

Depiction of Feminine Concerns in Zainab Salbi's *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam.*

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore women's survival, resilience, and fortitude during times of conflict. As life becomes harsh and unpredictable during times of conflict, women battle the odds to grapple life with faith and fortitude. During challenging situations, women strive to unravel their feminine and their feminist selves by upholding and cherishing their values, identity and culture. Zainab Salbi's memoir *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the shadow of Saddam* is a personal and intimate memoir narrating the conflicting situations in which she and her family lived throughout their lives. The study concentrates on unravelling the feminine and the feminist concepts in the women characters of Zainab's poignant autobiographical narrative. The paper aims to understand how conflicts impacted womanhood and focuses on women's lives and experiences in conflict zones. The paper focuses to explore the issues faced by the women characters in Zainab Salbi and Laurie Becklund's brilliant memoir *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam*. The memoir reveals life during times of conflict and how women grapple for safety within the crude dictates of masochistic societies. Despite all these trials and tribulations, she emerged from a victim to a strong global activist voicing and fighting for the rights of women and the oppressed women survivors of war.

Keywords: armed conflict, ethnic cleansing, feminine, feminist, oppression.

Armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns governments or territories which involves the use of armed force between two parties. One of the main consequences of armed conflict is the violence against women and children. Though this action is euphemistically termed as a form of ‘ethnic cleansing’ by the enemy troops, the main idea of this is to demoralize women with a motive to degrade, humiliate and terrorize the nation as a whole. This affects the emotional, physical, and mental health of women and also tarnishes their social image as a wife, mothers and sisters, and so on. They are often rejected by their family members and by their communities, thereby leaving them to a life of penury; either forcibly imposed on them by the society or by the male pariahs of the society. Female populations are often brutally and ruthlessly killed, or they face labour migration to refugee camps where they are forced to lose their womanhood. Thereby they lose their identity, and the very question of survival becomes painful. There are even cases where women migrate to urban places from rural communities with the hope of finding their kith and kin and also with the hope of getting better employment opportunities. In most of the cases, they end up becoming victimized as rape survivors, with instances of forced marriages or prostitution imposed on them.

The paper aims to understand how conflicts impacted womanhood and focuses on women’s lives and experiences in conflict zones. A further reference to Zainab Salbi’s memoir *Between Two Worlds* depict a clear picture and helps to analyse how conflicts are represented in literature.

War and armed conflict leave painful and haunting memories in the lives of people, especially in women who face a constant struggle to balance the patriarchal norms of the society and maintain a balance in their personal lives as well. They face suffering and hardships at the hands of the state and enemy troops who target them just as worms to be caught for the bait of ‘ethnic cleansing.’ Women in popular texts and print media are often stereotyped as the ever-lamenting victim who becomes prey to the enemies and for their bullying behaviour. The State and the Centre do not consider women at the negotiating table to discuss and address their issues as they are systematically removed from all decision-making processes.

Women often face custodial violence in the hands of the army as well as from the militants. There were cases where women were attacked brutally merely on grounds of suspicion, and sometimes when the male family members were suspected to be informers. Such ill-treatment includes torture methods such as sexual violence, forced pregnancy, sterilization, strip searches, rape, detention, forced prostitution, solitary confinement, separation from one's family, children, and loved ones, abusive medical examinations, non-provision of sanitary material during interrogation, abusive and degrading insults, prohibition of family visits and so on.

Zainab Salbi in one of her interviews with Ted Talk explains yet another side of war, where people in a conflict zone experience life during times of war and how they recuperate themselves by behaving as normal sane beings.... "do you know that people fall in love in war and go to schools and go to factories and hospitals and get divorced and go dancing and go planning and live life going? And the ones who are keeping that life are women".(08:26)

Zainab supports and empathizes women who have survived the pains and agonies during times of conflict. She expresses her respect for women when she has witnessed for herself how men keep fighting wars and how women keep life going in midst of war. In one of her interviews with Sofija Stefanovio, Zainab narrates how women survived and experienced conflict:

"I think that the women who survive these wars are the most resilient ones. I am in awe of the women I write about. And their resilience is not only about staying alive. They are the ones who taught me to enjoy life...not only are these women resilient in terms of surviving and keeping ongoing, but they also have these soft aspects of resilience, which is in beauty and joy".

The notion of vulnerability itself was mostly a sham as women were most often fixed within the orbits of their pre-determined cultural and social norms. War was the only catalyst that triggered changes in the pre-defined roles.Zainab Salbi in her book 'Between Two Worlds,' describes her conversations with war victims during the attack on women in Siberia.She talks about war and how rape was effectively used as a war tactic:

“Rape was every bit as much a strategy of war as the ethnic cleansing fought with guns, perhaps more so because it didn’t just eliminate individuals, it destroyed whole families and societies. Serbian soldiers were encouraged to hate Bosnians because the Ottoman Empire had once controlled the Balkans, and to hate the Croatians because their ancestors were assumed to be Ustasha, Nazi sympathizers, during World War II. They had been told that they were avenging crimes committed against their grandfathers by the grandfathers of these women.

As if women were a battlefield, where two old enemies met to set scores straight”.
(218)

Women faced social isolation and emotional trauma, as they feared threat to their lives when they voice out the injustice meted out to them. So most often they often had to face the harm inflicted on them for the rest of their lives, with an eerie silence.

Bell Hooks, the much-acclaimed Afro American writer in her epoch-making book *Talking Back* reveals her fear and agony in writing about the experiences of women

“The willingness to be open about personal stuff that has always been there for me in talking has only recently worked its way fully into writing. It has taken longer for me to be publicly private in writing because there was lurking in me the fear of punishment – the fear of saying something about loved ones that would feel should not be said. The fear that the punishment would be a loss, that I will be cut off from meaningful contacts.

We must speak about ...if we are to heal our wounds (hurts caused by domination and exploitation and oppression), if we are to recover and realize ourselves”.(02-03)

Zainab Salbi in one of the Ted talk sessions titled ‘Women, Wartime and the Dream of Peace’ reveals how women faced issues of alienation and how they lost their identity when they strived to voice out their experiences. She states that this was the most hurting feeling to womanhood at large:

“...There is also the fear of losing loved ones, and I think that’s even worse. It’s too painful... ‘The fear of losing the ‘I’ in me, the fear of losing the ‘I’ in me’. That’s what my mother in Iraq used to tell me. It’s like dying from ‘inside out.’ A Palestinian

woman once told me, ‘It’s not about the fear of one death,’ she said, ‘sometimes I feel like I die 10 times in one day, as she was describing the marches of the soldiers and the sounds of their bullets.’ She said, ‘But it’s not fair, there is only one life and there should be only one death’’. (04:26)

Most often in conflict zones, women became silent victims, as they were doubly marginalized – by the oppressors, as well as by the male members of their society and families. They became weak and were subdued when the men folk in their domestic spheres vented out their frustrations on them. In a large majority of cases, rapes and crimes perpetrated by the family members or by enemy troops were not reported and published in any form of print or broadcast media. This led to a rise in incidents leading to physical, sexual, and psychological violence like dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, battering, non-spousal violence, sexual abuse of female children in the household, and so on goes the endless list.

Bell Hooks in her book *Talking Back* narrates how women had to fight their own inner battles and oppressions as they were left to fight their lone battle against violence and gender discrimination. “It is necessary to remember that it is first the potential oppressor within that we must resist –the potential victim within that we must rescue- otherwise we cannot hope for an end to domination, for liberation”(20-21).Bell Hooks explains how woman’s silence is often considered as a sign of feminine submissiveness to patriarchal authority. She emphasizes how feminist studies focused on ‘finding a voice’ for themselves, which sounded more like a clichéd expression. Hooks describes the condition of women during times of oppression.

“...women share a common speech or that all women have something meaningful to say at all times. However, for women within oppressed groups who have contained so many feelings – despair, rage, anguish -who do not speak, as poet Audre Lorde writes, ‘for fear that our words will not be heard or welcomed’, coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being an object to being a subject. Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless-our beings defined and interpreted by others.”(12)

Bell Hook also draws the reader's attention to Third World literature. She emphasizes how narratives symbolize the struggles, oppressions, and dominations faced by women in these places. Even the confessional genre of literature emerged as a gesture of rebellion and resistance. It urged the exploited and oppressed women to voice out their fears and anguish. She emphasizes how feminist struggle should be of primary importance because it symbolizes the painful agonies that a woman encounters in her daily life

“Feminist struggle to end patriarchal domination should be of primary importance to men and women globally not because it is the foundation of all other suppressive structures but because it is that form of domination we are most likely to encounter in an ongoing way in everyday life.”(21)

The feminist struggle for acceptance and the clamour for equality is the basic right that women need to obtain initially from their domestic spheres which would further enable them to position themselves within the community, nation, and international spheres. Bell Hooks emphasizes that the readers should understand how the recent trend in feminist politicization has enabled in resisting male domination and patriarchy.

“Only when we confront the realities of sex, race, and class, the ways that divide us, make us different, stand us in opposition, and work to reconcile and resolve these issues we will be able to participate in the making of the feminist revolution, in the transformation of the world”(25)

The feminist movement, when it first began, it was quite successful as it helped women to understand and analyse themselves. They became increasingly aware of the situations where they were dominated sexually and oppressed for a cause, which was remotely concerning them. But recent studies in the feminist movement indicate how patriarchy and male domination was not the sole reasons for oppression and domination of womanhood. Women's liberation has more to do with individual choices as women needs to be self-liberated from their internal conflicts to strike a balance with her own life. Bell Hooks reiterates the same idea when she emphasizes:

“Rather than aiding the process of self-discovery, many women felt a sense of disintegration as though their lives were becoming all the more fragmented and

broken (these women who name the pain engendered by sexism and gendered oppression, who went on to emulate males and to work at assimilation into the culture of patriarchy, the culture of domination, were able to experience a sense of fulfilment denied to those of us who were seeking transformation both of the self and the world around us) Longing for self-discovery, not simply the description of one's woundedness, one's victimization, or repeated discussion of the problems, many women simply became disillusioned and disinterested in feminism, uncertain about whether feminism was a radical movement"(32-33)

Zainab Salbi's memoir *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the shadow of Saddam* is a personal and intimate memoir narrating the conflicting situations in which she and her family lived throughout their lives. The study concentrates on unravelling the feminine and the feminist concepts in the women characters of Zainab's poignant autobiographical narrative. The paper aims to understand how conflicts impacted womanhood and focuses on women's lives and experiences in conflict zones. The paper focuses to explore the issues faced by the women characters in Zainab Salbi and Laurie Becklund's brilliant memoir *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam*. The memoir reveals life during times of conflict and how women grapple for safety within the crude dictates of masochistic societies. Despite all these trials and tribulations, she emerged from a victim to a strong global activist voicing and fighting for the rights of women and the oppressed women survivors of war.

Zainab was born and brought up in an affluent family, yet she had to suffer the pains and agonies of war just like any civilian who lived a conflict zone. She had to silently endure the pain and trauma of seeing her family disintegrating and had to witness the harm and terror which Saddam Hussein inflicted to separate her family. She describes how she led a much rebellious teenage life, how it shaped her to become a violent wife who struggled to voice out for herself and how she later became a public figure.

"...for over a decade, I have gone around the world, meeting with victims of war and the awful mass rape, the world seems to accept as an inevitable consequence of war. Seeing the criminal patterns behind such violence, I began encouraging women to break their silence and speak so that their oppressors could be punished. Yet, I have

been unable to break my own...how long would women continue to be complicit in their sufferings by remaining silent”(04-05)

Zainab’s father was the personal pilot of Saddam Hussein. From a very tender age, Zainab lived a life of fear, when she realized that her family feared Saddam Hussein who was the President of Iraq. Saddam Hussein was the only person who had the power to save them as well as to destroy them mercilessly as a ruthless dictator. The family had to hide their apprehensions as they feared oppression from the Baathist ¹party.

Zainab’s mother taught her how to survive with a ‘plastic smile’. She advised her daughter to hide and bury her fears within herself as she knew that Amo² could read ‘one’s eyes.



From a very young age, Zainab understood how to control her fear and resentment against Amo. “Every instinct in me-survival, loyalty, anger, horror, resentment, guilt, and most of all, fear- conspires to prevent me from speaking Saddam Hussein’s name out loud”.(3)Though Zainab’s family had hardly any interest in politics, they had to join the Baathist party, like most Iraqis to retain their jobs and to ensure safety for their families. Zainab witnessed how her mother renounced all her treasures and fine jewels for the cause of the Baath party and how she parted with Zainab’s favourite Abbasid coin as a gift to Amo due to her sheer fear. Though Zainab lived the early part of her childhood seeing the love, warmth, and affection of her parents, she had also been a witness to moments of stress,

¹ Baathist party rose into full power and authority in Iraq in 1968. Saddam Hussein was one of the most influential authoritarians in the Baath party as he had full autonomy to influence government employees, military personnel and even had ability to influence governmental decisions at all levels

² Saddam Hussein was often called as ‘Amo’ (which means ‘uncle) among his family and inner circle of friends. Zainab Salbi in her book uses the term ‘Amo’ very frequently in her book to refer to Saddam Hussein . Amo was also the traditional form of address that Iraqi children use to call male adults.

depression, and insecurities surmounting the family as she even saw her mother attempting suicide by popping the sleeping pills. As a young child, Zainab helplessly watched her family drifting apart and it later culminated in Zainab's unhappy adulthood, her hasty marriage and subsequent travel to America. Zainab's husband Fakhri was a conservative Shia³Muslim who detested Saddam Hussein and his tribe called Tikrit (the tribe as well as the place where Saddam was born). Fakhri dominated Zainab physically and emotionally and there were times when her husband punished her sexually to demonstrate his brute force and hatred towards her caste and her family for their affinity with Saddam Hussein. Fakhri belonged to the Shia caste and hence he detested Saddam Hussein and his tribe as Tikrits were instrumental in expelling Shias from their hometown. Zainab narrates the troubles and the tormenting situations she had to endure as Fakhri's wife during her stay in America. "I was the daughter of the pilot of Saddam Hussein, and Fakhri was doing to me in bed, what the whole exile community wanted to do to Amo".(183) For Zainab, marriage was like a leap from the pan to the flaming fire, as Fakhri subjugated her physically and mentally with his repeated acts of rape and punishment. Zainab lived in a forsaken space with no one to help her or to empathize her.

"Fakhri, on the other hand, seemed to see me like a kind of mail-order bride, like the lonely girl from Iran, like thousands of other young immigrant brides streaming into the United States from other oppressed countries worldwide. I was supposed to be not only obedient and amenable to spousal training, but to be grateful for the opportunity—a toxic mix of American arrogance and Arab masochism".(182-3)

The Iran-Iraq war made things worse, as Zainab could not contact her family and relatives. Living all by herself, she felt liberated and happy as she was freed from the clutches of Amo. Zainab had to face the pain of seeing her family drifting apart when her parents and her siblings got separated.

Zainab's second marriage to her long-time friend Amjad, whom she met during her stay in America was a happy one. Amjad was quite understanding and supportive to Zainab, but her life in Iraq, her painful memories of her family, and her fear of Amo always haunted her

³ Shia and Sunni are the two major denominations of Islam which formed after the death of the Islamic prophet Muhammad in AD 632. Sunni Muslims formed the majority of the Muslim population and Shias were a minority group who belonged to the Twelver tradition.

throughout her life. Zainab started realizing the troubles and fears that her mother had to face when she had to attend the parties hosted by Saddam Hussein's wife, Sajida and there were instances when Zainab had to entertain Saddam Hussein's daughters since they were the daughters of a powerful dictator. Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay were evil and notorious for their heinous crimes as they ill-treated women in the most degrading manner. They raped and mutilated women. The only hideout for Zainab was to escape from the very sight of these oppressors. Friendship was the only tactic that Zainab and her family could employ to protect themselves. "Never having mastered the art of making such dangerous thoughts fly out of my brain as my mother tried to teach me, I learned to hide them".(118)

Alia, the mother of Zainab Salbi is one of the most powerful characters in the novel. Alia was a beautiful young woman and a doting mother to all her three kids. She was a good daughter to her aged mother Bibi and a loving and affectionate wife blessed with a blissful marital life. She was born and brought up in a well-known Shia family in Iran, and later her family settled in Iraq after her marriage. Her husband Basil worked as a pilot in Saddam Hussein's personal jet plane. Though it appeared as a promising and prestigious job, Alia and her family lived throughout their lives fearing the oppressive ruler and the harm that Saddam Hussein could do to their family. Alia and her family tried to manage and retain a safe distance from Amo, but they were forced to be friends with Amo. Alia in her notebook relates how Amo had sent a rifle to the family as a token of friendship. "He talked about friendship that night and how death could be the punishment for any friend who betrays him"(20). Alia reveals all her fears and her frustrations in her personal notebook.

"He (Saddam) had a very charming personality, that made an immense impression on anybody who met him...He always makes sure to spend some time with each couple to get to know them through their own and part of his strategy is to start first on couples where the wife is particularly beautiful."(70)

Zainab Salbi recalls how her mother Alia withstood the situations of crisis and stood strong with their family. Zainab in one of her interviews with the Ted Talk reminisces how her mother stood as a pillar of strength during the times of the Iran Iraq conflict.

"We are missing a completely other side of wars. We are missing my mother's story, who made sure with every siren, with every raid, with every cut off of electricity, she

played puppet shows for my brothers and I, so we would not be scared by the sounds of the explosions”.(08:26)

Alia in her notebook mentioned how Saddam Hussein in one instance got annoyed with Alia, for her refusal to entertain Saddam’s concubine, Samira in Alia’s household. His anger was something that everyone feared, as it might even cost them to lose their lives. Alia could never express her fears about Saddam Hussein as she feared that her family could be harmed. Her notebook recordings were painful testimonials of the fears and insecurities which she faced.

“The games he (Saddam) played between friends to spread fear and suspicion among all of us, his nightly visits, his flirting with the wives, the inability to refuse him any request, for it may cost one’s life, among many other things led some to leave the country.”(91)

The initial rift in Alia’s family occurred when Basil, her husband told the family that the government forced Iraqi husbands to divorce their Iranian wives and they were encouraged by paying them 2000 dinars. Basil however had to discuss these with Amo, as he feared deportation since Alia and her forefathers were from Iran. With the consent of the President, a ‘special file’ was made on this behalf and Basil and his family were exempted from this on Amo’s special consideration. There were times in Alia’s life when the mother and daughter shared a very close friendship, as Alia confided her fears and her inner turmoil to her daughter. Alia revealed her perplexed state of mind to her daughter thus, “I feel like a bird in a cage”(52). Alia’s life became more miserable when she and Basil had regular disagreements regarding issues concerning Basil’s official duties as Saddam Hussein’s pilot; for she often feared that the President might go to any extent to harm her and her family. She longed to escape from the clutches of Amo, but she often felt disappointed and frustrated to understand that an escape was only a distant dream and could never turn out to be a reality. Zainab reveals the state of chaos in her family. “I remember my parents arguing as they swung back and forth between escape and the illusion of safety that came with submission...My father would fly away, and I would be left to watch my mother beat her wings around her, alternately trying to escape her cage and feather her nest”(95).

Though Alia lived all her life fearing Amo, she wanted to ensure that her daughter would be free and secure. It was only in her deathbed that Alia revealed the reasons for Zainab's hasty marriage with Fakhri. Alia agreed to the marriage to protect her daughter from the lusty eyes of the President and his sons who were notorious in crimes and for assaulting women whom they wanted. The only way in which Alia could ensure a safe haven to her daughter was to get her married off at the earliest.

Alia conducted Zainab's marriage to Fakhri in a hasty manner as she wanted to ensure that her daughter migrated to a far of country and she lived in safe custody. She always feared the safety and well-being of her daughter and it was during the last stages of her life, that Alia revealed her fears to her daughter. "I had to get you out, habibiti⁴...He (Amo) wanted you, Zainab...In his eyes, you were a woman"(240). Alia felt guilty for the hasty marriage. Her love and concern for her daughter can be seen in the letters that she wrote to console her daughter. "I ask you to remain strong, keep your ethics strong, and do whatever is right. You are a strong woman... Keep your self-respect"(193). Alia strongly believed that she had to leave Iraq in order to lead a liberated life. She migrated to Jordan with her younger son Hassan, leaving the eldest son Haider with her husband Basilin Iraq. Her happiness knew no bounds when she escaped from Iraq to a free new world. The novel leaves one with a tinge of pain lingering for Alia, as she struggled throughout her life, but she never received the happiness of freedom and liberation, for which she longed throughout her life.

Bibi was Zainab Salbi's maternal grandmother and the mother of Alia. She was a very strong person and a great influence for Zainab and a much greater source of strength and support to Alia at times of distress. Though Iran was her hometown, Bibi only had vague memories of visiting Tehran (Iran) during her early childhood. So Bibi and her grandparents were all registered as residents in Iraq of 'Iranian origin' (48)

Zainab reminisces the days of her early childhood when Bibi introduced her to the world of adventure, magic, and war through the stories and tales from the Quran. "It was from these stories that I drew my earliest lessons about women and men, about being Muslim and being secular, and about war and whatever you call life between wars, which I never knew to be peace"(22). Zainab recalls her childhood memories when she used to visit Bibi at her house

⁴ 'Habibiti' was the pet name which Alia used to call her daughter. The word means 'my dear little one.'

in Karbala. She felt the whole journey as an ‘adventure into an exotic past, a medieval city that was also a commercial centre.’ (24)

Bibi was a God-fearing person, who believed in the greatness of God. She instilled good values in her grandchildren and remained a source of emotional support to her daughters. Zainab felt that her grandmother’s life was much like the age-old Cinderella story; as Bibi orphaned at a young age and left in the custodial care of an uncle whose negligence left her in poverty. Bibi was married off at the age of thirteen. Her mother-in-law was a strong matriarch who established her sewing factory at the dawn of the twentieth century. Young Bibi was trained to be humble and subservient to her mother-in-law. As time passed by, Bibi outlived all the members of her generation and she found solace in religion. She left her palatial bungalow on Tigris and shifted to a humble household in Karbala where she lived a contented life with her daughters.

Zainab grew up witnessing the bonding between Alia and her mother Bibi. The bonding between the mother and the daughter had a strong and formative influence on young Zainab and this can be seen in the love and warm relationship which she shared with her mother.

“...in Karbala with Bibi, Mama calmed from the moment we walked in the door and Bibi greeted her full embrace. The love between them was obvious, the differences in lifestyles and dress irrelevant. I couldn’t imagine living like Bibi any more than a city child could imagine making a living behind an ox and a plow, yet when she hugged me, I felt myself collapse into a rustle of unquestioning love. She was the symbol of post-modern women my generation revered even if we didn’t choose to follow in their footsteps, the only human being in my life who never changed. Gentle, soft, and strong in the way people of unveiling faith are strong, she seemed the same from the time I was born until she died”. (25)

There were times when Alia, as a child would sob and vent out her fears and anguish in the company of her mother. “I remember going to Bibi’s apartment and seeing Mama lying with her head on her mother’s lap, the supposedly liberated daughter seeking comfort from an old woman who smelled of tea rose perfume”(119). Bibi’s death was a painful memory for Zainab as she was a great source of wisdom and strength to Alia and her family.

Zainab's memoir can be described as a woman's quest for her identity, a powerful and poignant memoir expressing the pangs of separation, the pain of leaving one's loved ones, and a woman's search for truth against the tyranny of dictatorship. It is the first account of modern Iraq by an Iraqi woman who has felt, experienced, and suffered under the hands of a dictatorial regime. Her longing for the love, the warmth, and the comfort of her family which she lost at a very young age is seen in her painful lamentations



“The love, the singing, the smiles, and the happiness I remembered during the first ten years of my life- all that was gone. Amo had torn my family apart. My mother blamed my father for staying in Iraq and my father blamed my mother for my failed marriage. As for their three children, we were now living in three different countries, all going in different directions, not knowing when we would see each other again, and not knowing why our parents had allowed this to happen to our family”. (194-5)

In many cultures and communities, women are held in high esteem- as the representatives of caste, ethnic and national identity. Most often the stereotype representation of women as the ‘Angel in the house’⁵ gets tarnished in a post-war phase where unemployment, alcoholism, and other social evils prevail. This mostly increases family tensions and domestic violence. The condition of women as seen in many of the cases is a state of sheer helplessness, as they are mostly unarmed and unable to fight against the enemy troops and the conflicting situations in which they live.

⁵ Phrase taken from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same title 'Angel in the House' which indicated women as a symbolism of nobility, grace and charm.

The paper aims to understand and analyse the depiction of feminine concerns in the selected narrative. The female characters fight and struggle for the same battle and a common cause. They are fighting against male domination and oppression imposed on them by a callous masochistic society. They try to create identities for themselves or strive to reclaim their lost identities. We often find them strangulated and struggling to set themselves free. They withstand the crisis and conflicts within themselves and with the social system of which they are part and parcel.

Initially in the memoir, one finds Zainab as a frail and fragile young girl clinging on to the warmth and comfort of her mother. She grew up seeing the pains and torments of her mother, Alia, and witnessed how their family struggled to live amidst the conflict of the Iraq war. Grim memories of the dictator Saddam Hussein still haunted Zainab in her life, yet she managed to resolve the conflict within herself to a considerable extent. The pain of seeing her family getting shattered and disintegrated at a very young age affected Zainab throughout her life. Bibi, the grandmother was a great source of strength and support, who amidst all the conflicts stood with the family and supported her daughter. In the case of all these woman characters, it is however immaterial as to whether they have succeeded in facing conflict while taking the bold decisions in their life, or while facing death. The journey to their resolution and how they endured their times of conflict is the most endearing aspect of their lives. They emerge as valiant heroines, who use all their might to fight and re-create identities for themselves. Their endurance, perseverance and their undying spirit for liberation, and resilience to face tragic obstacles in lives with optimism are the traits which deserve to be appreciated.

From these narratives, we understand the fact that the conflicting situations; within one's surroundings as well as within oneself, help the characters to acquire an inner strength as they understand that there is nothing to be feared more, as they have suffered enough. There is a point where fear and tyranny can control human lives, later the mind takes the stern resolve to face the situations with stoicism. Zainab Salbi in her novel 'Between Two Worlds' concludes by sharing her feelings of oppression, fear, and subjugation and how she faced them in life

“ I have taken a vow to myself never to let anyone hurt me or control me again. I was in what I thought of as my 'survivor mode' and if anyone had asked me how I

visualized myself, the answer would have been as a castle with a moat around it and guards on top with their pointed out”.(199)

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