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## **DISGUISED IDENTITIES AS MASK FOR NEGATION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS IN NADIA HASHIMI'S THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL**

**Hamda Bukhari**

*Govt. P. G. College (W) Satellite Town. Gujranwala, Pakistan*

**Hina Rafique**

*Govt. P. G. College (W) Satellite Town. Gujranwala, Pakistan*

**Farhana Tabassum**

*Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, The University of Lahore, Pakistan*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The present research study focuses upon the discussion of the disguised identities of Afghani women in the text *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* by an Afghan American writer Nadia Hashimi. The Afghani women adopt the disguised identities to survive in male dominated societies and the research strives to answer the reasons behind this adopted strategy. Judith Butler views have been taken as a theoretical framework to strengthen the research argument, who negotiate that in modern times there seems to be no fixed gender. The text elaborates the Afghan tradition of Bacha posh negating feminine gender and tells that how women break their shells, and boundaries to survive in male dominated Afghanistan. The research answers the primal point that how this practice and the struggle of Afghani women pose the question mark on the Afghan patriarchy and it enhances the determination and self-will of feminine gender. Besides, the research is qualitative in nature.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*Disguised identities, Mask, Negation of patriarchy, Bacha posh, Gender and Afghan society*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research negotiates the notion of gender-disguised-identities adopted by females for negating patriarchal authority in African societies. It aims at discussing the importance of disguised identities adopted by Rahima and Shekiba, the major protagonists in Hashimi's novel *The pearl that broke its shell*. Through the life of these protagonists it is observed that women face many

physical, psychological and emotional atrocities in Afghan patriarchal society. It is very tough for a woman to survive in Afghan society without any male member. As the researcher J Rajasree states that: “Life as a woman in Afghanistan is one of the most challenging situations. Some families in Afghan gave permission to elementary education of girls. Other families believe that to educate a girl is an unnecessary” (p. 1919).

Furthermore, the present research negotiates the concept of Bacha-posh and cross-dressing culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bacha posh is a cultural practice in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in which some families ask their daughters behave as a boy, when they do not have even a single boy in their families. Bacha posh makes the family to live honorably in male-dominated society by avoiding social pressure of not having a male child in home. By disguising their daughters as a boy, they can survive in a phallo-centric society where boys are considered superior and girls inferior. This cross-dressing culture is a way through which girls can enjoy the freedom in disguised form in male chauvinistic society. This tradition which comes from Afghan culture is also prevailing in Pakistan. Bacha posh tradition is actually a fight of women for their basic rights in male chauvinistic societies. It becomes necessary for families to disguise their daughters for their survival. As J. Rajasree Menon states that “they believe (Afghani) that having a bacha posh in the family bring good fortune and in a subsequent pregnancy mother give birth to a son” (p.1918). People in Afghan society feel comfortable in changing their daughters as boys because it is the old tradition and culture of Afghanistan.

To explore gender concept, this present research also sheds light on the views of Judith Butler from her book *Gender Trouble* to support this notion of gender identities. Judith Butler and Susan Bordo views have been taken by the researcher as a theoretical framework to strengthen this research work. Judith Butler is a famous American gender theorist and feminist. The theoretical concept of Butler that gender suffers destabilization supports the cultural tradition of Bacha posh which the researcher has taken to explore in this research study. It points out that Hashimi’s characters’ disguised identities suggest the survival opportunities for woman in the society. One can conceal his/her own identity in order to survive in society.

This research study is qualitative in nature with the critical analysis of the notion of gender disguised identities. Nevertheless, this research is a pure attempt to add to the finest research studies to this text by Hashmi. Furthermore, this research will be helpful for the researchers doing research on Hashimi an American writer. It would be a productive and constructive addition to body politics and feministic literature.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1. Gender Disguised Identities in the Pearl that Broke its Shell**

The word disguise comes from French word ‘disguiser’ which means “disguise, change one’s appearance” (Online Etymology Dictionary). One can conceal his/her own identity in order to survive in society. The researcher Sarah Catherine Moore in her research defines the concept of disguise in a way that:

Disguise in early modern prose fiction is a powerful plot element used to create narrative suspense and to entertain readers with dramatic irony or sudden turning points, but it is almost the most relevant typos to explore selfhood [...] disguise narratives question whether and how an identity

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core can be covered or faked, whether and how the ‘real’ substance beneath can be determined, and whether this substance can change under the disguise, or possibly also because of it (p. 01).

Here research paper focuses upon discussion of gender disguised identities adopted by the protagonists of the novel. The researcher intends to bring to notice all the relevant incidents and facts related to their life, problems, relations, societal status and other factors which strengthen the argument that Rahima and Shekiba have decided to disguise their gender identity in the narrative. This will also give us peep into their social, domestic predicament or plight as women in an Afghan Patriarchal society. This chapter entails two sections. The first section will throw light on Rahima’s gender disguised identities, the second section will discuss the gender disguised identity of Shekiba. It will also discuss the typical phallogocentric perspective of patriarchy, oppression and suppression of women and their agonies in this novel.

The canvas of the novel is vast because of multiple themes it encompasses. The novelist has capsulated various themes like womanhood, fate and destiny, family dynamics, difference between the upbringing of girls and boys, Talibanization, religious or fundamentalist approach of people. Furthermore, there is also unrelenting desire for sons in society, freedom, independence, oppression, suppression, psychological and physical torture on females, child marriages, impact of opium and drugs, maltreatment with wives etc. Therefore, through her novel, Hashimi has explored many themes and salient issues.

Hashimi in her novel describes the heart-rending story of two girls, one who belongs to early 20th century and the other one belongs to hundred years back period. Both of their stories run on parallel lines. Both Rahima, and Shekiba suffer almost the same pain, brutalities and atrocities of their lives. This novel is not only the tale of tribulations but about physical, spiritual and psychological strength exhibited by Rahima and Shekiba. They don’t have any male member in their family that’s why they decide to disguise themselves as males. And in the end, both survive due to their personal will. The researcher Roshni C states that “each and every female character in this novel has dealt with hardships; Madarjan, Rahima, Shekiba, Parwin Khala, Shaima, Benafsha and many others. The environment is really tough for any woman to survive (p. 05). As the researcher Javeria Khursheed (2018) states that:

Patriarchy in Afghanistan plays a pivotal role in establishing a woman’s identity in accordance with the social and cultural setting. In the context of weak law and order, the strict tribal norms, gendered values and religious extremism, which are embedded in the history of Afghanistan, associated with gross violations of the rights of women. Patriarchy is a disease that runs in our culture and irony is that men are not even aware of it, the reason being that it is so seeped into our psychic (p. 253).

The title taken from Rumi’s poem seems to be an ideal fit for the novel as the lines show that “There is some kiss we want with our whole lives, The touch of spirit on the body. Seawater begs the pearl to break its shell” (p.325). It shows the struggle of women who try to break the shackles of traditions, culture and chains of restrictions. As in the chaotic world Rahima and Shekiba did not have a feasibility to escape, that’s why they opt to simulate or disguise themselves as males to flee from the colors of life. As Rahima states that “Everyone needs an escape” (p. 246). They both have a dormant wish for freedom as the researcher states that “We can say that Rahima’s story is a modernized version of Shakiba’s. Both Rahima and Shekiba wanted freedom and the right to do

things as they wished, but since they were girls, they didn't have the access to do anything as they wished" (p. 02). The fact is that by disguising themselves, they are actually negating the phallogocentric mind of Afghan society.

There are numerous theorists, writers who have raised their voices to advocate for the rights of women. Some of the celebrated feminists who shared their views on gender, sex, cultural and gender inequalities are Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Bordo, Lisa Lowe, Julia Kristeva, Vicki S Helgeson, Judith Butler and many more.

Butler has written number of books and articles on Genderism, Culture, Feminism and philosophy. In her book, she throws light on Feminism, Gender inequalities, body politics and gender destabilization. She introduces the concept of gender performativity in which she says that gender and human body is something created by our cultural and traditional norms.

She has challenged the other feminists by giving a concept of gender destabilization. She makes her readers to think beyond the idea of binary divisions. She is the one who proclaims against the binary categories and states that gender is like human attributes and qualities that can be change rather to be fixed. One can make changes in her gender for her survival in particular society. She further states that: "the body is figured as a surface and scene of a cultural inscription: the body is inscribed surface of events" (1990, p.129). She emphasizes that gender can be changed as she states that: "the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (1990, p.140). She describes that gender is not permanent it is just the adaptation of body. As she states that: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being"(p. 33).

It shows that Butler is actually destabilizing concept of particular genders in society. According to her gender is not fixed one can change it for his/her need?

Along with Butler, Susan Bordo is one of the pioneers of "body studies" also talked about female body and binary categories. She is a famous feminist and Ph.D professor of English language and women studies. As a feminist she wrote different books like *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Eastern Culture, the male body, Twilight zones* etc. She is famous because of her area of interest and writings about body politics. While talking about female body she is of the view that it is the culture and society which shape the body and gender of females. As she states in her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Eastern Culture* (2004) that:

In the old metaphor of body politics, the state or society was imagined as a human body, with different organs and parts symbolizing different functions, needs, social constitutes, forces and so forth...the head and soul for the sovereign, the blood for the will of people, or the nerves for the system of rewards and punishments. Feminism imagined the human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control...from foot binding and corseting to rape and battling to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy, and explicit commodification (p. 21).

Just like Butler opines that body does not have a fixed nature, bodies and gender can change according to the social demands placed on them. As she states that: "The female body.... perhaps

the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class and sexual orientation... has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control” (p.166). Both the feminists talked about the female bodies and their gender which is culturally, socially and historically constructed in our societies. According to them, body politics means the influence of culture, society, traditions in the creation of female body and gender. As Butler (1990) states the argument of Simone in her as:

“No one is born with a gender.... gender is always acquired. One is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous; sex is an analytical attribute of the human; there is no human who is not sexed, sex qualifies the human as a necessary attribute. But sex doesn’t cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect of express sex (p.111).

In the light of Butler’s and Bordo’s views, we observe that everyone is free to disguise one’s gender to negate patriarchal norms or establish his individuality because gender is not fixed and it is a creation of social and cultural norms that’s why one can change it according to time and need.

## **2.2. Transformation of Rahima as Rahim (a bacha posh) or Disguised Identity of Rahima**

Bacha posh is a Persian word which means a girl disguised as a boy in Afghan society. Like the researcher J.Rajasree Menon states that:

Bacha Posh is a cultural practice, the girl dressed up as a boy. The family do not have any son will choose the younger daughter to live and adopt the behavior of boys. Bacha Posh solves all the problems and the social disgrace of not having a son. In order to raise the social standing, the parent’s convert their daughters into a bacha posh. Having a son is an important in the Afghan society and also it is a matter of pride, this custom provides social relief. Bacha Posh is a social tradition where the girls are raised as boys (p.1917).

Patriarchy in Afghanistan plays an important role in evoking women to change their gender for their existence. By posing as bacha posh women have created their own separate world while living in Afghanistan. Bachaposh is very old tradition of Afghan society. As Rahima states that“this is how things are done. People will understand. You will see. Everyone else.... teachers, aunt, uncles, neighbors.... they would accept my mother’s new son without reservation. I wasn’t the first bacha posh. This was a common tradition for families in want of a son” (p.36). The girls in Afghanistan who have adopted the cultural tradition of bacha posh actually want freedom, freedom of thought and expression. They are fully under the male members of their families, in short, they are living a restricted life.

In Afghan patriarchal society female gender is considered as slave, inferior, trivial and worthless that’s why females adopt the gender disguise identities in their lives. It is really very hard for women to survive in a tough country like Afghanistan. As the researcher J. Rajasree states that:

Afghanistan is the worst country in the world for a woman, if a girl is born in Afghanistan condemned to a half-life. In Afghanistan, there is strong gender discrimination and gender division and bacha posh is a short-term remedy for girls to attain their freedom (p. 1918).

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Hashimi in her article states about the tradition of bacha posh in Afghan society. According to her, “the bacha posh, a temporary third gender for girls who live as boys” and this practice is centuries old. In Afghanistan’s patriarchal society, sons are valued much over daughters. (Hashmi,n.p).

It is important to mention Jenny Nordberg, Swedish journalist, who for the first time has discovered the Afghanistan’s secret practice of bacha posh. Jenny in her novel portrays the story of a mother Azita who is a parliamentarian and forced her fourth daughter Zohra to behave like a bacha posh for their survival in Afghan Patriarchal society. Azita successfully changed her daughter Zohra into a bacha posh named as Mehran. She believes that this tradition creates a space for women in the male dominated society.

Hashimi is the one who has explored the life of Obayda and Rahima in her novels like just to show the struggle of women. The tradition of bacha posh is also in favor of gender de-stability as stated by Butler “Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an “act” as it were, which is both intentional and performative” (p.139).

Rahima is a girl who belongs to an Afghan Patriarchal society and tells the problems, struggles and experiences of her life. She has four sisters. In the beginning of this novel she tells us the mindset of her father and typical Afghan society. As the researcher Roshni states that “Her father always longed for a son who will bring about a change in their lives. It drove him into depression and he sought refuge in opium. Furthermore, Rahima herself explains that because of the piteous social and financial condition of her father and family, she has adopted this Afghan tradition of Bacha posh that allows a girl to manually assist or help her family as a boy. Hence, she contentedly dressed herself as a boy and successfully supported her family until her marriage. Moreover, she disguised herself just to become a son for her family and expends her teenage and childhood as a boy not only because of her family but also for her survival and freedom. Actually, she wants escape from the Afghan patriarchal norms and also from the miserable life of a girl that society by disguise herself as a boy. Ultimately it is Rahima who breaks her shell and gives a meaning to her existence in this world. As the researcher Rajasree states that:

Rahima the protagonist of the story is considered as a pearl. She suffers a lot in her younger age itself and also, she is not interested to lead a miserable life like other women in Afghanistan. She wants to escape from the realities as an Afghan woman, her mind is always craving to explore her entire life like an Afghan man. So, she tried to break the shell like a pearl and avoids all hurdles in the life and she escapes into her dreamed life (p.1921).

She mentions that there was a boy who always used to stalk and chase her when she and her sisters were returning to home. So due to the happening of this incident our mother scolds us and says that “We are not in a habit of keeping things from your father” (p. 04) These lines also show the secondary position of females as she states that “Sometimes women are pushed too far, kicked too hard, and there’s no escape for them”(p.215). Then she states upon the plight of woman as “ Why do we have a house full of girls! Not one, not two...but five of them!” (p. 05). Thus, not having a son, is not only the problem of their family but also the problem of whole Afghan society at that time. Due to this problem people were bound to follow the Afghan tradition of Bacha posh. She does not have any brother in her family, so this is the root cause that forces her to disguise herself as a boy.

She also wants freedom and wants to behave like a boy in her childhood. She does errands in the market as per her mother's wish that's why she believes, she has more freedom as she states that "Finally, I had freedom...even more than my sisters!" (p. 08). Therefore, to have freedom is her suppressed and dormant desire which automatically fulfilled by the idea of Khala Shaima. It is khala Shamia, who tells the impressive story of her great grandmother Shekiba. As she states that "She became what her family needed. She became what the king needed" (p.12). She says that to behave like a boy is very solacing and special for her as she can do things and perform tasks for her mother. So, in order to fulfill the need of son her family decides to change the feminine appearance of Rahima and disguises her as a male. As it states that: "we could change your clothes and we'll change your name. You'll be able to run to the store any time we needed anything" (p. 23). Rahima states that "It sounded like a dream to me! I thought of the neighbor's sons Jamel. Faheem. Bahir. My eyes widened at the thought of being able to kick a ball around in the street as they did" (p. 23). She changes her gender not through any surgery rather she only disguises herself by changing her clothes and mentality. It is necessary for her family to create Rahima a bachaposh for their survival in Afghan Patriarchal society. There is a fact that due to the presence of Taliban females are restricted to live in four walls of their houses.

Then Rahima begins her new journey as a boy Rahim and her family gives her new name "Rahim! We have to call her Rahim" (p.35). As her mother states that "You will forget about your sister Rahima and welcome your brother" (p.36). They are all excited to have a new brother in the face of Rahima. As Parwin states "So just like that she is a boy" (p.36) Rahima as Rahim starts wandering in the town like a boy and she enjoys each and every moment as a boy. She bargains with the shopkeepers and feels very happy. Her mother and father call her as my son. Her mother is not ready to change her back into a girl because she is performing this tradition very well. Rahima says that "I was too useful to her, to my sisters, to the whole family. She could not give up having someone who could do for her what my father would not. There are many families who changed their bacha posh into girls after their puberty.

She as a bacha posh started working with Agha Barakzai as she states that "he kept me busy until the evening and I came home to find that Mader-jan had not saved me any food" (p. 87). By working with Agha Barakzai she also earns some money and her father feels proud of her. Her father feels as if he had a real son in face of Rahima and he uses to treat Rahima as his son. Like one day Rahima as Rahim came home late and there was nothing for her to eat and then her father showed his concern scolds and slaps her mother. As he states that: "My son is hungry! Look at the money he is brought home! And even with this you cannot find a morsel of food for him? What kind of mother are you?" (p. 88). Thus, as a bacha posh, she gained much value in her family.

Behaving like a boy, she comes to know about different facts that male teachers are as strict with students as female teachers are (p. 50) and then being a boy, she enjoys playing soccer and declares herself as a boy. As she states "My name is Rahim" (p.51) which shows her fascination for male gender so she challenged notion of the gender divisions. Butler (1990) negates the specific roles of genders in society and states that "gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity" (p. 112).

It is also a fact that she is following the footprints of her grandmother Shekiba to survive and to attain something in her life. She is too much curious to learn more and more about the life of her great Grandmother Shekiba. After listening the story of Bibi Shekiba, she becomes ambitious. She feels that to behave like a bacha posh is best for her. But few incidents occur due to which her

parents believe that now Rahima is grown up and we have to engage her in marital life. Her mother further states that: "It's all right, Bachem. It's as much my fault as it is yours" (p. 107). This is the point from where something tragic happens in her life which is her marriage with Abdul Khaliq. It also shows that Rahima and her sisters' lives depend upon the decision of their father. As her mother states that "men are unpredictable creatures" and "God knows what he'll do" (p. 107). These lines also show the patriarchal strong hold of society.

Then Abdul Khaliq visits the house of Arif with his family members because they want Rahima as a second wife for Abdul Khaliq. He is a warlord as she states that "Warlords were Afghanistan's new aristocracy" (p. 25). As we know the economic condition of Rahima's family, Rahima's father resists a little but gives his consent regarding the marriage proposal of Abdul Khaliq for Rahima. Then she married to Abdul Khaliq as the researcher Roshni C states that "Like a thing Rahima is being handed over to her husband Abdul Khaliq who considers her nothing more than a maid who is bound to all the household chores" (p. 02). These lines show fate and destiny of females. According to Rahima's opinion Afghan tradition is same for her just as it was for her Great Grandmother Shakiba.

After her marriage to Abdul Khaliq, she suffers much and her husband is too much older than her. She is totally unaware of womanly responsibilities because she spent her childhood as a bachapoch and now her parents have bound her in a strict bond of marriage. She feels that it is impossible for her to cope up with this period of life. It shows that it is quite tough for the girls who adopted this tradition to continue further in their lives. Rajasree (2018) states that:

For a bacha posh it is very hard to change back to being girls because at the time of developing their personalities, they are boys, so they show boyish personalities. Some bacha posh feel their lost childhood memories as a girl but others feel that it was awesome as a bacha posh by enjoying all the freedoms that they would not get living as a normal girl in Afghanistan (p. 1919).

Then Abdul Khaliq as a husband appears a brute, inhuman, vicious person because he tortures her physically as well as mentally. And her mother-in-law often scolds her due to her mistakes while performing the daily chores. After Rahima's marriage she was bound to live in the four walls and even restricted to step out of the house. Bibi Gulalai tells her that: "If you think you'll see your sisters, though, don't get your hopes up. Neither one of them brings their wives when they come by. The women of this family are not habitual of travelling much and you should also try to get used to live inside home. "They're going to be all you see" (p. 165).

After visiting Kabul, she feels that she should have to maintain herself without her cruel husband but the most tragic thing happens to her that she loses her son. After the death of her son, she decides that she should leave the place that has taken her child away from her. In Kabul too, she learns that women are like puppets in the hands of males. Rahima as a strong woman feels that she can fight boldly to live an independent life. By gathering her all strength, she leaves her compartment and again disguises herself as a male, just as she disguises herself as a boy when she was a child. At that melancholic moment, she uttered that: "I was a little girl and then I wasn't. I was a Bachaposh and then I wasn't. I was a daughter then I wasn't. I was a mother then I wasn't. Just as soon as I could adjust, things changed. I changed. This last change was the worst" (p. 384).

At the end, with the help of Ms. Franklin, she finds a shelter home where she finds hundreds of women like her. This is the abode where she can seek solace and comfort. Hence, Rahima disguises



herself as male just to survive in a male dominate society. The text ends on an optimistic note that Rahima wants to develop her own life and her transformation suggests that women in Afghan society can do anything with their lives. It is Rahima, the protagonist of the novel, who chooses disguise to level gender equalities. She is the real fighter who by disguising herself as male is actually negating the typical patriarchal norms of Afghan society. All the female characters in one way or other rebels against the male dominance and patriarchal norms of society.

Hashimi wants her women to survive in a society intellectually, socially, physically and she wants to negate this notion that women are not inferior, other and less than males in every society. Her real motive is to empower the women living in the backward societies. As Hashimi proclaims that:

I see both Rahima and Shekiba as pearls caught in repressive shells. But I also see Rahima and Shekiba as every woman. When I read Rumi's lines, the sea is Rahima's inner voice, expansive and powerful, beckoning her to break free and realize her potential (n.p).

Hashimi has also introduced the tradition of bacha posh in her novel *One Half from the East*. In her novel she tells us the heartrending story of Obayda a bacha posh. As we know her father lost his leg in an accident so that's why her aunt suggests her mother to create Obayda a bacha posh for their survival in society. So, her parents changed her physically and named her as Obayd. It is very difficult for her to behave like a boy. But her parents do not realize that she is a girl. We can say that like Rahima she become a bacha posh in her childhood then again become a girl in her mature life. So, life become a play for them and they are like toys in the hands of fate and society. As a researcher J. Rajasaree(2018) states that:

Rahima and Obayda, both were a victim of bacha posh practices. The transition can be quite traumatic and it leads to identity crisis on a young psyche. The bacha posh girl emotionally feels gender dysphoria, it will lead to a larger problem. The society treats and looks at these girls as the other. These bacha posh girls are mentally and physically marginalized (p.1921).

Rahima and Obyada both are different because Rahima loves to be a bacha posh and Obayda hates to be a bacha posh. Both the girls in Nadia Hashimi's novels face the situation of otherness, marginalization, gender inequality, gender dysphoria. They both disguised themselves as a boy for the sake of their families.

### **2.3. Shekiba Disguised as Sheikab**

This is the second section of this research paper which throws light on the Shekiba's Gender disguised identities. When the author narrates the story of Rahima side by side, she also narrates the tale of her great grand-mother Shekiba. Shekiba is the inspiration and embodiment of hope for Rahima because both face the same atrocities in their lives. As we know it is Khala Shaima who tells us the story of Shekiba.

The meaning of her name is precious as the narrator states that "Your name means gift my daughter. You are a gift from Allah" (p.13). She was born in Afghanistan. As the narrator states that "Shekiba was born at the turn of the twentieth century, in an Afghanistan eyed lasciviously by Russia and Britain" (p.13). We perceive that Shekiba's whole life has enclosed in one sentence "a gift passed from one hand to another" (p.13). Shekiba used to live in a village with her family where people are pessimistic and conservative as she states that "Shekiba's village was unforgiving" (p.14). Most of the people spend their lives in this village. Shekiba's father, Ismail

bardari is the youngest and struggled a lot for the survival of his family. He knows the ways and tactics to flourish his land. Then after tremendous struggle his father has built a house for his family.

Shekiba's mother: Shafiqah and her in-laws are not pleased with her because they think she is timid. They do not have any interest in her and in her daughters. They only love Tariq and Munis. Their grandparents do not like Shekiba and her little sister Aqela. Hashmi says that "The boys were liked by their grandparents and valued as male heirs" (p.15). So Shekiba has no importance in the eyes of her grandparents. Shekiba's life is full of miseries because when she was only two years old something very bad happened to her that left scars not only on her face but also on her entire life. At that time, it was her mother who looked after Shekiba and her grandmother who did not like Shekiba came and suggested that "Shafiqah pay closer attention to her children and muttered thanks that it had not been one of the boys" (p.16).

After that disastrous incident, her life becomes more miserable as Hashmi states that "Shekiba was halved. When she laughed, only half her face laughed. When she cried, only half her face cried" (p.16). People use to mock her by mentioning at her face. Her close family members also make fun of her face. Hashmi tells that her cousins call her by saying "Shola face," as her skin resembled the lumpy soft rice. "Babaloo" or monster." She herself was afraid of "the babaloo, the creature that frightened every Afghan child in the night" (p.17). Due to different people comments her mother has decided to cover her face and she used to cover her face when she sees people coming to their home. Shekiba's mother is her support as she uses to encourage her as the writer states that "Remember, "Shekiba" means "a gift". You are our gift, my daughter. No need to let others gawk at you" (p. 17). So, they are living a happy life but in 1903 cholera pandemic affected Afghanistan and it has affected Shekiba's whole family. They all suffered due to this disease except Shekiba.

Shekiba worked hard like a man with her father, after death of her siblings and mother, due to cholera, in the fields without thinking that she is a girl. And her father also felt relaxed due to her presence. Shekiba becomes a son for her father. "She hoed, she slaughtered and she chopped as any strong-backed son would do for his father" (p.20). With the passage of time her physical appearance becomes manly because of working in the field. As the writer states that "Shekiba's features grew coarser; her palms and soles were thick and callused" (p.20). Then as the time passes her father becomes weaker and weaker as the writer states that "There were days Shekiba was left to run the entire farm and house on her own" (p. 20). The tragedy of her family did not end here, still she has to face much. After the death of her father she loses her hope and tries to commit suicide but survived. She wants to meet her mother. She becomes very weak but she has to survive. Shekiba has to live with her grandparents and her grandmother involves her in daily chores and soon they realize that she is perfect in doing daily chores as Hashmi states that "She was quite capable and could manage even the chores that required the combined strength of two women" (p. 53) and resultantly she has to work in home and in fields too. In her grandparents' home, her grandmother and aunties always cursed her that Allah has burnt her face in order to punish her. This shows the plight and miserable condition of Shekiba. As her grandmother states that: "You wretched creature! Allah in all His wisdom has marked your face as warning to all! (p. 61). Then Kaka Zalimi takes her at Azizullah place with him. Then he introduces her to Azizullah and she works with Azizullah's wife in their home. Shekiba who is already perfect in handling daily chores has handled Marjan's duties effectively.

Women in Afghan society cannot be an owner of a land. When her land was occupied by her uncles, she was not given back that rightful piece of land. Shekiba herself is highly determined and wants to change her life. Then she decides that she has to do something to find her freedom.

After entering the king Habibullah's palace the transformation is going to occur in her life. She struggles throughout her life for her survival. Because the king wants strong girls with manly qualities to work as a female guard in his palace. Now Shekiba enters to the king's palace as a gift. As the writer states that "Shekiba, the half face. The girl-boy who walks like a man. Shekiba was not a whole anything" (p. 115). And she poor girl always treated like an object (a gift). Consequently, her disguised identity for her survival in male-dominated society continues. She is very brave; she tries hard for her survival in this palace. Furthermore, she becomes surprised when she observes that "the guards in this house were actually women dressed in men's clothing" (p. 155). Then the transformation takes place in her life when she has been appointed as a female guard who dressed like a male. Shekiba has actually disguised herself as a male for survival. By disguising herself she actually strives to negate the Afghan patriarchal norms. Ghafoor who was the in charge of five guards instructed her as:

She was instructed to bathe and given a set of clothing identical to what Ghafoor wore. Shekiba stared in wonder at the pants and could scarcely believe she should walk in them. She slipped one leg in and then the other, fastening the buttons at the waist. She was given a corseted undergarment that pushed her modest bosom flat against her chest. She slipped her arms into the shirt and buttoned it closed. (p. 155)

All the guards working this palace are actually women because king does not like male as guards for her palace. Shekiba as a guard has to keep an eye on the concubines of king. Shekiba by performing the role of guard feels herself comfortable. As the writer states that "She was comfortable as a man" (p. 160). As Butler states that gender is constructed by social norms and it can be changed according to the situation. It can be said that Shekiba changed her body or gender according to her need. Hence, Shekiba begins her life as a Shekib adopting male identity to survive. Furthermore, Ghafoor introduces her with the whole palace and tells her to keep an eye on surroundings of palace. As Ghafoor states that:

Just keep an eye on things. Most important is to control the ins and outs. No one is to come in without our knowledge and approval, just as no one is to go out. Every once in a while, especially for someone who is new here, they may want to wander around. It is our responsibility to guard against things like that. And sometimes the women call on us for help with something (p.201). When Shekiba as Shekib has indulged in her duties, she always struggles in her life because she wants to give meaning to her existence no matter whether as a girl or as a boy. As the writer states that "Shekiba knew in her heart that she would need to act if she were to find her true purpose" (p. 204). When Shekiba as Shekib is busy in doing her duties again she glimpses king's son Amanullah with his friend Agha Baraan. His appearance in the garden steals her heart and arouses her womanly feelings and emotional. As the writer states that "Shekib melted into Shekiba" (p. 208). It was the time from when she started dreaming about her marriage through which she can change her fate. Hashmi states that "And then Shekib realized how she could change her fate. How she could stop being gifted from one stranger to another" (p. 209). She realized when needed to marry a man and give birth to male heir, then she could break her chain of slavery (p. 209).

Just like a typical Afghan woman Shekiba thinks that by giving sons to a man she can survive in her life. The researcher Javeria Khurshed states in this regard that: “Shekiba faces similar problems being women in a patriarchal society that does not have any role for women besides bearing sons and doing housework” (p.253). That’s why she wants to get ideas from king’s concubine Mahbuba to borne sons. She replies that “why are you asking such questions? You are a man now, are you not?” (p. 226). She talks to Tariq (guard) to whom she has expressed her desire as she states that “I want to be married. I want to have children and a home. I want to live somewhere else, do not you?” (p. 229). So, she shows her desire that she wants to escape from this palace. Khurshed opines in this regard that:

Benafsha from another story of Shekiba, is one of the concubine of king where Shekiba is the king’s harem’s guard and through this character Nadia Hashimi highlights the hypocrisy of the patriarchal structure where the king, being a male can legally have a mistress whereas the concubine cannot have a lover and if she does, she is stoned to death for the crime of adultery; where the adulteress has not been formally wedded as the religion and culture demands. Benafsha is stoned to death, for the crime of love, that she has for a man who is the product of patriarchy and cannot take a stand for her and the consequence is that a woman is executed, without disclosing name of the man who has led her to the unnatural death (p. 252).

The sufferings of Shekib go on a long way as she suffers severe punishment along with Benafsha because that night Shekib was on duty. She expresses that “When the crime is adultery, the punishment is ‘sangsaar’ . I will be stoned” (p. 293). The news about Shekiba’s stoning has spread in the whole village. Bobo Shahgul states that “She ruined her father’s life and gave her entire family nothing but grief” (p. 323). Shekiba tells Benafsha that “They are going to stone us both” (p. 324). And then shows anger on Benafsha “That is your fault! They are going to stone me because of you!” (p. 324). Shekiba becomes depressed due to her life and she states that “I have been both girl and boy. I will be executed as a girl. A girl who failed as a boy” (p. 326). Then at the end the scene changes and “Shekiba was married to Agha baraan” (p. 348). Shekiba is Agha Baraan’s second wife now. He treats her as an object or as a puppet. He actually wants to have a son from her because her wife Gulnaz is unable to give him. Then Shekiba gives birth to a son. After the birth of her son she spends a happy life with Agha baraan.

With the arrival of Queen Soraya and King Amanullah things and conditions of Afghanistan are going to change. As Hashmi states that “Afghanistan was in period of rebirth” (432). Change is coming in Afghanistan especially for women and “It is a new day in Kabul!” (434). During the reign of king Amanullah women flourished. Hashmi opines that “women should also take their part as women did in the early years of our nation and Islam” (p.434). Shekiba somehow has succeeded to give a proper meaning to her life. Throughout her life, she has struggled with her fate but she struggled hard to fight for her “naseeb” (p. 435). And it tells us the miseries and pathetic condition of women in Afghanistan.

After all this discussion, it is negotiated that Shekiba strived hard to cope with all brutal situations. She disguised herself as a male guard for her survival in male patriarchal society for her survival. This shows that one can change gender identities for his/her existence. As Butler (2004) voices that:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural significance, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction (p.2553).

Such theoretical views of Butler support the Afghan tradition of Bacha posh or disguised identities of women. Both the stories of Rahima and Shekiba are connected and parallel to each other in this novel. The researcher Khurshed states about the women of Afghan society that “All these women, in one way or the other, protest against the roles traditionally assigned to them and fight for voices in a repressive patriarchal world” (p. 254). Thus, the aim of this research is to highlight the fact that Hashimi uses women’s disguise as a mask to fight against patriarchy. She chooses disguise as a way to negate the patriarchal norms of society for their survival.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The present research study attempts to define the heart shaken and piteous realities related to women survival in Afghan patriarchal society in an eloquent way. This research study has negotiated the true and zealous struggle of Rahima and Shekiba under their disguised identities to maintain their existence as a woman under patriarchal norms. Hashmih as presented distinctive perspective to the Afghan literature through her writing by enthusiastically capturing all the strident realities of patriarchy and its after effects on the lives of Afghan women. The research discusses that how women survive by disguising themselves as males in order to negate the Afghan patriarchal norms and traditions. The heart rending happening and incidents shown in the novel depict the pathetic situation of women in Afghanistan. It deals with concepts of gender disguised identities, violence, freedom, women suppression, enslavement and maltreatment with women.

The researcher has tried his utmost to bring to limelight the relevant incidents, struggles, events and narrative details related to proposed hypothesis: the evidence of violence, struggle, and women’s disguised identities for negation of patriarchal authority in Afghanistan. The research highlights that the text under study *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* does not only represents the darker and horrific life realities of Afghan women but also reveals their strength and determination to fight against the Afghan patriarchal society which is the outcome of this research study. As the researcher Roshni C states that: “the novel ends on somewhat a positive note. We can hope that the energy and courage that Rahima and Shekiba depicted give courage to the young girls in Afghanistan who have been toiling hard to make their own identity in a patriarchal society” (p. 05).

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