms of life. Students, poets, writers, women, and people from all walks of life came down to the streets raising slogans against the rulers. Several governments toppled over, rulers were arrested and sometimes given capital punishment. However, the regime that came to power after the revolution in most of the countries turned out to be despotic and unleashed terror in the name of religion. Fanatics inflicted trauma on

women and children, imposing impractical laws and made the lives of people difficult.

The repercussions of the Arab Spring were felt on most of the Arab countries, especially Egypt and Libya. The better rulers of the countries of Middle-East, Oman, UAE and others were keen on the welfare of the people and they adopted measures to solve the problems of their citizens like unemployment and failing economy in the wake of the fast-spreading Arab Spring. However, these countries too marked their presence in the Arabic transition. Iranian Revolution of 1979 was also a public revolt against the autocratic ruler. However, the revolutionary government, which came to power failed to uphold the aspirations of the people. Arab women writers in Diaspora and the native writers, began to portray the impact of such regimes on people through their writings in native language as well as in translation. They clearly brought before the world, the life and trauma of the Arab people in the aftermath of the revolution.

The researcher, for her study has taken up the books, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, a memoir by Azar Nafisi from Iran, *The Queue* by Basma Abdel Aziz, a novel from Egypt, and *Celestial Bodies*, a novel from Oman written by Jokha Alharthi. These novels trace the impact of trauma on people in three different nations spanning over a period of fifty years.

Azar Nafisi, the renowned writer from Iran recounts her stay in Iran under the theocratic regime soon after the Iranian revolution. In her memoir she speaks about how secretly she had to welcome home her beloved students to read and discuss literature. The social status of women was pathetic and the traumatic experiences of life during the regime made them helpless and depressed. As the new regime hated the western culture, everything western was banned by them. Women were not given freedom of movement unless they were accompanied by men of blood relation or their

husbands. The Family Protection Law was suspended immediately after the revolutionaries came to power. That meant that men could divorce their wives as they wanted and just notify them by mail. Child custody was taken away from women. Men could marry more than one permanent wife and as many temporary wives as they wanted. At the same time, men had the right to stop their wives from going out in the streets or from working. The life of women had become so miserable when the revolutionaries came to power.

Azar Nafisi in her memoir presents this cross-section of society where educated women were disillusioned about their future. Severe punishments were being meted out to women for not complying with the theocratic tradition. Stoning to death and several other barbaric practices like mass executions became common as described by Haleh Esfandiari in her book *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution*. (56). In her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi's students who visited her house every Thursday morning to discuss literature, were living in a traumatic world. Iran's government had decreed that lifestyle of women should be in compliance with the religious principles. Mahshid, one of her students was jailed for five years because of her affiliation with a dissident religious organisation and she was banned from continuing her studies for two years. She had very traumatic experiences at the prison due to which she had a permanently impaired kidney. Mahshid shared with her Thursday class group at Nafisi's house that her traumatic memories of the jail still persisted in her dreams, and she did not know a way to articulate them. The regime cast such horrors in prison, which were outright denials of human rights. These experiences were relived quite often by the prisoners even after they were released. Mahshid feared the new regime and sought asylum in literature. Reading classics of western literature helped her to normalise her life.

Book stalls were shut down by the government and western books were burnt showing their contempt towards anything Western or American. Mahshid and her friends read classics like *The Great Gatsby* and *Lolita* to keep them sane in a degenerating world. Thus, art and literature became too essential in their lives like they had been to Cincinnatus C., the protagonist of the novel *An Invitation to a Beheading* written by Vladimir Nabokov. Nafisi and her students clung onto reading books to escape the torments of trauma they experienced in life.

Nassrin, another student of Nafisi opened up her heart to her. Nassrin said that she was physically abused by her uncle at home. He was a very pious person but when he was taking tuition for her, he had his hands on her body. Nassrin was abused at the age of eleven and the shock it had given her as a child, led to trauma in her later life. It was like a hairline crack on her psyche, the crack widening as the child grew up to become a woman. She was an intellectual who was quick to respond to injustices meted out to her. According to Nassrin, every woman in Iran had a traumatic story to tell.

It was often physical abuse at home that shattered the women along with the tortures of holocaust. The common men had no safe place to go, to hide themselves from the attackers. Women of Iran were denied social life. They were not even allowed to eat apples or ice-creams in public places as the revolutionary guards charged them. When the war with Iraq started, the Iranians were exposed to the worst kind of trauma with destruction of life and property. The regime exhilarated in combating the war but never initiated any peace talk. Homes were raided, satellite dishes seized and books burnt. The government was against western literature, knowledge and culture. Those citizens who had dreams of pursuing their western life became dejected as they were traumatised by their own political leaders. They were

constantly assaulted and persistent lack of kindness of the regime disheartened the women population. Sanaz along with some of her girlfriends had gone for a two-day vacation near the Caspian Sea. Even though they wore their long robes and scarves properly they were attacked by the morality guards.

Afterwards, they were given a trial, forcing them to sign a document confessing to their sins, which they had not committed. Moreover, each of them was given twenty-five lashes. Sanaz was literally broken by the virginity tests that she had to undergo and also by the forced confession. The physical pain of flogging was less compared to the mental tortures. Finally, when she returned home, she had to suffer the angry retorts of her own brother who decided to chaperon her, whenever she had to go out. Her car was seized by her brother and she even lost her mobility. Basic human rights violations made the life of Iranian women all the more traumatic. Sanaz effectively represented her situation when she handed over a simple drawing to her teacher Azar Nafisi. Sanaz's picture was a representation of women of Iran. Nafisi witnessed the trauma of Iranian women through her Iranian students. The helpless women still depended on the fundamentalist regime and obediently fulfilled all their orders even if they were choked out of their existence.

Sanaz represented the women who had no peace at home and in the social sphere they had to face the worst form of indignity through virginity tests, flogging and denial of education. The institution of family too supported these atrocities making them double victims of trauma. They were already living in a politically unrest nation with civil wars in the name of religion and with an external war with Iraq. Hunger was a major problem for people in general. Whenever a war strikes, it is always the women and children who are the worst affected. In the midst of all these insecurities women were torn off their dignities, their identities and subjected to

public floggings and similar punishments when they violated the strict decrees of an overtly religious regime.

Azin, another student of Nafisi loved to put makeup and paint her fingernails even though it was against the dictates of the revolutionary government. One day she told her class group that she was being ruthlessly beaten up regularly by her husband. The next morning, he would apologise, but very soon would beat her again. He insulted her saying that no one would marry her again if he deserted her and that she was like a used second-hand car. He added that if she left him, he could always marry an eighteen-year-old and live as he pleased. Azin's husband crushed her self-esteem but would not leave her. The trauma that Azin was going through was horrific. She had a three-year-old daughter and Azin continued to live with him, because the regime gave the custody of the child only to its father. She feared that she would lose her child if she defied him. She had lost her peace of mind, her sleep and she felt dizzy all the time. Her only relief was the time she spent in reading literature at Nafisi's house.

An individual is said to be exposed to complex trauma, when the person either witnesses or experiences repeated instances of the same type of trauma over a period of time. Azin was a victim of such complex trauma which magnified with multiple dimensions and she had to suffer domestic violence and the war induced emergencies as well.

Yassi, the poet among the group of literature students had a dream of going to America and pursue her studies there. Her family had to go into hiding when the revolutionaries captured the government. However, they were caught, tortured and put in jail for many years. Yassi had seen their hardships and though she had not joined any political group, she was the real rebel. She did not get married and went to the

university to study. She was brought up without any social contact, like majority of the girls of Iran. She always wore the veil but upheld the notion of identity, self-respect and dignity.

Women, deprived of social and political agency, endured everything in silence as their traumatic experiences slowly transformed them into mere shadows of themselves, mechanical in their existence. All her students found reading western classics which upheld the philosophy of individual freedom, creativity and identity quite consoling. It was hope, something that they could long for or achieve someday that brought them close to those books. When they began to read Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, they identified themselves with Lolita who could not break away from Humbert, her exploiting stepfather. Lolita continued to reach out to Humbert for help even though he himself was her ruthless abuser. Nafisi's students identified Iran with Humbert and felt they could never escape from the clutches of the fundamentalist regime. At the end of the novel *Lolita*, Nabokov finally turns her fate by giving her courage to break away from her torturer and cast down his offers. Lolita filled their minds with empathy and a faith that everything is possible if they chose to fight the struggle. The courage that the book instilled in them made them optimistic and wait for a rainbow in their lives. The book was banned in Russia for a while because it was considered scandalous at that time. Reading *Lolita* in a theocratic country like Iran, that had banned every European and American book was a daring challenge. They read the book in secrecy and revelled in the inspiration they received from it. Nafisi and her students also read classics like *The Great Gatsby* and *An Invitation to Beheading* and imbibed the spirit of Humanism from them.

Two other students of Nafisi – Rezia and Mehtab had taken part in the protests organised at the University of Tehran. Nafisi's reading classes helped Mehtab

to relax, though gradually making her hopeful for a better future. Her mental taboos on men, religion and society softened with her exposure to literature. More than literature reading, they got time to share their woes, trauma and anxieties, which helped them to a great extent in psychological unwinding leading to mental peace and well-being. Nafisi too recorded in her memoir, her own positivism, when she received her students on Thursdays. Those days were a period of hardships and turmoil, especially for women.

It was not just social life that was disrupted by the decrees of the government. The atrocities they did to women in the name of religious practices were suffocating. Though public flogging was given as punishment, the unfortunate ones were publicly executed as well. Stoning to death was another barbaric practice imposed by the government for charges of adultery. The regime accused active and intelligent women who protested or circulated pamphlets against the regime of prostitution and condemned them to death by stoning. Women's plight reached its culmination when Iran-Iraq war broke out. Finally, when Iraq stopped the war, Iran had become a devastated nation, its cities reduced to rubble by the bombings.

The women in houses suffered due to lack of resources to feed their children and also due to hardships in salvaging the remnants of their house after missile attacks. They were not sure whether they would survive another day. The domestic suppression by their male counterparts were also unbearable. The trauma those women had to face surpassed all levels of tolerance and pain. The internal strife and external attacks deteriorated the economy of Iran. The government also denied Western support to provide basic necessities to the citizens. The Iranian women withstood all the trauma inflicted on them with great endurance. The people were filled with hopes when the revolutionary group came to power after the Iranian

Revolution. The change of power from an autocrat to revolutionary people were termed as the Arab Spring because of the hopes and dreams that the people associated with it. Even women had taken part in the protests of the revolution upholding the slogans of change of government. Unfortunately, the fundamentalist group that came to power turned more despotic than ever and unleashed a regime of terror, especially for women.

Writers like Nafisi voice their protests through their writings addressing the many tortures women were subjected to. Through her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* Nafisi presents a cross-section of society especially women. The researcher gets an idea about the socio-political background and contemporary situation through her memoir. The trauma they suffered could be classified as the collective trauma of women who were denied all pleasures of life. Their trauma is complex, as it is an entangled version of domestic trauma, trauma due to sexual harassment and abuse, other physical tortures and psychological trauma due to their miserable state of existence. The trauma is incomparable to trauma faced by women in other parts of the globe. Their struggles are not for equality or equal representation in governance but for basic human rights. These women, despite their extreme conditions, uphold their spirit and fight against every unpleasant situation they are subjected to. Their resistance to forces that trench them down are not feeble. They react with all their might in overcoming the obstacles just to stay alive.

Nafisi unravels her own life and struggles to stay in Iran and brings to light the lives of her students of Thursday class who were all randomly picked. All seven of them had undergone torture and had a very traumatic past, but they try hard to overcome their misery through literature. Nafisi hints at the power of books in combating trauma. Western literature opened vistas of knowledge on democracy,

equality of women and their emancipation which helped them to dream about a better future. The students depicted in the memoir are the representatives of womanhood of Iran, who had to fight all odds to dream of a better tomorrow. The law-and-order situation in Iran was torpedoed and the women were mistreated irrespective of caste or creed. They upheld their dreams and believed that someday it would change, bringing an end to the trauma they suffered.

The memoir ends with a happy note, as Nafisi recounts how the students outlived the trauma, through the changes that happened in their lives with the passage of time. Nassrin had reached England and continued her studies there. Mitra had left for Canada. Yassi enrolled in a college and had a son. Sanaz too had migrated to Europe, got married and intended to enrol at a university. Azin left for California after her husband took over their daughter Negar from her. She felt she had nothing else to stay for in Tehran. She had remarried and was starting a new life. Mahshid, Manna and Yassi continued their lives in Tehran. Mahshid had become a senior editor, publishing books of her own. Yassi recovered from her haunting traumatic experiences by diverting her thoughts and energy to a better cause. She held her own private classes, her students loved her and she even went for mountain climbing. She was ecstatic about her interests and was working hard to go to America to pursue her graduation. Nima and Manna pursued their literary skills with Nima as a teacher and Manna as a poet. Nafisi thus brings forth how these fearless young women with determination and self-will rose from the ashes, like phoenix birds. The utmost trauma they faced seasoned them and prepared them to take any risk to make their lives happier.

Nafisi concludes the novel on a happier note:

I read the writings of the young students and former revolutionaries, the slogans and demands for democracy, and I know now as much as I will ever know anything that it is this dogged desire for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by young Iranians today, the children of the revolution, and the anguished self-criticism of former revolutionaries that will determine the shape of our future. (383)

In the novel *The Queue*, Basma Abdel Aziz analyses the political situation of an Unnamed City (obviously Cairo), soon after the Arab Spring and the Islamic regime that came to power. Yehya, the protagonist is suffering from excruciating pain from the gunshot he received during the Disgraceful Events. However, he is not ready to share the news with the people in the queue as he feared some intervention might block his treatment. Moreover, the unspeakability of trauma makes him silent. The condition of Yehya, when he stands in the queue and that of Dr. Tarek, when he is told by the government that there is no bullet in Yehya's body is worthy of notice in the context of trauma. As a literary device, 'the unspeakable' has been relied on as an effective shorthand for traumatic experience and the ongoing effects of trauma. Understanding trauma in the context of the unspeakable is a more nuanced approach bringing in its purview the kind of evolution that speech requires for representing traumatic narratives of the characters.

As defined by Paul Crichton, trauma may be experienced directly, indirectly (through knowing family or close friends having experienced trauma) or vicariously. Trauma is not determined or measured by an event. Rather, trauma relates to an individual's experience of an event, and any post-traumatic symptoms consequently experienced. Trauma is an utterly unique and isolating experience.

In the novel *The Queue*, it is not Yehya alone who experiences trauma. If Yehya's pain is physical due to the bullet lodged in his pelvis and the Authority's denial that it is not there, his friend Nagi girlfriend Amani also pass through the impervious pain of Yehya in all its intensity. When Yehya goes through the pangs of trauma due to the bullet in his pelvis, he is physically and mentally exhausted. It is Amani, a strong woman of indomitable courage, who supports him and leads him for medical attention.

When Dr. Tarek hesitates to do the surgery, Yehya remains an onlooker with excruciating pain, unable to voice his needs. With every growing red ring of blood discharge in his underpants, his inability to sit or bend his body, the severe pain of the bullet lodged in the body for many days, the loss of his body weight and his emotional instability, the margins of physical trauma cross all bearable limits. The mysterious disappearance of his X-ray, Amani's adventure to Zephyr Hospital to retrieve it and her soul shattering traumatic experience at the Zephyr Hospital, all dismantle Yehya's composure. Yehya's trauma is unspeakable, and he is not likely to survive it. Basma Abdel Aziz points fingers at the fundamentalist regime for the denial of human rights to its citizens. The people's government that came to power overthrowing the monarchy in the guise of the Arab Spring proved to be worse than the monarchy. People became victims of collective trauma as they suffered pain and agony as represented by Yehya, Amani, Um Mabrouk and many others at the individual level.

The government denies that there was firing on the day of Disgraceful Events and hence there were no bullets. They want to project to the world that everything is fine in their nation. Meanwhile the victims of firing face the utmost torture. Many of them succumb to death while a few like Yehya are bent on staying alive and face torture. Yehya too might have succumbed to his peril later as the author leaves his

predicament unclear. However, the women in the novel who faced collective trauma as well as emotional trauma resisted the recurrence of trauma by daring to face the situation.

Um Mabrouk, the servant woman who works in many houses goes through trauma of many types. As a social being she experiences the collective trauma inflicted on the society by the fundamentalist leaders of the regime. Apart from that, she suffers emotional trauma too due to her abusive husband, poverty, sick children and her physical ailments. Her inability to catch up with her missed prayers also adds to her stress and remains as a nagging psychological pain. At the end of the day, she curses herself and sheds tears of remorse. The recurring memories of misery and her inability to solve them persist pushing her to psychological trauma. She develops weird mannerisms and incoherent speech which resonate with her traumatic psyche. The impact of collective trauma thus becomes manifold as each individual is subjected to existential, social, physical and psychological trauma at personal levels.

The grief-stricken Um Mabrouk fight against all odds. People like her often had their own existence questioned, leading to trauma and disillusionment. She becomes hysterical when she has lost her sick child due to the delay in getting timely medical support. The government concerned itself with only power problems and people like Um Mabrouk were treated only as scumbags by the authoritative government. But despite all drastic circumstances, she rises from her ashes and continues her fight for life.

Basma Abdel Aziz's characters faced all trials and tribulations with courage and accumulated strength for survival. Even during the difficult times of war and power games, women were exploited and abused. However, bold women like Amani and Um Mabrouk fight against the injustices and the atrocities committed against

them by men folk. This proves to be a life guiding principle for all women, not to succumb to the suppressing conditions created by the society around them. Thus, Aziz formulates a novel that upholds the unyielding nature of women, quite beyond any caustic circumstance. They are not passive victims of male suppression.

Dr. Tarek could not operate Yehya and take the bullet out then, as there has been a decree from the Gate, not to give treatment to victims of bullet wounds. The government denied bullet firing during the Disgraceful Events as they did not want to project it before the international community. Hence Dr. Tarek gives him first aid and sends him home with Amani, giving him pain-killers. Amani is subjected to terrorising trauma which continues to haunt her even after her release by the authority of Zephyr hospital. That experience devastates her totally, erupting her from the inside. With all her rationality, logic and courage put to test, she remains strong and supports Yehya to pursue his attempt to have the bullet removed from his body. Amani, Um Mabrouk and several other women characters exhibit great mental strength, surpassing all kinds of trauma inflicted upon them by several men, the government and the all-imposing structure Gate, which has stood as an epitome of aggressiveness and autonomy. Amani and Um Mabrouk have had the nerve to question them and apply for the completion of formalities to achieve their aspirations.

The collective trauma to which the entire community in that unnamed city is subjected to, is nauseating. The citizens are denied even basic human rights, their mobile phones are tracked, recorded and used as proof to punish them severely. Mysterious disappearance of people standing in the queue has become common and no one knows as to what happened to them. The government even uses their military against their own people often ending up with gun-fires and deaths. Even in the midst of such dire situations, they hold on together supporting each other. This humaneness

is found, especially in women as they bravely combat every tough situation of life courageously, making the researcher come to a conclusion that women have an inherent capacity to withstand pressure and turmoil and an everlasting optimism, even in the face of trauma and holocaust. Though the character of Yehya, the wounded, is portrayed as the protagonist, it is indeed the women counterparts like Amani and Um Mabrouk, who make the resistance alive with their persistence and support. Basma Abdel Aziz observes that not all women are endowed with such strength, but a very few, who have the mettle to fight for the cause they represent.

Basma Abdel Aziz, being a psychiatrist and journalist in Egypt, could witness the anarchy unleashed by Egyptian authorities at the wake of the Arab Spring and consequent political undercurrents which lead to people's uprisings and protests. The government suppressed the revolts with iron hands leading to death and torture of the citizens. Aziz treated those torture victims and hence had the first-hand knowledge of the public upheavals. The Cairo Nadeen Center, a psychological recluse of people, challenged by trauma was raided and closed by Egyptian authorities. The novel also reveals the nature of human beings, and the way they live, when they are subjected to extreme trauma, at individual and collective levels, and the choices they are forced to make in life. The novel presents the possibilities of exploitation using technology and how governments can turn autocratic and fundamentalistic, leading to neglect of laws and regulations.

Democracies will be toppled by power-mongering bureaucrats who go to the extent of using military against their own citizens. Basma Abdel Aziz hints at the political instability and the resultant chaos of Egypt in the past two decades. With her powerful novel *The Queue*, she redefines Arabic women's literature. The book raises its voice against the persecution and imprisonment of writers for stating their views

and reiterates the writers' freedom around the world to depict reality, how much ever scandalous, in their literature. She observes through her women characters that trauma experienced in their lives is never cured, never forgotten but they gather strength and will power to overcome it by persistent struggle for existence. Aziz's women characters, in their attempt to become empowered, use their own judgment regarding their choice of friends, religious beliefs and career so as to encourage their counterparts in facing traumatic situations. In refusing to conform to the decrees of authoritative government, they emerge as women who are aware of their own rights and needs, with an identity of their own, however harsh their lives are.

The author from Oman, Jokha Alharthi in her classic work *Celestial Bodies* exposes the life and trauma of the people of Oman, and represents individual trauma experienced by characters like Abdallah, Mayya, Asma, Khawla and many others. The book reveals the story of an Omani family over three generations shaped by the rapid social changes of abolition of slavery, consequent changes in outlook and internal strife of characters that traumatise them. Set in the remote village of al-Awafi, just outside the capital city of Muscat, the story gives a kaleidoscopic view of oriental life quite unfamiliar to the West. Alharthi spans through the lives of poor servants to that of wealthiest merchants of Oman. The women characters in the novel are portrayed as strong ones, who are not stereotypes. Most of the story, told in third person narrative, develops with myriads of characters. Abdallah, the son of Merchant Sulayman and husband to Mayya tells his own experiences as first-person narratives. Abdallah is torn between his memories of past which keep haunting him throughout his life. He is a victim of domestic abuse by his father at an early age. With his self-confidence shattered by the traumatic experience, he finds it difficult to lead a normal life.

All the chapters in the novel entitled “Abdallah” are marked by a unique font style. When he shares his traumatic experiences with the readers through the first part of the novel, Abdallah’s inability to voice his traumatic experience could be seen. His experience of being hung upside down in the well shattered him. The inability to voice the pain endured during that time is a characteristic of psychological trauma. His own loud voice or screaming became intolerable to Abdallah in later years as he is reminded constantly about that traumatic experience. He withdraws into himself and quivers at the thought of punishment from his father even after he becomes an adult. He always feels insecure after getting such a punishment from his father. He wants Mayya, his wife to love him and bring him security but in vain. Mayya could not connect to Abdallah due to her own reasons. Abdallah is also haunted by the obscurity about his mother’s death. He is tortured by that unknown reason which Cathy Caruth terms as the trauma of not knowing.

The women characters in the novel are also subjected to violence and other traumatic experiences but unlike Abdallah they try to cope with their trauma and attempt to overcome them through persistent efforts. The most prominent woman in Abdallah’s life, until his marriage, has been Zarifa, the slave woman, his mother figure. She had his father’s beloved, after his mother’s death. Merchant Sulayman has taken care of Zarifa and she, his household. Zarifa had a traumatic life, before she was bought by Merchant Sulayman as a slave. Her earlier life as a child was traumatic, as she was used as a sexual toy by the men in the household of the Shayk. She was the child of a rape victim Ankabuta, and no one cared about her dignity or self-respect. Along with other slave families, she was Merchant Sulayman’s inherited property, and lived in his house taking care of his household. Habib, her husband was a little eccentric in his ways and he used to beat Zarifa.

Habib becomes delirious at times because of the terrible experiences he had during his transit from Africa. He was also a victim of transgenerational trauma. He was captured from Africa and forcefully brought to the slave market in Europe with other slaves. Habib always wanted to break away from the chain of slavery and reclaim his freedom. He was a representative of slave community who were forced to submit before their white masters even though slave trade was abolished internationally. Merchant Sulayman traded slaves, though his main merchandise was dates. The slave progeny who had no idea about their native land were constantly perturbed by their slave existence and displacement from motherland, when they heard the narratives of their parents. These slaves were tortured to such an extent that they often became delirious or mad with the torture they suffered.

Moreover, Habib's wife has become the beloved of his master, and she fulfils his desires of pleasure. Hence, he has to face disruption of his self-respect and his existential crisis forces him to abscond from his master and his wife, Zarifa. There is nothing left for him at al-Awafi except for his helpless mother and son Sanjar. Habib, thus has become a victim of both psychological and transgenerational trauma. Quite like Abdallah, Habib too finds it extremely difficult to handle the traumatic experiences in his life.

Zarifa has borne the sexual assaults, slavery and domestic violence with courage. She finds happiness in rearing her son Sanjar, and her master's son Abdallah together taking care of all their needs and requirements in the household. Ankabuta, Zarifa's mother had a horrifying past. She was a victim of prolonged sexual torture. The continuous sexual abuse made her hysterical and finally, when she was freed, she was pregnant and gave birth to a girl child, whom she named as Zarifa. Ankabuta had a powerful mind and began to conduct Zar exorcisms which made her strong in her

own realm. The dark face of Ankabuta concealed the pain she had suffered and she became ruthless in conducting murders and killings in connection with Zar exorcisms. Ankabuta was strong and resilient in combating her personal trauma.

Pooley E. Apryl, Rebecca C. Benjamin, et al. discuss in the article “Sex differences in the traumatic stress response: PTSD symptoms in women recapitulated in female rats” published in *Biology of Sex Differences*, that the post traumatic disorders (PTSD) affect men and women differently. Not only are women twice as likely as men to develop PTSD, they experience different co-morbidities associated with PTSD. The bio-chemical studies conducted by them revealed that men and women responded to trauma differently. Females exhibited more resilience to the effects of traumatic stress, unlike males. Males and females show fundamentally different responses to trauma that do not simply reflect differences in resilience. The difference in the impact of trauma on two genders is due to the neurobiological underpinnings based on the sex differences (11). Even though the prevalence of PTSD is twice as high in women compared to men, the ability to counter trauma is higher in women. Women are exposed to trauma at much higher scale than men, especially due to more sexual assaults.

Alharthi also presents other characters like Salima, Masouda and Khawla who are traumatised in one way or another. Masouda, the old slave woman is confined in the tiny room after she being stamped mad, by her own daughter. Some believed that Masouda’s madness is fabricated; but nobody knows who confined her in that room or what secret she has carried at heart. Masouda is subjected to intense trauma due to which she has lost her mind and become insane. The author reveals one of the biggest secrets in the novel through Masouda.

Another significant woman character in the novel is Salima, Mayya's mother. Salima's trauma dates back to her childhood, soon after her father's death. She was taken to her uncle's house and Salima shares the pain that she did not get enough food and that she was always hungry those days. She had lost her parents and her only brother at an early age. She had to suffer insults and rebukes at her uncle's house, but she had nowhere to go. When she grew up and got married, she lost her two sons too. Salima has a fighter against the trauma she experienced in life and she finds resilience in bringing up her daughters Mayya, Asma and Khawla. Like Abdallah, Salima was also haunted by traumatic events which were unbearable in their horror. Salima had her son Hamad die in her lap as she could not arrange for a vehicle to take him to a hospital on time. When her granddaughter is born, Salima is reminded of her son Hamad and she feels that her heart will explode in grief. With the death of Hamad, Salima loses her intimacy with her husband Azzan as both of them could never broach up a discussion on Hamad. Thus, Salima becomes all alone in life and she seems trapped in her own traumatic experiences.

Salima resonated with power when Mayya got married to Abdallah, Merchant Sulayman's son. Even though she used to get recurrent memories of her family's death, especially that of her brother, who happened to step on to a mine and exploded to fragments, Salima overcame her anxieties and memories by actively involving in getting her children married off to worthy people. Salima was a woman of courage who fought against all odds of life. Even when Azzan, her husband was drawn towards a Bedouin woman, Najjiya and all the neighbourhood spoke about it, Salima did not react. She had responsibilities to fulfil and she focused on her duties and kept away from every disturbing thought. She is an example of womanhood who strove

hard to overcome her personal woes for the sake of her children, Mayya, Asma and Khawla.

Khawla is another remarkable woman in the novel, who was stubborn and argued that she would marry only Nasir, who was in Canada and waited eternally for him, neglecting all the good proposals her parents brought for her. Her waiting for Nasir became traumatic. After marrying Khawla, he returned to Oman once every two years to see the new child in his house and left Khawla pregnant again. Khawla's husband, Nasir, had been living a double life. While he was married to Khawla, he had a girlfriend in Canada who did not know about his marriage. Khawla, suspected that something was wrong with her husband, but was unable to get at the truth. Her anxiety grew worse because Nasir only visited her occasionally, which stopped her from fully healing from the pain of his neglect. Despite her hurt, Khawla stayed in the marriage for the sake of her children, hoping that Nasir would eventually return to her.

Nasir finally came back to Khawla after his girlfriend in Canada ended their relationship. He settled down and tried his best to make up for the time he had been away. However, Khawla had endured years of emotional pain and trauma. Over time, she realises that she could manage on her own. As she prepares for her daughter's wedding, Khawla decides to divorce Nasir. She could not forget the past neglect and betrayal, and her self-respect had been deeply hurt. These memories of abandonment make it impossible for her to continue the marriage. Khawla thus takes a brave decision to divorce Nasir, denying all entreaties of Nasir, his family and friends. Khawla is a powerful woman who has tried to change the course of her life by taking a decision on her own.

The other important character in the novel is Mayya, Salima's eldest daughter. She named her first born as 'London,' much to the displeasure of the elders in the family. Mayya being married to Abdallah, Merchant Sulayman's son, could afford the best education for her daughter. London becomes a doctor and marries Ahmad, her college sweetheart, who is also a doctor. Ahmad writes poems and dreams of becoming a famous poet someday. Though, they get married out of love, they begin to drift apart due to their difference in visions and perspectives. Ahmad becomes more of a hypocrite and he makes plans about their future considering his interests alone. Ahmad's and London's dreams are different. Despite the differences in their aspirations and dreams, London has clung on to the relationship only because she does not want to be a divorcee in life. Moreover, Ahmad has taken to body shaming her saying that she is so dark and thin. He spares no opportunity to belittle her. Unable to tolerate his hypocrisy, insults and injuries, London decides to demand an annulment. Ahmad is not ready for divorce and tries to cajole her making her feel that she is his prized possession. London has suffered so much of trauma staying married to Ahmad. Ahmad has even entertained the company of a woman, which London is not ready to accept. Her decision to break away free from the entanglements is quite revolutionary.

Alharthi's women characters are indeed powerful ones who hold a mirror to the cross-section of society. They represent thousands of other women who suffer trauma in their lives and attempt to overcome them through their own unique qualities of self-respect, identity and courage. All the three writers – Basma Abdel Aziz, Azar Nafisi and Jokha Alharthi point out how the characters face trauma and its manifestations in their lives. They juxtapose male and female characters to make the readers get a glimpse of how trauma is handled by both of them. Trauma

manifestations extend beyond the earlier concepts of unspeakability. Even in literature, writers experiment with the new theories of trauma interpretations put forward by psychologists through their works.

The most important claim of contemporary trauma theory is that trauma causes a speechless fright that destroys identity. In a trauma novel, interplay of representations of trauma in language, experience, memory and place can be seen. Description of the geographic place of traumatic experience and remembrance situate the individual in relation to a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and reconfiguration of self. Out of the myriad representations of trauma in literature as put forward in the novels of the said Arab and Iranian writers, the victims of trauma, especially women, do not yield to the recurring experiences of trauma. On the other hand, they try to adjust with it or overcome it with definite goals. At times they engage in digressive activities or fight. They resort to flight or escape from the recurring situation. Sometimes, they attach themselves to perpetrators of trauma.

In Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, the helpless sexually abused teenager, Lolita, seeks refuge with Humbert, the abuser. Sometimes trauma victim freezes in response to violence inflicted upon them. The victims may not be able to react or respond effectively as their mind gets fragmented at the impact of trauma. The author uses these pluralities of trauma responses to depict the internalisation of trauma they are subjected to. Though trauma studies in literature have brought in innovative changes, the impact on consciousness and psychopathology is yet to be understood in its full magnitude. The victims gradually learn to handle their own conflicts. The women characters in the novels, develop a set of skills to handle their trauma at their best.

Literature has influenced human beings and it has an empowered language to represent the inner world of man. There is always a space for memories, introspection, retrospection, flashback and awful remembrances that are coloured by pain, wound and trauma. Writers take the data for trauma representation and discuss the effect of language on developing the self. Women characters in the novels use their own trauma for self-knowledge and self-understanding. The main point is that different people react differently to traumatic situations. Traumatized females are found in the centre as well as on the periphery. Significantly, trauma does not always have a negative meaning. The psycho analytical readings of trauma narration in the novels lead to the empowerment of people, making them strong to face the harsh realities of life.

With the political unrest in West Asia, most of the Arab speaking countries have become cauldrons of political upheavals and the change of governments have put the lives of common man on the verge of turbulence and anxieties. Arab Anglophone writers hold up a mirror to the sufferings of people especially to that of women and children. Their writings serve as a meeting point and a battle ground for a variety of disciplines and theories. Their works help readers to conceptualise and revisit the societal disruptions in those countries. The rapidly changing Arab world, bringing in a profusion of thoughts about the political and cultural identities of its people could be seen in them. The cultural milieu and the role of women over the decades give an insight into the socio-political condition of a major race. In all the three novels, the themes vary, but the reader gets an ample view of practical human life. The changing national politics and policies usher in a range of cultural variations and social set ups.

While men become more mute but aggressive in resisting trauma, women are highly vocalised. The plurality of responses to trauma includes flight, fright and fawning attachment with respect to women. However, all women trauma victims exhibit great power of resilience, nullifying the extent of trauma inflicted on them and embrace life with all their heart. Even when they lose partners, children and parents in the course of bullet firings, holocaust and internal strife due to civil war, domestic violence and sexual assaults and psychological problems, they try to swim against the current of adversities. The selected writers gain visibility across the globe, as the governments of Iran, Egypt and Oman are forced to update themselves and mark their progress with regard to modernisation and cultural development. The identity-crisis, the socio-political tensions, the societal framework, the cultural changes, the expanding horizons of regimes and the relative position of women form major areas of understanding human lives better. These writers thus unveil the human rights violations in front of the international conscience, requesting to take up measures to curb the war that continues to lacerate the region.

Scope for further study

There is a great scope for further research in the works of Arab and Iranian women writers with respect to trauma, holocaust studies and psycho analytical studies.

Further studies in this field have the potential to reveal the untold stories of generations who remain in the shadows, their lives obscured by the political upheavals that shape these regions. Each of these novels can be analysed applying postcolonial theories and other new theoretical paradigms in literature.

A feminist reading of the novels can also be attempted, whereby the theories of feminist critics can be used.

Arab literary world can definitely be an interesting topic for further research work on the social, political, cultural and landscape study of the place. The responses to trauma being gender-centric, it opens new vistas of research with respect to psychopathology and trauma care.