

# The Fragility of Women's Rights in Afghanistan: A Study on Nadia Hashmi *The Pearl that Broke it's Shell*

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## **Abstract:**

Struggle is a part of life but it is the only journey for women. In most of the countries women are struggling still to live their own life, because of partial and strict rules. Inequality is practiced everywhere and male dominance is growing expeditious. In Afghanistan, women are struggling between patriarchal dominance and the absurd rules exerted upon them. Under the rule of Taliban's girls and women are deprived even the basic rights like, right to education and work. Patriarchy, poverty and lack of education for women has stifled the right of women for decades. Child marriage and abusive actions against women are exerted by their own husbands and relatives. Women are forbidden to create their own identity. The study aims to enumerate the problems they face every day, and examines how Afghan women struggle to live their normal life

**Key Words:** feminism, patriarchy, struggle, oppression, women's right

All the human beings are equal in this world, they have their own rights. Every woman wants their rights on political, economic, education; but there are countries who suppress women by hindering them to do what they want. Feminism expose the bitter truth of patriarchy and their frustration by being an underpowered and submissive spirit. The vicious circle of patriarchy tightly grips a women from her great achievements, to reveal her own identity to the world, to make her path on her own and to be an empowered women. Even nowadays women and girls are trafficked into forced marriage, slaves, and sexual abuse. Even the useful technology resources are more vicious against women and they struggle to survive even in this era.

Lois Tyson, professor Emerita of English at Grand Valley State University, USA, in her *Using Literary Theory: How To Read and Write Literature* explains about many theories in English literature, Feminist Theory is one among them. She explains about feminist as:

According to feminist theory, the patriarchy ideology or responsible for the oppression

of women throughout the world and for the failure of the most women and men to live up to their full human potential. Therefore, the definition of each patriarchal ideology is followed by feminist theory's argument against it. (141) (Tyson, 2011)

Feminist theories highlights that socializing women and men to confirm to gender roles mean limiting people's options and denying them the choice to follow the path that fulfills their potential. Therefore it says that Patriarchal programming is unnatural, unhealthy, and unethical. In Afghanistan women suffer a lot because of Taliban rules. They formulate new absurd rules for women and inhibit education, job, liberty, economic, independence, all the basic rights for women. Women are under the control of men and are not allowed to step out without their male guardian. They treat women as homemakers and slaves for their husband. In the period of Taliban's rule, women face so many struggle. Taliban's imposed rules for women like; no education, a strict dress code, not to go jobs, and to be an homemakers. The Taliban's authorize Sharia Law. The primary aims of Sharia law are justice, mercy, fairness, humanity. Sharia Law dictates Islamic people on how to live a proper and good mannered life. For every Muslim Quran is mandatory and the Sharia Law is based on holy Quran which on how a women should live her life properly and with respect and good manner. But the Taliban's does not follow the purpose and intention of the law, they just utilize the law. By using Sharia Law, the Taliban's treat the women as slaves, and cause difficulties for the people. Sharia Law is a way of living, it is not meant to be associated with political power. They modified Sharia law with new rules and regulations, and if the women fail to obey the law they were severely punished by the Taliban's (stoned and lashed in public). The women in Afghan suffering the most because of the vulgar punishments of the Taliban's. Even the women journalist and lawmakers are afraid to move or spill out against the Taliban's. Farzana Kochai, a member of Afghan fears for her life. She says that the Taliban's are unpredictable and Afghan women know the nature of Taliban's. She says that after the take over of Taliban's she lost her freedom. Women workers are hiding from the Taliban's to save their lives. Nadia Hashmi's *The Pearl that Broke It's Shell* centers on an young Afghan woman Rahima and her great-great grandmother who faces the oppression and patriarchy issues. Rahima is an submissive, brave and optimistic young girl. Rahima was dominated by her drunkard father and later by her abusive husband. Rahima's father didn't allowed her to go to school "In the end, Padar-jan decided to pull us out of school again (5)(Hashimi, 2014). She is forced to marry a in her young age to a man who already has four wives and treats Rahima as a sexual object, a slave, and physically abused her. She struggles herself to liberate her from the oppressions. Her great-great grandmother also suffers patriarchy dominance and oppression. She is not even allowed to get her own property from her uncle. She struggled her whole life to get back her rights and freedom. Rahima also facing the same problem even after generation passes.

Children are forced to marry men who are older and they face rape, abuse, beating and starvation. In Afghanistan most of the women are illiterate and most of them are forcefully married. Due to debt and starvation parents vend their girl as they have no option to solve their problems. In the eastern Afghanistan market, women and girls are



openly sold out. Most of the victims are widows, poor families children, wives of abusive husband and abandoned girls. They do not even consider women as a human being. Women are used by men and they are not even allowed to talk normally. They have to speak in a low voice and have to bear all the torture and needs by men. 97 percentage of women in Afghan are facing domestic violence and forced marriage.

Seven years old Fathima was married to man old enough to be her grand father. She is abused sexually and faces starvation. Her family has disowned her and her in-laws try to kill her. Due to severe torture she commits suicide, and she is hospitalized for a while but her mother in-law did not allowed her to go to hospital by refusing to buy her medicines. Fathima says that after her marriage her dreams are shattered. Patriarchy is also based on sexism. In *The Pearl that Broke it's Shell* Rahima was forcedly married in her thirteen to an adult man who demand to Rahima's father for her daughter for marriage and he also has four wives and children. Her husband only used her for her body. He abuse her and physically torture her physically and mentally. "In fact, it put me right in front of this war world who demanded at my hand in marriage. Barely a teenager. I was to be wed with to this gray-haired fighter with bags of money and armed men to do his binding". (133) (Hashimi, 2014)

In the Talibans rule women lose their rights in political, social, economical participation. The dreams of all women and girls for living in Afghanistan have been shattered. The joy, bliss, brightness of the Afghan women is gone when their freedom was snatched by the Talibans. It is a curse to women to live in Afghanistan. Nearly 60,000 Afghans have left their own country, and have become a refugees to save their life and their generation. Kamilaa Alamgir is an Afghan who has lived in India as a refugee for 25 years, and her dream of returning to her motherland was shattered because of the victory of Talibans. Her has become a miserable one. She spend her life with teary eyes and a aching heart. At first she had hopes that she will go back to her motherland and be happy but now she has lost all her hopes and is living an unwanted and miserable life.

Gender inequality between men and women make women suffer from social injustice. According to the men women are useless and they are just a prey for them. Men hold all the power even freedom, rights, education all the basic needs are possible for men and forbidden to women. In this independent world women are living their life like a prisoner. There is no hope of living a independent and blissful life. In *The Pearl that Broke it's Shell* Rahima and Shekiba undergoes the bacha-posh tradition. Because of the gender inequality they transform them into man (bacha-posh) to roam outside and to go out for shops. Rahima is a brave and bold girl because no women could go to shops but Rahimabravely managed it."Two weeks into out expulsion school, the shop owners had gotten to know me. That were not many nine-year-old girls who would walk determinedly from shop to shop". (6) (Hashimi, 2014). "Feminist theory points out, however, that these roles are produced by patriarchy rather by nature. And they have been used to justify many in equities, which still accurate today". (Tyson, 2011)

In the term of patriarchy women struggle in many forms like economic class, religion, sexual orientation. They are oppressed in all divisions like socially, economically,



psychologically. They were tired of being a submissive soul. They have to sacrifice their whole life living under male domination. In this novel Rahima is submissive under her husband, she was powerless she can't do anything without the permission of her husband. She has to bear the sexual abuse and torture done by her husband. She is just like a puppet for her husband. She wants to defend him and live a free life but she was fears that anything would happen worse if she oppose her husband.

Each time, I felt dirty and weak. I hated that I was powerless under him. I was supposed to be this man's wife and that changed everything I wasn't supposed to fight back. And the look on his face told me that fighting back would make matters worse. (174) (Hashimi, 2014)

In Afghanistan 10 of 1000 people are seeking refuge; five million children are facing famine. And there is 500% increase in child marriage. Surviving for women in Afghanistan is too difficult. Everyday they have to face so many struggles and live a stressful life because of the Taliban. They wander for a peaceful life. On the other hand women are facing domestic violence.

The Afghan women are oppressed because of the Taliban, male dominance, patriarchal issues, domestic violence. They want to live their life freely and they want to achieve their goals. In *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, Rahima was not allowed to go out by her mother-in-law and her husband she was caged by them but she wanted to escape from them. So she tries to get out and she successfully reached the front gate of her house and she escapes from the clutches of her husband and runs away to lead her own life as she wants to. She decides to live her life on her own as an independent woman. "I moved closer and closer to the front gate, my palms sweaty. Don't hesitate, I told myself, and opened the gate to walk out, waited and but heard nothing. No one had even noticed". (184) (Hashimi, 2014) Women's rights are in decline in Afghanistan. To get the freedom back women have to raise their voice they have to come forward to break such absurd and ridiculous laws. Women need to be empowered beings. "Patriarchy as a political structure seeks control and subjugate women so that that possibilities for making choices about their sexuality, childrearing, mothering, loving and laboring or curtailed". (Eisenstein 1983)

Women have equal rights in the society. The gender difference is just a difference between sex. Women are conditioned by the society that they are weak, submissive and unworthy. All humans are equal in this world and they should be treated equal with respect and dignity. Every woman should stand in their own and lead their life on the basis of what they wish and want.

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