

### I. (A) Personal Details

Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Dr. Sumita Parmar	Allahabad University
Paper Coordinator	Prof. Sumita Parmar	Allahabad University
Content Writer/Author (CW)	Dr. Shamenaz Bano	Allahabad Institute of Engineering & Technology, Allahabad, UP
Content Reviewer (CR)	Prof. Sumita Parmar	Allahabad University
Language Editor (LE)	Prof. Sumita Parmar	Allahabad University

### (B) Description of Module

Items	Description of Module
Subject Name	Women's Studies
Paper Name	Women & Literature
Module Name/ Title	Women Writers from the Arab World
Module ID	PAPER-2 MODULE-25
Pre-requisites	The learner is expected to be aware of some of the issues confronting the Arab world
Objectives	The objective of the unit is to draw attention to some of the significant writing being done by women and their initiatives in highlighting the consequences of war.
Keywords	Middle-East Women writers, conflict zone, victims of wars, sanctions, personal narrative

**Women Writers from the Arab World : Fatima Mernissi, Daisy Al-Amir,  
Najde Sadig Al-Ali & Zainab Salbi**

*“In the past, wars only burnt homes, but this time*

*Don't be surprised if even loneliness ignites.*

*In the past, wars only burnt bodies, but this time*

*Don't be surprised if even shadows ignite.”*

Sahir Ludhianvi, *Parchaiyaan*

The truth is that human beings have always engaged in wars since the beginning of civilization. Wars have been fought for power, supremacy, money, ego and many other such

reasons. But whatever the reasons may have been or are, women and innocent children are the worst sufferers. Kamila Shamsie in her novel, *Burnt Shadows* made the following statement about the disastrous impact of war on people on whom it had/had been forcefully imposed:

War is like a disease. Until you've had it, you don't know it. But no.

That's a bad comparison. At least, with disease everyone thinks it might happen to them one day. You have a pain here, a swelling there, a cold which stays and stays. You start to think maybe this is something really

bad. But war— countries like yours (US) they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. This is why you fight more wars than anyone else.

The disease always happens somewhere else. It's why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better. (344)

Writing is not only the best medium of expression, it's a medium accessible to women and many use it to articulate their experiences and raise the voices. They use it to tell the stories that others are not likely to tell, stories that might never be told at all, other women's stories; narratives of anguish and deep suffering but also narratives of unbelievable heroism and courage, of the undefeatable human spirit. Women writers of the Arab world have done commendable work by exposing to the world the realities of the ground in war affected zones. Some of them are Fatima Mernissi, Daisy Al-Amir, Najde Sadig Al-Ali, and Zainab Salbi

### **Fatima Mernissi**

Born in a middle-class family in Morocco in 1940, and considered a pioneer of feminist writing in the Arab world and an internationally acclaimed Islamic feminist, Fatima Mernissi is a sociologist and a teacher by profession currently working in the Mohammad V.

University of Rabat . As a sociologist, she has done a substantial amount of fieldwork mainly in her country, Morocco. Working for the UNESCO and ILO she conducted many interviews in late 1970s and 1980s in order to map the prevailing attitudes towards women and work. She has written extensively on women's issues, women in Moroccan society as well as on women and Islam from a historical and contemporary perspective and been widely published in magazines, journals and newspapers. Because of her extensive work, she was awarded, -Prince of Asturias Award along with Susan Sontag in 2003.

In her writing, she analyses the historical development of Islamic thought and its modern manifestation and critiques women's roles in it. This she does by a detailed investigation of the nature of the succession to Prophet Mohammad. She questions the validity of some of the -Hadith on the issues of the subjugation of women in Islam but not in the Quran. The central themes of her writings are based on the life of women within harems, questions of gender, and women's place and role in the public as well as private spheres.

Her works have been translated into both English and French and therefore have a worldwide reach. Her works in English include: *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society* (1975) which was revised in 1985 and 1987, *Doing Daily Battles: Interviews with Moroccan Women*, translated by Mary Jo Lakeland (1988). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretations of Islam* (1992), *Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (1993), *The Harem Within*, which was retitled *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1995), *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001), and *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (2002),

She believes in the theory that Islam does not subjugate women, rather it celebrates female power. In *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society*, Mernissi argues that Islam had given many rights to women. Indeed, in contemporary society, that fact so many women are working in various sectors in Arab society including show-anchors, films and

video stars in more than 500-plus Arab satellite channels telecast around the globe is evidence of this. Sexual inequality which is a major issue and hindrance to women's progress is not peculiar to Islamic societies alone, but is a global phenomenon, a problem common to both Western and Islamic societies.

In the book, Mernissi states that there was a perception among Muslim theorists that women as active sexual beings required stricter regulation and control since inherent in that sexuality was a potential danger to civilized society, a perception not confined to the Islamic world alone, but found in patriarchal societies and religions the world over. However, with the advent of modernization, the prevalence of traditional Muslim structures are becoming less stringent and are giving in to more flexible arrangements compatible with the modern world.

Further she clarifies her viewpoint through popular source materials, exploring the disorienting effects of modern life on the present condition of male-female relations and examines the male-female unit as a basic component of the framework of Muslim orderliness, reflecting the sexual dynamics of the Muslim world to the readers. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society* is regarded as a classic book in the United States. Earlier it was not available in the Britain, but now the revised and updated version, is available around the globe.

### **Daisy Al-Amir**

Daisy Al-Amir is an Iraqi writer, a poet and novelist. Born in Basra, Iraq in 1935, she was educated at Baghdad and Cambridge, earning her PhD in Arabic Literature. The publication of her book, *The Waiting List: Iraqi Tales of Alienation* earned her widespread recognition and made her one of the leading female writers of Iraq.

Her stories express deep concern about the plight of women and portray their experiences during turbulent times in the Middle East, specially during Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and the Lebanese civil war. She is the author of five published works focussing

mainly on women-centric themes. These are : *The Distant Country that You Love* (1964), *Then the Wave Returns* (1969), *In the Vortex of Love and Hate* (1979), *Promises for Sale* (1981), *The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman's Tales of Alienation* (1994).

Daisy Al-Amir wrote *The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman's Tales of Alienation* in 1994 in Arabic. This collection of stories was first published in Arabic in Lebanon as *La'ihat al-Intizar*, and was later translated into English by Barbara Parmenter with an introduction by Mona Mikhail who placed her stories and poems in the context of contemporary Islamic literature and gender studies. Among her five publications, it is considered the best. The stories in the book are located in Iraq, Cyprus and Lebanon and describe the life of a single woman, a cultural and political refugee, who is a divorcee but educated and affluent. The impact of the rise of Saddam Hussain as an Iraqi leader, the chaotic atmosphere prevailing after the Lebanese Civil war and its impact on a woman's life and her single-handed struggle for survival, as well as her experiences in Middle-East society are very sensitively described by Al-Amir. With her portrayal of strong woman characters in her fiction, Daisy Al-Amir has carved for herself a prominent place in the contemporary world of Arab Fiction.

She is not only a novelist but also a poet who is a follower of a long tradition of Iraqi poetry, an influence manifested in the sensuality of her prose-writing. But there is also a blend of existential elements in her works as she tries to find and maintain a balance between fate on the one hand and the capricious riotous world she inhabits on the other. In her writing, her treatment of time and space is minimalist, a surreal style that depicts the disappointments of life through the experience of her own memory. While struggling alone, without family, in a chaotic state, moving from one country to another, she explores and interrogates the meaning of life in the changing world she inhabits.

**Najde Sadig Al-Ali**



Najde Sadig Al-Ali is an activist who has been involved in the women's movement of Egypt since many years. Her father is Iraqi while her mother is from Germany. She has been working as a Professor & Chairperson of Gender Studies in the Centre for Gender Studies at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS). She holds the prestigious position of President of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS), and is also the member of the Feminist Review Collective.

Besides being an academician, she is also a political activist and the founder of the Iraqi British organisation *Act Together: Women's Action for Iraq* in 2000. She is deeply involved in the activities of the London branch of 'Women in Black', a worldwide network of women who are against war and violence. She has authored various books, some of which are: *Secularism & the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movements* (2000), *New Approaches to Migration* (2002), *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (2007), *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (with Nicola Pratt, 2009). Her writings reflect the experiences of Iraqi women in the war zone, and their recent struggle to raise their voices against the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Najde published *New Approaches to Migration* in 2002, which is a critical evaluation of the contemporary migration taking place in the international arena. She has thrown light on the relationship between 'home' and transnational communities. Earlier the meaning of 'home' was nostalgic for many, but now this trend is changing and evolving because of the advent of globalization. International migrants now have developed new globally oriented identities. In this book, she has explored these and related issues such as, the meaning of 'home' to transnational peoples, how social spaces are transformed and the nature of their transformations.

*Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* by Najde is a remarkable piece of work highlighting 50 years of experiences of the women of Iraq, their lives, aspirations,

losses and the physical as well as emotional and psychological consequences of displacement. It gives the reader an insight into what the lives of people living in a country destroyed by war is like and what has been the impact of American and British armies overrunning their land. It is an individual as well as a collective account of the histories and struggles of women through their own narratives.

The book gives details of the political upheavals of a country and how a nation is devastated because of global politics. Or in other words, how Iraq became the victim of the greed of powerful nations. The book is unique in itself as it covers areas ranging from development policies to gender studies and provides a multi-layered analysis and perspective, which is not only relevant but quite indispensable to numerous schools of thought and academic disciplines. It critiques the rapid growth of violent discourse of Occidental hegemonic ideologies against the Oriental world.

Although educated and brought up in Germany, Najde has deep affection for the country to which she belongs. Iraq occupies a central position in her intellectual and emotional self and this is quite obvious in her writings that mostly focus on the country of her origin. Her memories of visiting her Iraqi relatives, the nostalgic memories of her childhood, the illuminating sights and sounds, observations she has heard and experienced since her childhood all permeate her work. In her narratives she acknowledges the significance of her female relatives whose courage inspired her to pen down their experiences of life. She has vividly captured their knowledge of life, their warmth and culture, the political chaos and its dreadful impacts on their lives in her writings. She is committed to working for the education, economic development and emancipation of Iraqi women.

### **Zainab Salbi**

Zainab Salbi has a multifaceted personality; she is an author, a human right activist, humanitarian, social entrepreneur and a media commentator who was the founder and former

CEO (1993-2011) of Washington-based Women for Women International. Born in 1969 in Baghdad, Iraq, her father was a personal pilot of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. During Hussein's regime, her family experienced so much psychological abuse that she decided to dedicate her life for the cause of women around the world.

At the age of 19, she migrated to the US, from where she carried out her mission. She was a witness of the plight of women during the Iran-Iraq war and this led her to work for women affected in war. Throughout her life, she has written and spoken extensively on women affected by rape and other crimes & violence during war. She is a prominent public figure with her extensive coverage on media outlets which include being several times on the immensely popular ÷Oprah Winfrey Show and the famous ÷Washington Post. ÷For her humanitarian work in Bosnia, she was honoured by President Bill Clinton in 1995 at the White House. She is working currently on creating multimedia platforms on giving a voice to Arab and Muslim women.

She is the recipient of many prestigious awards, honours and prizes which includes:

- Time magazine Innovator of the Month for her pioneering work as philanthropist
- Honoured by President Clinton at White House (1995)
- Harper's Bazaar 21<sup>st</sup> century heroines nominee (1993)
- Forbes Magazine Trailblazer Award (2005)
- Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize on behalf of ÷Women of Women International (2005)
- World Economic Forum's Young Global leader (2007)
- David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award (2010)
- Austin College Posey Leadership Award (2011)
- Harper's Bazaar 21<sup>st</sup> Century Heroine (nominated by President Bill Clinton)
- Honorary doctorate Degree from York University (2014)
- One of the Most Influential Women on twitter, Fortune Magazine (2014)
- One of the Most Influential Women on Social Media, Wear Your Voice (2015)
- One of the 100 Most Powerful Arab Women, Arabian Business (2015)



Her works includes- *Between Two Worlds Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam* (2005), *The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope* (2006), *If You Know Me You Would Care* (2013).

Zainab Salbi published a memoir, *Between Two Worlds Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam* in 2005, which reflects her own experience of growing up in Iraq in an adverse situation under Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime. *Between Two Worlds* has been highly praised around the world. According to the *Publisher's Weekly*:

... the most honest account of life within Saddam's circle so far.

It's an enlightening revelation of how, by barely perceptible

stages, decent people make accommodations in a horrific regime. (web)

The memoir recounts her story from the tender age of 11 years when her father was appointed as a personal pilot to one of the dictators of the modern world, Saddam Hussein. This led to her family's association with him when they were forced to spend weekends with him so that he could watch their every movement. This was discomfiting for her and her family. She was further sent by her mother to America for an arranged marriage. The marriage which was an escape for her from a tyrannical rule, further affected her life. She faced another atrocities and abuse in her married life. But she did not compromise with the situation but moved on and transformed herself into a strong woman. It was at this point that she started a campaign against atrocities inflicted on women focusing mostly on war victims. She founded *Women for Women International* and is recognized as a champion of women survivors of war.

She published *The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope* in 2006. This memoir is very different from her previous one as it takes us to the world of some war affected countries like, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Columbia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Sudan. It narrates the stories of women affected by war in these

countries who are facing the toughest challenges of life daily by reclaiming the lives of their families and communities destroyed as an outcome of conflict. As she states:

War is not computer-generated missile striking a digital map.

War is the colour of earth as it explodes in our faces, the sound of a child pleading, the smell of smoke and fear. Women survivors of war are not the single image portrayed on the television screen, but the glue that holds families and countries together. Perhaps by understanding women, and the other side of war... we will have more humility in our discussions of wars... perhaps it is time to listen to women's side of history. (August 14, 2010)

Salbi, along with a photographer Rennie Maifredi travelled to countries like, Afghanistan, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina covering the stories of women war victims. They recorded their experience collaboratively in *If You Know Me You Would Care* which was published in 2013. The memoir reflects the experiences of those women who have overcome the worst of situations by their toughness and their spirit of survival. Salbi interviewed women who have faced the most dreadful situations and yet have survived. She wrote about their definitions of war and their hope of peace, about their horrifying experiences and their struggles to survive them and finally about their optimistic attitude towards the future. While Salbi took the interviews of these courageous women, Maifredi photographed them. This is a very rare account as both the interview and images together create a compelling, global, first-person account of the experiences of women survivors of dangerous man-made calamities. *If You Know Me You Would Care* is not simply a memoir but a celebration of strong womanhood against all odd and adverse situations — it is a journey undertaken by Zainab Salbi and Rennie Maifredi to describe the atrocities of war and the incumbent poverty, and to narrate the stories of women survivors to the world.

These stories have had a huge impact since they are not just tales of tears, sorrows and victimhood but also of happiness, love and forgiveness. Zainab makes the following statement about the book :

The women in this book are an inspiration to all of us who aspire to triumph over adversity. It is a personal peek at the most intimate as told by women who have survived war. It is a tribute to them, to their survival, their achievements, and their dreams. I hope people everywhere will take away the powerful message of survival this book inspires. (web)

Fatima Mernissi, Daisy Al-Amir, Najde Sadig Al-Ali and Zainab Salbi are role models for women, not only in their countries but around the world. They are trailblazers and architects for peace who have survived against all odds and adverse situations. This module has tried to highlight the efforts they are making through their writings for bringing gender equity to society and showcasing the plight of women affected by military violence in the world. Their voices are the voices of transformation as they advocate for more fair and just social systems for women. They write for the creation of a social order where women will not be either marginalised or subaltern creatures but will have space to grow and contribute towards building a better world.

It is through the efforts of many feminists and peace-makers like them that women have started emerging in almost all fields in the Middle-East. The recent example we have seen is that of the appointed of Zekra Alwach, a civil engineer, as Mayor of Baghdad in February 2015. She is the first woman to hold such a prestigious position in a capital city in the Arab world. Although there are many women parliamentarians in some countries of the Middle-East, but Iraq holds the highest percent with 25 percent of seats for women candidates in the

parliament, which is quite remarkable in a country which is continuously facing political turmoil. The future has much more to offer to women in that part of the world.

