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Shifting Patterns of Life in Oman: *Celestial Bodies* as a Picture of a Society in Transition

Abstract

Literature featuring life in the Middle East has excited the interest of the western reader for long. The Omani writer Jokha Alharthi's second novel, *Celestial Bodies*, has recently made headlines by winning the 2019 Man Booker Prize. The paper examines the novel as a picture of the Omani society in transition. The transition is examined through shifting patterns of gender roles, attitude to education, treatment of slavery, weakening of class distinctions, breaking of taboos on transgressive love relationships etc. The paper also hints at the voyeuristic interest the award of Booker to an Omani novel would trigger and satisfy about life in an obscure region of the Middle East. The book has everything that would fascinate a western reader and satisfy his expectations about Arab culture: sway of blind faith and superstitions, exorcism, invocations of love poetry, slave trade and elaborate descriptions of date harvests, lavish weddings and traditional rituals. In conclusion, the paper expresses the hope that *Celestial Bodies* being the first work by an Omani author to be translated into English, the award of Booker would generate more interest in literature from the region.