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Possible Solutions to the Sufferings of Afghani Women in Nadia Hashimi's novel, *That Pearls Broke Its Shell*

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Abstract

Aim: *This study aims to prove that the sufferings of Afghanistan women is the result of the practicing outdated, harmful cultural beliefs and the societal pressure exists on men to prove manhood, and the blind belief in the religious script without trying to know the real meaning of it as reflected in the novel, *That Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi.*

Methodology and approaches: *This study is designed in a qualitative way. Extensive approach is used to examine topics such as gender, culture, psychology, religions which are not directly related to the novel.*

Outcome: *Unable to confront her husband directly, Rahima escapes from her house after her son's death and dresses like a man and leads a free life like once her grandmother did. Eventually Rahima finds out her own survival tactics. It is observed that it is in the hands of women to take initiative to free themselves from all clutches.*

Conclusion and suggestions: *Afghanistan men are actually in need of intellectual inputs from other countries. Taliban leaders should be in touch with other Islamic countries where women are treated with dignity. The freedom of Afghanistan women is only in the hands of Afghanistan men. If at all they understand the capability of women; the need and functions of men and women's body; the negative results of following old fashioned cultural practices; the science behind the functions of men and women's brain; the correct interpretation of Sharia; the problem of Afghanistan women can be resolved.*

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On the eve of Taliban's return to political power again in the year 2021, there was much hue in the media, telecasting women and men trying to escape from their own country and ready to be refugees in foreign countries. All educationalists and politicians suddenly turned their attention on Afghanistan. Then the lime light was shed with the help of the media on the history of Afghanistan women who suffered under the rule of Taliban from 1996 to 2001.

Taliban strictly follow *Sharia*, a legal system of Islam. It is framed with the doctrines given in the Quran, the holy book of Islam. It functions as code of conduct to humans while they live on earth. It insists on adhering to prayers, fasting and donations to the poor. It teaches Muslims on how to lead every aspect of their lives according to Alla's (the divine god of Muslim) plan. But violence against women is carried out in the name of Islam religion. It is told that no rights are given to women in Sharia. Women are allowed to be ill-treated physically and emotionally by men. But intellectuals and humanitarians can understand how one religion can be partial to one gender. It cannot be true. It might be the result of wrong interpretation or wrong translation of the holy book.

Literature and life cannot be separated. Literature is the mirror of life. All the problems going on in the world are reflected in literature. Novels are the best source to understand the condition of men and women of any country. Hence *That Pearls That Broke Its shell* by Nadia Hashimi is taken for study to understand the plight of men and women of Afghanistan. The story revolves around two major protagonists namely Shekiba and Rahima and both are connected as great great grandmother and granddaughter. Both are separated by a century but have the same inquisite. Both fight against the violence of men. Both question when their rights are violated. Both adopt *Bacha Pose* to safeguard themselves. The author, Nadia Hashimi is an Afghan-American writer. Her parents left Afghanistan in the 1970's. She was brought up in United States, and in 2002 she visited Afghanistan for the first time. She is a paediatrician by profession. She portrays the real condition of women and men of Afghanistan beautifully in the selected novel.

Woman suffers through the means of her body every month. She suffers

under the name of culture and tradition. She suffers in the hands of men. Women need to undergo triple suffering. Suffering through monthly pain cannot be changed since it is not in human control. But the suffering under the remaining two things can be changed. Men and culture are the main reasons for the suffering of women whereas the cause of men's suffering arises from social norms and expectations.

The novel has been examined widely for unfolding the sufferings of women in the country of Afghanistan. An analysis on the practice of *Bacha Pose* is made by many scholars of Literature background. A study on *Bacha Pose* as resilience against patriarchy is made. A research work on gender intervention through toxic masculinity with reference to this novel is made. Elements of gender subalternity and resistance of Afghan women have been investigated. Trauma of being nothingness with reference to women characters of this novel is studied. Explicating violence and suffering with reference to women characters is made into analysis. The novel being a ground for rich diversity of issues related to women's suffering, many researches are done on focusing women's problem. However this paper tries to explore possible solutions to stop the sufferings of women in Afghan with reference to male and female characters in the selected novel of Nadia Hashimi's *That Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.

This study aims to prove that the sufferings of Afghanistan women is the result of the practicing outdated, harmful cultural beliefs and the societal pressure exists on men to prove manhood, and the blind belief in the religious script without trying to know the real meaning of it as reflected in the novel, *That Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi. This study is designed in a qualitative way. Extensive approach is used to examine topics such as gender, culture, psychology, religions which are not directly related to the novel.

Instead of focusing the problem, the reason for the problem needs to be identified in order to solve the problem. Afghan Women are suffering mostly because of Afghan men and age old customs of Afghanistan. Why Afghan men are aggressive with other women? Why culture and tradition in Afghanistan is

against women's empowerment? Is there any possible solution to make Afghan men and women to live in harmony with each other by referring this selected novel?

The freedom of women in India is achieved by the voice out of men in India. Many Indian men upheld the view that women should get freedom and many supported their wives to enjoy freedom. It is because of their commendable efforts, Indian law also supported them and now Indian women are free from fear in working place as well as in Mother-in-law's house. Only men suffering from inferiority complex is a threat to women in India. They only violate laws, indulge in physical and psychological assault of women. But the ratio of such men is less in India. Even India needs to go a long way to achieve hundred percentage of equal treatment of men and women.

In Afghanistan the situation is totally different. The culture, tradition, law and religion all are against women. It is painful to see that all the possible measures are taken carefully by the Afghanistan government to control movement of women. "Meticulously constructed policies of inequality" Statement on Afghanistan by Ms. Sima Bahous UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director made on 15, August 2022 exemplifies the condition of present Afghanistan rule. Women and children face many types of abuses under Taliban.

They are not allowed to study. Watching television is considered a serious crime. So it is banned. All kinds of entertainments including music and movies are banned. Above the age of ten, girls are not allowed to go to school. They are accused of cultural abuses if they disobey Taliban rules. "It didn't affect us much until we were pulled out of school, windows were blackened and music was banned." (Hashimi 27). Khala Shaima says to Madar-jan, "If you hold these girls back for that, you're no better than the Taliban who closed their schools." (11).

It is because of King Amanullah, who ruled from 1919 to 1929, many girl students had the opportunity of going to school. He gave permission to his queen to remove *burqa* (Veiling). If Afghanistan educated men and educated Taliban

who are in rule, take up the first step to stop violence against women, then the rest of the men community will at least think over. The mind of the Afghanistan men must be enlightened with modern thoughts and gender equality. They should realise the foolishness behind the so called concept of “men is higher than women”. Those who are in authority needs to have a broader vision of life and to realise that the real happiness of men arises from treating genders equally. Mothers of sons need to have zero tolerance for practicing polygamy for the sake of getting male heir.

Because of Taliban’s ignorance of the real knowledge of gender, the other half of women community is undergoing tortures. They are not allowed to walk alone in the street without their brothers or husband. Their education is under threat. Students are identified as male and female and they should not see and speak with each other. Women cannot work outside. Their jobs are taken away. Economic freedom is completely seized. They need to depend on male members for their survival. They need to cover themselves with *burqa*. Women are stoned till death for the crime of infidelity. Women are whipped for other minor offenses. They are punished for not wearing *burqa*. Even for child birth they are not allowed to go to hospital. How barbaric the idea is? The civilisation of Afghanistan has not yet taken place except during the period of King Amanullah and during the period of American support. Not only Taliban but also the whole of Afghan society seems to be more conservative in ideas and follow strictly the doctrines of *Sharia* that prevents women’s rights and voices.

Many women and men characters suffer in this novel only because of internalising the idea of having male heir is eulogised, expected and accepted by the society. Gender discrimination is passed through culture and tradition carefully in Afghanistan. There are few men characters in Nadia Hashimi’s novel, *That Pearl Broke Its Shell* do not beat their wives. When their expectation of having a male heir is fulfilled, they behave gently with their wives. Expecting a male heir is a universal disease. All over the world still somewhere, some people expect a male child. It is deep rooted in the minds of both men and women

that having a male heir is a prestigious one. In Afghanistan country, it is very intense. If Afghanistan women need to be set from torture, Afghanistan men and women should uproot the idea that men are physically strong. Many sociologist, psychologist and scientists proved that women are no way inferior to men.

In Shashi Deshpande's novel, *A matter of Time*, Kalyani's husband also suffers from the fear of not having a male heir. His mentally retarded son was accidentally missed in a railway station by his wife. From then onwards he stopped to speak with his wife. He mourns the loss of his son till his last breath. He never speaks with his daughters freely. The mental trauma of not having a male child is severe for men in India as well as in Afghanistan. After all they are all men of neighbouring countries. Even the protagonist Meera in Shashi Deshpande's novel, *The Binding Vine* longs to have a son when she is pregnant. The concept of having a male heir is deep rooted in all men and women of south Asian countries.

The culture of *bacha posh* is being in practice in Afghanistan. A girl is allowed to wear boy's cloth and appear like a son until she reaches the age of marriage or attains puberty. How foolish is this? Can a girl simply by wearing boy's cloth become a boy? The people with inferiority complex of not having a male heir accept this kind of foolish practices and such girls enjoy the freedom of going to market, playing with boys, not doing household works. Moreover fathers are affectionate to them. Instead of asking Rahima to bring coffee, her father asks her to inform her sister to bring the coffee since she is a *bacha- pose* (girl dressed as a boy). "Bachem, ask your sister to bring me a cup of tea" (49). Before changing Rahima into Rahim, her mother convinces Rahima by explaining the possibility of enjoying freedom if she becomes *Bacha-Pose*. Madar –Jan to Rahima "You'll be able to run to the store any time we need anything. You could go to school without worrying about the boys bothering you. You could play games" (23).

Fathers maintain distance with girl children. "Abdul Khaliq kept his daughters at arm's length but his sons stayed at his side."(224). Fathers are attached with male children. They cherish the moment with them. "Long overdue,

but worth the wait. Look at my son! Look at the healthy colour in his cheeks! He's a lion, my son!" (398). Rahima's husband feels proud of having a male heir, Rahima says, "He was proud to have boys" (224). Aasif gets angry when his first wife and second wife are not able to conceive a child. He worries of how society will think of him. "What are people to say? Two wives and not a single son! Do you know what that does to me?" (381). All men face the pressure of the society. Society expects only if man is able to become a father, he fulfils the norms of so called "manhood". Stanaland, a Ph.D candidate in Psychology and Public Policy from Duke University explains, "Our findings led us to hypothesize that younger men feel more pressure and are more sensitive to threats because they are in crucial identity formation years—when it's important to prove oneself as a "man" (e.g., provider, husband, business leader)" (Gillespie, np).

Professor of Sociology, Murray Knuttila says in his book *Paying for Masculinity: Boys, Men and the Patriarchal Dividend*, "notion of male superiority and male dominance as natural is really woven through our culture, our belief systems and our social institutions" (np). When wives are not able to deliver male child, naturally wife needs to undergo all the tantrums run by her husband. Shekiba's husband's behaviour with her and his first wife is cruel before they deliver a child. "Shekiba and Gulnaz kept house together and endured Aasif's outbreaks, episodes where his frustration got the best of him. He ranted, berated and slapped. He threw things, twice breaking window-panes. The cost of replacing them sent him into a new rage (387). Shekiba's livelihood is questionable if she is not able to conceive a baby. Shekiba's husband warns her that if she is not able to give him a son, she will be thrown into street. Aasif says, "I feed you and clothe you and for nothing! This is what you do to me! I should throw you out on the street!" (384).

Shekiba prays to god to give her a son so that she and her husband's first wife can live in peace. "*Please, merciful Allah, I am begging you to give Aasif the son he so desires. Satisfy his wish so that we may live in peace with this bitter man*" (395). When Shekiba delivered a son, Aasif feels happy and proud as if he

has achieved something. “Aasif walked with his head high, a smug smile on his face as his family came to visit” (395).

Brizendine, a doctor, finds out that female brain is nine percent smaller in size than the male brain. This finding made one to comprehend that men are smarter than women. In fact, the size of the brain varies but the number of brain cells remains the same. Brain cells of women are firmly packed into their skull. “The male and female brains acquire languages, solve mathematical problems, and master scientific detail in a manner wholly indistinguishable: as illustrated by the fact that in modern universities the papers sent in by male and female candidates are as a rule absolutely identical in type”(Schreiner 183).

In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill says that the size of the brain has no relation to the performance of the brain. Only the active blood circulation speeds up the brain activity not the size of the brain. Though most men’s brain is larger in size, women’s brain has got active blood circulation. Variation in the size of brain no way related to the performance of women.

This is sometimes said: ‘there is anatomical evidence that men’s mental capacity is superior to women’s: they have a larger brain.’ In fact, it is by no means established that a woman’s brain is smaller than a man’s[. . .] The size of the brain in human beings, anatomists say, varies much less than the size of the body or even of the head, and the one can’t be at all inferred from the other. Some women certainly have as large a brain as any man. (Mill 38)

Many people are perplexed about the difference between male and female is biological or socially constructed. Maria Mies, a feminist activist and scholar writes in “The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour” that the “male-ness and female-ness are not biological givens, but rather the result of a long historical process” (73). For some people masculinity is biologically constructed. For some others culture constructs masculinity. Simone de Beauvoir says, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.” When the child is brought up, society teaches set of model behaviours in appropriate to the one sex or the other. Judith

Butler says, “When the relevant “culture” that “constructs” gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny. (11)

Socialization, gendering or gender indoctrination all these terms are nothing but teaching children their gender role. According to Ruth Hartley, “socialization takes place through four process, namely, manipulation, canalization, verbal appellation and activity exposure. All four processes are normally differentiated by sex and all are features of the child’s socialization from birth on” (qtd. in Oakley 177).

The knowledge of the differences between the sex and the gender will help people to understand the reality better. The sex refers to visible differences in genitalia and its role in procreative function. The gender refers to masculine and feminine qualities and behaviour patterns. Gender is man- made. It is socio-cultural. Adler says that masculine traits are framed by society. It is not biological. One of his popular phrases was “masculine protest.” He says that both men and women are basically capable of protest but women are discouraged to be assertive but men are encouraged. “Boys were held in higher esteem than girls. Boys wanted, often desperately, to be thought of as strong, aggressive, in control - i.e. "masculine" - and not weak, passive, or dependent - i.e. "feminine." (Adler et al.65) Adler views that men’s assertiveness is the result of society’s encouragement not because of their innate superiority.

If men think women are physically weak, it is a myth. As Addler noted down, women are not trained in a way to build muscles. In the case of Shekiba, she has been trained to work in the field so she gained muscles as men do. She is able to do the work of two men do. Physically she is very strong. “Shekiba’s father took his daughter-son to the fields to help him manage their small plot of land. She hoed, she slaughtered and she chopped as any strong- backed son would do for his father. She made it possible for Ismail to go on believing that life had always been father and son. Shekiba proved to be able-bodied, affirming her

father's confidence in her ability to manage the farm. Her arms and shoulders knotted with muscle (Hashimi 20). Her uncle's wife said, "She has the strength of a man, but she does the chores of a woman" (53).

Usually death rituals are allowed to be performed by male members. It doesn't mean that men only physically strong to carry the dead body. Even women can also do the same as Shekiba did for her father. "The ritual washing should have been done by a man but Shekiba had no one to call on....She bathed him, turning away as she poured water onto his man parts and blindly wrapping his stiff body in a cloth, as she and her mother had done with her sister. She dragged him back outside and opened the earth one final time to complete her family's interment (21). Azizullah says of Shekiba, "Her strength makes me marvel. I saw her just a few days ago carrying three pails of water and walking straight, as if it were no effort whatsoever. Her uncles told me she had been keeping up her father's farm along with him" (81). One can understand that Shekiba develops her muscle by working in farm. She is encouraged to do the work so she develops man like muscles. Rahima is not allowed to do strenuous work so she is very fragile in appearance. So body fitness or developing muscles is not biological. It is the result of training.

It is not only men, but also women who internalised age old cultures and having proud in bearing male child need to realise the reality. Women who are in matriarchal authority as mother-in-laws should be aware that it is not the only work of women to beget children and taking care of house hold chores. They should give freedom to their daughter-in-laws and if their sons indulge in manhandling their wives, she needs to correct him and should avoid allowing her son to marry many wives to beget a son. Many women characters in this novel are proud of bearing male child. Shekiba's grandmother Bobo Shahgul enjoys playing the role of family matriarch. "She had earned the right to walk with her head high since she had given her husband six sons and two daughters. Now it was her turn to oversee the roost with the same iron fist she had survived"(40). Even women feel inferior, if they are not able to deliver male heir. Rahima's

mother feels inferior for delivering only girl children, “Her failure to bear a son had been a sore spot since Shahla’s birth” (12). Even wives wish to beget a son to his husband so that they can escape from wrath of their husband. Women are compelled to think that begetting a male heir alone can put a full stop to their sufferings. Rahima thinks, “If I brought a son into Abdul Khaliq’s compound, her husband and mother-in-law might not treat me as the lowly servant in the house. I doubted much would change. Bibi Gulalai looked at me as one would look at a flea-infested dog yapping at one’s feet”(194).

Two century ago also Rahima’s grandmother- Shekiba tries to collect information regarding how to conceive only male child. In the Harem, she notices one wife of the king named Mahbuba delivers only male child. So out of curiosity Shekiba even asked the science behind it. Mahbuba also gives information of how she is able to conceive only male child, “The shape of the moon, the seed of the yellow flowered plant, and the juice of an apple with no brown spots. These were simpler. But the other things, the things with the man, these made Shekiba wonder if Mahbuba was not looking to make a fool out of her. But there had been no glimmer of trickery in her eye.” (227).

The treatment met out by women who delivered male child is better than who delivered female child. Shekiba observes, “The nine women who had borne him sons were treated better than the others” (207). When some work is acknowledged and given recognition, it is natural people want to do the same. It may inspire positively or negatively. Women who delivered male children at least can escape from the anger of her husband and anger from her husband’s family. She may not be well treated but it is assured that she will not be ill-treated. This is why all women want to have a male child. Social pressure is the main cause.

The first step is to make men in higher authority understand demerits of oppressing of women community and women heads need to ensure the better treatment of women at home. If people of these two categories are enlightened, women’s suffering can be gradually reduced. Because women are the one who follows tradition and culture scrupulously. If they are aware of the foolishness

behind it, then the freedom of women is assured. Rahima's husband listened to the words of his mother, when his son is sick. Because of her wrong medicine, Jahangir died. He has got the strong belief in his mother's medicinal treatment. If he is able to listen to her mother during crucial moment, then he can also listen to her, if she is against polygamy and torturing wives. Mothers of sons have the great role in changing the scenario.

There are few male characters who are good by heart and never listen to their mother's preaching on second marriage and never allows their wife to be treated ill by their mothers. Shekiba's father is a perfect example of it. He married a woman much against to his mother's wish and lived with her alone. He never thinks of marrying another woman when his sons died in an epidemic. He only treated Shekiba as a son. He is a normal man working in his field. If he were in authority, he might have been an example to others. "Had Shekiba's father been like most other men, he might have heeded those whispers and taken a second wife. But Ismail Bardari was unlike some other men and stayed with the one wife he had, however his mother and sisters felt about her" (45). Second male character who is supportive of his wife is Fakhria's husband. Fakhria runs the shelter for young women who run away from the tortures of their husband and their husband's family. Her sister is killed by her husband. She wants to save other women from these kinds of tortures. When Hamida asked Fakhria whether her husband didn't mind about her spending time there, Fakhria answered, "No, he is very supportive actually. He's a kind man, my husband. After what happened with my sister, he knew I would go crazy just sitting there in mourning. We've got five children to keep me busy at home but I needed to do this. I wanted my children see me do something." (354)

In the beginning Shekiba's husband was very cruel to his wives. Once his manhood is proved, when their wives are able to conceive children, his male ego is satisfied. He never indulges in physical assault with his wives. Shekiba said about her husband, "I have no reason to complain, though. I am married to a man with a respectable position in the Ministry of Agriculture. He keeps us fed and

clothed in an esteemed neighbourhood of Kabul. He provides for his children and does not beat me. What more could I have asked of Allah?" (403).

Rahima's husband is so strict with his wives. When he comes to know that there is a television set in the room where his first wife and Rahima are staying to attend Parliamentary session in Kabhul, he immediately cut the television connection through his men and warned Rahima once while she was watching television at home, "What do you think you're doing? Let me catch you watching television and I'll rip your eyeballs out of their sockets!"(352). She doesn't understand the reason but her Khala Shaima correctly points out that through television women can connect with the world. Rahima's husband wants her to be away from the intellectual world so that he can have an upper hand always. In Khala Shaima's words:

He doesn't want you to see what's going on in the rest of the country, what the other women are doing. These televisions stations now have so many problems, female singers, and female news reporters. Even men advocating on behalf of women. Can you imagine that? Now can you imagine how you would feel if you were to see women like that every day? He needs to keep you blindfolded". (352)

Actually men have their own psychological problem of thinking women as their equal. The concept of Otherness arises in Men. In Simone de Beauvoir's words, "he is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other" (SS, xvi). Keeping women away from intellectual exposure cannot be a solution to their psychological problem of treating women as their equal. When Shekiba wants to have her father's land, she is beaten heavily by Hakim-*sahib*, a local authority. Even Marjan of the house, where Shekiba works, says that it is the fate of all women that they cannot claim their father's property. Only sons can inherit the property. "If you were a son, you would inherit the land. But you are not a son" (83). Since Shekiba's brothers all died in cholera epidemic, the property is divided among his father's relative that is not acceptable to her. She tries her level best to prove with the help of the deed, that property is not handed over to her father's relative

by his father. The land is taken away by her uncles without her knowledge. But that deed is torn into pieces by Hakim-*sahib*. In Shekiba's words, "Please Sahib, I have the deed to my father's land and I am his only surviving child. I want to claim my inheritance. That land should belong to me and my uncles are taking it without right." Brutally she is attacked by Hakim-*sahib* and Azizullah-*jan* for claiming her inheritance. When local authority beats her, she replies angrily, "I am only here to claim what is rightfully mine! I am my father's daughter and that land should belong to me! My father would never have chosen his brothers over me! He never did!" (129). Only Shekiba has the courage to ask her property rights but other women accept it as their fate. Marjan says to Shekiba, "My brothers divided our land and not one square inch of it was deemed mine. That's how things are! You accept it or you die. It's that simple" (142). Under the name of tradition and culture many injustices and foolish activities are being in practice. It is traditionally followed that only men can inherit the property from their parents. "Girl, you know nothing of tradition," he said and tore the deed into pieces" (129).

When Zamarud Barakati delivered a powerful speech in parliament against men, she was forced to stop her speech abruptly. She gave a powerful speech against men nominees who amass a fortune when many people are in hungry. She doesn't want to vote for such men. In her words, "how it is that some of our nominees have been able to amass a fortune when our people go hungry. How is it that they are able to live lavishly when they are engaged in simple business? We all know the answer. We know that these are sources of money that are not talked of, that are not openly discussed. Bribes. Nepotism. Drugs. These practices will bring our country down." (298). For exposing the colour of men nominees she is bombed out and lost her legs. Men who involve in mean deeds in the name of culture, they suppress women from becoming intellectuals and keep women in constant threat. Abdul Khaliq's first wife is a member of parliament but she is under the control of her husband. Whoever he wants her to vote she needs to vote. She is in control of her husband's men in parliament. "But he'll put

one of his wives in and tell her exactly what to say, how to vote, who to talk to. It's no different than Abdul Khaliq taking the seat himself!" (240). Women are kept under threat always in Afghanistan. When they are not able to fight back against men, women take it as their fate (*Naseeb*).

Survival of the fittest is wrongly understood by men of Afghanistan. Keeping one gender under constant threat and boasting about themselves is a mean strategy of survival. Equal rights and equal space must be given to all gender, whoever is fittest can survive. But only few men in Afghanistan are against this kind of mean survival but their ratio is less and they are not in power. Those who are in power they must understand the concept of gender, female, feminine, male and masculine. Because of their ignorance of the difference between sex and gender, the whole of women community is under threat. Powerful people must be knowledgeable and broad minded. If it is a game, same rule must be applied for both the party. Folding opponents' hands and announcing themselves as winners cannot be a real game. It resonates the poetry line, "Happy are the lives of sikhadas because they have voiceless wives". This is what happens in Afghanistan.

In order to suppress women, they get the support from the culture and tradition. Many traditions are reframed according to the modern society in growing countries. When there is no logic and no benefit behind the cultural practices then it is not wrong in not adopting it. Selling women to pay debts is a traditional practice in Afghanistan. Is it logical practice? How women can be treated as a material handed over from hand to another without her acceptance. Abdulkhaliq's third wife is sold off to him as a wife to pay her father's debt. Even the protagonist Shekiba is sold off to Azizullah for repaying her uncles' debt. In shelter also eight year old child is sold off to sixty years old man as a wife to pay her father's debt. Then she is sold off from her husband's hand to another person. How foolish and horrible it is? But it is a tradition which is being observed in Afghanistan. Is this a needed tradition? It is called child trafficking in modern terms Men who are in power should understand the real purpose of the

tradition, if some practices are not needed for the goodness of the human community, it can be abolished.

During the wedding ceremony of Rahima's marriage, Haji-*sahib*, the priest started with a prayer. But KhalaShaima found mistake in his pronunciation of verses from the Quran. "...Mullah-*sahib* is reading the *sura* incorrectly. *Oh causer of the causes*, the verse is meant to read. *Not causer of the fingers*. I'm sure he would want to know he was making such an egregious error, wouldn't you, Haji-*sahib*?"(147). Taliban think that their understanding of the Quran is the best. That should be proven wrong. Everything is in the mind. Believing wrong interpretation or wrong translation of the Quran is the reason for the suffering of many women in Afghan. Taliban should be made to understand that their understanding of the Quran is not right. What they have followed so far is someone's deliberately inserted rules against women's empowerment. Learned Islamic Preachers should take the responsibility of interpreting the holy book unambiguously clear. That will pave way to modern Islam where women and men can be treated equally. Already that task was taken by LaleBakhtier, an

American woman, Sufi, writer and theologian. She translated The Quran into English in *The Sublime Quran*. She says in it that men have wrongly interpreted a verse of the Quran 4:34 to allow themselves to beat their wives. "In Chapter 4, Verse 34, concerning how husbands should treat rebellious wives, she translates the Arabic word *daraba* as "go away", rather than "beat" or "hit" (19).

Men must be educated so that they can be in touch with other countries. They updated their technical skills in handling military guns in the same way they can educate themselves about gender equality. If only men become aware of gender reality, freedom of Afghanistan women can be secured. Due to severe punishments, women of Afghanistan lost all courage to fight back with men but they need to renew their energy and should give a tough fight to men of Afghan. Of late Iranian women cut their hair, burned their headscarves in protest against hijab laws. This kind of unity among women of Afghanistan needs to be strengthened.

Afghanistan men are actually in need of intellectual inputs from other countries. Taliban leaders should be in touch with other Islamic countries where women are treated with dignity. The freedom of Afghanistan women is only in the hands of Afghanistan men. If at all they understand the capability of women; the need and functions of men and women's body; the negative results of following old fashioned cultural practices; the science behind the functions of men and women's brain; the correct interpretation of *Sharia*; the problem of Afghanistan women can be resolved. Many women characters in this novel realised their capacity and voiced out their rights but it was oppressed by men of traditional followers. Men have the fear if women are given equal rights, they will not be deemed higher. Their position will be taken away by women counterparts but that is not true. Each one has got their own rights to live on earth. Each one has got their own role to play as planned by god. With much positive sight this article is concluded with Shekiba's succinct words, "and may Allah give my daughters, should I be blessed with any, a chance to do what Queen Soraya seems to believe is possible. May Allah give them courage when they are told they are out of line. And may Allah protect them when they seek something better, and give them a chance to prove they deserve more" (Hashimi 435)

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