

Exploitation of Women Characters in the novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi

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Abstract- *This study examines the lives of Afghan Women in Afghan Society, their struggles and their lack of freedom. This study also focuses on women who follow the tradition bacha posh which means they disguise themselves as men in order to live in the society. They face societal restrictions on numerous occasions in their life. Gender Inequality and Suppression can be seen in their life. This study explores how their lives had been controlled by men. Their identity had to be hidden and they were never given the opportunity to educate in the society. This study examines the lives of women characters and how they are mistreated and exploited in the society.*

Indexed Terms- *Identity, Inequality, Restriction, Struggles*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature resembles the historical events with the related characters in a work. It reflects the past and the present and at times, future. It has different genres in it. Accordingly many writers of different genres have embodied historical events in their works. For instance, Shakespeare, the well-known playwright, had written about Richard II and his failings in his play *Richard II*. Similarly Angie Thomas wrote the novel *The Hate U Give* focused on racism which is based on an incident where a black man named Oscar Grant was shot by a police in the year 2009. Therefore Writers use their literature to represent the events that takes place in their native town and through their works, readers are able to know and interpret the unknown truths in the society. Similarly Nadia Hashimi, Afghan- American Author, in her debut novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, talks about the Bacha posh tradition, which is mostly followed in Afghanistan and Albania.

Patriarchal Society mainly leads to the Exploitation of Afghan Women as shown in this novel. Nadia Hashimi's debut novel focuses on the bleak truths of Afghan Women in the Society. She describes those truths by representing the characters, Rahima and Shekiba and the stories revolve around these two characters.

Afghan Women were given freedom but they also endured a lot before they got their freedom. Liberty was given to women who were in the city but the condition of women in rural areas remains the same being marginalized. They were not given a freedom that is forever as they desire. During the 1920s, King Amanullah and his wife Queen Soraya improved the state of women and encouraged for women empowerment. They were treated equally in the constitution during the 1960s especially in 1964. But the presence of Taliban changed their lives during the 1990s, where they imposed rules that led to the abolition of women rights. Also they were not given the freedom of speech.

• Societal Restrictions

Bacha Posh is a cultural practice that is mainly followed in Afghanistan. A *bacha posh* is a Dari word which means, 'a girl dressed as a boy'. This tradition is believed to follow in the Afghan families if they do not have a son. It is followed by girls until they attain their puberty, they are not allowed to follow, and they do not have to, which means they have got to the access of male world only until they attain their puberty.

There are novels that are written based on *bacha posh* tradition. The novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* talks about the two protagonists Rahima and Shekiba, whose lives are changed after following this tradition. They are compelled to follow this; they do not have any other way to escape from this. In Rahima's life

she becomes a *bacha posh* since her family has no son which made her father annoyed. Her mother is being mocked by him for not giving him a son. He did not allow his daughters to go to School. Her mother changed one of her daughters as a boy for her husband.

... MADAR- JAN TOOK MR BEHIND THE HOUSE with Padar- jan's scissors and razor... (Hashimi, 34)

Shekiba, the great- great grandmother of Rahima belongs to the 20th century. When she was two years old, accidentally a hot pot of oil burnt her half face, made her mother tremble in fear. She could not fight to recover because of the pain in her face. Her mother could not do anything to change the melancholy state of her. Shekiba's survival was a question because of the burnt skin. Her mother prayed to God for her daughter's life. Shekiba's father was not helped by his brothers as he lived alone, and his mother visited her. Her mother was thinking that her mother- in- law would give her some advice but her hope was of no use. She told her to take care of Shekiba.

Shekiba was introduced to *bacha posh* tradition as a guard for King Habibullah's concubine. She was given a new name Shekib. She was married to Agha Baraan and her life eventually becomes beautiful after she gives birth to a son.

Abdul Khaliq was attracted to Rahima and all he wished is to marry her to satisfy his physical desire. Through the following lines, he is a man who believes a woman is only to satisfy a man's hunger in him.

The above similar situation can be seen in the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini.

... "There is no shame in this, Mariam," he said, slurring a little. "It's what married people do. It's what the Prophet himself and his wives did. There is no shame"... (Hosseini, 76)

In the name of marriage, a husband takes complete advantage of his wife to satisfy his desires. In Marriage a wife is being trapped or controlled by her husband. In the novel Roots and Shadows by Shashi

Deshpande, the character Hemant speaks the following lines,

... "A trap? Or a cage," May be the comic strip version of marriage... a cage with two trapped animals, glaring hatred at each other... isn't so good after all. And it's not a joke but tragedy. But what animal would cage itself?... (Deshpande, 61)

In general, most of the Afghan families encourage Child Marriage. They do not care about their children and all that matters for them is to get them married as soon as they could. This can be seen in Afghanistan which is a major cause of lack of education for girls. At a very young age, they are exposed to this cruelty and the worst is they are married to men who are old. They do not know how to handle household chores. They are not matured enough to run a family. But this is never understood by men in Afghan Society.

On the other hand, Shekiba who lived in the 20th century was suppressed at most of the times in her life. She never had the liberty to choose her path of life. Everyone used her as a servant until she had got married. She was mocked for her burnt skin since she was two years old. Her half face was burnt, and her misery started from this. Wherever she goes, there are people to taunt her. She was given new names and people forget to call her with her name, rather, new names started following her for her face.

CONCLUSION

From the study it can be seen that there is a lack of freedom of expression in the society. Patriarchal Society and the tradition *bacha posh* mainly lead to the exploitation. Women never had freedom to decide what they wanted in life. They were mistreated by men in the society. Through the character Rahima, it is clear that she was mocked for being a *bacha posh* and Shekiba for her half burnt face. Radical feminism can be considered to be the solution of this suppression of Afghan women because the aim of Radical feminists is to abolish this patriarchy. This study would help the future researchers to analyze how women in Afghan society have been. Between the past and the present, women have the courage to fight for their freedom but this has never helped them

to solve the issues. It is a bleak truth that the situation has not changed as shown in the novel.

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