

**STUDY OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BATTLE OF  
AFGHAN WOMEN THROUGH NADIA HASHIMI'S THE  
PEARL *THAT BROKE ITS SHELL* AND A *HOUSE*  
WITHOUT WINDOWS**

*Dissertation*

*Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for  
The award of Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature*

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled **STUDY OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BATTLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN THROUGH NADIA HASHIMI'S *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL AND A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS*** is a bonafide record of research done by **SAINABA EM** (Register Number AIAVMEG016), has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other similar title.

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Place: P.Vemballur

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## **Introduction**

Throughout history and across culture, women have faced various forms of cultural and patriarchal oppression. This oppression has taken many different forms such as legal and political restrictions, social and cultural norms that reinforces gender roles and stereotypes. Restrictions of women's access to education and employment opportunities can be considered as one of the common forms of oppression. In many societies, females are not given the same opportunities as males to attend school or pursue careers. This can limit their potential and perpetuate gender inequality. Another form of oppression is the objectification and sexualization of women in cultural society. Women are often portrayed as object of desire or as submissive or passive, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and never-ending misogyny and gender-based violence. Women also face patriarchal oppression in the form of sexual assault, domestic violence and harassments. These are often neglected and gone unnoticed and victims may be traumatized and silenced.

Another major issue that should be discussed is the denial women's rights in the society. This has been widespread and ongoing issue which has taken in in various forms throughout history and across cultures. If we checkout history, we can see women was denied of legal rights, such as right to vote, own property etc. not only that they also have to face legal restrictions in some cultural societies such as laws that requires women to be either chaperoned or obtained permission from male before travelling or leaving the house. Women also have been denied of their right to make choices about their own lives and body, due to cultural norms and expectations that decides how women should behave, how she should dress, interact with others etc.

Since feminism emerged in the early twentieth century, women's awareness about their rights has been wide spread in many countries around the world. However, the news and records about discrimination and lack of opportunities for women to advance and expand in

patriarchal society seem endless until today. Afghanistan as one of the patriarchal countries is known for its strict rules on women since the reign of the Taliban. Afghanistan is situated in the centre of Asia, bordering Iran to the west, Pakistan to the south, China to the far northeast, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. Afghanistan, a land of high mountains and rugged topography has faced one of the worst human tragedies of modern times (Das, 2006: 8). Having suffered violence and discrimination during Afghanistan civil war under the Taliban (1996-2001) and the U.S led intervention (2001- 2005) bring impact severely on women (Brown et al, 2001: 2). Kristensen (2016: 1) states that Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous and difficult countries for women to live or to even survive. In addition, there are large number of oppressed women in Afghanistan in the international media, development reports and the academic literature, and images that so many times Afghan women have become the world's stereotypical victims of male domination (Murray, 2012: 1). Therefore, when it comes to women studies, Afghanistan gets main attention from countries around the world. The serious conditions that happen to Afghanistan women cannot be separated from the existence of patriarchy through the tribal strong practice of Afghanistan.

Looking back to the history of Afghanistan, the lives of women has been shaped by a range of social, cultural, and political factors over the centuries. Women have been subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence throughout the history of Afghanistan, but they have also played major roles in the development of country's cultural, political, and economic life. In the early 20th century, lots of efforts were made to improve women's access to education and their status in the society. However, progress was slow and limited, so many women continued to face discrimination and oppression. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the following rise of the Taliban regime in the 1990s has led to a major deterioration in women's rights and status.

Under Taliban rule, women were largely confined to their homes and were denied from working or receiving an education. They were forced to wear full body coverings in public and were subject to harsh punishments for violating the regime's strict laws. Following the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, there have been some improvements in women's rights and status. Even though Women have been granted wider access to education and employment, and women's rights organizations have also emerged to advocate for their rights, the progress has been slow and uneven, and many women still faced barriers to equality and participation in public life.

In recent years, the Taliban has regained control of Afghanistan, raising concerns about the future of women's rights in the country. But many are continuing international support for women's rights and for the protection of women's gains in the years since Taliban was last in power. Afghan women have faced a wide range of patriarchal discrimination throughout their history. This discrimination has taken in many forms and has been continued by social, cultural, and political norms that have limited women's basic rights and opportunities. One of the most significant forms of discrimination faced by Afghan women has been the denial of education. Historically, girls and women had limited access to formal education, and many have been unable to even attend the school at all. Even today, many families hesitate to send their daughters to school due to concerns about their safety and cultural norms.

Women in Afghanistan have also faced discrimination in the legal system. Those women who are victims of domestic violence or other crimes may be reluctant to report their problems to the authorities due to injustice or lack of support from law enforcement officials. women may be forced into marriage at a young age, and may be subjected to domestic violence or other forms of abuse by their husbands or other family members but whenever they try to escape or react against it, it will either backlash or they will be silenced forcefully.

Women may also be a subject to restrictions on their freedom to travel and may be expected to conform to traditional gender roles. Overall, patriarchal discrimination had a major impact on the lives of Afghan women, limiting their opportunities and limiting their ability to participate fully in society. While progress has been made in recent years, they still have more far to go to ensure that women in Afghanistan have equal rights and opportunities.

Even though people get to know more about Afghanistan through televisions and news, some writers paved way to have a close learning about Afghan culture and society. Nadia Hashimi is one among those writers who was able to portray both the beauty and brutality of Afghan culture. Nadiya Hashmi, an Afghani-American novelist who was born and brought up in New York. She was born on December 12, 1977 in Queens, New York. Her parents were Afghans who were migrated to America in 1970s, before the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Professionally she is a paediatrician, she obtained her paediatric degree from SUNY Downstate and completed paediatric training at NYU/Bellevue hospital in New York, a famous novelist and the former Democratic congressional candidate for the United States House of Representatives for Maryland's 6th congressional district. Eleanor Smeal, the president and the co-founder of Feminist Majority Foundation from were Hashmi received the official endorsement, introduced Hashmi as the first Afghan-American woman and paediatrician to run for Congress. Currently she is working as a paediatrician and also a part of group of local female physician called Lady Does. She was married to a neurosurgeon Dr. Amin Amini who came to America as a refugee. Fortunately, she was married to a big family which kept their Afghan culture as a part their life. Presently she is settled in Washington DC, suburbs with her family

In 2002, Hashmi made her first trip to Afghanistan with her parents. There when she saw the lives of girls and women made her feel pity about them, on seeing the Afghan girls get education despite the obstacles they face, had truly inspired her to write about the Afghan

lives to the females and she successfully wrote and told to the world how the Afghan females are struggling in their life. We can see her experiences in the Afghanistan and it were reflected in her many novels and it is the foundation of her most of the writings. The major themes of her novels are the bitterness of the life of the Afghan females. Hashmi very frankly wrote about the cultural practices and the tradition of Afghanistan.

"Nadiya Hashmi has written a tender and beautiful family story Her always engaging multigenerational tale is a portrait of Afghanistan in all of its perplexing. enigmatic glory"  
(Khaled Hosseini)

Hashmi's most of the works are the depiction of Afghan life and culture Because she was living with a large family of uncle, aunts and cousins, who keeping the Afghan culture and tradition as the integral part of their lives. In her works we can see the themes like conflicts, forced migration, poverty, colonialism, misogyny and addiction, most of them are based on Afghan culture and lives. She mainly focused the lives of the marginalized people especially the females in the Afghan society Most of her theme include, the rise and fall and again the rise of women in Afghanistan, history and the philosophy and also the link between the medicine and writing etc. The very interesting factor about her is her depiction and the narration of Afghan history through fiction. Not only the history but she also speaks about the mystery of Afghanistan.

Nadiya Hashmi is notable for her three international bestselling novels namely *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, *When the Moon is Low* and *A House Without Windows*. *TPBS* is her debut novel which becomes her first international novel written in 2014. It won the Goodreads finalist in the categories of Debut Author and fiction in 2014. The same work is translated into multiple languages including French, Italian, Norwegian, German, Turkish and Hungarian. Her second novel, *When the Moon is Low* was her second international bestseller which was published in 2015 and published by Harper Collins and the novel is hailed as "A

must-read saga about borders, barriers and the resolve of one courageous mother fighting to cross over by the Oprah Magazine. *A House Without Windows* was her third novel and international bestseller which was released in 2016. She also became notable for her latest novel *Sparks Like Stars* which was published in 2021. Her other works are *One Half from the East* and *The Sky at Our Feet*.

*The Pearl That Broke its Shell* narrates the story of two women in Afghanistan who had lived in different decades but are destined to go through the same consequences. Rahima, one of the protagonists, lives in the contemporary storyline while Shekiba had lived in the history. Both had similar experience of becoming a male or rather dressed up as a boy and cropping her hair to help her mother and escort her sisters to school, while back in history the great grandmother Shekiba was dressed up as a man to guard king Habibullah's haram.

*A House Without Windows* talks about a story that took place in a remote Afghan village where a young woman named Zeba is accused of murdering her husband. Zeba is thrown into the prison after her husband was found dead. Even though she denies the charges against her and insists on her innocence, the officials find it difficult to believe her. The novel also throws a light on the challenges faced by the women in Afghanistan and gives an insight on the country's legal system and cultural norms.

Powerless, subjugation and lack of identity are the main issues of women found in different cultures. No matter how society progresses, female is always subjugated to male and are trapped under man-made societal norms. Women had become helpless victims of cultural and societal norms. Not only society but religious fundamentalists have also made female lives miserable. Feminism advocates the women's rights across the world. The oppression of men faced by the women and the status of women as voiceless and inferior enrooted the concept of feminism. Feminism as a theoretical approach tries to represent the comprehensive account of oppression and subjugation of women, the causes of subordination and the ways to

overcome this oppression with liberation. The feminists like Virginia Woolf and Mary Wellstone craft questioned the condition of women in the society by exposing the issues of patriarchy, suppression and gender inequality.

Modern feminism began with Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), a work that criticizes the stereotypes of women as emotional and instinctive and argues that women should aspire to same rationality prize by men. Craft believed that women should enjoy social, legal and intellectual equality with men and drew for support from the work of progressive social philosophers. Feminism gained more prominence with the philosophies of the French existential feminist, Simone de Beauvoir. In her book *The Second Sex* (1988), she explained that the term sex is biological while gender is a social construct. She argued that men basically oppress women by characterizing them on every level, as the men occupies the role of self or subject, whereas women as the object, the other. In the second sex, she famously stated "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". She encourages women to take up responsibility and question her permanent framing as an object because she strongly believes that the unalterable biology cannot be a reason for the further rejection of justice.

Marxist feminism and Radical feminism are two of the important categories of feminism. Marxist feminism looks for the uncountable ways in which women are oppressed through system of capitalism and privet property. Engels argued that the bourgeois family lies on the material foundation of the inequality between husband and wife, the later a kind of unpaid prostitute producing heirs for the transmission of property in exchange of boarding and lodging. Radical feminism saw the patriarchal oppression that exists in all societies as the original reason for the gender injustice in the world. They asked for the revaluation of sex roles and reconsideration of the reproductive process. Andrea Dworkin argues that it is



primarily an abuse of women's body and manufacturing 'consent' is ultimately, a patriarchal strategy of domination of the body of the other.

Among the branches of feminisms, radical feminism is strongly against the force of power in patriarchy. Patriarchy undeniable connection to subordination of women (Johannasdottir, 2009: 9). Furthermore, radical feminists blamed the patriarchy for women's subordinated status in society. In other words, men's violence against women can be seen as an important basis of men. The system in patriarchal society is used as an 'instrument' for the men to have power over women. Kate Millet is one of the American radical feminists who argues that patriarchy is a political institution. Millet (1970: 52) defines the term politic as the power-structured relationships, whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. In Relation to women's struggle in patriarchal society, Millet (1970: 77) writes: Women to be aware of their situation both in the society and at home, to form a self-consciousness as women, to demand their equality with men and to obtain their autonomy. equality, dignity, and rights such as right to education, right to birth control, right to divorce, and to participate in decision-making.

In this project we have taken the novels *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *A House Without Windows* in order to study and analyse the oppressions and subjugation faced by the women in Afghanistan. Both the novels lie under the theme of women's survival from men, how they overcome from the patriarchal oppression. Gender roles, objectification and victimization of Afghan women are the major concepts analysed in this project. To achieve this goal the project is organized into three chapters, which are named after three major characters of both of the novels. The first chapter is entitled as "Shekiba: the gift". Shekiba is the women character in TPBS who lived in the history. She was considered as a gift for her parents from God but ended up being a gift or a commodity to men as well. This chapter deals with how women being objectified in the patriarchal society, not only the main

characters but all the women characters have been objectified and trapped under the patriarchal norms.

The second chapter is entitled as “Zeba: the victim”. Zeba is the central character of AHWW. She is a mother who has been victimized for the sins of her husband. So, this chapter deals with how women have been punished for the sins or mistakes that are made by men. It also deals with the misinterpretation of religion and denial of justice and basic rights. The third chapter is entitled as “Rahima: the survived”. Rahima is the women character of TPBS who lived in the present time. She has been strong dared to fought for her freedom. So, this chapter discuss about the struggle and the survival of women that they had gone through in order to achieve their freedom and how they have escaped from their destiny.

## Chapter 1

### Shekiba: The Gift

The word “objectification” can be roughly defined as seeing or treating a person, particularly women, as an object. If we look back into the history, in many culture women have been objectified sexually as well as they have been treated as a commodity. Back in history, women are offered as gift to the king in order to make him happy or to fulfill their needs. If a king is interested in a woman he spots randomly, he was free to fulfill his sexual desires with her and neither the women nor the people will have the courage to go against the king. Women are always expected to be faithful to men whereas the expectation of male’s faithfulness has never been universal. In ancient history, Romans and Greeks kept concubines; slave owners in south America kept concubines. The biblical king David, king of Israel, supposedly had multiple concubines who may have given birth to many unaccounted children.

Genis khan, former king of the Mongol empire famously acquired multiple wives and concubines from empires and lands that he has conquered. These women were often princesses or queens that were taken captive or gifted to him. For centuries, the Abbasid harems in Baghdad were filled with wives and concubines. Such women eventually rose to positions of power. China’s only female empress Wu zetian was formerly a concubine of the emperor. Having many heirs ensured dynastic succession, and consolidated a king’s status and position. In Europe, monarchs usually made dynastic marriages for convenience, queen are supposed to stay loyal to her husband but the king usually had mistresses, who have more influence on king more than the queen. From this history itself we are able to find that women have been sexually objectified and people never entertained the birth of girl child. Many women in history were exploited by the wealth and power of the kind. Even today,

women are forced to obey and fulfil the sexual desires of rich and powerful people without having any choice.

"There is no way out for her than lose herself, body and soul in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential." (Beauvoir, 1988, P.643),

This statement is proved true in this novel "The pearl that Broke its shell." Afghanistan's patriarchal traditions values sons over daughter. In more rural areas, women never enjoyed the freedom that women in Kabul experienced. Decades of war and invasions left Afghan women battered and bruised, their rights were stripped. Moreover, gender is the ultimate consequence in Afghanistan, Nadia clearly pictures how women are being objectified by the dominating patriarchal society. The attitude of the society is in such a way that giving birth to a girl child is considered as 'sin' and giving birth to a boy child is a blessing. The women who make her husband happy with the boy child will have a lot of privileges from her husband as well as her in-laws. Nadia portrays two women from different decades but destined to go through the same situation. Each women character that we meet in the novel goes through the same situation. Hashimi portrays Rahimas sisters as a representation of talents in women. Her first sister Sahla's strength were her intuition and her intelligence, and Parwin, her second sister is gifted with artistic qualities. Rahima herself represents bravery. But the attitude of her father is that what will these qualities do benefit for their future. The women were not allowed to use their talents. The male society demands women to show their only talent which is to borne a male heir for the family.

In the case of Shekiba's family, her mother Shafiqqa was a nervous and timid person. Her in-laws were not all interested in her and advised her father Ismail Bardari to marry another girl. But Ismail was unlike other men and stayed with one wife he had Sheikiba had two brothers and one sister. The boys were liked boy their grandparents. Ismail's mother Bobo shagul, always said that boys were the only good thing to come from Shafiqqa. This

itself indicates that women can only make their in-laws happy by giving them a male heir. At the same time, we can see how much Shekiba was hated by her grandparents. When Shekiba's face was melted by the hot oil which was accidentally slipped from her mother, her relatives were not sad but rather thanked God that it hadn't been one of the boys. This means that whatever happens for women is not considered as important. When a wave of cholera decimated Afghanistan in 1903, all except Shekiba and her father was dead. This was also blamed that Shekiba is born cursed and she is the reason for her family's death. For the society women is a headache. Rahima's grandmother too is disappointed with her grandchildren. Her grandmother is very proud of herself because she had respectably borne five son and only one daughter. The third world women are proud to say that they had borne son for their family and fed shame if they hadn't. But they are not realising the fact that they are subjugating their own by supporting whatever the patriarchal society demands. Women in Afghanistan are obsessed with pleasing the men and their in-laws and they forget about their freedom and their choices.

It is reported that more than 50% of Afghan girls are married or engaged by 12 women activists say that up to 80% of marriages in poor rural areas are forced or arranged. Rahima's family believe that their house is full of young women and it is not right. All people tease that Arif's house is full of young women and that wasn't right. But the irony is that whom they call 'young women' are merely thirteen or fifteen. They assert keeping teenage girl at home is like keeping time bomb so it is better to be married off rather than providing them education. While Arif decides to marry off his young women daughters, his mother forces him to marry again. She states that they have given Rahima's mother plenty of opportunities to give a son but she had failed. What do you mean by giving her opportunities? After all it is not women who is responsible for bearing male or female child, it is actually men's genetic traits that determines the male and female. But here the patriarchal society had

forced the womanhood to believe that it is woman's mistake for not having male child and it is her responsibility to face its consequences. If woman fails to give son or a smaller number of sons, then the next option of man is next marriage.

Most of the girls marry very old men mostly in the 60s for girls it would be their first marriage but for men it would be third or fourth. One man always chooses girls of tender ages which leads to the destruction of the girl's life. One of the shocking things that happens or still goes on at Afghanistan is that some girls are bartered into marriage to repay debt or resolve a dispute. And widespread of poverty force many parents to get married of their daughter just to reduce the burden in the family. As Hashmi states in novel "men could do what they wanted with women" (PBS P.123). In the case of Rahima, she is married off to warlord Abdul Khaliq, just because he had offered plenty of opium and bride price and Shekiba was first barded to Azizullah by her uncle and later she has been gifted' to king Habibullah this incident clearly shows how women are objectified by the male dominating society.

While Rahima and her two sisters was 'sold' for 1 million Afghan is bride price and plenty of opium, Shekiba was taken to the kingdom to guard King's harem. King Habibullah can be portrayed as an ideal of the patriarchy. King's harem signifies how much women are downgraded as a mere object that are used by the male. Sometimes wives are not enough for the king, they are forced to believe that a man can take more than just the real wife. Ghafoor, women-man who Guards the harem explains to Shakiba that these are the women whom the king spent his time with. It is shocking to see that she casually says that taking will pick one of them whenever he is struck by the mood. In such situation so there won't be any value of women's emotion whenever the kingdom as they have to obey him without any choice. There are 29 concubines in the harem which means 'stock' of women for single man. It is ridiculous to know the fact that most of the women are gifted to taking their family for

example the four has been given to place to exchange for cow. Some were brought from the places where the king visits, they believe that a lot of families can do without a girl. After all, their wish is to 'less the burden' and they used to believe that he is the king, he can take smarty what he they used to believe that he is the kind. He can take what he wants there is no other evidence to begin to show a pathetic situation of women of the 20th century in Afghanistan.

Not only that, women among the concubines are also discriminated on the basis of bearing sons. "Nine women among them who had borne son to the king were treated better than the rest of the concubines. They were given good dresses; quality fruits and their palace were secured more than the rest. All thanks to their gifted wombs" (PBS, P.207). That's what they believe, bearing son is a gift while bearing daughter is a sin.

Rahima constantly wishes to get out of her husband she tried to resist as much as she could to stop the wedding as well as her night with the old man. The only as Shahnaz his third wife says "Men want something fresh." Men sees women as a toy or an object. When it is new, they find it very attracted but when it is used and old, he will lose his interest and look for another. When Rahima gave birth to a boy, which her in laws believes the only good thing she have done for the family, she thanked God for not making him a girl. Not because she hates girl, but she knows that her daughter will also face the same fate.

Shekiba too wished to be married to "Amanullah", the price, for that what she tried to do is to mention that women in her generations of family rarely bore anything but boys. There men don't really demand a woman with good qualities or personality but they demand for women who bore sons. We cannot predict whether they will have son or daughter in future. They are so obsessed in producing male heir which in turn raised hatred towards the girl child. Shekiba came to know that she is getting married from her fellow guard Tariq. She

didn't even know whom she is getting married to nor anyone ask for her whether she is willing for this marriage or not.

At first, she had no idea why Asif Baraan, Amanullah's friend and advisor had married her but later it was revealed. It was certainly the tale of her family bearing sons. Shekiba too believed that if the first-born child is a son, it would make her husband a happy man. She also believed that she had the responsibilities to lie with him even if it terrified her. Nadia had also showed us how men are irritated with the menstruation. Whenever women get married, they have to stop their 'illness' and get pregnant within two or three months. They are merely a reproducing machine only meant to produce male child. If she produces female child, then then machine is considered as defective.

We can see from Asif's statement when Shekiba talks about her illness. Shekiba has been married to Asif for five months but still she is not pregnant. Asif was angry at it he didn't want Shekiba he wants sons. Not only that, his first wife Gulnaz was unable to give him a child so this was an embarrassment for him in public. They have been married for one year. They have tried everything but didn't work so it was necessary for shekiba to give a son as soon as possible. When Gulnaz was pregnant Asif was Satisfied and waited for his son. But his fate was to have a daughter. This had raged Asif the shout that is there no end for this humiliation. A girl, even before she is born can tell she is not wanted. The whole blame was on Gulnaz and he don't even want to hold his own daughter. He will always resent her "That how it is for girls. A daughter doesn't really belong to her parent. A daughter belongs to others." (PBS, P.394)

Shekiba explained she was lucky because she had given birth to a boy. While Rahima had lost her son due to infection. He was delayed to be taken to the hospital but the blame was of course upon Rahima for not looking after her son properly. Abdul Khaliq had abused her physically as well as mentally. She was beaten so rudely. He claimed that she was



worthless and good for nothing since she came here. He believed that she was a waste of money and time, a big mistake. He also accused that she is a worse mother than as wife. He believed that his son would be alive if he had a better mother than her. But the truth is that Bibi Gulalai, Abdul Khaliq's mothers had resisted them for taking her son to the hospital. She believed that her home-made remedies would cure her grandchild but it went wrong. What they have done is they have buried it and put all the blame on Rahima's shoulders.

All the abuses she had faced was more than she could handle as a mourning mother and this had led the loss of her second child even before it was born. We can see how even the guards treats Rahima as a mere sexual toy of Abdul Khaliq. The way they talked about Rahima is so disgusting. When recall the day Abdul Khaliq met Rahima for the first time, they imagine what interesting would be under her clothes. Even the visual of women could do the sexual appetite of men. Nadia Hashimi has clearly pictured how Afghan women are treated as a sexual instrument as well as an object for producing children. She also points out how the birth of a girl child is unfortunate in the society and how even women are to be believed that bearing a girl child is a sin.

In all patriarchal societies, discourse has been observed to be dominated by phallogocentricity, where logic and male dominance obtain supremacy. Susan James (2000) writes, "Feminist writers have directly addressed the opposition between body and mind, in an effort to reveal how the body is tacitly marginalized in philosophy and to find ways of reinstating it" (p. 30). So, in the novel AHW, "the mind" marginalize the harmed body because an act of crime with regard to sexuality must be punished. The unmarried mother with her two illegitimate boys, even when a man had forced himself upon her and she was silent for fear of the knife. According to Catharine A. McKinnon (1982), "rape is a sex crime that is not a crime when it looks like sex. To seek to define rape as violent [...] often seems strategic" (p. 649). This mother of the two boys was victim of rape that they cannot be seen

as violent because of her submission for the means of survival, and therefore she is not a victim in heterosexual discourse. In such situations, to seek a definition of violence against a female in cases like these becomes what McKinnon calls “strategic.”

In AHWW, legal discourse emerge from the power of men over social, economic, and legal spheres. Zeba shows no trust on the law since it acts by the power that disregard a woman and her rights. She remarks, “As long as men are the judges, nothing will change” (Hashimi, 2016, p. 327). The logocentricity leads to the rejection of the participation of a female judge to serve on the Supreme Court claiming that she menstruates each month and cannot touch the Quran for a week each month (p. 327). Therefore, the undismayed patriarchy rules over and all judgements are passed to victimize the victim even more when it is a woman. King (2004) shares a very similar view while discussing the opposition between the binaries of man and woman. She remarks, “Man may be able to transcend his biological materiality, but a woman is entrenched in her physicality,” and thus, even when she rises to the stature of being nominated for the highest places of execution of justice, she bears the brunt of her gendered body (p. 31).

## Chapter 2

### Zeba: The Victim

While women have the tendency to blame herself if something goes wrong, men also have the tendency to put the blame up on women for whatever mistakes they do. If men get into extra marital affairs, he may claim that his wife is not satisfying him well or she is not meeting up to his expectations. He would justify his mistakes by pointing out the flaws of his wife. But funny thing is that society will readily agrees to him. Whenever man commits sin, the society says that it is because the women in the house lacks the ability to fulfil her duties along with maintaining the household. But if it's the other way around, then women will be slut shamed and even punished without a second thought. In earlier men used to runaway from home if they are burdened with debt. They use escaping mechanism and run away from their problems. But that fact that it is their women who are left behind and they will take the responsibility of man's burden of family and debt. To the society, a house without man his like dead bodies left for vultures. They believe that women without man have all the possibilities to commit sin. Even if a woman is assaulted sexually and if she seeks for help, she'll ends up being punished for committing sin as the blames that it happened only because she didn't resist him.

Nadia Hashimi acknowledges Heather Barr, The Acting Co- Director of Women's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch. Nadia says that it is her report "I had to run away"; the imprisonment of women and girls for "moral crimes" in Afghanistan which has become a window to learn about the inner workings of women's prison system in Afghanistan. This has helped Nadia to show us the lives of Afghan women imprisoned and the crime that they commit through her novel AHWW. Heather's report sheds light on the systematic abuse of women and girls of Afghanistan who are imprisoned for "moral crimes". The interesting fact is that these "so called crimes" include running away from forced marriage, fleeing from

domestic violence, rape, and engaging in consensual sexual activity outside marriage. The report outlines how Afghan women and girls are often forced into early marriage and that to against her will. They are later subjected to domestic violence and face severe punishment if they try to escape and seek help. These includes imprisonment in “rehabilitation” centres, where they are subjected to further abuse including rape and forced prostitution.

Furthermore, the report highlights the lack of legal protection for women in Afghanistan, as well as the failure of the Afghan government to enforce the existing laws effectively. It is sad truth that women who report abuse or seek help from the authority often face further violence and discriminations, and are frequently blamed for the abuse that they have experienced.

In AHWW Zeba is initially described as a loving wife, patient mother and a peaceful villager and she don't do anything to draw attention to her. Kamal her husband on the other hand is described as a man who has disintegrated over the years. Kamal is abusive towards her and treats her as a property rather than a human being. When Kamal was found dead, Zeba is immediately accused of murder and was taken to custody without any evidence. For Afghan men, moral crimes are more than enough to punish women. So, a woman murdering her husband is beyond they could imagine. As mentioned in the novel “it is unusual for a wife to kill her husband. Its much more common the other way around” (341). The society is used to men killing women and sexual abuses but even if they take any action, it won't be that severe as it has become more common in Afghanistan. Whereas if women commit any kind of crime, they are sentenced to jail without even investigating or knowing what the actual truth is.

The novel also highlights on the contrasting relation between the actual prison of Chil Mahtab and the worldly prison that women live in under the domination of men. The number of violated characters such as “the little girl” as well as the main character Zeba carries the

burden of patriarchal injustices happening in Afghanistan. The horrifying stories of being rejected and exploited by male institutions, especially the law, draws the picture of Afghan society and gender-based violence to the world. When occupied within an actual prison due to patriarchally constructed societal law, women, as victims of injustice, seek for liberation within the prison along with the other women. Nadia gives a contrasting portrayal for prison as it offers a space for women to create a coexisting relationship within the prison. Usually, prison is meant for punishing the criminals and the mentioning of its name itself gives an image of punishment and sufferings. But here, Nadia offers prison as a safe and vibrant place for women, the prisoners of Chil Mehtab feels like belonging to a safe haven called home where they can be of their own and be themselves, instead of living in their patriarchal house-of-a-man who owns them as a master. All these women, when sharing their stories, do not merely coexist but grow together.

Both in Afghanistan and in the novel, there is no representation of women holding any authority. The Rule of Law is constructed and made by men and for men, through which they maintain their dominance. In power structure and legal discourses, a woman is a mere puppet where power is exercised. Even if the constitution allows a woman right based on religious laws, the execution depends on the nature of the guardians of the law. We can see how Yusuf satirically calls these books of law as “a playbook” because in most parts of Afghanistan, “people didn’t play by the rules. Even some of the higher courts judged without jurisprudence. [...] There was no true rule of law” (Hashimi, 2016, p146). For women, they sentence without even a trial. Aneesa remarks that the justice system of Afghanistan is “as twisted as a mullah’s turban” (p. 146) where a case like that of Zeba’s is an open and shut case and judgements were not even left for the judge to pass but pronounced by the streets (p. 340) and the white beard (p. 146). Hashimi narrates one such tale of torment where a woman is executed by the mob for destroying the Quran, but later turns out that she was not the

culprit, but unfortunately, she became the victim of an unverified rumour. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2007) report details the violence perpetrated against women in Afghanistan where most of the cases are handled by “customary laws” that affect women badly and further marginalize them because they have “no knowledge about their constitutional rights” (pp. 15-16). Due to the customary laws or whimsical judgements many prisoners like Mezghan, Nafisa, Latifa, and other women in the prison end up in Chil Mehtab.

Men of Afghanistan values honour and dignity above life. Most of the women of chil mehtab were arrested for “moral crimes” that they claim to be committed. Hashimi narrates some of the tales of prisoners to show how men controls the laws. Nafisa, a sharp-tongued woman in her mid-thirties, has been imprisoned as she has been accused by a relative for an improper relationship with a man. Nafisa as an unmarried woman is someone who have the tendency to commit sin in the eyes of Afghan men. Nafisa had been convicted of attempted ‘zina’ or sex outside marriage. Nafisa says “I’m not a child, I should be able to eat in the park when I want. We weren’t doing anything wrong. We were just eating” (p.44). Though Nafisa swore that she has done nothing but having a quick bite with her male friend in the park, the society find it difficult to believe her story as a male and female being “just friends” is platonic and beyond they could imagine.

Another prisoner, Latifa, was a twenty-five-year-old with deep voice and wide body. She was beaten and cursed until she could take no more. So, she left her home with her sister in hoping to escape to Iran. Since it was two days travel, she befriends with a decent woman in the market and she offered her shelter for the night. But at the checkpoint, the police become suspicious and accused of intending to prostitute her sister. They tracked down her family and charged with kidnapping and running away from home. Her sister was returned home and married off to a distant relative in order to save themselves from the humiliation.

Latifa feels like she is treated better in chil mahtab than her own home, where she is supposed to feel safe.

Another prisoner named Mezhgan is a nineteen-year-old girl who refused to marry her sister's brother-in-law. When they found out that she is in love with a boy in her neighbourhood, they pointed angry fingers at her and soon she has been arrested. Mezhgan was taken to health clinic for a virginity test only to find out that she is pregnant. Haroon's parents refuse to get them married because of the shame and humiliation; they claim that they have nothing to do with them. Parents refuse to accept their child's mistake and tries to put all the blame upon the other. Haroon's mother says that Mezhgan has chased after her son but it was actually the other way around. As Zeba quotes "men love for a moment because they are clever; women are fools because they love forever" (p.47), men refuse to take up the responsibility of the mess they have made. Women, when fallen in love, will blindly trust and obeys men and does whatever they demand out of love without even thinking about the after effects. Mezhgan can be a representation of teenagers who lack sex education and their troubles they face. She says "I swear I did not do what they say, it was nothing like that" (p.46).

Another prisoner, a mother of twins was arrested when she went to the police station for help. She was attacked by her cousin at her own home. She was cornered at the knife point and told not to scream or he would kill her. When she went to the police to report this. Instead of being protected, she was accused. Since nobody had seen or heard, the police doubted her and they arrested only because "she didn't scream". Even after explaining her situation, they refuse to admit that she is innocent and instead of protecting her and taking action against her rapist, the victim got arrested. She later came to know that she is pregnant and gave birth to twins. Now she has no intention or desire to be free as her parents too abandoned her. All she wishes for is her twins to stay with her. When parents found out that

their daughter is arrested or trapped, instead of trying to know about that truth being supportive, they literally abandon her. Their only concern is their reputation in the society and those who tries to ruin them is considered dead.

In all social institutions in Afghanistan, the superstructures are under man's tight fist, courts are handled by men like Qazi Najeeb who focuses to create fame and honour, and evidence for cases is collected by men like Hakimi by arresting without any witness and evidence in the novel. The police chief, Agha Hakimi, overlooks many nuances of Zeba's case because each case for him is more of a means to recover his lost dignity among the villagers and less of an objective evaluation (p. 21). On finding the dead body of his cousin, Fareed expects the streets to pass judgement and, finding them silent, exclaims in exasperation, "Have you lost your mind – all of you?" and, getting no response, he "pounces" on Zeba (p. 23). Instances of sudden spurt of anger is exhibited by physically hitting women or abusing children are not only found in fictional world but are also to be found in the interviews (Brodsky et al., 2011, p. 231), fieldwork (Mahendru, 2020, p. 3), and reports (UNODC report, 2007, pp. 23-24) from Afghanistan.

"What can a girl do in this world anyway?" This is the attitude of Afghan women which is programmed by the patriarchal society. Men doesn't allow women to do anything what they do. They make women believe that they are powerless and they can't do anything. They misinterpret the religion and controls women in the name of religion Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) talks about restoration of history of figure out the causes of oppression of third world women. She says that "there are certain practices which people carry out in the name of religion, due to religious behind them these practices are considered as the representation of truth knowledge and piety of place." (Spivak, 1988, P 300) Men in Afghanistan use the religion as a tool to objectify women, who are born to obey them and remain within the four walls of their houses. They altered the religious and



cultural rules in such a way to fulfil their personal desires. Abdul Khaliq is an example for the one who manipulates religion and culture for his own benefits he has four wife including Rahima. He wishes to marry another girl and for that purpose he wants to get rid of Rahima but what Bibi Gulalai claims that her son Abdul Khaliq lives according to Islam and Sunnah (Teaching of Holy prophet Muhammed SAW) because Abdul Khaliq is an admirable devout Muslim, he can afford more than five wives but he wants to make the society to believe that he is living according to his religion. As Islam allowed a man to have four wives because in the history of Islam, there was battle of badr which is one of the battles which is specifically mentioned in Holy Quran. Many of the soldiers were dead in the battle and their families were orphaned. So, in this circumstance, Islam had emerged with a sunnah that man can have four wives. Islam had also specifically mentioned that man can have another wife only if the first wife permits him. But men haven't taken this on account and they marry one after another just to fulfil their desires.

The truth is that men of Afghanistan have no knowledge about their religion, they only pretend so. As Haji Sahib a man who is brought by Abdul Khaliq for the Nikkah of Rahima recited the Holy Quran incorrectly. Hajji is a person who performs the holy pilgrimage of the Holy land of Mecca. He recites the Holy verse as ya musabibal Asaabi (O! causer of the fingers)" instead of "Ya Mussabibal Asbaabi (O! causer of the causes)"(PBS, P.147) Rahima's aunt khala Shaima corrects him three times but he keeps on reciting incorrectly. When khala Shaima corrects his mistake, she is asked to show some respect for the religious preacher. What Hashimi points out is that even the religious preacher doesn't have the complete and correct knowledge of their religion. But khala Shaima respects Holy Quran more than her societal norms who would not allow speaking in front of elders and questioning the religious authorities. Khala Shaima thinks that he is disrespecting Islam and Holy book (Quran) by reciting it incorrectly.

Hashmi also pictures the ways women are subjugated by men in Afghanistan. they denied women the right for property as well as right for political power. Shekiba's father was tilling the most fertile land and her uncle tries to own them. Hashmi had explained shekiba's struggle to save her father's land from her uncle. Men had constructed a rule that daughter may inherit a portion of what the son would inherit but the truth is women do not claim land or in clear men won't allow her. To whoever shekiba asks about claiming the land, people furrow their brows asking for such a ridiculous question, because for them women owning land is beyond imagination. When she went to Sharifullah the hakim, he said that this is wrong and young and you should not be wandering around alone. In short Shekiba says that she has no place in this world. Afghan women are forced to believe that "that's how things are! You accept it or you die. It is that simple." (PBS, P.142)

In the case of politics too women don't have any role or power. During the parliament election one of the seats was reserved for women. When Abdul Khaliq knew this he shouts "since when do we have a woman do a man's job?" (PBS, p.222) Abdul Khaliq had no choice but make his wife as a candidate. Abdul Khaliq hated to see his wife in his position. Even though Badriya was elected as a candidate Abdul Khaliq male sure that it was his decision to put her into the election and that it had nothing to do with her. In spite of women elected to the parliament, they remained merely as a puppet in the parliament controlled by others and not having a freedom to express their views. The parliamentarians had two paddles to vote for each candidate, red and green indicating yes or no. But Badriya waited until a man who sits opposite her to raise the paddle because badriya was instructed to follow what that man does whether the candidate is good or bad. If women who raise their voice in the parliament they are wiped out in the next moment.

Hashmi shows what would be the fate of a women with voice though Zamarud. Whenever the candidates are asked for their opinion Zamarud raises her voice and men will roll their eyes. Zamarud was the first women to point out the wrong decisions made by the cabinet and the political corruptions that are held. She implied that the candidates had been chosen for reasons other than their qualifications, since one was president's brother-in-law while another was president's childhood friend. She critically said,

We must watch who we place in these official positions they should be there for the right reasons for the development and for the protection of our beloved Afghanistan we have suffered enough in the lands of others in the last decades. Our people deserve to have right minded individuals in power. I wonder, as do so many others, how it is that some of our nominees have been able to amass a fortune when our people go hungry. How it is that they live lavishly when they are engaged in simple business? We all know the answers we know that source of money that not talked of, that are not openly discussed. Bribes Nepotism Drugs. This practice will bring our country down. (PBS, P .298)

Zamarud's comment was not raised upon the cabinet in the novel but the people who are involved in political corruption in Afghanistan. This question is raised against the politicians in current Afghanistan. Through Zamarud, Nadia exhibits the voice and power of women in politics. But at the same time, she depicts how men reacts against the voice of women. Here zamarud was attacked by a bomb in a car. They also reveal that "can't handle a woman with a voice."(PBS, P.320) Men fear the growth of women. The third world women are not aware of the development of the country because almost one third of the country are rural area. Even Rahima came to realise about their rights when she went to Kabul. But there too they were controlled by Abdul Khaliq even in his absence. They weren't permitted to watch Television it was taken from their hotel room as instructed by Abdul Khaliq. He doesn't want them to see what's going on in the rest of the country, what other women are

doing. The main reason for the women in rural area to remain as third world women is the Afghan men. They try to conceal the development of the country from women in every way and Nadia shows us that men cannot blind women every time no matter how much they try.

## Chapter 3

### Rahima: The Survived

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 Just as soon as I could adjust things changed, I change.

(PBS, p.384)

Naseeb as a concept is equivalent to "destiny" in the American culture. The difference, at least to me, is that "destiny" has a positive connotation, something you would want to fulfil In the Afghan culture, Naseeb is used to explain any event in an individual's life, but very often is used to rationalize misfortune. To an Afghan woman, for example, Naseeb explains why they are struck in between such a pathetic situation. While it can be used for both good and bad experiences, it's definitely a go-to consolation word for life's darker moments. Mostly Afghan women blames at Naseeb for what happens in their life but they never take a step to change their destiny. Both Rahima and Skekiba's life had a turning point in their life when they tried to change their Naseeb. Shekib'as destiny was changed after the death of her father. The meaning of the word Shekiba is 'gift', in her life she was gifted away from one to another. At first, she was taken to her grandparents' home later her Naseeb was changed when she was gifted to Azizullah's home and from there to the Kingdom. In the case of Rahima her Naseeb was changed from being a bacha posh to getting married to Abdul Khaliq, All the women in the novel were struck in their miserable life and some believe it is their fate while other tries to escape from it.

Rahima's mother Raisa was burdened with the abuses of their husband and in laws for son for the family she tried as much to stop the marriage of her children but all her not giving s efforts was futile. By the marriage of her daughter, she had gone numb and mentally depressed in order to escape from her Naseeb she had started to take her husband's medicines

that is, she had become a drug addict. Another tragic attempt to escape from Naseeb was Parwin, Rahima's second elder sister. Nadia symbolised Parwin as beauty and artistry. Even Nadia had struggled with Parwin's decision. In her imagination Parwin has a delicate strength. She pictured the girl with the talents buried by circumstances Parwin was a special child even though she was lamed from her birth. "She had a gift, an ability to show you what you did not see even though your eyes grace the same city as hers." (PBS, p.7) Parwin is the music and artistry in Rahima's world and all the beauty is snuffed out when she became a child bride. Nadia thinks that her life becomes unbearable, as it does for many Afghan women. Whenever Rahima meets Parwin, she never said anything about her married life but her physical appearance reveals what she suffers. Self-immolation is scarily common practice in Afghanistan and through Parwin Nadia speaks to the desperation these women feel. In fact, she doesn't think that Parwin could have tolerated the life she was thrown into for long period. Everything that was important for her was taken away. Even Rahima's fate was so cruel that she had lost her beloved son Jahangir, not only she has to mourn for her son but she had to face the blame upon her son's death. She was numb after her son's death. Even Rahima the strongest character had even thought about death.

People close to death have little to lose they can think things say thing that other wouldn't khala Shaima and I were both in that same position, she because of her health and me because that same position she because of her health and me because I felt no desire to open my eyes in the morning.

(PBS, P.386)

Through Shekiba's life too we can see how she faces her niche. Benafsha one of the king's concubines is one of the people who had accepted her fate, Benafsha was regarded as one of the highest positions in concubines but she had a secret relationship with Asif Baraan When

the king had found out Banafshe's secret relationship, she was ordered to be punished when the crime is adultery the punishment is 'sangsaar' which means stoning to death.

Unfortunately, shekiba was also about to receive the punishment because she as a woman guard had failed to catch Banafsha's secret lover. Shekiba asked why she should find another affair when she have more than everything from the king but Banafsha replied that she won't understand. Till the stoning she didn't reveal the name of her lover and accepted her, Naseeb. Banafsha's path is paved in love. It feels odd, but in a country of arranged marriages and strict modesty, romance actually flourishes. Afghan poetry and song are rich with passion and devotion. Banafsha's is that love story, just like Romeo and Juliet kind of love that defies reason and circumstances. Her commitment to her beloved makes sense only because she believes the love between them is so profound that it transcends this world, she accepts her faith because she knows the risks that accompany risky relationship. If Banafsha had chosen any other path, then her romance would have lost its fairy tale quality. Shekha wouldn't understand about love but at some point, she has lost all the hope to live "Maybe this is how it is meant to be maybe this is how I will finally be returned to my family and saved from this wretched existence. Maybe there is nothing for me in this world."(PBS, P.325) But again her Naseeb was changed.

Both Rahima and Shekiba had lost all their hope but they never, like others were ready to accept their fate. During the rule of Amanullah, things had changed for the women in Kabul. Even after Asif's displeasure, Shekiba went to hear the speech of queen Soraya. King Amanullah, unlike his father considered about Afghan women and their education and also promoted modernised Afghanistan. He married queen Souraya who was well educated and they had made the decision that head scarf is not required in Islam. The queen had proposed the idea of women to acquire knowledge, this had made Shekiba to have a glimmer of hope, a feeling that things might get better with this woman Amanullah had chosen "Sometimes you

have to act out of line, sometimes you have to take a chance if you want something badly enough."(PBS, P.435) she accepts that life is bitter than sweet but we should move on fighting.

Rahima had tuned her escape from her Naseeb through various elements. One of the prominent elements is education, her basic education had paved her way of escape. As Badriya was nominated for the parliament, Rahima knew that Badriya don't know to read and write. So Rahima took this as a chance to assist her so that she can go to Kabul, there she was able to meet sufia and Hamida one of the parliamentarians they encouraged her to join the resources lender with them. The visit to Kabul had made Rahima to meet the western civilised women such as Ms. Franklin, from western civilised women helps a third world women to rise up from their destiny rather than discriminating them. There she taught to learn English and to operate computers. There she was able to meet Ms. Fakhria who raises women shelter for those who came escaping from domestic violence. But the government won't give any financial support because for Afghan men saw women shelter as brothels. When Rahima had gone through the death of her son as well as the abuses faced by her husband, it was Hamida and sufia who had heard all her sorrows and helped her for her escape. As they planned her visit to Kabul, she pretends to be ill so that she could stay at the hotel. After Badriya had left, she cropped her hair and wore. Abdul Khaliq's son's cloths which she had taken from home. She slowly opened the door and walked opposite to the direction were the guard sits. The guard couldn't recognise her and she took a bus which would take her far away from Kabul. As per Ms Franklin's instructions, she had reached to a local women's shelter and finally she had escaped from her Naseeb.

The role of aunt khala Shaima is crucial in Rahima's life. Nadia says that it's a tough environment and one in which you have to be tough to survive. These sassy Afghan women can tell raunchy jokes, fire off insults and fight for their rights. She had channelled all the



strengths she have seen in different aunts and grandmothers to mould Shaima's character. Khala Shaima is a pistol of a women, a sass and strong spirit despite her disfigurement. She had hunched back so no one was willing to marry her so she had lived unmarried. But her disability was her power as we can say she was the ultimate reason for Rahima to see the lights. She is the one who connect the history to present by narrating the story of Shekiba. She was like a guide line for Rahima throughout her life. She was the reason for Rahima to get basic schooling and it was her idea to transform Rahima as Bacha posh. When Rahima was married off, she visited her in spite of her health and disability. She never let Rahima to lose her hope. It was she who taught her not to surrender Infront of her fate when Rahima was escaped, she wrote letter to Khala Shaima signing as Bibi Shekiba. In short many of strong women had paved the way for Rahima's escape.

As same as khala Shaima, Gulnaz is one of the crucial characters in Zeba's life. She serves as a catalyst for struggle to change and represents the struggle for women's rights and freedom in the patriarchal society. Gulnaz embodies resilience in the face of adversity. She rejects the societal norms and risks her life and safety to pursue her education and knowledge. Even though she faces consequences, remained constant and determined. she inspired those around her to challenge their own circumstances. Through her secret literary classes, she provided them with tools to gain knowledge, to express themselves and to challenge the oppressive traditions and conventions that have confide them. Her actions spark hope and possibilities for better future, empowering women to take control of their lives. Both Zeba and Gulnaz represents the silenced voices of the voiceless in the society. Through their courage and determination, they have raised the voice by advocating for equality and challenging the oppressive structures in place. Gulnaz's unwavering belief in the power of education and her refusal to accept the status quo provide a beacon of hope for herself and those around her.

As a prisoner in her own body, Zeba rejects her victimhood by exercising power over her body and choosing to be silent when the male inquirers demand for her to speak. The subaltern figure of an Afghan woman succeeds in rejecting the suppression of patriarchal supremacy by choosing to be silent. The silence gains women a freer space of political prison, thereby giving up their natural prison of the gendered body. While Zeba and other women makes decision that allows them to survive in the more liberated environment of the prison, Hashimi chooses fiction as a free space in which she can exercise her freedom through poetic styles. She inhales into the body of her narrative with unusual poetic references and comparisons to reproduce her own *écriture féminine* that disregards the rules of order laid down by male writers. In her novel, Hashimi tries to encounter the societal idea that “girls without honour were better off dead” by reinstating their honour with their strong resistance (p. 359).

Most of the women in *Chil Mahtab* were accused and arrested for moral crimes like sex outside of marriage, running away from home, falling in love etc. Challenging the male authority in the family by any means is enough to land a woman in prison. But on contrary, Inside the prison, the women have the liberty to do what they love to endorse their femininity, which was usually barred by men in ordinary families. They enjoyed doing activities which men couldn't even imagine of women doing; for example, Latifa smokes, and Nafisa texts her beloved from her contraband mobile phone. Others have pictures of Bollywood actors and actresses pasted on the walls of their cells, they apply make-up in the prison salon, and watch reality shows on TV. According to Wikipedia, in Middle Eastern traditions, the number forty is used to refer to a large number or “umpteen”. Once the women arrive at *Chil Mehtab* due to one or the other allegation, they start sharing a life of ease and with no fear of men. Zeba, too, finds her space of resistance inside the prison cell. In a hysterical manner, she cries out that “this is not a prison. Prison is out there [...] God as my witness, I am

unshackled” (2016, p. 207). The sense of “unshackling” from patriarchal injustice can be felt by all the female prisoners, even though the allegations and the judgements are far from just. While Zeba fought against patriarchy through her silence in the outside world, she feels free to speak, among the women of Chil Mahtab, in such a way that her expressions take the shape of poetry. The first words she pronounces in the prison are what she had learned when “women would get together in secret.” In these private female spaces, they would reject the body politic and move beyond the set limits to find “ways to empty a heavy chest” (2016, p. 48).

Chil Mehtab is liberal space for the prisoners, which the women realized after ending up there. For instance, Latifa says that she would often “have marched herself past the barbed-wire fence long ago, turning herself in for some kind of impropriety” had she known what a prison meant for a woman (2016, p. 45). Behind the bars, the women find a safe, secure and peaceful environment, so safe that even a mother prefers turning her daughter in to prison to save her from the wrath of her brothers after losing her virginity. Nafisa’s mother considers Chil Mehtab as a refuge to save her daughter, “fearing her sons would see no way to restore their honour except by spilling Nafisa’s blood” (2016, p. 44). After sharing the meal with her platonic male friend, Nafisa’s conversations and phone calls with him come to an end. But the prison offers her a safe haven to choose and act as per her desires: “Nafisa marvelled without looking up from her contraband mobile phone. She had just texted a message to her beloved widower and was waiting for a response” (2016, p. 49). Zeba practices black magic for the first time inside Chil Mahtab, adapting to the new space that she occupies on her own ways, where, like other women, she has no demands from men to satisfy. Zeba soon realizes the physical demands she has been meeting outside the prison. Her body had previously been used for catering to a family, and it is in this haven where she only deals with the demands of her own self:

She had no responsibilities in the kitchen. Her meals came with impressive regularity. Zeba bathed herself and no one else. She missed Rima's soft cheek against her own, but there was also a delicious peace in walking without a baby on her hip, without the tiny fists pounding out the hot rhythm of a tantrum, without the mouth seeking her bosom with total disregard for Zeba's needs. (2016, p. 67)

## Conclusion

The feminization of discourse has given women an authoritative voice and authenticity. Many South Asian writers wrote about the problems of Third World women and their struggles to survive in phallogentric hegemonic society. They presented cultural, traditional, religious and political beliefs of Third World people through the use of English. They constructed a cross-cultural bridge between the First World and Third World. This novel represents the Third World women from a feminist outlook that illustrates them as the casualties of their own patriarchal society and social conventions and now they cannot convey what needs to be uninhibitedly on the grounds that their general public does not permit them to utter. It, likewise, demonstrates the disempowerment of women in the chosen novel which additionally concentrates on the predicament of women in Afghanistan against mistreatment, exploitation, and brutally honed on them by their patriarchal social orders and acquired customs.

This research provides an outlook that how the identity of Muslim woman is shaped and manipulated by socio-economic and cultural factors under the influence of men. This study has made an effort to capture the image of Muslim woman in Muslim society which is defined by patriarchal and conflicting ideologies that governs her life. Our analysis of gendered subalternity through female characters in the novel is endowed with a pattern of patriarchal oppression that takes its course through a control over female body.

It is clear that *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014) and *A House Without Windows* (2016) are feminist work that portrays the lives of women in Afghanistan, which focuses on the issues of women in male dominated society and depicts women as subaltern category. These novels also highlight the struggle of women characters, struggle for freedom and struggle to unshackle the chains of patriarchal norms. It does depict women as active members of society who are aware of their subjugation and try to break their shells.

Following lines shows that women are politically active and trying to speak and they are conscious of everything going around. "I will not be silenced! I have had enough of their nonsense! Which of you will speak up if I do not? Call me what you like but you know I speak truth and it is you all that are damned for what you're doing"!.! (Hashimi, 2014, p.299)

The patriarchal society of Afghanistan asserts that women can't do anything that men does rather than being a poppet of men like Badriya at the parliament. But what Nadia highlights through the novels is that women can do whatever men does. For example, Nadia pictures Shekiba, an eighteen-year-old teen performing the rituals of death all alone when her father dead the ritual all alone when her father was dead. The ritual washing and placing the body into the grave should have been done by a man but Shekiba had no one to call she washed him, wrapped his stiff body in cloth. She dragged him outside and opened the earth she said few prayers and watched her father disappear under clods of earth. This shows how much women can be strong despite her miserable situation. Shekiba alone had toiled her land and harvested food without anyone's help. Her hard work had resulted her physical as well as mental strength. strong despite of her miserable situation. Shekiba along had toiled her land and harvested food without any ones help her hard work had resulted her physical strength. Likewise, Shekiba dressed up as men to guard kings Harem.

In the case of Rahima too she had become bacha posh to run errands for her family and escort her sisters. But however, they are disguised as men they won't be real men so actually women are doing the job of men so what the need for them to be disguised as men? They could have dressed up normally like women and do all these jobs. The truth is that men know the talents and abilities of women but they are not ready to accept it or in clear we can say they are afraid of women to take over men. In order to make that impossible, what narrow minded Afghan men does is that they make women to believe that only men are strong and can work and women are frail they pushed women into a superstition that they can work like

men only if they are dressed up like one. Women can run errands guard, harem and join the parliament independently. But doesn't allow this rather they take all the credits that men do and they make sure of women that whatever they do is only because of men.

Shekiba and Rahima live during two different time periods in Afghanistan: the first in the early twentieth century, when the country was under Amanullah Khan's rule and the second just after the fall of Taliban. The condition of women in Afghanistan was so bad that one could not imagine later on women were given rights made the situation even worse. Women were dehumanised and stripped off from their rights. It was not allowed to a woman to walk freely in streets without any male guardian. Even after decades the situation of women in Afghanistan remains the same that is what Nadia convey us through her novel. The story ends with somewhat hopeful note. But even Nadia cannot promise what would be the future of Rahima and Shekiba. Shekiba found comparatively satisfied married life but that doesn't mean that she was completely free from male dominating society. What we can except is shekiba is at least safe and there is no fear of her to be gifted away gains in the case of Rahima, they had successfully escaped from her husband and how safe at a local women's she shelters for the time being. But we cannot promise that she will be protected and safe for so long. Because Afghan government was not fully encouraging the idea of women's shelter and they were running only due to the influence of western women activist. So, we cannot predict for how long this would exist Nadia states that the country as a whole is challenged by geopolitics of the region. As long as we have countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia funding extremist factions Afghanistan will never enjoy peace. The new government needs to learn to stand on its own feet and cleanse itself of the internal culture of corruption. There's going to be a long recovery process. But still we have a hope and this can happen if the younger generation stays motivated and invested the recent presidential election saw a nearly sixty percent turnout despite kidnappings, violent threats and suicide attacks at election

centres. A female candidate ran for vice president and many women ran for provincial seats. We are gains seeing women working as doctors, lawyers and other professionals outside the home. That's a pretty steep curve of progress given that women had been barred from the public world just over a decade ago. The younger generation is especially determined to have a voice in the country's future and they are working and to bring about change so we can assume that this energy is going to push Afghanistan into a new era.

All the female prisoners in the novel *AHWW* constitute a harmonious whole by establishing their own house without windows, where their co-existence helps them not just to survive but to grow together. Hashimi locates the strength of each female prisoner in their union. They achieve liberation by refusing to be victimized by the men in their respective households and accepting the state's punishment of a criminal even though by not committing any crime. They to be in prison better than that of being a victim of patriarchy and gender-based violence who finds no solace anywhere in Afghanistan. The only spaces left empty are the segregated spaces of discipline – the prisons. Residing inside this space of solidarity makes female prisoners wish to have found it much earlier, had they known this was an option for those who sought freedom (2016, p. 45).

The significance of *Chil Mahtab* resonates in its name as well, which literally means Forty Moons (2016, p. 81) and metaphorically refers to the strength to be found in unity. In Middle Eastern tradition, “forty” represents a large proportion, whereas the moon has been used as a signifier for something that doesn't own its light, or in this context, women who are powerless and build a powerful force when they come together in union. Women in Afghanistan suffer the subordination of their sex in the context of the family and society. The societal diktats, family responsibilities, and economic dependence result in a rapid increase in violence against women. These women live their lives in societal prisons that expects them to



play their gendered roles, and any deviation leads to bitterness within the family and punishment by the law.

Similar cases have been studied by Ahmed Ghosh (2014), and she remarks, “Any threat to polygamy, removal of bride price, raising of marriage age, or divorce laws was seen as loosening control over women who would then challenge men’s authority. Yet, this means that women’s dependence on men [...] ties them to the family [...]” (p. 10). Circumstances like these land women in a situation where they have to choose between a rock and a hard place. In Hashimi’s novel, Gulnaz jests and plays on the word “prison” by saying, “That is what marriage is, isn’t it?” (2016, p. 189). From an Afghan woman’s perspective, a marriage contract is no less than a punishment, or a prison where a woman plays her roles as per the dictates and expectations of a patriarchal setup. Such roles of subordination make her believe she has no autonomy and can never escape the authority of the men in her family.

Apart from the oppression due to the social system, the burden of female honour adds more suppression on Afghan women. Hashimi’s female characters are positioned between a social experiment and a sexual object of desire. In both situations, a woman’s sense of subjugation and inferiority is where Hashimi places in her storyline. She writes:

It was all about honour. Honour was a boulder that men placed on the shoulders of their daughters, their sisters, and their wives [...]. This girl had lost her father’s honour in Zeba’s courtyard. If he knew that something had happened to her – the details hardly mattered – she might not be forgiven, even though she was an innocent child. (Hashimi, 2016, p. 234)

This fragment sums up the slow revealing of the sequence of events. Here, Hashimi provides a brief description of her plot and opposes the judgement of a male society where all the sins begin from women even if she is “an innocent child.” Zeba too is aware of what future holds for the child who is supposed to be excused from being judged based on her gender rather than just be seen as a victim of sexual violence. The author underscores that in Afghan

society, if a woman's honour is lost, she is held responsible no matter what and for whomever the perpetrator may be. This norm of absolving the criminal and holding the victim responsible is what reinforces a sense of inferiority and subordination in Afghan women.

Towards the climax of the novel, we can see how Zeba was free. She wasn't free because they find out she is innocent. It was only because the judge came to know the rumour that her dead husband kamal had once set fire on Quran. Since blasphemy is strictly prohibited in Afghanistan, the judge favoured Zeba since Kamal is not alive to be punished. It is shocking to know that they don't punish the criminals who commit offensive crimes such as rape and sexual abuse against children but will take sudden actions against those who does blasphemy. Instead of seeking the reason behind why Zeba has killed Kamal, everyone was eager to punish her because she has killed her husband; because according to men, women go crazy over little things. Zeba had witnessed her husband sexually abusing a child who was at the age as same as their daughter, at her own courtyard. Even though Zeba has stabbed him with the hatchet, it was that child's shot that lost his life. But we cannot claim that she killed him as an act of self-defence. If the child's name was drawn attention to the society, she would have lost her future once and for all. In order to protect her future from the vultures, she had kept silent and never mentioned anything about the girl.

While Fareed's angry hands tried to wring the life from Zeba's neck, Laylee's mother had been bent over her daughter, her tears mixing with the ghastly crimson she was dabbing away from between Laylee's tensed and bruised thighs [...] Laylee had begged her mother to end her misery. Kill me, she'd pleaded. In the next room, her father, Timur, had fallen to his knees to hear his daughter make such a quietly catastrophic plea. They had no other children Laylee was everything" (p.411).

Hashimi has shown the depth of the misery the girl and her family has gone through, through these lines. Both the girl and her family are aware of what the consequences are to be faced even if they are the victim. The girl begging to end her life shows how unprotected they are in society and it is better to be dead rather than living as a victim in this patriarchal world.

Hashimi quotes Rumi in her epilogue of *AHWW* but makes it dual with a feminist play on the sign of windows and light. The word play on “window” begins from the very first line where it’s used as a means of light to pass and a house without windows is called a “hell.” Hell, therefore, is a silent woman who lacks the enlightenment or her knowledge come out of her. Rumi refers the creation of a window as “true religion,” and Nadia uses it to advocate for the true empowerment of women in Islam. In the epilogue, Rumi calls for raising the “ax [sic] to frame a window” and Hashimi boost up a feminist agenda in the Afghan context to frame it for the cause of the true religion, i.e., justice. The concluding couplet is much philosophical that Hashimi uses it to argue against the phallogocentric ideas of enlightenment (“sunlight”) and the reason that it is but a shadow for women, same as the appearance of the sunlight from behind the black veil of her dress. So, these lines are an indirect criticism of patriarchal justice, which is not even fair to women.

The metaphor of the window is repeatedly used in the novel *AHWW* that associates with light and enlightenment. When Zeba is taken to the shrine to treat her insanity, she moves close to the window because the new space gives her hope to be free, and then, as later it reveals, the same place gives her hope in the figure of her father. Yusuf too has the habit of sitting on the edge of the window of his room to “spy into other windows” to learn more about the private lives of his neighbours, only so to guard their secrets, a responsibility he carries at large as a lawyer for Zeba and others (Hashimi, 2016, p. 301). Zeba’s mother, Gulnaz, as bold as she was, attempts to look at her future husband through a window, an impropriety only a woman of her spirit could attempt. Here again, the window is used in

terms of her gaining forbidden knowledge: “when he smiled, Gulnaz whirled away from the window and pressed her back to the wall of the house” (2016, p. 126). She presses against the wall of the house to maintain her dignity. The walls are then can be associated with the family honour, and daughters are considered the honour of the house according to patriarchal system.

We cannot go without mentioning the significance of the title of the novel the pearl that broke its shell we can say that the title itself is the major theme of the novel. It associates its characters with the continuous struggle. In their lives to break patrilineal norms and conservative traditions Rahima breaks her shell by adopting the custom of Bacha Posh Nadia had adopted the title of the novel from the estatic poem 'some kiss we can't' by Jalal AD Din Mohammed Rumi an Persian poet in the thirteenth century like the line depicts "Sea water begs the pearl to break its shell" (Rumi 13C), the circumstances and the miseries experience by Rahima had leads to break the shell of patriarchal norms.

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