

Naseeb: Tales of Syrian-Armenian women through generations

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Abstract

Naseeb is a fictional book in a reflective memoir inspired by real-life events of Middle-Eastern women, specifically of Armenian Diasporans in Syria. Its purpose is to provide awareness of how the fictional stories that are presented may be a reality for someone else, as the stories aim to bring insight into the lives of Armenian women. It explores equality, generational trauma, family roles, freedom in decision making, and the beauty of Syrian-Armenian culture and how it shaped the women, whether in good or bad ways. The book was written in a fictional format mimicking a memoir of different women (memoirs within a memoir), with a combination of both fiction and nonfiction writing. All in all, *Naseeb* brings awareness to the secret thoughts and dreams of Syrian-Armenian and diasporan women everywhere, and brings light to issues that still exist today. The book also presents hope and motivation in guiding its readers and those close to them who have lived through similar experiences, to break the cycle.

Naseeb: Tales of Syrian-Armenian women through generations

We often associate stories with tales for children, yet we find ourselves coming back to reading them even as full-grown adults. Stories contain nostalgic comfort. They contain narratives and reflections of lived experiences. But there are such stories one can understand as an adult solely, which often carry the weight of history, culture, and identity, whether feather-light or unbearably heavy. *Naseeb* is such a book. A fictional book inspired by real events, structured as a memoir within a memoir, capturing the voices of Syrian-Armenian women whose struggles, dreams, and realities are often left untold into thin air. *Naseeb* means destiny or fate in Arabic; a frequently used term by Syrians or Syrian-Armenians to express how destiny decides our life, whether we like it or not; it cannot be controlled. Or so they thought.

My project sheds light on the ways cultural traditions, generational trauma, and gender roles shape the lives of women in the Armenian diaspora, particularly in Syria, a community that has historically balanced the preservation of heritage with the pressures of assimilation and survival, still ever prevalent today, especially for Christian Armenians.

The importance of the research behind the book lies in its ability to amplify silenced voices. While much has been written about Armenian history and identity, the specific and highly detailed experiences of Syrian-Armenian women remain largely absent from the usual spoken discourse. As a Syrian-Armenian young woman with a deep connection to this cultural heritage, my perspective and purpose are both personal and analytical. My lived experiences and the ones of others allow me to approach this project with a dual lens that seeks to tell stories with authenticity while critically, almost pointedly, bit by bit, examining the societal structures that shape them to this day. My position here grants me an intimate understanding of these narratives

while also giving me the space to question and challenge them, as many of the real-life narratives (though they are changed in my book to protect privacy) came to me through different circles and, therefore, are not as intimate.

By blending fiction with nonfiction elements, *Naseeb* invites readers to engage with these realities in a way that is both emotional and thought-provoking. This capstone aims to create awareness, encourage conversation, and inspire a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggles and resilience of Armenian women in the Syrian-Armenian diaspora.

Literature Review

Stories or chapters from the book hold multiple perspectives, usually a perspective of each generation after the previous. Therefore, the narratives show ideological points specific to the Syrian-Armenian culture, old or modern, regarding males or females, as well as the common traditions and their roles today in comparison to before. Each narrative is both individual and has a bigger picture; no narrative is the exact same but tells the story of many, “Rather than simply relaying individual experiences of personal relationships, they are seen to reflect possibilities for storytelling located within wider social and cultural narratives” (Breheny, M. & Stephens, C., 2011, p. 36). In the literature review, I explore themes of Syrian-Armenian culture, the aftermath of genocide (especially in Syria), and the Middle-Eastern perspective.

Syrian-Armenian Culture and Women

Just like in Armenian culture, Syrian-Armenian culture is deeply rooted in familial values and traditions; one’s individual identity stems from those factors rather than from individual thinking and experience. Titizian discusses this in *Independence Generation: Perception of Family and Marriage* (2017), as she claims that the family unit is what maintained Armenian culture and identity in times of constant hardships. She also notes how Armenian families

contain a patriarchal structure. A family member's identity or even just lifestyle choices (marriage, leisure, modesty, education, political parties (Hnchakyan, Dashnaktsakan, and so on), etc.) are made with the strong approval of fathers first (Titizian, 2017). If not fathers, then male figures like uncles and grandfathers, or even brothers. Mothers or female members are the last to be included in an approval. Both sons and daughters are affected, with the daughters in a stricter position, almost like in a glass box. Therefore, Titizian adds how the "family factor", meaning the major influence or inclusion of family in one's life, plays a role in countless areas (2017). The "family factor" is highlighted abundantly in the book. Since toxic marriages and overall relationships are a major topic in the book, I also address the common issues many Syrian-Armenian women (or even Armenian women) have faced, ranging from emotional abuse to normalized (and even expected) infidelity from husbands that wives are usually blamed for. However, there are some aspects that I tell in a more humorous way, such as the well-known phenomenon of the noisy Armenian neighbors who love to gossip, whom I address as the "neighborhood's highly advanced surveillance systems", or "security cameras", as neighbors are very quick to judge and spread rumors regarding when a girl comes home a little later than usual when that girl or her family has not uttered a single "hello" to them. Titizian alludes to this same phenomenon in her article that focuses on the role of neighbors tremendously, hinting at how they consider themselves as members of the family; having the right to judge when someone comes home (Titizian, 2017).

Change is a paramount theme in the book and the main element in making the book's tone a hopeful and positive one, rather than one to close and sadly sigh. Change does not have to be drastic, but should allow women to practice their chosen individuality, all the while keeping familial values and virtue, but not letting inequality be a patriarchal obstacle, especially today.

Back then, it was not easy to do so, but today there is more freedom to destroy generational trauma and “break the turning wheel” (from the Armenian phrase, “անհլուք կը դառնայ կոր” depicting the concept of a generational cycle that constantly repeats itself).

Something common in the subculture of Syrian-Armenian women is collective memory; many beautiful memories and special moments are those experienced collectively and are often passed down from generation to generation. Yet most of these transactive memories have roots of gender differences, as Smith alludes to in the article, “Beyond individual/collective memory: Women’s transactive memories of food, family, and conflict,” as there are constant connections between women, food, and group activities (Smith, 2007). Smith argues that transactive memories are formed when there is deep communication within a conversation (within women, as the main example). For instance, the concept of *sheerket* in Syria revolved around a close group of women (friends, cousins, neighbors, etc.) gathering around each week or biweekly at their houses for a generously hearty lunch and each one putting a certain amount of money on the table. One person (the treasurer) would collect the money, and some months after that, the money would be split among the women. Most women would go and buy gold as an investment with the money earned. Thus, this whole process alludes to Smith’s point of transactive memory going beyond individual memory, as such activities among women are decided as a group (2007). On the other hand, this is gender-based because males in Syria think more individually of their money, and if they had to even borrow some money from a close person, it would be a very hush-hush, not a fun and hearty biweekly gathering. Food is another example, most men were not used to putting even a plate in the sink after they were done eating, much less making a meal. It was the woman’s job (still is today, but most couples I see go 50/50 and balance chores with their work to make things easier for each other).

Smith emphasizes how much food has an effect on transactive memory, there are countless collective memories for Syrian-Armenian women (2007). Such examples are new brides and elders (mothers or relatives) gathering together to make labaniyeh (a hearty yogurt dish with meat balls filled with butter) for the first day of New Year's, the elders guided the brides on how to make the difficult dish, not forgetting to utter a "Hail Mary" for good luck. The "Sarma" (A dish with meat/rice filling and covering of grape leaves) is another famous dish for that gathering, same for the "kahke" dessert for Easter (a buttery cookie filled with walnuts and topped with powdered sugar). Each and every communal food had its own memory, which goes beyond just a simple individual experience.

The Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide in Syria

The Armenian Genocide and the overall tragic history of the Armenians up until their presence in the civil war in Syria are mentioned in small bits throughout the book. I am not focusing on them wholly, but I incorporate their impact on the culture, mindsets, and even thoughts of the characters, especially in the beginning chapter. Ellen Kennedy, executive director of *World Without Genocide*, links Syria and Armenia together with their horrors of destruction, loss, and displacement, all due to authoritarian leaders (Kennedy, 2018). The Armenian General Benevolent Organization (AGBU) reflects the same in its article about the Diasporan Armenians and their place in Syria (AGBU, 2013). I have chosen these two articles as the authors have a personal connection; Kennedy talks about the topic due to her activism against genocide, while AGBU's entire identity is centered around the Diaspora. AGBU goes more in-depth about the Armenians adapting to life in Syria and how they built their culture there among the hospitality of the Syrians (AGBU, 2013). Culture here alludes to the formation of political parties, churches, and community organizations. Syria may not have been the homeland of the surviving

Armenians, but it became their adoptive country, later becoming an actual beloved homeland to the following generations.

The book reflects on some post-traumatic events, like the aftermath of the Genocide and of the Syrian Civil War. Chandler argues that many autobiographies came from events of crisis and how writing them provides recovery, a healing act if you will (Chandler, 1990, p. ix). As someone with close ties to both events (especially the Syrian Civil War), narrating these events or their aftermath in a fictional manner is a way for me to purge my own guilt (survivor's guilt, the guilt of having a more accomplished life than the women I hold dear to me, etc.) and trauma. As a narrator, I intend to reconnect with my community and “speak silence”, as coined by Chandler, the silence of the women I present fictionally (Chandler, 1990, p. ix). My decision to convey my opinions and points in a format of stories comes from the concept of relatability. With the book, the author (myself) and the readers find solace in being like one another, we find comfort in giving shapes to individual and raw experiences all of us have been through (through ourselves or loved ones), and I find comfort in having authority to “speak silence”, and they will have comfort in having the authority to learn of that “silence” (Chandler, 1990, p.1). Though I have autobiographical elements, there is a thin line between fiction and nonfiction, as well as between the private and public. Chandler mentions overall how stories must be read for their meanings and ideas (1990, p.6), and since I want to keep the privacy of the stories but still reflect the important lessons, I decided to fictionalize them.

Middle-Eastern Perspective

For a more general idea of societal conformities, “Development and patriarchy: The Middle East and North Africa in economic and demographic transition” provides useful insight. Even though the article focuses on social change and women's status in a more generalized

perspective of the Middle East and North Africa, it provided a lot of insight that could make the points and stories in my book realistic, especially in terms of education and independence (Moghadam, 1992). Moghadam begins by arguing that even though most Middle Eastern countries had literacy, employment, law, and other aspects beginning to work in the women's favor (therefore producing vocal women not dependent on others), the same countries were still dismissive of a general "Western-style" system. This freedom for women can exist, but a tad bit more of it should not be generalized; for instance, women working in male-dominated fields should not be generalized (Moghadam, 1992, p. 2). Her argument coincides with my point about Syria that I make in the book; women were not prevented from independence by law, but they were not encouraged by culture. The article also mentions how development is a process of expanding people's choices, which, again, the women in my stories didn't experience; choices were given to them, but they couldn't expand, and some could barely choose (Moghadam, 1992, p. 6). If I compare to my book, some female characters had the potential to work greatly in jobs, but they were advised to leave education or completely focus on their family. Additionally, this mindset towards women had patriarchal elements, and in Syria, Islamic elements of ultra-conservativeness were intertwined. Moghadam states that Christianity and Islam both were born in patriarchal societies (1992). Syrian-Armenians, despite their already-conservative Christianity, had to conform to the Muslim conservatism as well (though, of course, not like the Muslims did; Christianity was still intact as a religion for the Armenians, but both religions added layers of conservatism). For instance, in my opinion, Christian Americans, Christian Europeans, or even Armenians who lived in those regions, did not have the level of conservativeness that Syrian-Armenians had in the past, as the latter were not allowed to "touch another boy's hand" (as told by people who had firsthand experienced such conservativeness),

but the formers (who had the “Western-style”) were freer to explore love and relationships as important experiences to help them navigate through life and marry the spouse they saw fit.

Syrian-Armenian women married the spouses their parents and society saw fit.

I have explored the traditions, gender roles, cultural shifts, autobiographical elements, and countless more within the Syrian-Armenian community, particularly the patriarchal structures shaping individual identities. The book’s generational narratives highlight these dynamics among the themes of Syrian-Armenian traditions and their impact on women, the genocide’s impact in Syria, Syrian-Armenian women, and the Middle-Eastern point of view. Added humor, collective memories, and the realities of the women’s roles make these narratives both engaging and reflective. The genocide and repeated displacements further contextualize these experiences in a relatable manner for the readers. The book does not seek to criticize tradition outright but to present an honest (brutally honest or soft) portrayal of both its burdens and its beauty.

Research Question

How do the fictionalized memoirs within *Naseeb* reflect the lived experiences of Syrian-Armenian and overall diasporan women, and in what ways do they illuminate the impact of cultural traditions, generational trauma, and gender roles on their personal agency and identity, which can inspire current readers to break the cycle of stifling traditions and mindsets in these modern times?

Methodology

This section explores the methodology of the project and the sources involved to put it all together. The research is qualitative, meaning that it is done by finding patterns and perceptions in certain topics. It gives priority to lived experiences and emotions, in contrast to statistical or number-based data (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Since the book is based on true-life stories, it is necessary to refer to a multitude of stories yet present them in a fictionalized way, as well as be inspired by my own experiences, perceptions, or lessons learnt as the witness. The book's chapters are seen through the point of view of different characters, as the generation begins and continues. Therefore, with all of this in mind, it is essential to navigate through three themes: narratives, self-study, and creative nonfiction.

Narratives

Narratives are the perspectives of stories; a certain angle of a story coming directly from the holder of said story. It is an intersection of humanities and social sciences, to shed light on different cultural stories and how they shape society (Andrews et al, 2000). I chose narratives as a method because each story in my book comes from a different character, either made-up completely or based on someone I know in real life. Narratives are what drive the core of the book, they form the whole structure. To me, narratives are important because they bring color and variety to a book, rather than just one person's narrative driving the book, especially since I touch upon (or dive deep into) so many aspects and topics of Syrian-Armenian culture or womanhood. No narrative is the same in those factors; they may be similar, but not the same. This is where *Lives in Context* (Knowles, 2001) comes in. The work urges researchers to understand the experiences of others because doing so is the true way to get the answers to my inquiry, to fully imagine and consider every single little aspect. The way different persons act, think, live, and how their context shapes their life; it is not just listening to a story and writing

about it, it is valuing each and every element that makes the story worthy to hold and tell. Knowles adds that a story should be presented in such a way that it is always up for interpretation, such as how a photo can be interpreted differently by different people (Knowles, 2001). Telling the truth is important, of course, but should not be spoon-fed; it should draw the reader in to interpret. This is extremely important for me, the book must be both empathetic and sympathetic to the readers, it should be a source of comfort (even when handling uncomfortable truths), at least enough for them to be inspired by it.

With *Lines of Narrative*, I felt advised to also adopt a psychosocial approach like Andrews et al. did in their work (Andrews et al., 2000). To sum it up, it means to connect social conditions with internal identities (e.g., sexism and how it prompted women to adopt it as well back then, but now current women are fighting back against that social condition, Syrian-Armenian women included). A social condition I include is how the voices of Syrian-Armenian women began to emerge in different contexts (gaining education, working, divorcing a bad partner, etc). Andrews et al. (2000) advise including explanatory writing, clear and casual time sequences, and even images. I agree with this and in any case, include in a more subtle manner, because the dates are random enough to fit into each generation, so I am not focusing on the book being historical, but having enough explanatory writing to not lose the reader.

In *Talking Back*, hooks elaborates on concrete examples of psychosocial approaches. The book is a narrative of a girl who went against social conditions defiantly, which resonates with me as a feminist and writer. Writing about narratives means leaving a trace, which is what I want to do with my book: to leave a trace that will do more than just talking about stories (hooks, 1989). hooks brings an example of herself as someone's lover and connects her experience to

her experience as someone's niece (e.g., the boyfriend and her uncle both smoked cigarettes, so their scents matched each other), leading her to remember the warmth of her uncle's hug being like her lover's. I would write my own examples (made up or true), like how in the book, a girl connects the resembling identities of her crush to her father (who has a persona she would never want to marry), and realizes that her narrative as a daughter and potential wife would meet and "continue the wheel". hooks adds that narratives are a continuum of one person, even if they are separate identities in one person. She herself says that she did not kill her childhood self (her young narrative) as she grew up, but rather reclaimed it as a healed woman (hooks, 1989). Similarly, with my book, I saved my childhood narrative that was traumatized from being subjected to some social positions in the book, and healed it by moving forward as part of the generation that "left traces" in everything.

Self-Study

Self-study revolves around the author's identity and its role in a work. It deals with immersing oneself in both self-analysis and external research to understand what there is to write about, whether through culture, circles, and personal events or stories (Tchamitchian, 2022). For me, self-study is the essence of this book, because the stories come from events that occurred with, in front of, or around me. Studying myself as a source itself needed a lot of careful but abundant analysis of my fears, likes or dislikes, and difficult opinions. For this section, I consulted another capstone similar to mine, titled *To The City That Holds My Home*, by Kaline Tchamitchian (2022). Tchamitchian's research focused on analyzing herself and her connection to her homeland as she grew up. She would focus on memory, particularly how much memory drives feelings or opinions about a person or place (Tchamitchian, 2022). This work helped me to analyze myself on an extra-personal level, as far as, for example, to trigger certain memories

through taste or smell (adoring powdery perfumes because my grandmother's room always smelled like that when I slept over, remembering my brother's Kinder Joy toys whenever I eat a Kinder Egg, etc.). Tchamitchian also insists on the importance of opening up to yourself to self-study, even if it gets painful (Tchamitchian, 2022), which I find essential in order to establish vulnerability between the book and me, and eventually, the book and the audience.

I found a highly concrete visual example of that vulnerability in *Bone Black* (hooks, 1996). The vulnerability stretched through multiple spheres, even uncomfortable ones that resonated deeply with me and my background. I found countless similarities to Syrian-Armenian culture. The work helped me open up with more ease, by reading about someone else's destiny and choices revolving around it, I felt a bit braver and motivated to write my own work, it no longer seemed daunting or dangerous to do like at first, hooks did hers anyway, whether it was scary or not. hooks brings endless stories of uncomfortable truths, each one with a layered meaning that helped me connect with my stories. For instance, hooks talks about her grandmother, who had been treating her daughter-in-law (hooks' mother) in a horrible way, from spreading lies to thinking her son should not have married her (hooks, 1996). Yet when she gets sick, it is the same daughter-in-law who takes care of her. I connected this story to my points about nightmare mothers-in-law I have known, some who smoked cigarettes in the same rooms as their newborn grandson (who later developed heavy allergies because of that), and some who insisted that ugly brides have the best luck in getting a good husband (when the bride was not even ugly). hooks points at the difference between boys and girls in the beginning chapters too, which I resonated with tremendously; growing up, teenage boys could get away with the most scandalous things (cheating or having endless lovers), but girls are berated harshly for even looking at someone a second too long.

Symbolism is used a lot by hooks (1996), such as hinting at discrimination through the story of her doll, or how she would rather be with a snake than a grown man (who wanted to marry her, even though they just met). I would like to use symbolism as well to not spoon-feed certain concepts to the audience, but make them comprehend on a deeper level than if I were to just write the concept word for word. I would bring a story regarding the dolls, but the concept would convey how teenage women got married too quickly when they probably still had dolls and tea parties. I would bring the story of me learning to play piano, not for myself, but for others to listen to, and I hated performing in front of others.

With *The Sand Diaries*, Kamanos-Gamelin (2005) brought an interesting perspective to self-study in methodology. She emphasized vulnerability as a key to help us write, but also to help greatly rethink what we previously thought of ourselves, even if it gets tenuous (Kamanos-Gamelin, 2005). It means to face the “how?” of our identity rather than only the “what?” How did memories affect how I feel towards love? How is my current self inspired by women in my life? And so on, “how?” dives deeper into the study to find associations never thought of before. For self-study, my book varies a little in terms of how even the side characters’ perspective matters, so I not only study myself but also those involved in my stories, whether the characters are entirely made up or based on people I know.

Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction is the combination of the fiction and nonfiction genres. Fiction is for made-up storytelling and its content is not always true to life, while nonfiction is factual and relates to the real world (Dawkins, 1977). When combining these genres, we have a story that is made up but still conveys the truths of life. Usually, this combination is used to either entertain readers through stories while still teaching them about reality. *Talking Back* has lots of useful

elements that set the balance between fiction and nonfiction, blending them at the right note to establish creative nonfiction, where you can tell a story based on true life, but it is still a story (hooks, 1989). The reason why I chose this theme is because I want to keep the privacy and bearers of the stories I tell in my book. The Armenian circle, nonetheless, the Syrian-Armenian circle, is a small community where everyone knows everything about each other. I do not want the stories to be connected to anyone in particular. I took whatever true stories I have heard and seen in my lifetime and fictionalized them enough to cover traces of the true events or people involved. I want to reveal those unspoken truths, but do not intend to cause discord among the community; that is not what the book is about.

For this similar state, the *Dear Leader Dreams of Sushi* (Johnson, 2013) brings the peculiar story of Kenji Fujimoto being the sushi chef for the North Korean president(s). It is a story that reveals the truth about North Korea's strict regime, but it is fictionalized enough to blur some confidential truths and be safe from trouble; it still got the job done. The work gives me a good idea on how to blur the lines between secret and obvious, all the while keeping the interest of the readers, which can lead them to remember the told truths better.

On a more technical note, I consulted *Defining Fiction and Nonfiction for Students* to better grasp the basics of fiction and nonfiction, separate or combined. Dawkins elaborates that even though fiction is made-up stories, there is such a thing as realistic fiction, which conveys the true and real in life through stories (Dawkins, 1977), which is exactly what I am going for, and that made me feel that I am on the right track. The book can be based on realism (realistic characters and settings). As for the nonfiction side of it, Dawkins brings a plethora of types where nonfiction is used for various purposes, even going as far as providing their meanings and concrete examples (exposition being an encyclopedia to explain, satire being a humorous source

for truth, etc) (1977). For the nonfiction element of my book, I, naturally, adhered to realism, but also went with descriptive writing to immerse the reader; a “show, don’t tell” type of way. I included discursive writing, which is intended to reflect back (such as with personal essays), since it smooths and transfers the impact of self-study tremendously.

Research Design

Each source has its role in elevating all three themes of my book: self-study, narratives, and creative nonfiction. For my project, the qualitative research was more appropriate for gathering narratives from self-study stories similar to mine or just exploring creative nonfiction as a blurry genre between truth and fiction. For the theme of the narrative, works like *Lines of Narrative*, *Talking Back*, or *Lives in Context* helped to go deeper into different states of a perspective, and what factors shape it (cultural, gender-based, traditional, societal, etc), which helped me to find patterns in the characters’ mindsets. For the sources of self-study, like *The Sand Diaries*, *Bone Black*, or Tchamitchian’s capstone, I put myself in the shoes of such perspectives that came from the authors. With them studying themselves and putting to paper the unspoken truths (that I include abundantly in my own work), I learned how to properly present each story concisely with all the right details. Finally, for creative nonfiction, I first analyzed works that broke down the difficult writing genre (*Defining Fiction and Nonfiction for Students* and *Talking Back*), then got to dissecting an actual creative nonfiction story that also needed to tell the truth without telling too much (*Dream Leader Dreams of Sushi*). Here, the genre is blurry because nonfiction is known for regarding real life, but fictional or creative works are not realistic most time. So to combine them means to present truth but in a fictional frame, so that privacy would be kept, but the meaning of the book is still presented. If I put the true stories from real people, readers would try to guess which people they came from, but if facts, names,

and details are blurred, people will not focus on that, and the privacy of those stories would be preserved.

The qualitative research and the themes of the methodology are connected deeply with the essence of my book, and are not only a means of research for the methods. With narratives, as each chapter shows the changing narratives of the women in the story, all of different ages, situations, social backgrounds, and so on, this theme sets the structure of the book itself; its characters are each a narrative. For self-study, I put my own self under a deep lens and thoroughly dissect each detail necessary that drives the motivation of the book and sets the foundation for the “why?”; why I wrote this book, what part of my self urged that purpose, etc. The creative nonfiction is the mysterious one, while the other two are rooted in their truth-telling content; this theme builds the medium for them to be presented. It gives the truth but not the whole truth; it keeps the audience intrigued without revealing anyone’s privacy.

Artist Statement

Stories have a way of revealing truths that often go unnoticed, or in some cases, plainly ignored. *Naseeb* is a memoir disguised as a fictional book; it’s a collection of voices, memories, and emotions inspired by the real experiences of Syrian-Armenian diasporan women. Through interconnected narratives, the book explores themes of cultural identity, generational trauma, familial expectations, silenced dreams, and personal freedom of identity. Some of these stories reflect the beauty of diasporan traditions, while others expose their long-ongoing constraints, showing how deeply these experiences shape the lives of women, for better or worse. I wanted to write *Naseeb* because I’ve seen (and experienced firsthand myself) how certain struggles, especially those tied to gender roles and cultural expectations, are either rarely spoken about

openly or immediately shunned as taboos. However, they persist, passed down through generations in ways that often go unnoticed until we stop to reflect their potential damages. This book is my way of bringing those quiet struggles into the light, offering a space for both recognition and positive guidance. At its heart, *Naseeb* isn't just about hardship, it's about resilience and the possibility of change. While it highlights the hidden realities that many women face, it also aims to empower, showing that every experience, no matter how difficult, carries the potential for growth and transformation, especially now in modern times. My hope is that readers will not only connect with these stories but also see how they relate to their own lives and the lives of the women around them, and instead of sighing sadly when they close the book, they will have a surge of fresh motivation to break the generational cycle of stifling mindsets and traditions—each reader has their own cycle in their stories.

Reflection

Naseeb became a form of therapy for me that I did not realize I needed. Up until I became a young woman, all of those stories were so normalized that I thought every woman in the world had to go through them. Yet even as a child, I knew something was wrong. There have been so many times where one or two stories could have been mine, such as being forced to date someone I do not love, or immediately getting married without working at a job I love; becoming a trophy wife even in the modern world; some men truly are still living in the past. Thank God I knew better. That wheel that's always turning? That destiny that is written on my forehead that I can never erase? No such things. I demolished that wooden wheel when I rejected my first suitor, who just could not take a no. I wrote my destiny when I received my education and prayed for

strength to always keep learning, so that my chosen destiny would be the one on my forehead, untouched.

I got into the minds of women dear to me, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, friends, and ancestors. I acknowledge that the majority of them had been in situations where they had no choice in the matter; they had dreams and passions as little girls that were buried deep. With this book, I hope to have raised their voices that they did not know they had. Writing this down is all the more impactful than just talking about it. This book can be a symbol of hope for those women, of any age and ethnicity and context, of past, present, and future generations. For the past, to comfort them that their voices are not silenced anymore. For the present, to help them guide their daughters and granddaughters to always have the freedom they could not fully have. For the future, to continue with a cycle that they want to set – with the immense encouragement of this book, a cycle of education, marital happiness, and familial equality. To pave the path, to break down the turning wheel, to write their own *Naseeb*s.

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