

## BREAKING TRADITION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF NADIA HASHIMI'S *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL*

By

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### **Abstract**

*In this article, an attempt has been made to know about the plight of Afghan women and how they try to come out from the clutches of male dominated society, but failed in attaining it. This paper will take Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* and unveil the trauma, struggle, and buoyancy of women through her novel. Attaining equal rights between the sexes – man and woman, has become a global phenomenon. Women across the world are chained under the patriarchal society and are still treated as the “weaker sex”. They struggle to accomplish their target of achieving women's rights, respect and proper recognition. This is because women's identity has been exploited and abused, which made them initiate and involve in a movement calling for women's liberation. The life of women in Afghanistan is filled with battles, restrictions, and social discrimination. Their struggles are comparatively different from struggles endured by women in other parts of the world. They are compelled to accept everything in the name of religion and they are even denied from receiving the fundamental rights from their society. This is because Afghan society has been controlled by men. She is the object in the hands of men and therefore she cannot visualize her identity without the help of a man. Due to this, women had to battle each day for their very existence. Islamic Government imposed brutal laws against women and they are restricted even to laugh or talk loudly. Even though women in the twenty first century started celebrating their freedom and empowerment, women in Afghan society are still fighting to attain their basic freedom, name, education. They were neither treated as humans nor as living beings. This agony brought Afghan women to join together to fight for their liberation.*

**Keywords:** *liberation, Afghan women, empowerment, patriarchy.*

### **Introduction**

In most Islamic Nations, women are pushed to face hardships. Their basic rights have been monitored and controlled by men in the name of religion and law. In the midst of Afghanistan's violence and democracy, women's rights seem to appear as a vision and a faraway goal. This is due to the fact that Afghan women are still considered "half of men" and second-class citizens, who deserved only to be imprisoned in their homes. As Helen Cixous states that,

“(woman) without man she would be indefinite, indefinable, non-sexed, unable to recognize herself : outside the Symbolic” (46).

Therefore, this article discusses the role and contribution of a few Afghan women who used their writing as a weapon to voice out their struggle. Western Feminist writers have highlighted the significance of women's writing. French feminist critic, Helene Cixous explains about the need of women's writing. In *Laugh of Medusa*, she asserts that,

“Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing....Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement” (875). Afghan women writers use their writing to convey awareness of the tragic situation and subjugation that they go through in their respective societies. Further, through writing these women writers also motivate women for their change and improvement.

Nadia Hashimi is an Afghan American novelist. Her debut novel *Pearl that Broke its Shell* uncovers the painful experiences of women's life in patriarchal society. The study delves into the theme of identity, shedding light on Afghan customs and beliefs such as “Bacha posh” which means, a girl “dressed up and raised as a boy”. It is a traditional culture that has been followed in Afghanistan and Pakistan since ancient times. This instance proves how men treats women and completely disregard the numerous roles played by women in their primitive society. Through her novel, Nadia Hashimi projects how women can overcome these dangers by finding meaning in their lives in this troubled world.

Feminism theory has been chosen, as the experiences encountered by the protagonist are similar to those of real-life women living in Afghan society. In almost all the novels of Nadia Hashimi, women are being exploited but they finally have the ability to overcome their oppression and find their identity. If a family does not have a son, the younger daughter will live and adopt boyish characteristics. Bacha Posh removes all of

the troubles and social embarrassment that comes with not having a son. Parents transform their daughters into bacha posh to improve their social standing. Having a son is significant in Afghan society and a source of pride; this ritual also provides social relief.

Women in Afghanistan desperately fight for freedom and gender inequality. Bacha posh is a short term remedy for girls to attain freedom and receive an education. The parents are not very much concerned about their daughters' mental trauma. There are so many Bacha Posh in the Afghan family, but they keep it very confidential. Girls who are in the period of Bacha Posh find it difficult to bring back their original girl personalities, since they are disguised as boy and follow boyish activities. Some girls tend to enjoy the Bacha posh, as they get a chance to enjoy all the freedoms. So, when they change into girls again, all their freedom get disappeared and they find it very hard to get into womanly characteristics.

Afghan-American writer Nadia Hashimi recounts the story of two women characters who are forced to confront the predicament of bacha posh practices and they both challenge and encounters their problem in various way. Nadia Hashimi depicts the life of Afghanistan women and the realistic background of Afghan society. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is a story about two Afghan girls. Rahima, the nine-year old young protagonist of the novel resides in Afghan society and has been transformed into a Bacha posh. She is the third child in her family. Her life is intertwined with that

of her great grandmother Shekiba. As Shekiba was affected by cholera, she dressed in men's attire. Even Though Rahima's part is a contemporary one, there isn't much change in Afghanistan.

Similarly, Rahima dressed as a boy so that she will have opportunities to work outside. She loved the freedom that made her go to school, play in the ground, and gave her chances to enjoy her life without any trouble. Bacha posh is the oldest tradition followed by Afghan people, thereby allowing girls to dress up as boys until they get married. Even though Rahima enjoyed her freedom for a very short period time, her father made her get married to an older wealthy man. Rahima is his fourth wife. He married her only for begetting a child. Though she married an older man, Rahima is comfortable with him and delivered a baby boy. Later on, she was forced to live for her husband and her kid. This made her to quit the needs that she wanted to do in her life. She expressed her anger as: "What am I supposed to do? Clearly, this is what Allah has chosen as their naseeb-Oh, the hell with naseeb! Naseeb is what people blame for everything they can't fix (Hashimi, 139)."

## Conclusion

Through the novel, the writer projects the struggle of the protagonist and brings out the way to escape from the hardships. The novel also reveals the spiritual journey of Rahima who always longed for a better life. The title is apt for the novel as it describes about a girl who tries to come out from her shell and in the midst of adversities, battling hard to find her own identity. *The Pearl That broke it Shell* signifies that Rahima in the novel is treated as a pearl. From the very young age she faced tremendous struggle, also she was not interested to lead a miserable life like other Afghan women. She had a quest to enjoy her freedom as an Afghan man. Therefore, she decided to break the shell and tries to escape from the problems in life and move into her dreamed life. Later in the novel, she also realizes that she is as precious as the pearl and cannot be taken for granted. Rahima were the victim of Bacha Posh, yet she loves to continue her life as a boy and explore her entire life by escaping the harsh realities of her life.

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