

BACHA POSH CULTURE IN THE SELECT WORKS OF NADIA HASHIMI'S THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL, ONE HALF FROM THE EAST

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ABSTRACT

The bacha posh culture is a tradition in Afghan culture where there is an inferiority of female gender. According to this culture, female children born in the family when they attain an age of thirteen cut their hair and wear male clothes and pretend to be boys, go to work and do household chores. Afghanistan has a shariah law which clearly states the men must go to work as they are the bread winners of the family and women must be submissive to men and engage themselves in household chores. In the novel *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, Shekiba and Rahima felt happy to show the culture of bacha posh. Shekiba the great great grandmother of Rahima worked as a harem's guard to earn income for the family. She was born in a family where no male children were born. So, she has to dress like a teenage boy and cut her hair and go to work as a guard in the harem of the king. Shekiba gets paid well as a guard of the harem. The Afghan girl from childhood until her marriageable age has to be a bacha posh. The novel "*One Half From The East*" also describes the bacha posh culture. In this novel a girl named Obayda becomes a bacha posh and is named Obayd. She meets a boy named Rahim who is also a teenage bacha posh previously known as Rahima who later becomes his close friend. Both go to school, play sports in the morning. After the school hours they work and earn money for their families.

In "*The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," Rahima becomes a bacha posh and takes up the responsibilities of looking after the family as her father Arif is a drug addict. In "*One Half From The East*", Obayda becomes bacha posh as her father becomes handicapped after a fire explosion accident. This study examines the bacha posh culture in Afghanistan through the select novels of Nadia Hashimi. It brings out the plight of female teenagers who have to work for survival as a male in the absence of male members in the family.

Keywords : Bacha posh, Harem, Shariah law

INTRODUCTION

"*The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*" is a novel by Nadia Hashimi which describes the bacha posh culture. It was published in the year 2014. Nadia Hashimi was born to migrant parents. Her Afghan parents migrated to America in the 1970's and Nadia Hashimi, though born and raised in America, still has roots in Afghanistan. She writes about Afghan culture. The Afghan people have set shariah laws for Afghans which they must follow. According to the shariah law a male of the family has to earn the income for the family. Female members of the family are not supposed to work. So, it's the obligatory duty of a male to be the bread winner of the family. Writers like Nordberg's "*Underground Girls of Kabul*, (2014) Deborah Ellis's "*The Bread Winner*" (2000), Ukmina Manoori's "*I am a Bacha posh* (2014)," describe the story of bacha posh culture in their novels. In "*One Half From The East*" (2014), Nadia Hashimi gives an account of Obayd and how he has transformed into Obayda and becomes a bacha posh in the school. She is frightened of other boys but eventually befriends a boy named Rahim who is also a bacha posh in the school. The novel describes the life of Afghans as they lived under bomb explosions during the period of American colonialism and the civil war.

Obayd feels happy when another bacha posh joins her and both play sports, and enjoy life. Obayd can now study in the male section of school. When Rahim gets married (Rahima), Obayd becomes alone and she goes back to the life of a girl.

Shariah Law : Shariah law of Muslim world does not allow a female member of the family to work when male member of the family is alive. If a female member of the family wants to work she has to be accompanied by a male member of the family. Maharem is a husband, brother, father or son the female members of the family.

The punishments like stoning to death, hundred lashes for committing an adultery may look harder but can protect society from harm and major destruction of family and society.

For example in "*The Fort of Nine Towers*", Akbar says that

"Women should not step outside their residences. In case of emergency, they can go out but they should not wear fashionable clothes to attract the attention of other men, because they belong to only one man (husband) or soon she will be property of a man (husband). If any woman is seen outside with fashionable, tight, and charming clothes, she will be chased to her house, and her brother, father, or husband will be punished and imprisoned. Women have the responsibility of a teacher for their children and a helper to her husband." (Akbar-281)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the period of American colonizers in Afghanistan many American writers described the culture of Afghanistan. The Afghan-American writer Qais Akbar Omar in his novel "*The Fort of Nine Towers*" describes the Afghan soldiers fighting between two political parties of Taliban. Today the Taliban rules Afghanistan with shariah laws of the Muslim world.

“Women do not have as much brains as men, therefore they cannot think wisely as man. So, we refuse to allow them to become involved in politics.” (Akbar-281)

In *“I am a Bacha posh”*, Ukmına Manoore, tells her story as a bacha posh. She does not want to convert back to woman state when she attains teenage, because she cannot attain freedom like a boy when she converts again to a young girl. A bacha posh culture can give her wings of freedom and spirit to fulfil her financial status and to enjoy outdoor life.

Nordberg’s *“The Underground Girls of Kabul”* is a story about a bacha posh who works to survive in society. Deborah Ellis’ *“The Bread Winner”* (2000) narrates the story of Parvana. Parvana’s father is a English language translator. He helps in translating letters in local language of Afghanistan. He helped the American military as a translator. The Taliban caught Parvana’s father and beat him brutally so, he became paralyzed. Parvana takes up the job of a translator from her father. Parvana had learned to read and write in English.

DISCUSSION

In this paper the political issues of Afghanistan and their ancient culture of baccha posh are discussed. Afghan woman face issues of harassment due to the male supremacy.

In the novel *“The Pearl That Broke Its Shell,”* Nadia Hashimi describes Afghan women to be treated well by their husbands, if they bear the male children. If they deliver female children they will be considered not valuable. The King gave gifts to his wives and made them happy for bearing as male children as many as they can and get more gifts.

“The nine women who had borne him sons were treated better than the others. These nine women were given dresses with the finest embroidery and the choicest fruits, and they walked taller than the rest. Their places were more secure than the others’, thanks to their gifted wombs. Neelab, whose three boys had not lived more than a month, was the exception. She had disappointed the king more than those women who had borne him daughters and she would receive no special treatment until she could give him a son who would live long enough to at least take a few steps.” (TPTBIS-297)

“I wonder how long I would have gone on as a boy had Madar-jan not seen us on the day. Most children 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. My grandmother warned her it was wrong. She couldn’t bear to give up having someone who could do for her what my father couldn’t. and I was happy to continue playing soccer with the boys.” (Hashimi, 2014: 84).

The Afghans are meat lovers. Their cuisine of Afghanistan has kebabs, Chapli kebabs, meat balls, meat rolls, and also Akbar says that in his novel *“The Fort Of Nine Towers”* (Akbar-57).

“My mother stopped going to the bank. She did not feel safe traveling across the city. Also, she was much busier than before going to the bazaars to buy food, which was sometimes hard to find --mostly rice and whatever vegetables the farmers could bring to the market, and not the meat that The Afghanistan was not safe during the period of American-Afghanistan war. These twenty years women did not feel safe travelling safe while going alone. Because the women were not given karate or fighting training during the period to protect themselves.”

Ukmına Manoore in her novel *“I am a bacha posh”* describes living as a male when she is a female in the culture of Afghanistan. She has to become the bread winner of her family. She was born into the family where no male children were born. Ukmına Moori as a preteen girl decided to change herself as a bacha posh for survival. The culture of Afghanistan has a tradition of bacha posh. During the colonialism, the American government encouraged women to study and work.

Rahim has been kicked by boys in the streets of Kabul. The physical weakness of these girls made them to run away. And hide themselves behind a wall by stopping their breath silently.

CONCLUSION

The life of Shekiba and Rahima and their life as a bacha posh in the ancient Afghanistan highlighted in the paper. Rahima’s great great grandmother Shekiba has taken a role of a bacha posh in her teenage and became a bread winner of the family. This has been discussed in detail in this paper.

The life of Afghan woman as a bacha posh has been discussed in the novels like *“The Pearl That Broke Its Shell”*, *“One Half From The East”*, were the father has been wounded by a bomb explosion and he was prosecuted by Taliban for learning a foreign language named English, because The Taliban considers American forces as the occupier of Afghanistan and the war of America. Afghanistan lasts for over 20 years. (from 2001 to 2021). These twenty years of sufferings of Afghan civilians in the hand of foreign forces made them not to learn English and

punish the Afghan civilians who learn English or any other foreign language. The bacha posh culture of Afghanistan. give rights for the female to work, study, play sports and enjoy freedom. They are with the mindset that the Afghan women are born to do household chores. They struggle for freedom and dignity in their homeland. Many of them went to Pakistan during American-Afghanistan war. The Afghans took refuge in Pakistan. The Afghan girls and women are married off in Pakistan to escape the war in Afghanistan.

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