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**Afghan Women through Generations: A Feminist Analysis of Nadia Hashimi's
The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014)**

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Dedication (1)

I dedicate this dissertation to my father **Lazhar** and my mother **Nora** for their love, trust, and support. You are the best parents ever. To my lovely brother **Yahya** for his encouragement, despite being so far but I feel him always by my side.

To my friends **Saida, Houda, Marwa, and Selma**, with whom I shared the joyful and stressful moments of my life.

To my cousins **Malek, Rayene, Ismahene, and Aziza** for the happy moments they make me feel amidst my sadness.

Dedication (2)

This thesis is dedicated to the sake of Allah, my creator and my source of inspiration, and my Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him).

To my two beloved precious people who were my world, my life, and my happiness. Although they no longer exist in this world, their memories continue to regulate my life. First and foremost, to my mother 'El zohraa' may god bless her soul; she raised me with her full love and trust. My only dream was to send her to pilgrimage, but unfortunately, everything fell apart.

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Abstract

The present study seeks to find the reasons behind women's oppression in Afghanistan. The present study is divided into three main chapters; the first chapter entitled A General Overview of Afghan Anglophone Literature, the second and the third chapters are a deep analysis of the novel; the second chapter is entitled Shekiba's Avant-gardism and Inspiration, and the third chapter is entitled Rahima's Identity Development. Though women's status have changed in almost all parts of the world, nothing much has changed in Afghanistan which attracted many researchers and writers to look for the causes and outcomes of women oppression in this society. Nadia Hashimi is one of the most praised Afghan American writers. Because of her Afghan origins, she is mostly interested in Afghan women's issues. Through her debut novel "*The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*" (2014), Hashimi describes the detailed life of Afghan women in general and the two main characters in particular. Shekiba and Rahima were relatives who are separated by a very long period of time yet they shared the same miserable lives because of their sex. The detailed life of both characters revealed the psychological and physical oppression they suffer from. This thesis deals with the reasons why women in this Islamic society are deprived of their rights, and why males are preferred over females which often force the families without a born son to disguise one of their daughters as a boy. It also reveals the psychological impact which the *bacha posh* (changing girls into boys) has on their gender identity when reverting back to femininity at puberty.

Keywords: Afghan literature, Nadia Hashimi, Feminism, Gender roles, Gender identity, *Bacha posh*

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الملخص

Résumé

Introduction

The early Afghan literature dates back to the rise of Sufism. Writers like Jalal Din Rumi, Ahmeddhah Abdeli, and Rahmani Baba used to write poetry in their two main languages “Dari” and “Pashto”. Their works have been translated into many languages such as: French, Spanish, English, Italian, especially in the twentieth century. Afghan literature is widely influenced by the Iranian, Indian, central Asian, European, and American cultures. In Afghanistan, poetry is produced by both male and female poets. Rabia Balkhi is a poet who wrote powerful Persian poems about love in the tenth century. Since she lives in a patriarchal society, where love is forbidden for woman, she was imprisoned and killed by her brother because she fall in love with one of the slaves.

In comparison to the rich literary works of Dari and Pashto, Afghan writings in English appear to be a relatively new genre, with only few writers like Nadia Hashimi, Khaled Hussein, and other contemporary writers like Atiq Rahimi; whose works were translated into English. Diasporic Afghan writers choose English as a means of expression, through their literary production; they express the trauma of violence, fear, and oppression which the Afghans are suffering from in their mother country.

For many years, the status of women has been a subject of intense debate. It covers a wide range of topics, including girls and women's education, women's care, female economic empowerment, and women's roles at home, community, politics, and others. Men used to rule society, and women were treated as second class citizens. Women had little to no say in family matters, and men were solely responsible for making all decisions; woman was thought to be the property of a man. Men were expected to achieve great academic achievements and formal jobs, while women were expected to fulfill family responsibilities and carry the burden of housework. Women in various parts of the world have suffered greatly as a result of a patriarchal and oppressive society. They have been (and continue to be) mistreated both inside and outside of

their homes. The significance of this research lies in the depiction of the subordination and the sufferings of Afghan women in their patriarchal society. It also sheds light on the similarities and the differences which are shared by the two Afghan women; Rahima and her great-great grandmother Shekiba despite being separated by one hundred year period, as well as to understand the main cause behind women subordination in that Islamic country in an attempt this situation will be changed for the next future generations.

Depending on the time period, women's rights in Afghanistan have shifted back and forth. Under the 1964 constitution, women were granted official equality. During the ongoing civil war in the 1990s, however, these rights were taken away by various temporary rulers such as the Taliban. Women had little to no freedom, especially during Taliban rule in terms of civil liberties. Women's rights have gradually improved under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan since the Taliban regime was removed following the September 11 attacks in the United States, and under the 2004 constitution, which was heavily based on the 1964 constitution, women were once again equal to men. Women's rights, on the other hand, are still hindered by some groups (particularly rural areas) who want to go back to pre-1964 inequality, which continues to be a source of international concern. Worries about the future of women in Afghanistan grew when the Taliban overran most of the country in 2021.

Nadia Hashimi is an example of an extremely praised Afghan American contemporary writer and an influential novelist. She was born to Afghan parents and raised in New Jersey and New York. Her mother, the granddaughter of a well-known Afghan poet, studied civil engineering in Europe while her father immigrated to the United States to provide his family a better life; there he worked hard to realize his American dream. Nadia was raised in a huge family of aunts, uncles, and cousins who have instilled in her an appreciation of Afghan culture. She earned a bachelor's degree in Eastern studies and a Master's degree in biology from Brandeis University. She studied medicine in Brooklyn, New York, and then finished her pediatric residency training

at NYU and Bellevue hospitals before relocating to Maryland. After years of voracious reading, she began writing stories that drew on her history and the difficult realities of Afghanistan. She visited Afghanistan for the first time in 2003 with her parents, who had not visited since departure in the 1970s. She continues to serve on the boards of organizations dedicated to teaching and nurturing Afghanistan's most vulnerable children, as well as developing the next generation's female leaders. She is a member of The Afghan Women's Council in the United States and consultant for Kallion, an organization that aims to improve leadership via humanities. She is a Montgomery County health care commissioner and a member of the Gaithersburg Book Festival's organization group. Hashimi is the author of six international bestselling novels, *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* (2014), *When the Moon Is Low* (2015), *One Half from the East* (2016), *A House Without Windows* (2016), *The Sky at Our Feet* (2018), and *Sparks Like Stars* (2021).

In her literary debut, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Nadia Hashimi illuminates the reality of life in Afghanistan, a country that was rarely thought of or discussed prior to September 11, 2001. The novel tells two stories: Rahima's and her great-great-grandmother, Shekiba's. The two women, who live in two very different Afghanistan, face similar hardships and tragedies as they seek freedom and control in an oppressive society.

In a culture that values *Naseeb* (or fate), Rahima's story begins in Afghanistan after the Taliban's fall, in a family with four sisters and no brothers. In Afghanistan, the value of sons over daughters forces Rahima's family to transform their daughter into a boy, a practice known as *bacha posh*. Rahima discovers the liberties that come with being a boy. Rahima is married off to a warlord five times her age when she turns 13, and she must re-adjust to life as a girl. She spent the majority of her new life wishing she could go back to the days when she was a *bacha posh*. Shekiba, a century before, goes through a series of horrific, tear-jerking events before

landing in the king's palace dressed as a man guarding his harem, since, obviously, men lack self-control.

While already living in a complicated Afghan culture, the characters are subjected to a series of tragedies. The novel focuses primarily on Afghan women's struggles, but it also touches on the pressures that men face, such as the threat to masculinity and the shame that comes with not being able to father a son. Hashimi wisely chooses to simplify her language with such a powerful, complicated story to tell, using short, basic sentences that allow the reader to easily become immersed in the world of the characters. Hashimi, like Khaled Hosseini in *The Kite Runner*, incorporates words and phrases from the characters' native language, Dari, for example Agha, Bachem, Burqa... into the story. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is a beautiful and powerful story as it educates its readers, especially those who know little about the Afghan culture and women's sufferings in that patriarchal society.

It is essential to say that *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is an important novel to be discussed academically because of the issues it deals with. The novel can be approached from different perspectives, whether religious, social, or political. Since the literature review considered the cornerstone of academic studies, it is important to mention what other writers, researchers, and journalists have said about the struggle of women in Afghan society.

Shahzadi Sumra and Mehroz Taseer in their article entitled Subalternity in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell: An Alternative Feminist Analysis* asserts that the theme of the novel lies in its title; Rahima is the girl who transforms herself into a boy to live freely in a society where women do not have the same rights as men. Men were superior, while women were inferior. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is a story of two women; Rahima and her great-great grandmother Shekiba; who are separated by a century but sharing the same problems like: oppression, subjugation, and violence. Shahzadi and Taseer argue that some feminist researchers viewed Islam as a patriarchal religion; it is Islam that oppresses women, and ignore gender equality

(Sumra and Taseer 168) Gender equality and women's rights was developing through history, yet with the Russian invasion and the Taliban rule women's status in Afghanistan become worse. Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1965) argued that colonialism is responsible for violence, oppression, subjugation, patriarchy, and mental illnesses. Wherein the author addresses the wider social, cultural, and political implications of colonization, while providing a psychological and psychiatric examination of its degrading consequences on both the person and the nation. "For the colonized people the most essential value and the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all dignity" (Fanon 44)

In her novel *The Pearl That Broke its Shell*, Hashimi emphasized the importance of history. Rahima's great-great grandmother's stories inspired and motivated her to take a step forward in her life. Women are oppressed and subjugated as a result of colonization, Soviet invasions, and freedom struggles, in addition to cultural and societal norms that contribute to women oppression in Afghanistan. Afghan society is divided by the struggle over land and power, which creates social hierarchical structures of class discrimination in which men control social power over the land and property. Rahima describes the state of war and power in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover, she says: "everyone wants control and power but it was very hard to get, but Abdul Khaliq was one who had it" (Hashimi 25).

The Taliban has started a civil war in the country, and their power is growing by the day; schools, colleges, and universities have all shut down. Windows and doors are closed and colored over; no woman is allowed to walk the streets without a male blood relative. Half of Afghanistan is in fear and anxiety, as a result of the American invasion and the Taliban rule, their homes, structures, and lives have all been destroyed. Rahima married to the warlord Abdul Khaliq as his fourth wife for a costing bridal price. Hashimi explains the culture and traditions of Afghanistan. She reveals that men in order to fulfill their desires, they made all laws for their own benefits, and Islam is taught by men in order to teach whatever they want to fulfill their

desires; they demanded women to give birth to boys, girls were rejected despite it is not acceptable in Islam. Rahima adopting the *bacha posh* tradition attached her with her father, but he is getting farther when she is a girl again, this is a cultural and societal norm of Afghani people. The struggle of female characters for freedom and break the patriarchal norms is highlighted in this novel. It does portray women as active members of society who are aware of their inferiority and are attempting to break their shell.

Roshni C in her article 'Representation of Women and Politics of Identity Crisis'(2018) attempts to overcome the matter of identity, investigate the *bacha posh* traditions, explain how males utterly neglect women's responsibilities, and how both Rahima and Shekiba attempt to improve their lives. Moreover, the novel ends on a hopeful note, Rahima and Shekiba's passion and courage should serve as an inspiration to young Afghan women, who have been working hard to create their own identities in a patriarchal country. Nadia Hashimi address several key concerns in Afghanistan through her book, in the hopes that if not today, then in the future, it may result in a favorable shift in public opinion. In this tale, every female character has faced difficulties including Madarjan, Rahima, Shekiba, Parwin Kala Shaima, Benafsha, and others. It is extremely difficult for any woman to survive in this situation.

Many organizations now work to address women's challenges, such as promoting education and creative talents, empowering women, and helping them to provide meaning to their lives. In an interview with Jacobs, Caitlin interview on 29 July 2014, Nadia Hashimi explains :

I see Rahima and Shekiba as every woman .When I read Rumi's lines, the sea is Rahima's inner voice , expensive and powerful, beckoning her to break free and realize her potential. We all need to mind that voice that lives within, that tells us to want better for ourselves, to not throw up our hands in defeat.

According to Arneta Fajar Surya in her previous research "Afghan Women's Responses toward Oppression" in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2020) argued that the

novel explores how Shekiba is brave, quiet, and ignorant, whereas Rahima is brave, obedient, and educated. Both of them are subjected to oppression; which includes marginalization, impotence, and violence as women. Finally, both major character's react toward oppression; Rahima chooses to be dressed as a boy to escape her reality with her companions, demonstrating that she refuses to be the second favorite "I wish I could say that I put on as strong a front as Shahla or even Parwin, at least for my mother's sake. I wish I could have done something. After all, I'd been a boy for years. I was more than just a girl. I thought" (Hashimi 158). Rahima was unsatisfied with herself; her manhood experience is not enough to preserve her family. Although she regrets not being able to end the oppression, Rahima used to feel liberated, which leads her to think about abandoning reality. Shekiba, on the other hand, decides to continue her life as a wife who is no longer subjected to physical violence.

In her article entitled "Afghan Narratives Portraying the Identity Crisis": Interpreting the Pattern of "Bacha-Posh" in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Javeria Khurshid argued that writing has become a powerful tool for women to re-establish their distinctive self that has been a victim of patriarchy through centuries; women can change the course of history through their narratives. Khurshid states that *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is taken from Rumi's poem *There is Some Kiss We Want*, which tells the story of a concubine Benefsha who stoned to death because she fell in love with a man. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is a story about two Afghan women from two different generations, yet shares the same destiny. The cultural and the social violence has placed the status of women as subordinate, which is a product of social norms, values, practices which restricts their ability to exercise choice in their lives. This caused the loss of identity among Afghan women. Rahima is the main storyteller in the novel, she and her great-great grandmother Shekiba face similar problems being a women in a patriarchal society, their main role is bearing sons and doing housework. In Afghanistan the lack of sons is a social and economic problem which the family and the society as a whole face. Rahima with the help

of her aunt Khala Shaima; who tells the story of her great-great grandmother Shekiba and the ancient custom of *bacha posh*, she becomes Rahim; who can go to school, help her mother outside home without being noticed. Later on her addicted father decides to marry her and her older sisters, Shahla and Parwin. Now her mother will teach her how to behave like a girl as she get used to male's behaviors.

Shekiba on the other hand, after her family's death, she moves to live with her grandmother, where she is treated like a slave, she is longing to take her father's land, and since she is a woman she cannot inherit the land. Even if she lives as a man, working as harem guard, does not change her reality, she still feels unsafe of being a woman. She is married to the King's Amanullah advisor, Agha Baraan and bears him a son. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell's* story centered around two Afghan women who are trying hard to change their roles in their patriarchal society. Thus, this novel will be analyzed through the feminist lens; the Feminist Theory and psychoanalysis theory are best to analyze the novel.

The present study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter entitled "A General Overview of Afghan literature"; it is an introduction to Afghan literature, what Afghans used to write, what are the major themes behind their writings. It will show the history of Afghan literature and the depiction of women in the Afghan society. The second title is about Afghan Anglophone Literature which is an illustration of some Afghan diasporic writers, the themes of their literary productions and the importance of their writing for the improvement of their mother country. The second chapter is entitled Shekiba's Avant-gardism and Inspiration, it sheds light on Nadia Hashimi's debut novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, the first title Shekiba: A Man Fighting for Gender Equality; it will have a deep analysis of the great-great grandmother Shekiba; her adoption of the *bacha posh* tradition and her trials to get her rights, then the second title Shekiba's Experience Inspires her Great-grandaughter, it explains how her experiences influence her great granddaughter, Rahima. The third and the final chapter is

entitled “Rahima’s Identity Development” the first title Rahima Adapting a Masculine Identity: it will analyze Rahima, the major character, her adoption of the *bacha posh* custom, having the same freedoms as boys, then Rahima A Woman Under Subordination: when she reverted to a woman again, get married and suffer from both physical and mental abuse.

Chapter One A General Overview of Afghan Anglophone Literature

This chapter will provide a glimpse about the languages which Afghan writers used in their literary productions, the starting point and the major themes they tackled in their literary works. Additionally, this chapter will be a further illustration of Afghan-Anglophone literature which is mainly written by Afghan diasporas and exiled writers who tackled the political and social issues on their mother country. Women oppression, the soviet invasion, and the harsh rules under the Taliban control were the main topics which the writers tackled in their writings.

1.1 An Introduction to Afghan Literature:

Afghan literature is steeped in a long tradition of both the written expression and the oral ones. With politicians and travelers alike being asked to understand the context of their actions, literary and historic writing has played a substantial position in shaping regularly harsh caricatures of Afghan cultural norms, politics, and traditions in the public mind. The history of Afghan literature stretches from antiquity to the current day. Oral transmission was once used to skip along the oldest works of literature. Its writing method has lengthy been linked to Arabic script. The oldest existing files of the literature, courting from the 5th and 6th centuries, are thought to be derivatives of the Nabataean variety of the Aramaic script. Its roots; however, might also be traced back to the early Islamic years. The Nabataean inscriptions were written in a local Aramaic variety using a local script. Nevertheless, various Arabic loanwords and grammatical borrowings have been observed. Today most scholars believe that the linguistic presence of Arabic in Nabataean is due to the fact that the Nabataeans spoke Arabic in everyday life but employed Aramaic as a lingua franca to write their inscriptions or other documents (Petranoni 18)

Archaeological excavations dating back to 1922 have published stunning art of pre-Islamic inscriptions. Following the Islamic invasion of Afghanistan, the country's literature was firstly written and transmitted in the Arabic alphabet, leaving it with a prosperous linguistic history of pre-Islamic scripts that existed before being displaced by using the Arabic alphabet, such as Sharada, Kharosthi, Greek, and Brhm. Pre-Islamic writings are additionally linked to the Bactrian language Afghan literature has long and illustrious records of oral and written traditions. With almost sixty million audio systems (including these outside Afghanistan), the two important languages of Afghanistan, Pashto, and Dari have a plethora of literature that is mostly unstudied, marginalized, and unknown.

Afghan history and culture may additionally be traced back to the beginning of Sufism. Poetry was once composed in a variety of shared languages, consisting of Persian, Dari, Pashto, and Urdu, with solely a few exceptions. Foreign language poetry, such as English and Turkic, had a big effect on Afghan poetry. The poetry reflects the country's several non-secular traditions. Many Afghan poets, in particular, have been influenced by mystical and Sufism experiences. The earliest structure of literature in Afghanistan is poetry, which has a lengthy written and oral legacy. The poetic expression has been in Afghanistan for ages, Rumi was an Afghan poet who spent his whole life writing in the Dari language. Other poets also wrote in Dari, but Persian, Pashto, and Arabic languages had a study effect on them. The traditional Afghan poetry form of landay, which consists of two rhyme, is by and large written with the aid of present-day women. Mawlana Jalaluddin Mohammad was born on 30 September 1207 in the province of Balkh in present day Afghanistan. His name Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi, he is known as Rumi in the west. Mawlana Jalaluddin Mohammad had been spontaneously composing ghazals, Dari poems (Ahmadi 1)

Several authors have written on Afghanistan's political, social, and cultural growth, however only a few have captured actual life in their works. Khaled Hosseini is an instance of a creator

who has blanketed nearly every issues of Afghan existence considering the fact that the Russian invasion and Taliban takeover in the 1990s. *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are two of his best-selling novels that precisely depict the political, social, and cultural evolution of Afghanistan and its repercussions on Afghans in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion and Taliban rule.

Hosseini has validated how the Russian invasion destroyed Afghans' peaceful lives. He has additionally shown the culture in which men still have the upper hand. Afghanistan is a place where each individual is the ruler of his own home and no one is allowed to impact his decisions. It is a country in which women have no choice except to follow the rules. Women's circumstances have improved since the advent of the twenty-first century, as they have been granted political and educational liberty. Hosseini as an author brought multiplicity to the literary world with his inventive, funny, and philosophical views. His early writings were mostly about residing in Afghanistan.

Starting with *The Kite Runner's* openly topical mood, he moved on to the social and political context, discussing the drastic transformations in Afghanistan. He used everyday characters to portray the deplorable state of the people living in the war-torn region. He effectively produces precise experiences for his viewers by using a nostalgic writing genre in his compositions. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* which was published in 2003 presents new idea and color, namely complexity of conflict toward friendship (characters) and other conflicts that happen in Afghanistan during colonization and post colonization era. It is very different with other writers that most of them tell about alienation, cultural shock, and depression. Hosseini can open the eyes of the readers to know Afghanistan life truly which for a long time is closed from outside. Hosseini wrote about Afghanistan before the Soviet war because that is largely a forgotten period in modern Afghan history. For many people in the west, Afghanistan is synonymous with

the Soviet war and the Taliban. Hosseini wanted to remind people that Afghans had managed to live in peaceful anonymity (Farlina 13)

In his writings, he investigated the tragedies of life haughtily and arrogantly. Indeed, his imaginative and humanistic beliefs, together with his unwavering love for his hometown, enabled him to document his opinions. Destruction, violence, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and unfairness and injustice are reoccurring topics in most of his books. His love of books inspired him to write short tales and novels. *The Kite Runner* is a sad novel about a family who lived in a pretty quiet Afghanistan before witnessing the tragic results of the monarchy's fall following Russia's invasion, which modified everything.

The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini uses two cleverly portrayed relationships to explore the interpersonal and cultural conflicts that are part and parcel of being Afghan. The father-son relationship is used by Hosseini to investigate courage, the capacity to discern right from wrong, and the willingness to risk their lives to protect others from injustice as Amir, the novel's narrator, struggles to explore the virtues traditionally. The conflicts in this connection also somewhat resemble Afghanistan's effort to preserve a traditional sense of national identity in the 1970s. Amir is also unable to regard Hassan, his closest childhood buddy and family servant boy, as a friend due to more general aspects of Afghan society including ethnic and social barriers. Amir's attempts to reconcile with both his father and Hassan as their relationships slowly break down serve as a framework for Housseini's illuminating analysis of Afghanistan's recent cultural and national history (Miles 207)

In *The Kite Runner*, women are completely overlooked. They are shadows in this culture, and they are not prominent. The novel illustrates the struggle and suffering of hopeless Afghans attempting to exit their homeland during the chaos that follows the invasion. It demonstrates how powerful and corrupt individuals entered the Taliban ranks. Assef, the novel's antagonist, was a bully in his youth and came from a wealthy family. When Hassan and Amir were children, he

bullied them and even raped Hassan. That rapist rose to become the Taliban's commander, who tracked down Hassan's son, Sohrab, and suggestively raped him as well, to settle an old score with Amir and Hassan.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is Khaled Hosseini's second novel, which also begins in Afghanistan. The book covers three generations and spans the 1960s through the 2000s. Mariam and Laila are two women characters who are abused by the Taliban. The work was inspired by women's experiences during Taliban oppression and wartime. It was a huge hit and quickly became a worldwide bestseller. It is the best novel ever written about women's lives in the wake of the Soviet invasions and Taliban authority. It also provides light on how women are generally perceived as weak and how they are prevented from expressing their rights over their lives. The novel also emphasizes the people's physical and emotional destruction as a result of the Soviet invasion and the Taliban's earlier control.

Mariam grew up in Afghanistan's Herat area as the illegal daughter of a businessman named Jalil. Nana, Mariam's mother, kills herself due to mental illness. Jalil's wives despise Mariam and marry her off to Rasheed, a Kabul shoemaker. Laila's two older brothers fought in the battle against the Soviets, both of whom died in the war. She was protected by Rasheed and Mariam, who nursed her for months. Rasheed knows of Tariq's visit on his way back home, which enrages him. He would have killed Laila if Maryam had not beaten him with a shovel on the head. The novel provides an in-depth look into the Afghan people's culture, conventions, and beliefs; it covers all different shades of life in Afghanistan. Tariq and Laila were married in Pakistan and were living there happily ever after when they heard that the American bombing had helped to normalize the situation in Afghanistan (Kakutani)

For more than a century, Women's rights in Afghanistan have been the topic of controversy and strife. When Islam entered to Afghanistan there was not any central administration in this

geography. The north, south, east and west of the country was ruled by several local rulers who had different languages and cultures. The biggest development in education took place after 1919. King Amanullah Khan (ruled 1919-29) made the primary schools compulsory to all (Khwajamir1-2). He led Afghanistan to independence from the United Kingdom in 1919; he was the third son of Emir of Afghanistan Amir Habibullah Khan who pushed for Western-style reforms to modernize the nation. Child marriage was outlawed, polygamy was prohibited, and religious leaders' authority was limited. The veil was no longer obligatory for women. In late 1927, King Amanullah Khan and his wife, Queen Soraya Tarzi, visited Europe. On this trip, they were honored and feted. This was an era when other Muslim nations, like Turkey and Egypt, were also on the path to modernization. Upon returning from his tour to Europe, King Amanullah Khan let his wife appear without a veil in public. He also prepared a progressive and democratic plan for modernizing his country. One of the key elements of this plan was the elimination of hijab of women, access to education and active participation of women in the social, economic, political and cultural processes in the society (Bamik 3) she was the first Muslim wife to accompany her husband in public and the first Afghan woman to hold public office. During Afghanistan's struggle for independence, she became a powerful figure in not just the Muslim world, but the entire world.

The pro-Soviet commander who had ousted Zahir Shah was slain in a coup in 1979, and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, imposing a Marxist puppet monarchy. Women's status began to deteriorate as the state disintegrated into civil war between communist troops and their opponents, particularly Islamist militants known as "mujahedeen." After the Soviets left in 1989, the Taliban, which had started as a religious youth organization in the early 1990s, seized power. They marched across the country declaring peace and modern administration, but the reality, especially for women, was considerably different during their presidency, which lasted from 1996 to 2001.

They had to wear the burqa, a one-piece garment that covered their entire head and body, and they couldn't go to school, work, and talk in public or even leave their homes unless accompanied by a male. Violations were punished with public flogging and stoning to death. Suicide rates among women had soared. Their access to health care was limited due to restrictions on their mobility and the requirement to attend women-only hospitals and wards. Women were excluded from all elements of politics, including administration.

1.2 Afghan Anglophone Literature

Afghan Anglophone Literature comes from various nations; we begin with Afghan American Literature. With the spotlight on Afghanistan's condition in the media, no one can help but be concerned for the future of the Afghan people. Empathy for other human beings living in remote places of the world under harsh, horrible conditions, which readers, can know about only via TV or reading books (through literature). Books can only do so much, but they can help comprehend the difficulties that the Afghans, especially women, suffer. While *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* are well-known, there are many additional works worth mentioning that reflect Afghanistan's culture through literature.

Afghan British Writers also play an important role in depicting the harsh life of Afghans. Andrea Busfield is a British journalist who reported on the Taliban's demise in Afghanistan in 2001. During her numerous travels there, she encountered children who funded their families by entertaining tourists in a variety of inventive ways. Fawad, one of these kids, was the naughty yet endearing demon she named the protagonist of *Born Under A Million Shadows After*, (2009). Busfield introduces us to a country that lives in constant terror of a dissolved organization, yet rises above the gloom to preserve its humanity flourishing through Fawad, the protagonist's vivid vision. In addition to Busfield, Saira Shah is a famous journalist, writer, and filmmaker. She was born in the United Kingdom to Afghan parents. She wrote her famous book *The Storyteller's*

Daughter (2004) a memoir in which she depicted the oppression which Afghan women were suffering when the Taliban took control and her identity as a diasporic writer. Saira visited Afghanistan when she was only twenty one years old working as a reporter, where she spent three years documenting the Soviet invasion.

Afghan Australian Writer Hafizullah Khaled is the founder of the Help Afghan School Children Organization (HASCO) in Vienna. He is an Afghan Austrian humanitarian, peace activist, and writer. HASCO is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that helps Afghan new returnees and displaced families enroll their children in school. He has dedicated his life to promoting the message of peace and supporting Afghanistan's most vulnerable youngsters. Hafizullah has traveled to different parts of Afghanistan multiple times in the previous ten years to help orphans and vulnerable children, as well as advocate nonviolent education for Afghan youngsters. He has written various articles and poetry in both Afghani and English (Pashto and Persian). His poetry encouraged Afghans to defend the rights of impoverished children by spreading a message of peace. Some of his works, including *Children the Flowers of Our Garden* (Pashto poetry), *Curse on War* (Persian poem), and *Why this Continued War?* (Persian poem), and *My Dream* (Pashto poem), has appeared on many Afghan websites and magazines.

Gulwali Passarlay, as a political refugee, arrived in the United Kingdom at the age of 13 and was eventually accepted to the University of Manchester. He does youth representation and involvement work outside of his academics. Gulwali published *The Lightless Sky* in October 2015, which chronicles his trip from Afghanistan to the United Kingdom. Passarlay described his journeys of refuge which her mother planned for him and his brother, seeking refuge from their country's harsh conditions under the Taliban rule which explained that even men were suffering in this society not only women.

Innocent Deception (2018) is a novel by Shabibi Shah Nala, author of the gripping memoir *Where do I belong?* (2008), that chronicles the connected stories of people compelled to flee Afghanistan to start a new life in England. By describing the double and triple stories of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, Shabibi Shah's knack for sharp observation enriches our knowledge of hidden identities. It is an unusual and captivating modern tale.

Shabibi Shah departed Afghanistan in 1983 and negotiated the release of her husband, Zafar, who had been imprisoned by the then-Communist government in Kabul. She waited two weeks after he crossed the border into Pakistan before making the risky trek into the mountains with her three children, the youngest of whom was just four months old. Their journey was terrifying: first as nomads to Jalalabad, then by ancient lorry and on foot across the mountains into Pakistan, where they faced yet another ordeal: a year and a half in Peshawar, a dangerous border town overrun with refugees where Zafar was once again imprisoned, before finally receiving visas to the UK. They arrived in London in 1984. After her departure in 2004, Shabibi returned to Afghanistan for the first time, and this freshly revised edition recounts what she found and how it compares to the country she fled in 1983. Shabibi has volunteered with several organizations, including Croydon's Refugee Project. She created the Refugee Help Point at Croydon's Ambassador House after completing her counseling training in 1998. In 1999, she received an award from the Mayor of Croydon for her volunteer activities. She is now a trustee of the Ruth Hayman Trust, a charity that promotes young people's education in the United Kingdom. She currently works as a foster mom for unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 and has three Afghan boys under her care. She dedicates her life to helping refugees. She is a published poet in Dari, her native language. *Innocent Deception*, based on Shabibi Shah Nala's gripping memoir, *Where Do I Belong?*, explains the interconnected accounts of persons forced to leave Afghanistan to begin living in England (Johns worldview)

Shabibi Shah left Afghanistan in 1983 to negotiate the release of her husband, Zafar, who was imprisoned by the communist regime in Kabul at the time. She waited two weeks after he crossed into Pakistan before taking her three children, the smallest of whom was just four months old, on the dangerous expedition into the mountains. Their journey was terrifying: first as nomads to Jalalabad, then by ancient lorry and on foot across the mountains into Pakistan, where they faced yet another ordeal: a year and a half in Peshawar, a dangerous border town overrun with refugees where Zafar was imprisoned once more, before finally receiving visas to the United Kingdom. Shabibi returned to Afghanistan for the first time after her departure in 2004, and this newly edited edition tells what she saw and how it compares to the nation she fled in 1983.

Shabibi Shah Nala, who holds a journalism degree from Kabul University, has worked as a professional journalist in Afghanistan for the past 12 years. While working as a college professor in Afghanistan, she married a political journalist. Zafar, her husband, was detained by Communist officials at the time. Shabibi was let free, and Zafar was able to cross the mountains into Pakistan. Shabibi and her three small children came two weeks later. They landed in England as refugees a year and a half later.

When her spouse died in 1993, she was able to study English fluently and write her autobiography, *Where Do I Belong*. Shabibi has volunteered for various organizations this year, including the Croydon Refugee Project. After completing her counseling studies in 1998, she established the Refugee Help Point at Croydon's Ambassador House. Her voluntary service was honored by the Mayor of Croydon in 1999.

She was the chair of the Afghan Paiwand Association from 2010 until 2014, a non-profit that helps refugees with day-to-day issues, from 2010 until 2014. She is now a trustee of the Ruth Hayman Trust, a UK-based charitable organization dedicated to the education of young people.

She is now caring for three Afghan boys as a foster mother for unaccompanied kids under the age of 18. She devotes her time and resources to assisting refugees. In Dari, her native tongue, she has published poetry.

Haroon Yousofi is a poet, writer of satirical literary works, and an Afghan journalist living in London. He went to Kabul University to study Persian literature and then Moscow State University to study Russian literature. He taught Literature at Kabul University after returning from Russia in 1976, until 1990, when he moved to the United Kingdom. Yousofi produced and presented several successful artists and culture series while working as a Producer at the BBC World Service Persian from 1990 to 2010, including Studio 7 and Rainbow.

He has won various accolades around the world, including the Afghan Writers and Poets Association's 2012 Poet of the Year Award. In 2019, he published *Hay* (Persian:), a collection of his recent poems. He works on Afghan television, radio, and the internet as a host. He interviews prominent Afghan personalities on his live web weekly show, Studio 19 (made during the Covid-19 lockdown). And over a hundred Russian short stories have been adapted into Farsi. Haroon Yousofi produced three poetry books. His two satirical works, *The Testimony of Mirza Sadaf* and *I Forbid*, were published by the Independent Association of Afghan Writers. He was forced to depart Afghanistan and sought asylum in the United Kingdom in 1990.

Poetry, reminiscence, fables, proverbs, and stories are fundamental to Afghan culture, which was created by a poet, Ahmad Shah Abdali (also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani). Durrani became the King at the age of twenty-five and marked his name in history as the founder of a vast Durrani (Masaeli et al.100)

Years of chronic instability and internal displacement have produced a difficult environment for authors of all types in modern Afghanistan. Since the turn of the century, twenty different flags have flown over the country. Changes in rulers, kings, emirs, and presidents, as well as

revolutions, Soviet invasions, and Taliban administration, have resulted in opposing political ideas and significant restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, notably for women. Even though Kabul has twenty-two publishers, Afghanistan has limited apparatus for local literary translators and editors, and literary work is rarely translated between linguistic communities and ethnic groupings. The majority of Afghan writers who have appeared in English translation are men; the majority like the few Afghan women who have made a living as writers elsewhere, reside outside the country.

Women writers were unable to leave their homes and their imaginative realms based on their everyday experiences, Women's literacy is still disproportionately low in post-Taliban Afghanistan, and those who desire to write find it difficult to get help. Despite this, many of these women believe that ideas and concepts may be developed in Afghanistan, despite the country's insecurity and political unrest. Women's viewpoints are essential to comprehending a nation's change. Various one-off projects have aided these writers in recent years, and some of them have appeared in anthologies of current Afghan writing. However, establishing initiatives in what is still a difficult working climate is difficult. As a result, emerging female writers' voices go unnoticed.

Throughout the last two centuries, the world has mostly observed Afghanistan and the way of life of its living people through the words of Anglophone writers who described and revealed the harsh lives of Afghani people. Though there are few outliers, such as relatively under-studied Russian sources. The English dominion over all things Afghan is even more obvious in the field of literary fiction. Travelers, journalists, diplomats, and, more lately, French-speaking Afghans are among the few French writers who provide a contrast to the Anglophone literature. In Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014), the status of women in Afghanistan was clearly revealed. Through the second and the third chapters which are a deep analysis of the novel, the readers will discover the reality of the life of Afghani women and girls.

Chapter Two Shekiba's Avantgardism and Inspiration

This chapter is a deep examination of Shekiba's experiences when she adopted the *bacha posh* traditional custom and fought against gender inequality which was a serious problem in her patriarchal society. How her life as a woman inspired her great-great granddaughter, Rahima, who lived a decades after Shekiba passed away. Shekiba and Rahima were two different Afghan women, from different generation, yet they had some shared similarities.

2.1 Shekiba: A Woman Fighting for Gender Equality

Gender inequality has existed from centuries, especially in patriarchal countries which were ruled or dominated by men. Afghanistan is one of the world's Muslim countries where patriarchy is often at its highest degree and women face severe limitations; therefore, women's submissiveness is a major source of gender inequality in Afghanistan. Nadia Hashimi is an Afghan-American author whose work *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* became an international hit. Her debut novel was published in 2014. The novel examines the historical and current oppression of Afghan women. The fact that the situation has stayed unaltered for nearly a century indicates that patriarchy has shaped social standards. According to Jackson and Jones, the factors that influence women's lives are examined through the Feminist theory which investigates the cultural perceptions of what it means to be a woman. They argued that Feminists insisting on questioning gender disparities between both genders, because they rejected the idea that gender inequalities are inherent and unavoidable (Jackson and Jones 1). Recognizing basic inequities between men and women, as well as studies of male dominance over females has been a focus of feminist social theory. Its primary concept is that male supremacy is a result of social, economic, and political systems unique to each society.

The Afghan women make constant attempts to escape their inferior position, one of the ways they found convenient is to become a *bacha posh*. *Bacha posh* is a procedure that a woman undergoes to get some freedom as men. A *bacha posh* must usually return to being a girl after they reach puberty. Women in this society rely on men in everything in return they are treated unfairly; nothing has changed about their situation from centuries.

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell was written and published by Nadia Hashimi in 2014. It is an interesting novel as it reveals women's lives in Afghanistan. The story is set in a place near Kabul, where people follow "Islamic laws". Outside of the house, women have limited access; they are responsible for domestic tasks. The story centers on two major characters, Rahima (her story is set in 2007) and her great-great mother, Shakiba (her story is set in 1900s). The two stories are separated by a period of hundred years, yet they went through the same struggles, obstacles, and experiences. Even though they are not totally the same but related in many points. This novel showed the dreams of Afghan women and their hopes and desires for better life.

Shekiba lived with her small family; her parents, sister Aqela, and two brothers, Tariq and Munis. The two boys were treated much better than their sisters that "Ismail's mother Bobo Shahgul, often said the two boys were the only good thing to come from Shafiq" (Hashimi 23). This first quote explains gender bias among Afghans; males were always preferred whereas females were rejected by their families and the community as a whole. Shekiba's life was so miserable; she was rejected by her society because of her gender. In addition to being a woman in a patriarchal society she suffered because of her scared face which made her feel ugly and self-conscious, especially when she saw how people around her reacted to the scar. When she was only two years old, a pot of hot oil dropped on her, and burned the entire left side of her face and other parts of her small body. Since then, Shekiba had to hide her scars

using a headscarf. Her disfigurement affected her personality in a negative way; she was suffering from low self-esteem and low self-confidence. She decided to stay at home to avoid people's hurtful and satirical comments about her; "In summers, the burqa was hot and stifling but she felt safer within it, protected. She was not exactly happy but was satisfied to stay in the house and out of sight" (Hashimi 25). Her disfigurement affected her personality in a terrible manner that she was often confined at home; she did not attend school nor played outside to avoid people's horrible gazes at her face.

Shekiba suddenly lost her brothers and sister because of cholera, later on she even lost her mother who became mad after the death of her three children. Shekiba lived with her father Ismail and behaved like a son; in addition, she worked with her father on their land. She worked so hard in order to show her community that women were able to do what men did, and worked hard in her father's land as if she was his son not his daughter; "She hoed, she slaughtered and she chopped as any strong-backed son would do for his father...Shekiba proved to be able-bodied, affirming her father's confidence in her ability to manage the farm. Her arms and shoulders knotted with muscle" (Hashimi 28). Shekiba and her father's relationship had been father and son not father and daughter relationship. After the death of her father she remained alone, working the land to feed herself; "Years passed. Shekiba's features grew coarser; her palms and soles were thick and callused...There were days Shekiba was felt to run the entire farm and house on her own" (Hashimi 28). She was living like a man not a woman. She kept working the land as her father exactly did, and she did not even care about her physical appearance as women would; "[she] had become apathetic. She hadn't bothered to wash her dress...Her hair was a tangled nest of lice and unwashable for months" (Hashimi 45). Her family's death deeply affected her psyche for they were the only ones who loved her despite her scared face. She hated her existence as an orphan, scared girl.

When Shekiba's uncles knew of her father's death, and that she was living alone, they were shocked since women were not allowed to live alone in their society; it meant shame for the family. They took her to live with them, with her disagreeable grandmother, Bibi Shahgul, who was not satisfied about Shekiba's existence since her birth. Bibi Shahgul frequently hurt her granddaughter with harsh comments about her disfigured face. She often bit her with her walking stick. Bibi Gulalai kept blaming Shekiba for taking her son away from her "You did your very best to keep him secluded, trapped with such a wild creature as yourself that no one would want to come near you or him!" (Hashimi 49)

Shekiba was oppressed physically and psychologically. Her mother in law and her uncle's wives put all the house chores on her shoulders; "She was assigned the least desirable chores in the house and accepted them without argument" (Hashimi 50). She had men-like body that they took advantage of and made her work more than anyone else did in their family; "She could balance three pails of water, instead of just two women. She could lift the wood into the stove" (Hashimi 60). She did all the housework she was ordered to her without complaining. Later on, her mother in law and uncles decided to let her go work the land for she used to do with her father. They order her that "Shekiba, when you have finished with cleaning this floor, you are to go into the field and help your uncles with the harvest" (Hashimi 61). They assumed that since she had experience working the land, she had learned the techniques of harvesting the crops as well.

The uncle's family was indebted to king Azizullah. They had to pay him back as soon as possible, but the king offered to take one of their daughters as a servant for his son, who was just ten years old. Since their daughters were too young, they decided to give him Shekiba instead. Azizullah accept their offer, and Shekiba was sent to slave away in a new place; "Do not do anything that will bring shame to this family" her grandmother warned her before she

was sent off (Hashimi 67). Shekiba realized that she will never return to her uncle's house again. She gathered courage to finally set her grandmother straight; "She lifted her burqa from her face and spat at her grandmother's wrinkled feet. A wad of saliva landed on her walking stick" (Hashimi 67). She was silent before about their bad treatment of her because she wanted to go back to her home and her father's land, but she realized that it was not possible. Finally, that one last time she revealed the hurtful hidden feelings they made her feel before.

Her first meeting with Azizullah and his wife, Marjan, made Shekiba feel comfortable. She got rid of her insensitive grandmother and cousins, and her uncaring uncles and their wives; "Despite the fact that she'd been brought here as a servant, Shekiba realized Azizullah's home would be a reprieve for her" (Hashimi 72). She was comfortable at her new house even though she was doing almost all the house work alone, Azizullah's sons and daughter reminded her of her brothers and sister. When Shekiba heard that one of her uncles told Azizullah that her father distributed the land between his brothers before his death, she was astonished, and she exclaimed "A lie! My father had no such conversation! [...] I should be the owner of that land" (Hashimi 88). She had been dreaming of inheriting her father's land and living independently and not as a slave from one house to another. She asked Azizullah's wife, Marjan, but she told her that the land is going to be inherited by her paternal side of the family; "Your father's land will go to his family, since your brothers are dead, may Allah grant them peace", Marjan explained (Hashimi 89). Women in the Afghan society did not have the right to inherit from their family's property, only males did.

Shekiba's identity was a mixture between that of a male and a female. She was a housekeeper, who was confined at home wearing her long dress and burqa and doing well all the housework, and a man with a strong body which allowed her to work the land and did everything women could not do. One day, Marjan caught Shekiba sitting like boys by surprise

and she exclaimed; “Is that how a girl sits? She said, waving an arm at Shekiba’s sprawled legs [...] Shekiba’s turned to look at herself. She was leaning against the wall and had her knees bent, the pile of potatoes in the valley her skirts formed between her legs” (Hashimi 100).

After nights of thinking, Shekiba knew that Azizullah wanted to get rid of her, so she decided to go to the Hakeem (the Wiseman) to prove the inheritance of her father’s land; she explained “please, Sahib, I have the deed to my father’s land and I am his only surviving child. I want to claim my inheritance. That land should belong to me and my uncles are taking it without right” (Hashimi 135). Azizullah became so angry at her because she will bring shame upon him and his family. Hakeem was also astonished, probably because no woman in her society dared to do that “Girl, you know nothing of tradition he said and tore the deed into pieces” (Hashimi 136). Afghans believe that a woman's husband will care for her financially; hence, she does not require her own land. According to this viewpoint, it is obviously more advantageous for a woman to give her portion of the land to her brothers, who will use it to support their children while her own husband looks after her (Lemmon). This quote explains how Afghan women are denied their rights. Despite the fact that Islam stated clearly women rights in the holy book ‘Quran’, Afghan religious men were modifying laws according to their understanding. Shekiba’s father’s land was taken by her uncles as her brothers died; her father’s land was her only hope in her miserable life, she wanted to live there with her family’s memories, despite of being alone, she wanted to continue working the land as she used to do before with her father. She was punished for trying to defy the laws of her community; “Two days passed before Shekiba could stand. Her lip was swollen and scabbed, her legs and back bore multiple bruises and each breath yanked her ribs in different directions...Azizullah had dragged her back to the house and beaten her for an hour”

(Hashimi 148). Women in this harsh society did not have rights at all, they had only duties that they were obliged to fulfill, even when they had the right to complain, they would find no one and no law in their favor.

Shekiba was then given away as a gift to King Habibullah to work as a guard in the king's harem (palace) because the king does not trust any men to guard his wives; "She wore ballooned pants and boots with a button-down shirt. If it weren't for her voice, Shekiba would have believed her to be a man" (Hashimi 160). She was no longer a woman now she became a man; she became Shekib. She was not the only women guard in the palace, however. There were other girls working as male guards. There was Ghafoor (or Guljaan), the leader of the guards who was bought in exchanged for a cow. Then there was Karim (or Karima), and Qasim (or Khatol), and finally Tariq, the newest guard. All these girls were exchanged by their families in order to pay a debt like the case of Shekiba, or they were given away because their families were no longer able feed them; "Karima and Qasim came from a family of four girls. Their mother cried violently as she told the girls they could not afford to feed all four and that their father had arranged for them to be taken to the king's palace, where they would have a much better life" (Hashimi 165). The girls were better off in the king's palace than in their homes. They were happy about their new gender identity and their roles as guards.

Shekiba was already familiar of with being a man-like, but she was not familiar with wearing pants and shirts; she get used of wearing long dress, veil which covers her face, and burqa. She became a little bit self-confident after she took off the veil, and she was no longer hiding her disfigurement. She enjoyed being there with the women guards. As she got rid of the physical abuse, she had faced in her grandmother's and Azizullah's house. Despite the fact that she lived as a man for many years, and that her gender identity was shifting back and forth from a man to woman, she still had woman inclinations and desires. She wanted to

marry and have a family as any other woman; “I want to be married. I want to have children and a home. I want to live somewhere else” (Hashimi 237). She was thinking of king Amanullah, and attempting to attract his attention. She had noticed the difference between the king’s concubines who gave birth to children and how they were preferred over the others who did not. She thought that if king Amanullah knew that she were able to give birth to sons, he will chose her to be his wife. She was longing to find out a solution which would provide her a descent life in the future, but her expectations suddenly fell apart. After Benefsha, the King’s concubine’s betrayal, Shekiba was blamed as a guard for not paying attention well to the harem; “Have her locked up! And Benefsha too! We’ll make swift examples of them both”, orders were set (Hashimi 299). Shekiba and Benefsha were imprisoned for three days without food until they would decide what they should do with them.

Benefsha was sentenced to death for her love affair and her betrayal to the king, also was Shekiba for hiding the truth. Michael Munisa in “Sharia Law and the Death Penalty: Would abolition of the death penalty be unfaithful to the message of Islam?” argued that the death penalty in many Islamic countries became a taboo subject to be discussed. Rules and punishments which the government applied on criminals were extracted from the Sharia (Munisa 6). However, Afghans always reverted to Sharia when it came to matters of punishments which are fixed from past generations till the present days. Benefsh’s punishment was set; “Your crime have been reviewed by the scholars of our beloved Islam and according to the laws of our land, you are to be stoned for the grave offense you have committed” (Hashimi 337) this explained that man have the right to choose his wife and soul mate whereas woman is forbidden and when she done so, she would receive a harsh punishment. All the rules in this country were against women, they were made by men for their own benefits. Shekiba on the other hand “...had been sentenced to a hundred lashes”

(Hashimi 340) for a crime she had no relation with, but because of denying the truth from the king.

Shekiba was sent away to another place, but this time was different; she was given as a housewife not a servant Catherine MacKannon stated “Marriage is women’s destiny, a destiny she defends and seeks to extend” (MacKannon 24) Afghan families do believed that a girl belongs to her husband not her parents. Agha Baraan Aasif, Benefsha’s secret lover, asked Shekiba’s hand in marriage. While Gulnaz was his first wife, Shekiba was his second. He married her since she told him before that all women in their family bear sons, he was longing for a son for many years. Gulnaz gave birth to a daughter which made him more disappointed “After all that? A girl? How can this be? [...] Is there no end to my humiliation?” (Hashimi 397) this quote shows how girls were not appreciated even by her family and parents.

Shekiba, the woman, had to adjust to her new gender identity. She was a housewife who had duties to fulfill. She was good at doing housework, but when it came to her husband’s duties, she would find ways to escape. She pretended to be sleep when he entered her room, and he ignored her for the first time, but he soon became upset with her; “Did you like being a man? Maybe that’s what it is! You like being a man so much that now you refuse to be a woman! ... You are not a man! You are not a woman! You are nothing! (Hashimi 389) He became disappointed with her, as she did not want to be with him under one roof. Days passed by and Shekiba helped Gulnaz do the housework as if she was her servant, till the day she noticed that she was pregnant, the thing that would make her life better especially when she would give birth to a son and made her husband satisfied. After prayers and begging she had a son whom his father named Shah. Aasif was so happy that he finally had a son who made him walk with his head high. Shekiba was no longer a woman, now she was a woman

and a mother. She was the ideal housewife in her husband's eyes. Her feelings of motherhood made her very careful for her baby, especially from the cholera disease which took away her family. She insisted on keeping him far from the kitchen in order not to be disfigured like what happened with her when she was two years.

Yatharth illustrated that there are significant periods in which women's status could have been improved in Afghanistan. During the reign of king Amanullah from 1919 to 1928, the rules of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), king Abdurrahman Khan from 1880 to 1901 who toiled hard to change the tradition of child marriage and create a more developed state. "He also enacted laws to support inheritance and divorce rights of women, within the provisions of the Sharia" (Yatharth 8). After the assassination of king Habibullah, his son king Amanullah took the reign where Afghanistan gained its independence. Unlike his father, king Amanullah made very interesting changes in favor of women; he declared that the veil is not obligatory for women. Queen Soraya his wife was an educated woman whom took with him in every occasion, unlike his father who confined his wives in the house. This was portrayed in Hashimi's novel; "He declared her, his wife, to be the minister of education and queen to the Afghan people" (444). This quote gave positive expectations for the development of women and their opportunity to work in public since women had no right to work outside their homes. This would change the status of the Afghan women and improve the situation for the coming future generations. Shekiba passed very hard moments in her life which made of her a strong woman who did not know what getting tired means. Her life was better than she had never imagined. Her son and his half daughter would expect to live a beautiful life than their parents did.

1.2 Shekiba's Experience Inspires Her Great Granddaughter

Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is centered on the stories of its two major characters; Shekiba and her great-great granddaughter, Rahima. Rahima was the narrator of her own story whereas Shekiba's story was told by Khala Shaima to inspire Rahima. The situation of Afghan women was well explained through the life story of both characters. Despite the fact that Rahima and Shekiba were separated by a decades, they shared similar conditions. Khala Shaima was narrating the story of Bibi Shekiba to her nieces in order not to keep blaming their 'naseeb' (fate) instead of taking actions to change some things in their lives.

Rahima's life would be much miserable without the help of Khala Shaima and her stories of her great-great grandmother, Shekiba, which influenced her life. Unlike Shekiba who had two brothers, Rahima lived in a family without a son. She and her sisters, Shahla and Parwin, were forbidden from going to school as they became young and were noticed by men. Shekiba did not attend school because of her disfigurement which affected her self-esteem; she decided to keep herself hidden so as not to get bullied. Rahima's addicted father decided to keep them at home. Rahima was able to fight against the Afghan conventions with the help of Khala Shaima who dared to oppose him and suggested the *bacha posh* helped especially with the problem of the girl's education. Khala Shaima's suggestion of the traditional custom worked. Rahima was disguised as a boy; her mother, Raisa, cut off her hair and gave her pants and shirts of her cousins to dress up. Eventually, Rahima became Rahim who had the same freedoms as boys, attend school, went to the supermarkets, and walk and play freely outside home without being attracted by men.

Similarly, long ago her great grandmother became a guard attaining the same freedom and walking freely without any restrictions. Like Shekiba who was helping her father in the land, Rahima was working on the supermarket to earn money to help her father, and helped her mother buy things she needed from the market. Though she was enjoying her life as a boy, at

the age of thirteen, Rahima was married off to a man five times her age. She was unable to refuse the man when her father found him suitable for her. Shekiba on the other hand, was dreaming of being a wife to king Amanullah, but they had chosen Agha Aasif Baraan instead as her suitable husband. Shekiba also could not refuse because she was a woman not a man. She, because of the scar on her face, did not get married at an early age like Rahima since no one was interested in her as a wife. In their teenage years, it was very hard for both Shekiba and Rahima to settle on one gender identity as their gender identity kept moving back and forth between male and female.

Shekiba and Rahima when getting married could not fit to their new gender role easily as they get used to the male's way of life, they failed in fulfilling their husband's commands, and therefore, they were rejected by their husbands for a period of time. But everything had changed the day of their childbirth and giving birth to male children; the only thing that made both of them accepted by their husbands. Their gender identity and femininity was fully completed by becoming the ideal housewives who gave birth to sons. Unlike Shekiba, Rahima was not that careful taking care of her son. She was occupied planning to change her life, and she went to visit Kabul to see the place which Bibi Shekiba had seen before and worked as Badriya's assistant while her son was left behind with her co-wife where he became ill and died. It was the loss of her baby which made her rejected by her husband again. After her son's death, she decided to escape from her husband's abuse. She went to women's shelter in Kabul where many women live with different miserable stories they carried with them.

Both Rahima and Shekiba were denied the right to education. Shekiba was because of her gender, and scarred face which caused her to be bullied. Rahima and her sisters also denied the right to education because they did not have a brother to accompany and protect them in their way to school. Oppression does not necessitate physical abuse; legal injustice, or

economic exploitation, are also possible forms of psychological oppression. To be psychologically oppressed means to be mentally frustrated and to lose control over your self-esteem (Bartky 1) both of them were abused physically and psychologically especially Shekiba who had lost her self-confidence when she was very young, yet by being disguised as males, they gained some power, intelligence, and self-confidence which helped them find ways to escape their oppression. Both of them were maltreated by their families and society, especially their grandmothers. Both of Shekiba and Rahima gained some freedom when they disguised themselves as boys, but the transition had a great impact on their gender identity which kept oscillating between males and females and pushed them to continue living with a shallow psychological scar.

Despite the fact that the two stories were similar, yet each one of them had its unique story with different circumstances. While Rahima married at the age of thirteen, Shekiba did not since she lacks feminine traits. Shekiba never attended school, but Rahima did. By becoming a *bacha posh*, the latter had the opportunity to attend school. Rahima was the only girl who had childhood memories of adventures with her friends and neighbors outside home, unlike Shekiba who remember only her days with her mother and sister Aqela inside their house. Rahima's gender shift from a girl to a boy was not as easy as that of Shekiba. Rahima was prettier than Shekiba, the able-bodied and disfigured woman who lacked feminine traits. Finally, both Rahima and Shekiba were accepted by their husbands when giving birth to sons. By the end of the novel, the two women were relatively happy; Shekiba's life would be better when king Amanullah had the reign and changed some rules concerning women. Rahima on the other hand got rid of her cruel husband when she took shelter in Kabul.

In conclusion, Khala Shaima was the major source of inspiration of Rahima. It was Khala Shaima who came up with the idea of the traditional custom which helped her attain some boy's privileges most importantly she was able to attend school. It was Khala Shaima's offer

for going to Kabul and work as Badriya's assistant. Khala Shaima was always advising her nieces to find the suitable ways to change their lives and do not kept blaming 'naseeb' (fate). Rahima's mother, Raisa was completely different from her sister, Khala Shaima; Raisa was a submissive woman who accepts every decision her husband made and never opposed him. After her daughter's marriage, she ended up addicted to opium which she found as her own suitable refuge. Like her mother, Parwin also was a submissive girl who burned herself and put an end to her miserable life since she was an artist at her home; she used to draw and sing, but her new life was restricted only in doing housework but anything else. Rahima followed her aunt's precious advices and find her suitable escape from her emotionless and selfish husband, and her cruel mother in law. After her son's death, she escaped to women shelter in Kabul hoping for a better life without any abuse.

Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* clearly depicted the life of Afghan women how they denied their rights, the harsh reality of child marriage, being totally absent from the public life, in addition to all of that, they were the victims of domestic violence. She lucidly informs the readers about the harsh reality of the patriarchal societies. Her use of real life characters with real life stories and cyclical plot help the reader understand and feel for the characters, especially the two female protagonists of the two major narratives. Through Rahima's story which is rather a modern version of Shekiba's, Hashimi was explaining that the situation of women in Afghanistan remained the same over centuries and through generations; despite some ruler's attempts to change women's status and rules which are mostly in favor of men.

Chapter Three Rahima's Identity Development

This chapter aims at examining Rahima's identity development from a *bacha posh*; who gains the freedoms and opportunities as men, to a housewife at a very early age who is going to face all kinds of oppression. Applying the psychoanalysis and the feminist approaches are best suitable for the analysis of the novel. Firstly, the protagonist will be examined as a *bacha posh*, who is able to attend school, walk freely in the street, works in the supermarket, and play soccer with her boyfriend neighbors. Secondly, Rahima will be examined as a passive housewife, who is confined between five halls, has to obey her husband, do house chores, and give birth to children. Rahima's identity was moving back and forth from a masculine to feminine identity. Dowling Susan argued that the beliefs, connections, thoughts, experiences, and memories that make up a person's subjective sense of self are all part of identity. This aids in the development of a consistent self-image that maintains stable throughout time when new aspects of the self are established or enhanced (Dowling 12).

1. 1 Rahima: Adapting a Masculine Identity

Afghanistan is a highly patriarchal society, in which women suffer from gender discrimination and oppression. In this society, males are preferred over females; men are the superpowers who control everything and every domain, whereas women are treated as a sexual satisfaction objects, and son bearing machines. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) proposed the idea that man have established power over women, this power is not inherited rather it is socially imposed. She stated that "Patriarchy does not mean just males dominating females, but also it is between men themselves" (Millet xii) In Afghanistan, females were forbidden to go outside home without male's escort, which obliged the families without a boy to transform their daughters into boys. Many contemporary researchers have argued that women cross-dressed to take advantage of male's privilege; such as escaping

traditional restricted gender roles such as child marriage, or entering traditionally male's occupations and having the right to education.

Deborah Ellis's novel *The Breadwinner* (2000) follows Pavarna's story. Pavarna is an 11 year old girl who lives with her family in Taliban-controlled Kabul, "the Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school. Pavarna was obliged to leave her sixth grade class, and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station" (Ellis 7). Her mother and school teacher disguised her as a guy after her father was imprisoned due to the Taliban's hatred for his western education, so she can work for funding a family of six members. Ellis's description of the daily life in Afghanistan based on the interviews with Afghani refugees in Pakistan. Despite the similarities that exist between the two fictional stories *The Breadwinner* and *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, they show that each girl, Rahima and Pavarna, has different experiences. Unlike Pavarna who her father was arrested by the Taliban, Rahima's father was present with the family most of the time, but he was careless since he was addicted to opium; which obliged her mother to turn her daughter into a boy in order to send her to the supermarket buying things her husband forget to bring home. Both Rahima and Pavarna lived in the era where Afghanistan was under the Taliban rule. Pavarna was disguised as a boy by her school teacher, MrsWeera, and her mother to provide help for her family whereas Rahima was KhalaShaima, who disguised her as a *bacha posh*. Both Rahima and Pavarna continued as a *bacha posh* despite their age and menstrual cycle had started.

In her book *The Underground Girls of Kabul: in Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan*, Jenny Nordberg spent months interviewing families across the country that had *bacha posh*. She writes her original non-fiction work on the practice of *bacha posh*, highlighting the ways in which women in a hostile environment have discovered methods to

survive under the harsh conditions. Nordberg discovered that women in Afghanistan disguise their daughters into boys in order to have the opportunity to go to school and work to help their families.

The Breadwinner, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* fictional stories, and *The Underground Girls of Kabul*'s real life stories of *bacha posh*, have striking similarities. But when they are combined, they show how each girl's experience is unique. When the Taliban took control, the practice of female's dressing as boys become required since girl's education became prohibited and all women over the age of puberty were ordered to wear a burka, be escorted by a male, and remain inside the house. A woman who is caught outside without an escort and a burka risks being assaulted and killed. This fear influenced Pavarna's family decision in *The Breadwinner*, because without a male presence, her family was left hopeless, putting her mother and siblings inside the house with no ability to get money or go to the market for food. At eleven Pavarna was a boy who escorts his family, and had a job; reading and writing letters for illiterate passengers to get money "I can read that letter as well as father can" (Ellis 7).

The protagonist of *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Rahima, adopted the *bacha posh* tradition since she lived in a family with five of girls and no boys; the thing that made her father unsatisfied and become more addicted to opium as he find it as his suitable refuge to forget thinking about his miserable reality and the shame of not being able to produce a son. Rahima's mother decided to transform her nine year daughter into a boy, thanks to Khala Shaima, the voice of the family, who was narrating the story of Bibi Shekiba; "I think it would be best if we let you be a son to your father" (Hashimi 31). Transforming one of the girls into a boy helped Rahima's father forget about the shame of not giving birth to a son. Rahima describes "Madar-jan took me behind the house with padar-jan's scissors and razor. I sat nervously while my sisters watched. She pulled my long hair into a ponytail behind my head, whispered a prayer and slowly began to shear away" (Hashimi 41). Consequently,

Rahima becomes Rahim, with a boyish hair and clothes; shirts and pants. But even if Rahima was changed to a boy, this did not change anything about her sisters who were forbidden from going outside home. It mainly benefitted Rahima who was then able to walk freely in the street, attend school, go to the supermarket, play soccer with the boys her age, and work and earn money to help her father was just thinking about his opium, and did not care about bringing food to his family. Being a *bacha posh* did not stop at Rahima's physical appearance, but it extends to her body language for she changed way she talk, sat, and walked...etc. Becoming a *bacha posh* meant that her behaviors must be controlled for not being discovered that as a girl. Rahima describes her first steps outside home:

My first errand as a boy was an exciting one. I was to go to the market for oil and flour.....I stepped into the first shop I recognized a large sign overhead announcing the arrival of a new cooking oil. Agha Sahib, how much for a kilo of flour? I asked, remembering to keep my shoulders straight. I couldn't quite bring myself to look the man in the eyes so I kept shifting my gaze to the tin cans he had stocked on the shelf behind him (Hashimi 53).

Rahima gradually shifted to her new gender identity, and while her freedom of movement could be linked to the fact that she is now wearing pants, her sense of liberation appears to be the result of a new mindset provided by her newly acquired masculine identity. Rahima forced herself to change her physical performance to fit her new persona; she confirms as she argues back at Agha-Sahib "I am no fool, agha-Sahib, [...] I said, and forced myself to look him in the eye, as a boy should" (Hashimi 54).

Despite her transition into a *bacha posh*, Rahima's gender identity continues to oscillate between male and female, highlighting the impossibility of obtaining unity between her boy-like body and her feminine psyche even when wearing and acting as men. Rahima's mother let her continue as a *bacha posh* even if she started bleeding "I wonder how long I would have

gone on as a boy had Madar-jan not seen us on that day. Most children who were made *bacha posh* were changed back into girls when their monthly bleeding started but Madar-jan had let me go on, bleeding but looking like a boy...And I was happy to continue playing soccer and practicing tae kwon do with Abdullah and the boys” (Hashimi 91). She was very happy to continue as a boy because she realized that once she reverted to a girl again, there will be no school, and no boyfriends; she will be confined between the four walls of their house doing house chores. She realizes that,

[...] It was worth it. Worth it for that moment when, inevitably, Abdullah would have me cornered, or would twist my arm behind me and I could feel his breath on my neck.

Somewhere inside I tingled to be that close to him. I didn't want him to let go, even if I could feel my arm pulling from its socket. I reached out and grabbed at his other arm, feeling his adolescent muscles flex under my fingers. When I was close enough to smell him, to smell the sweat on his neck, I felt dangerous and alive. That's why it was often me who started the sparring. I loved where it put me. (Hashimi 92)

Rahima's feminine psyche is completely separated from her male-like body, which appears to put herself in joyful conflicts with the boys. Rahima's mother became disappointed when she saw her daughter under a boy in the street, it was a shameful sight. She recognized then that the *bacha posh* tradition had passed its limits, and she decided to change what she has done before things went worse. She wanted to punish her daughter for her carelessness, so she did not leave much food for her at the dinner table, and Rahim blamed her mother; as boys would. Her father suddenly heard what had happened, and became upset with Madar-jan. He exclaimed,

My son is hungry! Look at the money he's brought home! And even with this you can't find a morsel of food for him! What kind of mother are you?... “Find him something to

eat or you will be going hungry for a month!” he barked. He struck again. A drop of blood trickled from my mother’s lip. (Hashimi 95)

The previous quote explains how Rahima’s father becomes angry at his wife for not giving food to his “son”. In Afghan society males are always preferred by their fathers whereas females were subjugated and no one cared about them, sometimes even their mothers. When looking at the structure of the family, the existence of boys was enthusiastically praised and women were believed to be responsible for generating sons. Boys were highly cherished in their society and their families because of their function they have in the household’s and society’s economic production (Corbez et al. 4)

Rahima was shifted to a careless boy who did not care about women’s sufferings. Unlike Rahima, her sister Shahla shared the same feelings of sorrow with her mother; she feels the pains and tear-jerking moments which her mother went through, this is due to her purely feminine identity, she interjects “Why did you have to say something like that to him? You know how he is! (Hashimi 99), Rahima was acting like a man, who is interested only about his own needs and forget about others “It has nothing to do with you. He was angry at Madar-jan so stop worrying about yourself” (Hashimi 99). Girls almost always have to revert to their feminine gender when they reach adolescence. Sometimes she did care about her mother, she even helped her in the housework; “Even though I had been relieved of housework when I became a *bacha posh*, I tried to help when I saw her washing clothes or beating the dust from the carpets” (Hashimi 110). But other times she played the role of a selfish boy who did not care about others “I had pushed the situation without thinking about anyone else” (Hashimi 128). Rahima’s identity was shifting from a boy to a girl; this had a great impact on her internalized feelings and her changing behaviors.

When Rahima become a young girl, her mother was heartbroken because changing Rahim into a young woman was not an easy thing for her since this meant that she would have no

one to help her outside home but she was unable to change anything now, she was a very submissive woman who obey her husband's decisions blindly. MacKannon claimed that female's discrimination resulted from the traditional roles performed by women themselves. Females were dependent on males in everything, if they did not do so, they will be considered as men" (MacKannon 72-73) Rahima's mother was the type of woman which her society asked for.

Her daughter would be once again confined at home; she would have to do her house work, and forgot about her education. After liking her as his son, now Rahima's father is no longer accepted her because he longed for a son to bear his family's name and take his place later on "My father looked at me as if he saw a new person. No longer his son, I was someone he preferred to ignore. After all, I wouldn't be his for much longer" she elaborated (Hashimi 129).

Researchers have found that the main reason of child marriage in Afghanistan is poverty. When families became unable to provide food for their children especially girls, they would decide to marry them and get rid of their burden. When Rahima's father, Asif, took his decision and promised his daughters to the warlord and his cousins in return for bridal price, all he could think of was the money he would earn. But he joyfully says "[...] more money than our family had ever seen and the promise of a steady opium supply" (Hashimi 125). "Despite the legal age of marriage in Afghan law was fifteen, yet some parents gave their daughter's hands before fifteen" (Yatharth 15), Asif's decision had an immense effect on his daughter's psychology. Rahima describes the instance, she says "We were young but not that young. Shahla was fifteen years old, Parwin was fourteen and I was thirteen. We were flower buds that had just started to open. It was time for us to be taken to our new homes, just like Bibi Shekiba" (Hashimi 142).

Unlike Khala Shaima who speaks her mind about everyone and everything, Rahima's mother, Raisa, was a submissive woman. She accepted every decision of her husband made and would never disagree with him. Despite the fact that she wanted her daughters to be educated and do not get married an early age, she could not change anything and was easily convinced that it was their destiny to be married at an early age. Raisa was convinced that it is her daughter's "naseeb" to get married very young, but her Sister Khala Shaima did not believe that. The two would argue; "Shaima! What I am 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 146) this quote elucidates how strong Khala Shaima was. Though her opinion does not mean that she did not believe in God and fate, but she did not accept every wrong decision made by man and tried to find ways out of problems as she had done with Rahima when his father forbid her and her sisters from going to school again.

Despite the fact that Rahima enjoyed some masculine freedom when she dressed as a boy, her freedom remained limited for she was not able to make a decision as men would. Man decided who is going to be his wife, but a woman could neither choose her husband nor refuse the husband which her father chose for her. "I wish I could have done something. After all, I'd been a boy for years. Boys were supposed to defend themselves and their families. I was more than just a girl, I thought" (Hashimi 142). Even Abdul Khaliq's mother, Bibi Gulalai, was unable to change her son's decision to take Rahima as his bride instead of his cousin. In that society, life is very hard for women as men were oppressing them and denied their rights.

Rahima's transformation into a boy did not protect her from her society's traditions of child marriage; she clarifies "Turning me into a boy hadn't protected me at all. In fact, it had put me right in front of this warlord who now demanded my hand in marriage" (Hashimi 125). It was not something easy for Rahima to accept her father's decision as she got used to the masculine way of life. She played soccer, fought with the boys, went to school, and

worked at the supermarket. When her female body started to change, she was no longer able to hide her femininity and feminine psyche as well. Now she became aware of her sexual desire as a girl. Her playing and fighting with the boys now aroused her femininity; “when I was close enough to smell him, and to smell the sweat on his neck, I felt dangerous and alive. That’s why it was often me who started the sparring. I loved where it put me” (Hashimi 92). Rahima’s mother became angry when she saw her daughter under a boy in the street and she recognized that the time for being a *bacha posh* is over, and she was obliged to turn her daughter back into a girl before something bad will happen; “In the mean time, Madar-jan had to undo what she had done to me. She gave me one of Parwin’s dresses and a chador to hide my boyish hair. She gave my pants and tunics to my uncle’s wife for her boys” (Hashimi 144).

While being a *bacha posh*, she tried hard to act as boys in order to hide her feminine identity, but now she is a girl once again, and she would try not to act as boys and train herself to act as a girl. She instructs herself; “You are Rahima. You are a girl and you need to remember to carry yourself like one. Watch how you walk and how you sit. Don’t look people, men in the eye and keep your voice low” (Hashimi 145). Her mother taught her before how to disguising her into a *bacha posh*, and how to behave as boys, now she would do the same things when transforming her back into a young girl.

1.2 Rahima: A Woman under Subordination

Time for the *bacha posh* was over; Rahima is a housewife now at Abdul Khaliq compound. She is his fourth wife; his first three wives were Badriya, then Jameela, and Shahnaz. Rahima’s new life was restricted to do house work; scrubbing the floors, washing laundries, cooking, but the most important thing was that she had to obey her husband and fulfill his sexual desires in order to give him sons otherwise she will not be accepted as an ideal housewife. Rahima was

not satisfied at all with her new life and her new home. All the time she wished she was at school; “I wished more than anything that I could be back in class” (Hashimi151). Rahima she was too young to be a housewife. She did not have much time to transform herself back from a *bacha posh* to a girl again. Unlike her sisters, Shahla and Parwin, who were familiar with the house work since they were forbidden from going to school again, they stayed at home with their mother doing housework, she faced a lot of problems doing house chores; “I found the broom felt awkward in my hands and I waited for someone to relieve me from my duty” (Hashimi 154). This put Rahima in a terrible situation with her in-laws, especially her mother in-law.

Rahima was double oppressed. First, by her mother-in-law who often held her by the ear when she had done something wrong or did it in unsatisfactory manner; Rahima complained that “[her] mother-in-law came back often. When the house wasn’t cleaned to her standards, she would pull [her] by [her] ear and make [her] scrub the floors while she watched (Hashimi 181). She added that her mother in law would tell her that “Your husband has asked for you. You should go and see to him as his bride...when I didn’t get up, she came after me, pulling me to stand by my ear...My twisted ear stung under her gnarled fingers” (Hashimi154).It was not only Rahima who was suffering from oppression and violence, but it was all women in her environs.

Second, she was oppressed by her husband; sexually “He called for me when he pleased and made me do what he wanted” (Hashimi 176). He was longing for her to do whatever he wants; fulfill his sexual desires without caring about her feelings otherwise she will be punished either by him or by her mother-in-law. Rahima was upset when her husband called for her. He excused her the first nights when she was afraid, but then he decided to put an end to her childish behavior and made her a wife who obeys his orders and does whatever he asked her to do without complaining; he instructed her that “I am your husband and this is your home.

When I ask for something, you make it happen [...] You're not a *bacha posh* any longer.

Tonight I'll show you that you're a woman, not a boy" (Hashimi 156).

Rahima's feminine identity was not fully developed by the time she got married. She was too young to recognize those things. She used to play and study and she had no idea about what is meant to be a housewife; "I felt out of place and I hated wearing a dress. It felt unnatural, awkward. I was a *bacha posh*! Just like Bibi Shekiba, the palace guard!" (Hashimi 155). The decision of her marriage happened suddenly and quickly. She did not have the chance to learn everything from her mother who just warned her to control herself, behave like girls, and respect her elders. Rahima could not fit to her new identity. Even when she wore long dress and veil covering her hair, she still had boy's manners; people asked her questions like "Rahima! Why are you sitting like that? For God's sake, aren't you embarrassed?...I'd been sitting like a boy basking in the summer sun" (Hashimi 158). Her unconscious boys-like behaviors would put her in trouble with her new family and made life harder for her; she explained "somehow it seemed I did everything wrong. I sat wrong, cooked wrong, I cleaned wrong. All I wanted to do was get back to school and back to my family, my friends" (Hashimi 161).

Going back to her father's home was impossible; it was shameful for a daughter to go back to her father's home after marriage, so she was obliged to stay there with her husband and obey him and the others related to him. She whined that "I swept the floors, washed the diapers and cleaned the western toilets as best I could. My hands burned at the end of the day and all I wanted to do was lay my head down" (Hashimi 184). Her new and most important job was to bear him sons in order to grow up in his eyes. Life was becoming very hard for Shekiba in her husband's house. She missed her parents and her sisters whom she could no longer meet. Though her sister Parwin lived near her house, she was still unable to visit her. Even when she asked her mother-in-law's permission, Bibi Gulalai quickly refused and slapped her face.

Rahima was not submissive like her mother and sisters; she was brave enough that she planned to visit her sister without telling anyone; she reveals that “I moved closer and closer to the front gate, my palms sweaty. Don’t hesitate, I told myself, and opened the gate to walk out. I waited but heard nothing. No one had even noticed” (Hashimi 191). When she made opened the door for her she lied and said that Bibi Gulalai wanted to come with her, but she was suffering from a terrible back ache and could not accompany her. She was afraid that if discovered outside her new home, she would be send back to her father’s home.

Rahima felt happy only when Jameela told her that she was pregnant, she thought that she would be accepted by her husband and Bibi Gulalai after all; “Your husband and mother-in-law will be pleased. Bearing children is a wife’s duty” (Hashimi 199). Alas! Her mother-in-law treated her as bad as ever. She punished her by giving her more housework to do “She focused her energies on making life miserable for me” (Hashimi 199).

Rahima became a mother to a son, Jahangir; “carrying him for nine months and pushing him out of [her] body had nearly ripped [her] apart”(Hashimi 219). She was very young to hold a child in her small body. She gave birth to her son at home because women were forbidden from going to the hospital. It was her first experience, and she did not have any idea about babies, but Jameela and Shahnaz were always helping her and teaching her how to hold him, nurse, and bathe him.

She grew attached to her newborn, and she found in him an escape from her terrible environ. She clarified; “I fell in love with him. Jahangir was my salvation __ his face became an escape. He gave me reason to rise in the morning and to hope for tomorrow” (Hashimi 220). Her aunt Khala Shaima always told her that everyone obliged to find an escape. Her family members chose wrong ways to escape their miserable life. Her sister Parwin lit herself up with fire and put an end to her life. Her parents found in opium a suitable refuge; Khala Shaima justified “Your mother is protecting herself. She’s protecting her spirit making the delicate petals as

hard as rock with the medicine your father brings home because it's the only way she knows to survive" (Hashimi 246). Unlike her sister and mother, Rahima was stronger and patient. She was intelligent and wise despite her young age. She recognized that by being a *bacha posh* gave her power to fight life otherwise she would have been as submissive and powerless as her mother and sister. Her son was growing and her motherhood feelings were growing with him. Eventually, she was accepted as a housewife in her new home.

Abdul Khaliq was working in the parliament, and he often travelled to Kabul. At one point in his career, a new law obliged him to choose one of his wives to work in the parliament. He was so mad; he did not want any of his wives to have a job outside home, let alone to work with men in the parliament. He protested; "Damn whoever decided on these shameful rules! Telling as we have to have women representatives? They have no business there! Who do they think is going to look after the children then" (Hashimi 230). This quote highlights the gender role determined for women in Afghanistan; they have to stay at home, take care of their husbands and children, and have nothing to do outside home. But as it was a rule that everybody must obey, Abdul Khaliq chose his first wife, Badriya, because she was old and no one would give her an odd look. Khala Shaima heard the news and advised her niece, Rahima, to seize this opportunity and go along to see Kabul, where her great-great grandmother Shekiba once worked. She told her that "It shouldn't be a big deal for her to take you along offer to help her" (Hashimi 255). Khala Shaima was always the source of inspiration for Rahima. She always offered her new ways to escape her problems. Since Badriya was illiterate and never attended school, Rahima was able convinced her that she would be of use to her in the parliament. Abdul Khaliq was also convinced, and Rahima was able to go and see Kabul.

In Kabul, Rahima was confused by the way of life which was so different from the life in the city she came from; "I was the same, wide-eyed and amazed, but in a different way. I had never seen so many cars and people in one place! ... This was different from home" (Hashimi 278).

She was the only one of her sisters who had the opportunity to visit Kabul because of her intelligence and the advice from her aunt. She found out that many women worked for the parliament. Badriya took a seat in the parliament, but she was not able to make a single decision on her own. She had to do whatever Abdul Khaliq orders her to do, and she would elect the persons whom he found suitable. During the elections, Rahima noticed that Badriya was following one man in the parliament. “Each time the director asked the parliament to vote on a candidate, Badriya waited until this man raised his paddle. And each time she would pick up the paddle that matched his” (Hashimi 313), this means that women did not have the right to vote. Even in Kabul they were not left alone or walk on the street alone, they were accompanied by Abdul Khaliq guards who took them from the hotel to the parliament. Rahima was given a chance to meet new women in the parliament including a woman called Zamarud, who reminded her of Khala Shaima, because expressed her opinion freely without any fear, unlike Badriya who never spoke or raised her voice. Badriya was right doing so because Zamarud was killed for speaking her mind in a men-governed society.

Rahima was given a chance to attend classes again, but this time was different; there were no boys and Moallim (male teacher), but Ms Franklin and other women who were working in the parliament; she described the classes; “we alternated every day. One day she would teach basic English, and the following day we were back on the computer, learning to navigate the Internet or type notes” (Hashimi 362). Rahima was so satisfied and happy to do these things instead of cleaning and scrubbing. She was relieved of the housework she was given every day by her mother-in-law. She also met with a woman called Fakhriya, who worked at a women’s shelter where oppressed girls’ lives were often saved. Rahima had never heard about a place like that before, but Fakhriya explained for her why she had created such a place; “My sister was killed by her husband. I decided I need to do something and then I came upon this shelter”, she said (Hashimi 363). Since there were no rules to protect women, men would do whatever

they wanted to their wives, sisters, and daughters without being judged or punished. Women were suffering from subjugation and violence in every corner of the country; some of them escaped their houses and found the women shelter as their only solution to be relieved from violence.

Rahima left her baby Jahangir with her co-wife, Jameela. While she was enjoying her life in Kabul, her son became very sick. She soon returned to the compound to find him dead. Jameela tried to comfort Rahima telling her that “God has decided to take your son! He’s taken your little boy, dear girl. God give him peace, that darling little boy!”(Hashimi 374) Rahima was heartbroken after losing her little sweet son; he was her happiness and her encouragement. He was the only beautiful thing that made her happy in spite of the miserable life she was living in her husband’s house. His face was her escape, and reason to wake up and fight every day. She regretted not taking him with her to Kabul where she would have been able to take him to the hospital. Her feelings of womanhood became stronger when she gave birth to Jahangir. His birth meant that she was no longer a *bacha posh*. She passed many stages in her life, each stage has a unique experience, but the last one (when she lost her child) was the most hurtful;

I was a little girl and then I wasn’t

I was a *bacha posh* and then I wasn’t

I was a daughter and then I wasn’t

I was a mother and then I wasn’t. (Hashimi 393)

Rahima, the little girl, once changed to a *bacha posh* in order to attend school, and then (when she was just thirteen) she changed back to a girl to get married to a man her father’s age with whom she gave birth to a child and became a woman and mother. At each of these stages in her life, Rahima adapted a new suitable identity and adjust to the circumstances, but losing her son made her weaker than ever. Her husband became unsatisfied with her again, he regretted taking her as his wife. Despite the fact that he was unable to take his son to the

hospital, he was blaming Rahima for not staying with him to take care of him as women in her society would. He scolded her; “Hard to believe you could be even worse as a mother than you are as a wife! My son deserved better! He would be alive if he had a mother better than you!” (Hashimi 418) Abdul Khaliq abused his wife both physically and emotionally. He did not care about her feelings of sorrow and pain over losing her only son. He did not just blame her, he slapped her on her cheeks and cut her hair as it was when she was a *bacha posh*; “More hair on the ground. I tried to crawl away but his grip was tight. I shrieked as I felt my scalp lift off my skull” (Hashimi 419). Rahima was pregnant again at that time, but unfortunately her new baby was killed by his father before he was even born; she explains that “I may have killed one of Abdul Khaliq’s children. But he had just killed another” (Hashimi 419) Despite naseeb (fate) was of much importance among the Afghans, when it came to the death of his son, Abdu Khaliq ignored the interference of naseeb and blamed it all on Rahima.

Abdul Khaliq was thinking of bringing another wife but religious traditions said that a man can take no more than four women. He was thinking of getting rid of Rahima and found in his son’s death a suitable reason to do so. Rahima knew of his plans and had some of her own. When she went back to Kabul with Badriya, she decided to escape to the women shelter where she found a lot of women with their painful stories even worse than hers; “I had time in the shelter, time to finally sit down and completed all that had happened” (Hashimi 459). She figured escaping was better than staying any longer with Abdul Khaliq who will keep abusing her for the rest of her life.

Afghanistan was the most difficult country for a woman to live in, since women were denied all their rights; the right to education, the right to work, the right to choose their life partners...their lives were limited to the housework only, women has nothing to do outside home. Shifting from one identity to another was not an easy task. Rahima’s identity development went through many stages, but she managed to build a strong personality and

overcome the restrictions her society imposed on women. By being a *bacha posh*, she got the right to education, and she worked in the supermarket in order to her family, she was also able to help escort her mother and sisters outside home. This experience made her strong enough to carry on her life and many prevail over the many obstacles she had to face later on. Being a girl again and getting married at a very early age was not that easy either, but she kept finding ways to be adapted to her new life. Her feminine identity was growing bit by bit until she reaches the stage of motherhood and it was completed as she became a mother.

Conclusion

Women oppression and subjugation has caught a nationwide attention especially in the field of literature. Writing was the only way for the oppressed to express themselves and make sure their voices are heard by other people. It is known that women's situation become worse in Afghanistan under the Taliban control, where women were forbidden from going outside their houses without covering all their bodies and being escorted by a male relative. These restrictions were the main cause behind the disappearance of women from the public life. Things become even much worse for the families who did not have a male child, which forced many Afghan families to disguise one of their daughters as a son so they would be able to attend schools and work outside home and help fund their families.

The first chapter of the present study is a general overview of Afghan literature; it discusses all types of Afghan literary works especially those produced in the native languages. It was also an illustration of some famous Afghan writers, their languages, and the main themes behind their writings. Because of the series of wars that Afghanistan had faced, people escaped from their country yet still had a strong attachment with their motherland. This resulted in the Afghan Anglophone literature genre in which writers describe the harsh reality of Afghan society as well as the main issues which women are silently suffering through generations. Nadia Hashimi, Khaled Husseini, Andrea Busfield, Saira Shah, and Hafizullah Khaled are among the prominent writers who wrote about their mysterious country, Afghanistan.

The second chapter was a deep analysis of the main character, Shekiba, through which Hashimi described the harsh conditions women in Afghanistan lived through. It gives a clear idea about how women were oppressed in their society in general and their families in particular, and how they had no rights and had only duties to fulfill towards their husbands. These women were rejected, marginalized and abused, both physically and mentally. Shekiba

goes through harsh obstacles that make of her a very strong woman. She tastes some freedom when she becomes a male guard which gives the readers a clearer idea about gender disparities in Afghanistan. The second title is about the key role played by Khala Shaima in changing her niece's life through the stories about Bibi Shekiba. Disguised as a boy, Rahima is finally able to attend school and enjoy her childhood playing and running freely in the streets. It is also because of the stories of Bibi Shekiba, Rahima has the opportunity to visit Kabul after getting married. Rahima's life would have been as that of her mother without the help of Khala Shaima and her Great Grandmother stories.

The final chapter is a further analysis of Rahima's character. It reveals the harsh tradition of child marriage in Afghanistan and the hidden reasons behind it. This final chapter also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of being a *bacha posh*; which on the one hand gives her the freedom she longs for, and on the other hand leaves a deep psychological effect on her real gender identity.

Nadia Hashimi in her debut, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, exposes Afghan women's suffering to the world through life-like Afghan fictional woman, Rahima and Shekiba in particular. She highlights the similarities which exist between the two characters despite being separated by a very long period of time. Through the life stories of Shekiba and her great-granddaughter, Rahima it is made crystal clear that women's status in Afghanistan did not change over centuries. Despite the fact that Rahima's story was a modernized version of that of Shekiba's, yet Rahima was suffering from the same problems which Shekiba suffered from a century ago. She is denied the right to education simply because she is a girl; which obliged her mother to disguise her as a boy in order for her to have some freedoms such as attending school, helping her father by working in the supermarket...etc. By being disguised as a boy and acting and living as such, Rahima loses her real gender identity for a period of time till she became pregnant and gave birth to a child which helps her womanhood be reestablished

again. Rahima was oppressed by her mother-in-law and her husband as well for not doing things they ordered her to do. She tolerated the abuse because she had no other solution than to be patient and obey their orders since no one and no law could protect her. By the end she found an escape from her subordination at women's shelter in Kabul.

Despite living in a patriarchal society in which everything and every law was in men's favor, Shekiba and Rahima did not give up easily and did not accept things as their 'naseeb' (fate). Instead, they kept toiling hard, opposing the patriarchal norms and moving forward. Both characters were strong enough to oppose their society's traditional norms and longed for achieving their dreams.

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث حول أسباب اضطهاد المرأة في أفغانستان. تنقسم الدراسة الحالية إلى ثلاثة فصول رئيسية: الفصل الأول بعنوان نظرة عامة على الأدب الأنجلوفوني الأفغاني ، والفصلان الثاني والثالث تحليل هما عميق للرواية ، الفصل الثاني بعنوان الطليعية والإلهام لشكيبية, أما الفصل الثالث بعنوان تطور هوية رحيمة مع مرور السنوات و تطور مكانة المرأة في معظم أنحاء العالم, إلا أن شيء لم يتغير في هذا المجتمع, الشيء الذي ألفت انتباه الكثير من الكتاب و الباحثين في النظر حول سبب هذا المشكل الذي يهدد مكانة و حياة المرأة. تحتل الكاتبة الأمريكية نادية هاشيمي مكانة مرموقة في اللائحة الأدبية الأمريكية, لكونها ذات أصول أفغانية, اهتمت بالمشاكل التي تعاني منها المرأة في بلدها. وصفت حياة المرأة الأفغانية من خلال أول رواياتها "اللؤلؤة التي كسرت قوقعتها-2014- حيث ركزت على الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين على وجه الخصوص. سلطت هاشيمي الضوء على الجدة شكيبية و حفيدتها رحيمة على رغم التباعد الزمني الكبير بينهما ، إلا إنهما عاشا نفس الحياة البائسة كونهما أنثى. كشفت الحياة التفصيلية لكلا الشخصيتين القمع النفسي و البدني الذي تتعرض له في بيئتها خاصة و مجتمعا عامة. تتناول هذه الأطروحة أسباب حرمان المرأة لحقوقها, أسباب تفضيل الرجل على المرأة و الدافع الذي جعل العائلات الذين لم ينجبوا طفل إلى تحويل بناتهم لفتيان. تكشف هذه الأطروحة أيضا الأثر النفسي الذي تعاني منه الفتيات اللاتي تحولن إلى ذكور لسن معين ثم يرجعون إلى هويتهم الجنسية الأصلية مجددا, الشيء الذي يسبب لهم أزمة نفسية كبيرة لأنه من الصعب التحول من جنس إلى آخر إلا و لا بد من وقوع بعض الأزمات النفسية على المتحول. النظرية الاجتماعية النسوية و التحليل النفسي مناسبان لتحليل "اللؤلؤة التي كسرت قوقعتها" لنادية هاشيمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الأفغاني, نادية هاشيمي, نظرية المساواة بين الجنسين, ادوار الجنسين, الهوية الجنسية, باشا

بوش.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à rechercher les causes de l'oppression des femmes en Afghanistan. La présente étude est divisée en trois chapitres principaux; le premier chapitre est intitulé A General Overview of Afghan Anglophone Literature, les deuxième et troisième chapitres sont une analyse approfondie du roman; le deuxième chapitre est intitulé Shekiba's Avant-gardism and Inspiration, et le troisième chapitre est intitulé Rahima's Identity Development. Malgré l'évolution du statut des femmes dans presque toutes les régions du monde, mais rien n'a changé dans cette société. Cela a attiré l'attention de nombreux chercheurs et écrivains pour s'occuper des causes de ce grand problème qui menace le statut ainsi que la vie des femmes Afghanes. Nadia Hashimi faisait partie des écrivains afghans américains les plus appréciés, en raison de ses origines afghanes, elle s'intéressait aux problèmes des femmes Afghanes. À travers son premier roman "La Perle qui a Brisé sa Coquille" (2014), Hashimi a décrit la vie détaillée des femmes afghanes ; Shekiba et Rahima, les proches qui ont été séparés par une très longue période de temps, mais ils ont partagé la même vie misérable à cause de leur sexe. La vie détaillée des deux personnages reflète l'oppression psychologique et physique dont elles souffrent. Cette thèse aussi questionne les raisons pour lesquelles les femmes dans cette société islamique sont privées de leurs droits, pourquoi les hommes sont préférés aux femmes et le motif qui pousse les familles sans fils à déguiser une de leurs filles en garçon et changer sa rôle de genre. Cette étude a également révélé l'impact psychologique dont souffrent les filles qui se transforment en garçons lorsqu'elles redeviennent filles à la puberté; la cause principale de la crise psychologique puisqu'il était très difficile de passer d'une identité de genre à une autre sans être touché psychologiquement.

Mot clés Littérature Afghane, Nadia Hashimi, Féminisme, Rôles de Genre, Identité de Genre, Bacha posh.