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Subalternity in *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*: An Alternative Feminist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The word 'subaltern' has become a cliché for women's voicelessness and subjugation. The representation of subalterns remains an important element in South Asian literature. This research attempts to show how Nadia Hashimi, an Afghan-American descendent, makes it possible for the voices of these marginal characters to be heard aloud. The study shows that these women took recourse to the use of their bodies as they are the only available revenue for their resistance. It explores that the desire of freedom creates a close connection between two Afghan women belonging to different generations. The purpose of this research is to highlight the elements of gender subalternity and resistance of Afghan women, the relationship between Islam and women, women's conditions in Islamic countries, and relationship between genders. Therefore, the study focuses on the theoretical paradigm of Spivak and Mohanty on the notion of subalternity. The research concludes that subaltern can speak, and they did speak but no one tried to understand them. Women as subaltern are conscious of their subalternity and they struggle to set themselves free from the chains of male-oriented societal and cultural norms.

Keywords: *Subaltern, Gender Subalternity, Phallogocentric Hegemony, Marginalization, Othering*

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1. Introduction

Humiliation, tyranny and powerlessness are the issues of women in many cultures. Despite much progress, female is always subjugated to male and man-made societal norms. The research intends to find out a way to eradicate this humiliation of women from societies and cultures. From centuries women are becoming helpless victims of cultural and societal norms. Besides male-oriented norms, religious fundamentalists have also made lives of women more vulnerable. A vast literature was written on the condition of women in societies. Autobiographies were written and protagonists of the novel fought against the societal system and cultural norms for their freedom. Said in his essay *Feast of Unveiling* (1973) sheds light on the western ideologies who considered Muslim woman as "a backward individual who living within the four walls of the house, veiled, crippled and ignorant who lacked the ability to accomplish the social roles" (Said, 1973, p.136).

Cultures have usually robbed the subalterns especially women brutally and stripped off their rights. The best way to destroy this malice from society is by giving a voice to marginalized community in discourse and in legislative issues. Spivak tried to challenge colonialism through her theories. Her critical theories raise the issue of marginalization of people especially women in the society. She says that people are still under the influence of colonial power structures. Morton in his book, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003), says that the societal structures established during the rule of colonialists have always molded the life of postcolonial nations in socio-economic and political aspects. Many anti-colonial theorists have emphasized on the socio-political inequalities faced by colonized nations during colonization. In order to search this away, a novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014) by Nadia Hashimi has been selected, who is an American writer of Afghan descent.

1.1 The Pearl that Broke its Shell: Background

The Pearl that Broke its Shell (2014) is a well-read novel of Nadia Hashimi. This story revolves around Afghan Families, especially two female characters, Rahima and Shekiba. This story is a comprehensive study of treatment of patriarchal society with women in Third World countries, especially Afghanistan as Hashimi depicts in her novel. Condition of women in Afghanistan was so bad that one could not imagine. Later on, women were given rights and gender equality but Russian Soviet invasion and Taliban laws made the situation even worse. Women were dehumanized and stripped off from their rights. It was not allowed to a woman to walk freely in streets without any male guardian. Hashimi tries to depict such situation in her story. This story provides an intimate look on how cultures and society treats a woman and how religions are being misused for the sake of personal benefits. Gender subalternity, humiliation, powerlessness and tyranny are the issues shown in the story.

The title of the novel *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014) is quite significant and is the major theme of the novel. It associates its characters with the on-going struggle in their lives to break patrilineal norms and conservative traditions. Rahima breaks her shell by adopting a custom of bacha posh. She decides to live life to its fullest, according to her own desires and ways. She frees herself from the shackling chains of norms and constraints. Thus, she becomes a pearl who breaks its shell.

The issue of gender subalternity is as old as the existence of man in the world. Women are considered lower and subjugated to men. She is always considered as the Other to man. "Man is the Subject and Absolute but woman is the Other" (De Beauvoir, 1988, p.13). This novel depicts the journey of Afghan women in the male-dominating society and their struggle for survival. The novel is an edifying tale of tyranny, oppression, subalternity and domestic violence. It is a tale of two women separated by time but sharing same destiny. Hashimi weaves the web of her novel in tough political situations. She has narrated the history of Afghanistan, the Soviet and American invasion and its consequences which inflicted havoc in the lives of Afghan women.

Some feminist researchers hold a view that Islam can be defined as a patriarchal religion. It oppresses women and legitimizes gender inequality. Like Said, Chandra Mohanty argues that this picture results from

'western ethnocentrism' (Said 1993). Her essay, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1984), is the first ever written critique of the hegemonic feminist discourse of the West by an Indian. She also analyzes western feminists' representation of Third World women. She shows two dimensions through which woman can be viewed, as an Other and as real, material subjects of histories. Most of the religions view the relationship between genders as a patriarchal one. Al Hibri writes in *Women and Revolution* (1981):

God was declared male, and man was declared to be created in His likeness. Eve became the symbol of temptation and sin. The woman was consequently judged as less likely candidate for salvation and an everlasting life in heaven than man (Hibri, 1981, p.176).

So, this novel could be used as a tool to explore the issues of humiliation and tyranny against women in many cultures for centuries especially in Afghanistan.

As this research focuses on the analysis of the selected novel with the feminist lens, so this part explains the theoretical approaches of feminism. It includes the socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-historical development of feminism in Afghanistan throughout the history. This section also includes an overview of concepts, such as the notions of gender inequalities, patriarchy, subordination, female subjugation and subalternity which helped to lay the foundations for this study.

1.2 Feminism in Afghanistan: A Theoretical-Historical Approach

Feminism as the theory and practice performed a major contribution in the representation of women. Feminism advocated the women rights across the globe. The oppression of women by men, their devalued, devalued status in the society gave rise to the roots of feminism. Feminism as theoretical approach attempts to represent the comprehensive description of subjugation and subordination of women, the causes of subordination and the strategies to overcome this subjugation with liberation.

In West the feminist like Virginia Woolf and Wollstonecraft questioned the status of women in society by highlighting the issues of patriarchy, suppression and gender inequality. Feminism gain more importance with the philosophies of Beauvoir. In her book *The Second Sex*



(1988), she explained that the term sex is biological while the term gender is a social construct. She gave rise to the issue of feminism at the level of gender biasness. She writes, “there is no way out for her than to lose herself, body and soul in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential” (Beauvoir, 1988, p.643).

The history of Afghanistan showed the progressive development towards gender equality and women rights. Women were given the equal rights to men in 1923 by the Afghan law but all of this suddenly changed with the Russian Soviet invasion and emergence of Taliban that brought the violence and oppression on Afghan women. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Afghanistan witnessed the impoverishment of feminism. In 8th March 1965 the first women's international day was celebrated at Kabul under her command. In the editorial of the New Kabul's Time, she wrote: “Women have the privilege of equal rights, education, health and work for the establishment of the country. Women's knowledge, education and freedom are utmost responsibilities of the government” (Gosh, 2003, p.14).

Besides all the feminist reforms the major part of Afghanistan was practicing the old conservative and tribal rules. The tribal Afghan women were still living a miserable and subjugated life. The women outside Kabul were stripped of their basic rights. After the invasion of Russian Soviet union in Afghanistan, the civil war was started. The Taliban or Mujahidin took control of Afghanistan and forced Russia to abscond the country. In 1996 the Taliban took control of the capital (Kabul) and declared Afghanistan an Islamic state. It was the year when demise of women in the whole Afghanistan started, working women indulged themselves in begging and prostitution to earn for their families. This shows their resistance against patriarchy. Women stoning to death became popular and legal law in Afghan.

1.3 Gender Subalternity: A Postcolonial Perspective

Sharp in *Geographies of Postcolonialism* (2009) writes, postcolonialism is a time period after the colonialism. The postcolonial literature opposes the process of colonialism and depicts deep social and cultural effects on the colonies for example the colonized people lost their identities, language and cultural values. The postcolonial literature examines the cultural, psychological and social struggles of the

Third World for their survival being colonized, oppressed, racist and sexist nations.

In the cultural hegemonic work of *History told from below* (1937), Antonio Gramsci defined the word subaltern as the social group who is excluded geographically, politically and socially from a society's established structures of hegemony, power and politics. In the postcolonial theory the term subaltern is attached with inferior and lower social groups of the society. According to *Spivak* the word subaltern is not just a word to describe the oppression and otherness but in postcolonial studies this term denotes everyone who has no power socially and culturally and had a limited access to his basic rights (Spivak, 1988). This definition explains that a subaltern is someone who has something but instead not being allowed to have it. The term subaltern is a synonym of proletariat (Gramsci, 1937).

Besides Gramsci and Spivak, the Indian postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha defined subaltern as the socially oppressed group of the society especially racial minorities, who are socially subordinated in front of the powerful hegemonic forces of the society. So, subalterns are the suppressed people of the society who are forced to live a marginalized life. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *Nation and Narration* (1990) said that instead of seeing the world as a huge coat of many colours, the western white people see the world in terms of good and bad opposites. They put themselves always at the good end and everyone else who is different at the bad end. Bhabha in his book *Cosmopolitanism* (2002) objected on the innate and continuous homogeneous traditions that falsely established the subordinate and inferior status of Third World nations. He also certified that cultures can be viewed as the transformation and interaction between two states besides the traditional binary oppositions. Spivak objected on the European literature for supporting European colonialism under the label of feminism. Western feminism is absurd in a way that it does not speak for the rights of non-western women. Rather the West has adopted the agenda of feminism for the purpose of cultural hegemony and power over Third World. “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1994, p.93). Spivak criticized that why women need men to be saved. Women are not objects to be saved. In her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak explained that the subaltern have no voice.

Hall in *The West and The Rest: Discourse and Power* (1992) that colonizers imposed their culture, ideas, knowledge through the use of their language on colonized people. "To speak means to assume a culture, above all to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1965, p.18). Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1965) explained that colonialism and its impact cannot be only seen as the failure of one or two nation (Europe or Colonized) but it can be seen as a destruction of mental and emotional states. The colonialism is the cause of violence, suppression, subjugation, patriarchy and mental disorders (like hysteria, depression).

McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000) agrees with Spivak's view of subalterns that they are not given any chance to speak. McLeod says that subaltern women tried to raise their voice but others did not know how to understand their voices with accuracy. He concludes his point by claiming that it is not that subaltern women did not speak rather silence of subaltern women is a result of failure of interpretation rather than communication. Society did not know how to interpret the meaning from the voices of marginalized women (McLeod, 2000, p.195).

In conclusion, the term subaltern that was originated by Spivak can be employed to those individuals who were assigned as the 'sub' and 'secondary' status in the society. For Spivak, the oppressed subalterns cannot speak even if they tried because of the opposite voices that devoiced and silenced them by ensuring that subalterns cannot speak. Despite of their oppression subalterns can speak. They always raised their voices through literature against the opponent forces. The oppressed voices, their cries, sacrifices and tragedies dragged the attention of others towards subalterns. In Afghanistan women are considered as the second sex. They are sufferers and slaves of their conservative, tribal cultural norms and values. In the eyes of Orientalists, non-western women (subaltern) are like the East, so they can be easily colonized and suppressed.

Many Arab and Afghan writers attempted to voice the oppressed women of Arab and Afghanistan through their literature. Fadia Faqir a Jordain-Britain novelist, in her novel *My Name is Salma* (2007) wrote about the agonies and miseries of a Bedouin woman who became pregnant out of wedlock. For the sake of her survival she took asylum in England under a

Christian identity. She suffered the racial and ethnic abuse in England by the natives. The novel narrates the double victimization, patriarchal suppression, honour killings and racial abuse. Being a migrant and marginalized she was suppressed by everyone in England. To express her pain and agonies she started to write letters to describe her pain and voice her agonies. Fadia Faqir, in another novel *Pillar of the Salt* (1996), explained the colonialism of Israel on the Palestine and the sufferings of Palestinian women. Khaled Hosaini pictured the journey of an oppressed subaltern in his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2006). His renowned novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003) portrayed the image of a suppressed subaltern to regain his independent identity. Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) is another example of gender subalternity in postcolonial fiction. Alice, as declared by Hanif, is triply marginalized figure in Pakistani society. She is marginalized not only on the basis of gender as well as religion and caste.

A very real example is Pakistani author Tehmina Durani's autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord* (1991) describes her sufferings and escape from bad marriage. She describes the plight of women who "exist as inferior beings, both intellectually and socially" (Omar, 2005, p.131). This novel is the best example of tolerating physical, emotional and sexual violence as patience has been taught to a woman. Tehmina Durani describes her plight in the following words:

There was no a day that Mustafa did not hit me. I just tried my best not to provoke him... I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances would reinforce his image of me as common slut... His class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man's carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was potential adulteress, not to be trusted. Mustafa did not realize that he had crushed my sensuality; I was on automatic pilot, responding as much as was important for him, but never feeling anything myself. It was at these times that I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession (Durani, 1991, p.106-107).

After a long struggle, Tehmina finally decides to get separated from her husband but she pays a very heavy price of bodily violence. She finds her voice in her writings. In her writing she gives a voice to her endured sufferings and gathers her shattered identity. It is here we realize the role of feminist literature which it plays in sharing



the sufferings of women and their quests to self-actualization. S. P. Swain in her work, *The Feminine Voice in Indian Fiction* (2005), urges women to, “throw off the shackles of tradition, to educate and carve out an identity for themselves” (Swain, 2005, p.16). Tehmina finally knows the importance of speaking out and stresses that: “Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy” (Durani, 1991, p.362). Thus, female figures need to break themselves free from the confines of phallogentric patriarchy to realize a female identity. This representation of women in literature portrays their suffering, their struggles against man-made societal norms and their struggles for survival in male-oriented society. Women’s resistance against patriarchy shows that they are not passive members of society as represented by western feminists. This study also sheds light on the contribution of women in socio-political and economic aspects of society. Women as the Other did raise their voices and still they do for their freedom and rights but it is always the society who never tried to interpret those voices. All the feminist writers focused on one side of the story, victimization of women, they never portrayed the positive aspect of that victimization that how those women resist against patriachs and try to make their own identity. This outlook changes the reputation of eastern women as active and revolutionary members of society.

In the same manner, Nadia Hashmi as an Afghan-American writer in her novels *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014), *When the Moon is Low* (2015), *The Half from the East* (2016) and *A house without windows* (2016) represented the journey of Afghan women from the patriarchal norms and their fight for survival. Her debut novel *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* was published in 2014, interweaves the tale of two women who were combined by same fate but belonging to different ages. Besides the tales of Rahima and Shekiba, Hashimi comprehensively narrated the history of Afghanistan, the Soviet and American invasion and its impact on the indigenous Afghan women. The novel is a cultural tale of powerlessness, inequalities, domestic violence, fate, freedom-fighting, and quest of identity.

1.5 Alternative Feminism in a Glance

Alternative feminism is the opposing theory to feminism. It claims that differences exist among women and they share different

experiences. So, it is not correct to categorize all women under the single group (Rothfield, 1991, p.56-67). But differences between them do exist as Mohanty in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1984) says that it is not correct to categorize all women into single entity because they do and do not share common experiences. These differences between women lead the feminism to alternative feminism because theories cannot possibly do justice to all. It may be justifying for some women’s situations but it can never represent the experiences of all women. So, it cannot categorize women in single group of womanhood.

1.4 Spivak and Mohanty’s Reflections on Subalternity of Women

The term subaltern was first adopted by Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist philosopher, to represent the people of ‘inferior rank’ (Gramsci, 2004). Gramsci used the term subaltern to denote subordinate or non-hegemonic groups or classes. The concept of subaltern is meant to cleave several kinds of political and cultural binaries. Ranajit Guha suggests that this subaltern group is ignored in studies of political and cultural change (Guha, 1988).

The subaltern notion generates an issue in postcolonialism, when Spivak critiques the postulation of the Subaltern Studies group in the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), because she elaborates the problems of subaltern by looking at the situation of gendered subjects in general and of Indian women in particular the ideological edifice of gender keeps the male dominant. In her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), she asserts the limitation of the subaltern i.e. whether they can speak or not. To Spivak, subaltern means the oppressed subjects or inferior rank, whose voices are unheard by the oppressors, as they are realized that the subaltern has neither any history nor any identity because of which they do not deserve to be spoken. For her, the term ‘subaltern’ is flexible because it can accommodate the social identities and struggles (such as woman or colonized) that do not fall under the terms of ‘strict class analysis’. She says that she likes the word ‘subaltern’ for one reason because it is totally situational (Spivak 1990, p.141). She, being a feminist, shows her more concern for the women and finds that the subaltern women’s existence is too vague to speak.

She regenerates the feminist discourse in her essay and focuses upon some problems of the Third World women. Her writings reflect the background of women's struggle and oppression in the Third World countries. She challenges the universal claim of western feminism, to speak for all women, regardless of differences in class, culture, language or nationality. She says that she is not against feminism, but feminism needs to concentrate on this variation that exists among women and help them to achieve their personal goals.

Spivak's theory of subalternity takes the perspective of Other as the one who had or has no voice because of the race, class or gender. Spivak says that in the case of academic feminism the discovery is that to take the privileged male of the white race as a norm for universal humanity is no more than a politically interested figuration. In *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988), she says that our ideology always keeps the male superior to woman and if we see in the postcolonial context then subaltern neither has any history nor any voice. As far as woman is concerned then women as subaltern are doubly marginalized and they are more deeply in shadow. She strongly rejects the definition of woman which depends on the word man. She tries to define woman with a deconstructive perspective and appeals for the necessity of definition which can allow women to stand and walk independently instead of becoming a shadow of man.

Mohanty analyses the fabrication of Third World women in (western) feminist texts, as singular monolithic subject. In her work *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1984), she portrays her significant contribution to feminist postcolonial and transnational studies over the two last decades. She distorts the political practices of western feminists and limits the prospect of alliance among western feminists, working class and women around the world. Western feminist writings on Third World women are political and discursive practices, and also a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses. Thus these practices subsist within relations of power.

In the book *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Colonial Discourses* (1984), Chandra Mohanty criticized western feminism as a failure to explain the Third World feminisms. Third World women were presented as the monolithic object. Western feminism perceives colonialism as the

practice that involves the social, economic and political system of overt domination. Western feminism is a practice that is implicating the discursive colonialism in the form of social hierarchies, ethnocentrism, gender inequalities and cultural domination. Mohanty pointed out three major problems in the western feminist discourses. Firstly, western feminism presents Third World women as an object that has no value in the process of political change. Mohanty proposes that Third World women had a status in their history, politics and society. So, they cannot be only perceived as an object (Mohanty, 1984, p.58). Secondly, she noticed that in order to fulfill the first presupposition the western feminism used the evidence of few happening. For example, honour killing, not every woman of Third World is a victim of honour killing. So, the representation of one example or fact is not the representation of entire structure. Thirdly, western feminism neglects the factor of struggle and liberation. The women of Third World do have some problems and needs, but they do need a choice of freedom and decision. Mohanty puts forward the example of veil. To West, veil of a woman is a prison in which she is captured. But the Eastern woman perceives veil as a part of their identity and a symbol of solidarity. So, the western feminism must avoid generalizations and western-centric views about the Third World women.

By taking into account the collaborated framework of Spivak and Mohanty, this research investigates Hashimi's novel *The Pearl that broke its Shell* (2014). It scrutinizes only those particular fixtures which may expose subalternity of female characters and their struggle against it, how this marginalization and struggle is creating problems in their lives and in their relations. It also highlights those parts of novel which may fall under the theoretical paradigm, where Nadia Hashimi provides the solution of those problems.

2. Causes of Women Subjugation and Obscurity to Question the Status Quo in *The Pearl that Broke its Shell*

Mohanty in her essay *Under Western Eyes* (1984) has criticized on the discrimination and between western women and the Third World women. For the discrimination between western women as active and the Third World women as passive is based on a false claim. She explains that the western feminists ignore the concept of race in representation of



Third World women. The western feminists assign certain characteristics with Third World women that they are backward, uneducated, non-progressive and religious. She explains that the common image of Third World women is more religious, dependent and pious in comparison with First World women who are liberal, independent and secular. The Third World women are struggling continuously against their racial discrimination, heterosexuality, class and gender oppression. Mohanty provided a detailed framework to comprehend the oppression, subordination and discrimination in gender relations.

Kimberle Crenshaw claimed that the Third World women are victim of double discrimination. First they are discriminated on the grounds of their race and color, secondly as women (Crenshaw, 1991b, p.1244). Spivak neglects all the debate between the distinction among western and non-western women. She rather focuses on the cause that mutes the subaltern women voices. In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak explains that the subaltern can speak if they retrieve and restore history and question their identity to find out the cause of their oppression. Hashimi presented history as an important factor in the novel, *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014). The stories of Rahima's great-great-grandmother, provides a motivation and impulse to her to move forward in her life. In the time of her oppression, Rahima tries to remember the stories about her great-great-grandmother Shekiba. The story also shows that besides the gap of a century between the tales of these two women, their sufferings and its causes are almost same.

Afghanistan is a country with a vast history of feudalism, war, monarchy, foreign invasion, rigid traditions, religion etc. The Afghan men implement a patriarchal system in society and practice it at their homes and domestic structures. As in theory of postcolonialism Spivak explains, the white men came to save brown women from brown men. The colonization, Soviet invasion and freedom fights are major causes of oppression and subjugation of women. Cultural and societal norms are other causes for women suppression especially in Afghanistan. The struggle for land and power divides Afghan society into social hierarchical structures of class discrimination where men control social power on land and property. Men in Afghanistan consider women as their property and belonging. The freedom

fighters like Rahima's father fight for the freedom of their land and in return they occupy everything they like. The outsiders (foreigners, NATO, America) are providing financial aid to these local fights. Rahima explains the condition of war and power in Afghanistan after the control of Taliban. She says, "Everyone wants control and power but it was very hard to get. But Abdul Khaliq was one who had it" (Hashimi, 2014, p.25). Abdul Khaliq is a warlord, who has a large network of power and he owns a business of drugs. Rahima's father, as a teen age boy of seventeen, fights on the side of Abdul Khaliq. When he returns from the war he was a different person. He starts medicating himself with opium. His parents compel him to marry to make him a normal man, but a beautiful bride and his innocent daughters are failed to bring him back. The opium Abdul Khaliq is providing, he calls it "crucial for his men to enhance their ability to carry on the war as the ammunition" (Hashimi, 2014, p.25). The Taliban initiates a civil war in country and their power grows stronger day by day. It affects every native and local of Afghanistan. The schools, colleges and universities are closed. Windows and doors are shut down and covered with colors. Taliban declares that no woman is allowed to wander in street without her blood relative. Every kind of art, music and outdoor activity is banned. Abdul Khaliq and his army fights against Taliban to defend their land, property and honour. After weeks of war, explosions, bombing, burying Abdul Khaliq defends his honour as a warlord by defeating Taliban.

After the incident of 9/11, situation of Afghanistan became shoddier and Afghan women were the main sufferers. The foreign forces especially America plays a significant role in the civil war and war against terrorism in Afghanistan, as explained in novel (Hashimi, 2014). Rahima's cousin Sadiq informs them about American invasion, he explains they are bombing Taliban with big rockets because they are upset on Taliban who have destroyed their 'one building in America' (Hashimi, 2014, p.26). Rahima's father brings back the rage of war on their home, whenever he comes. He beats his family and oppresses them in a brutal way. Due to American invasion and Taliban rule, half of Afghanistan crumbles in fear and anxiety. Their houses, building and life have been destroyed. Rahima thought that, "If America would upset about it to?" (Hashimi, 2014, p.27). Spivak asserts that White settlers made native people to

believe that they (brown men) are inferior to them and they (white men) have come there to civilize them and to save brown women from brown men. But white settlers imposed their rule on brown men and they made the situation worst. Colonials and patriarchy both oppressed the women for their own purposes. Everyone followed the principle that offence is the best defense (Spivak, 1994, p.93).

The warlord Abdul Khaliq asks for Rahima's hand. Her father considers him a powerful man who can change their family's lot (Hashimi, 2014, p.93). Padar Jan (Rahima's father) agrees to marry his daughter with Abdul Khaliq on a huge bridal price. Rahima is forced to marry him and she thought that, "Men could do what they wanted with women" (Hashimi, 2014, p.96). Besides Rahima, Abdul Khaliq has taken his third wife Shahnaz from a South Northern village where he defeats Taliban. In the return, Abdul Khaliq and his men take everything they want. They destroyed many houses by harassing and rapping women. Abdul Khaliq takes Shahnaz from her town as a price of his bravery. From then, she has never seen anyone from her family. Shahnaz misses her family but she is still grateful to Abdul Khaliq who has taken her as a bride instead of leaving her in disgrace. Soukarja Ghosal (2013) mentions that a victim of patriarchal dogma silently accepts the role of subordinate as natural. Silence of women, a display of modesty and purdah, serves to strengthen the male domination over the female body and desire.

Back in earlier century, the king of Afghanistan Habibullah keeps a lot of women in his palace in a place called 'harem' (Hashimi, 2014, p.117) where no other man is allowed to enter. Shekiba is assigned to guard those women. She is explained that these women are gift to king or sometimes people sell their daughters to king for goods. These Harem women are in king's palace to please him and give birth to his children. When a woman Benafsha is caught to have an affair she is sentenced to death by stoning. As the King is the monarch of Afghan society, so no one can question his actions. Spivak (1987) says that in a class divided society money is the only empowering agent; it can earn status and social respectability. Patricia Jeffery in her work, *Frogs in a Well* (1979), states that women are not subordinate because of the fact of exchange but because of the modes of exchange and values attached to these modes.

Hashimi in *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014) also explains the culture and traditions of Afghanistan. All of the traditions of Afghanistan are made by men to fulfill their choices. They often break their traditional values but if a woman breaks it the circumstances are different for her. Rahima and Shekiba both suffer by the hand of traditions and societal norms. Deborah Cameron in *The Feminist Critique of Language* (1990) points out how social taboos and restrictions prevent women from speaking:

Ever where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked or ignored (Cameron, 1990, p.4).

For Rahima, "Traditions had not lost their importance between Bibi Shekiba's time and now" (Hashimi, 2014, p.98). Women are forced to marry out of their choice. They are forced in polygamy and early age marriages. Most of the Afghan men had more than one marriage as represented by Hashimi in the selected novel.

Rahima's father considers it a shame to have no son. It is a tradition in Afghanistan, a man's honour, dignity and name has been carried by a son. Women are taught to obey their fathers, husbands and sons. Their task is only to perform domestic chores and give birth to sons in the order to dignify their men's name and status in society. Shekiba's husband feels ashamed and distressed because he has two wives but no son. When Shekiba gives birth to her son, he prefers her over his first wife because Shekiba gives honour to his name and status in society. Rahima's father beats his wife because she gives birth to five daughters and no son. These men blame women for not producing their sons. In a phallogocentric hegemonic society women are considered as child producing machines, and this makes no difference whether they belong to upper class or to economically under-privileged class. Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), states that it is our societal framework which always keeps the man dominant and superior to woman. She tries to define woman with a deconstructive perspective which can allow woman to walk and stand independently instead of becoming a shadow of man.

Rahima's mother (madar jan) transforms her into a bacha posh, she is told



that she is breaking tradition. Women cannot decide anything for their children. Even as a mother, Madar jan (Rahima's mother) is unable to resist on her daughters early age marriages. Rahima's father demands one million Afghan rupees as bride price by calling it a tradition. But it is not his family's tradition to ask for bride price. Rahima considers these traditions as worthless and fake. Family's honour and respect for elders, and cultural values have a great importance for Afghan men. But they easily violate their laws, traditions and values. Their traditions and cultural values are just mere lies and justifications of their wrong doings. There is not any place where woman is free from patriarchal claw. It has become difficult for women to question the status-quo because whenever women try to question they are forced to remain quiet. When Rahima's mother transforms her into a bacha posh, it seems acceptable to society but not for monarchs. Abdul Khaliq marries Rahima to make her realize that she is a woman and an object and not more than this. On the other hand when Shekiba tries to raise her voice for her property right she is abused and told that it is not woman's right to question anything in Afghan society. Mohanty mentions that cultural and class differences within a society cause oppression of women. This kind of presentation of Muslim women victimizes all women of Muslim societies and their struggles, efforts, achievements, and resistance against patriarchs remain buried under the piles of rubble (Mohanty, 1984).

3. Culture Serves as a Foil for Islam and Misinterpretation of Islam in *The Pearl that Broke its Shell*

Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) talks about restoration of history to illustrate the causes of oppression of Third World women. She says that there are certain practices which people carry out in the name of religion, due to religious halo behind them these practices are considered as the representation of truth-knowledge and piety of place (Spivak, 1988, p.300). In the novel, one major cause of oppression is religion and the use of religion for the interpretation of personal motives. The male characters of the novel are using religion as a weapon to oppress their women. Men interpret women as objects which are born to obey them and remain within four walls of their houses. Men are using religion as an excuse for their own oppressive attitudes. Women are forced out of the streets so that men could walk in the streets freely.

Abdul Khaliq has three wives excluding Rahima. He wants another wife for that he thinks about getting rid of Rahima. His mother Bibi Gulalai says that her son (Abdul Khaliq) lives according to Islam and Sunnah (Teaching of Holy Prophet Muhammad SAW) because Abdul Khaliq is an admirable devout Muslim (Hashimi, 2014, p.230). He can afford more than five wives but he wants to show his society that he is living according to his religion. As Islam allows a man to have four wives. Abdul Khaliq is not a devout Muslim as he claims he is. He is a drug dealer who sheds the blood of his own people for the sake of foreign money. He is an abuser and rapper also. He uses religion to maintain the honour of his name in front of his people and society (Hashimi, 2014, p.230). Rahima fears to be sent back to her parents if Abdul Khaliq divorces her. The fear of divorce is a cause of Rahima's silence against the brutality of her husband. In Afghanistan, when a girl is sent back to her parents they consider it a shame and refuse to take the girl back who dissatisfies her husband and bring a shame and dishonour on both families.

Asma Berlas writes in her book, *Believing Women in Islam* (2002) that all texts have different interpretations and like other texts people recontextualized the religious teachings in various cultures according to their own needs and desires. She further writes that in Muslim societies what passes as Islam actually ignores and violates the Qur'an's teachings. Amina Wadud in *Qur'an and Woman* (1999) argues that exegetes of the classical period relied on the linear-atomistic method to interpret Qur'an which includes verse-by-verse interpretation until the end of the Book. She says that little or no effort is made to recognize the themes and ideas of Qur'an. Berlas puts forward her view that Qur'an is a unified document which gradually unfolds itself, exegetes ignored the fact that Qur'an's content and context both are interlinked, one possess the other, so, one cannot understand the significance of the Qur'an's teachings without taking into account the contexts of their revelation. Sexism and misogyny that are associated with Islam arise in non-Qur'anic sources (exegesis). People ascribe all sorts of stuff to Islam that has nothing to do with the Islamic teachings such as harem, the veil, female circumcision, and the concept of holy war after 9/11. There are no such concepts in the Islamic teachings, and forms of polygyny, practice of having

several wives at the same time, which Muslims practice actually violates the teachings of Qur'an on marriage, as do many forms of veiling.

Hashimi truly illustrates that how Afghan men molded teachings of Islam to fulfill their desires. As Silva argues in "*Shameless Women*" (2003), "the boundaries between religion, tradition, and culture are collapsed and, for women, all three are prescriptive forces" (Silva, 2003, p.43). The men of Afghanistan have no knowledge of their religion. As Hajji Sahib, a man who is brought by Abdul Khaliq for the Nikkah (marriage) ceremony of Rahima recites the Holy Quran incorrectly. Hajji is a person who performs the Holy pilgrimage of the Holy land of Mecca. He recites the Holy verse as "ya Musabibal Asaabi (O! Causer of the fingers)", instead of "Ya Musabibal Asbaabi (O! Causer of the causes)" (Hashimi, 2014, p.111). Rahima's aunt khala Shaima corrects him three times but he keeps on reciting incorrectly. When khala Shaima corrects his mistake she is asked to show some respect for the religious preacher. The point to notice is that even the religious preacher doesn't have the complete and correct knowledge of their religion. But khala Shaima respects Holy Quran more than her societal norms who would not allow speaking in front of elders and questioning the religious authorities. Khala Shaima thinks that he is disrespecting Islam and Holy book (Quran) by reciting it incorrectly (Hashimi, 2014, p.125).

Phallogocentric hegemony is also shown by Hashimi in her work that men use religion to fulfill their needs. The men in Afghanistan call themselves Muslim and as religious men it becomes their duty to marry a woman and have children. But men are not marrying just to fulfill what their religion has asked for. Instead they are using religion to fulfill their own desires. They prefer young brides and prefer them until they get old. As Berlas mentions that Muslims' practice of polygyny breaches the provisions of Qur'an on marriage, and concept of Harem is not Islamic at all. The King Habibullah has thirty women except his wife. All these slave women are kept to fulfill his sexual desires. For the satisfaction of their own desires Afghan men bring teen aged girls. Bharucha in *Mapping Cultural Spaces* (1998) states, "women have always been the ultimate territories and countries on whom men have mapped their rights of possession" (Bharucha, 1998, p.95). Similarly, in the novel women bodies

become possessed territories by their men folks for their interests. Patriarchal men instrumentalise female maternal body to produce sons and social acceptance of this practice exerts pressure on women. Hedge asserts:

And so, in order to maintain their status and maintain their maternal duty, women work their bodies for the birth of the male child. The thought engages them continually – in their conversations, their banter, and their insults and in short their whole existence (Hedge, 1999, p.29).

The demand for sons and the hatred for girls are also non-religious and non-Islamic. Almost every male character oppresses his women on the birth of daughters. Shekiba's husband Aasif has a soft corner for his daughter, but because of his family he asks his wife to keep her away from him. Rahima's transformation into Rahim brings her father close to her. But when Rahima is again in the girls' clothing the same father turns her away. The phallogocentric hegemony, degradation and demoralization of daughters are totally cultural and societal. The Afghan men of the novel let their women suffer to keep their head high in the society. Berlas articulates that much is at stake for Muslims that how they interpret Qur'an and Islamic teachings, especially in the view of increasing violence against women in many states, from Afghanistan to Algeria. She says that Qur'an is inherently anti-patriarchal, it does not privilege men over women or advocate gender differentiation, inequality, or treat men as the Self and woman as the Other, or view women and men as binary opposites rather it allows people to theorize the equality of sexes. As many recent studies reveal that status and roles of women in Muslim societies, patriarchal structures and gender relationships has nothing to do with religion (Berlas, 2002).

Rahima is not allowed to watch television. In Kabul, she was astonished to watch women dressing a traditional dress and singing folk lore on the television, wearing modest scarves and makeup. All these things explain that not every Afghan woman is suffering from the same issues. Men like Abdul Khaliq has imposed certain restrictions on his women. Unlike Abdul Khaliq, Aasif (Shekiba's husband) never beats his wives for the food and shelter he is providing to them. There are many men in the novel who realized their women that they are providing them food and shelter thus the women have to obey their



commands and fulfill their desires. Qur'an is egalitarian and antipatriarchal, but in some matters Qur'an has given power and authority to man, in order to understand the conservative and patriarchal exegesis one should keep in mind the historical contexts of the Qur'an's interpretation, as one needs to keep in mind the historical contexts of the Qur'an's revelation in order to understand its teachings. Most Qur'anic exegesis has been produced by Muslims during the first few centuries of Muslim history, the Golden Age of Islam, which coincided with the Western Middle Ages. The misogyny of this epoch is well recognized that was cross-cultural and international in its scope. Contextualizing Qur'an's teachings shows that instead of being oppressive, they were egalitarian and it depends on Muslims how they position the Qur'an and also themselves historically (Berlas, 2002).

Khala Shaima explains to Rahima that her husband is a clever man. He does not want his women to see how women are progressing in Afghanistan and how people are demanding the basic rights of women. He wants his women to be totally blindfolded and dependent on him. Berlas declares that in many Muslim societies strict adherence to the assumed Islamic norms and scriptures result in the subjugation of women. "The Enveloping maleness" (Berlas, 2002) of Muslim religious text and legalization of sexual inequality by classical Muslim law, the Shari'ah, create severe problems for women. Patriarchal interpretations of Qur'an by exegeses' confuse the Islam and Muslims on one hand, and texts, cultures and histories are subsided on the other. Leila Ahmed in her book, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), points out that multiple readings of Qur'an yield fundamentally different Islams for women as the truth of this statement is engraved in the novel that how Taliban and Afghan men chose to interpret Islam.

It is forbidden for the women of Abdul Khaliq's house to leave the compound. But the rule changes when a patriarch considers it necessary. For the sake of political power and parliamentary seat of the province Abdul Khaliq uses her woman as a puppet in the outside world as well. As the parliamentary seat of their province is specific for a female candidate, so, he agrees to put Badriya (first wife) forward for the elections. The actions of Abdul Khaliq are unstable. His actions show that he acts according to his own needs. He takes foreign help and agrees to help them for the sake of

dollars. Karen Armstrong in his book, *Islam: A Short History* (2000), quotes that Muslim societies have experienced modernization as coercive secularism, but not as economic evolution or political freedoms (Armstrong, 2000, p.166).

In her computer class, Rahima meets a woman named as Fatima who is running a shelter house in Kabul for the women who are on the run from their abusive families. She tells them the story of a girl who came in shelter last week. The girl is eight year old and she has been forced to marry a man of sixty years old who abused her in every possible way. He sells her to other villagers to have sex with her. She gets asylum in Fatima's shelter. No one in the parliament is agreed to support the women shelter. Rather, the men spread certain rumors about these shelter houses and call these as the houses for prostitution. So, no woman thinks about to ask for help from these shelter houses. The eight year old refugee girl is an example of the brutality of Afghan men. As Afghan men represent themselves as very traditional and religious but they use drugs, rape women and sell their wives to others. But if a woman dares to do anything she faces her punishment. As Benafsha is punished stoning to her death. The novel shows many men characters violating the laws of their country and religion but they never face any severe punishment like stoning till death because they are after all men and men have power.

Asma Berlas mentions that one of the primary reasons Muslims have failed to recover the Qur'an's antipatriarchal epistemology has to do with the modes of reading. Muslims have tended to read the Quran historically instead of connecting the God to God's Speech, the doctrine of God's Unity and the organizing principle of Islam demonstrates that there is a perfect association between God and God's Speech (Berlas, 2002). Toshihiko Izutsu in *God and Man in the Koran* (1964) points out that God is just, although "strict, authoritarian and unremitting in justice," God "never does any zulm to anybody". Izutsu illustrates that in Qur'an to do zulm is to act in a way to transgress the limit and trespass the rights of some other person. If God is just then how can God's Speech can teach zulm against anyone and misogyny. God's Speech cannot be misogynist, or teach misogyny and injustice (Izutsu, 1964, pp.77-129).

The Afghan men, as represented in novel do not allow their women to speak in front of them. Rahima explains about a

woman Zamarud, who is a parliamentary member. She opposes corrupt men of the parliament and government. She accuses Afghan men who sit in the parliament and vote for the corrupt government that they have greased their mouths with money. Every one dislikes her because no one likes the idea of the criticism from a woman even if she speaks truth. Zamarud later has been attacked. Her car has exploded and she lost her leg after the attack. She is forced to be silent in front of oppressive patriarchal forces.

King Habibullah dislikes his cousin Agha Tarzi. Tarzi's daughter Soraya is in foreign state for higher education. King dislikes Tarzi because of his preference of science, education and economic development. While King Habibullah focuses more on war and presents himself as a religious person who denies the European ways of life. King Habibullah has only made some roads in Afghanistan but he did nothing else for his country. For King, as an Afghani and Muslim one must not look at Europe and learn from them. He calls Agha Tarzi a non-religious man in favour of science, technology and education. Shekiba asks her husband that we are different people and we are Muslims can we learn from the Europeans and non-Muslims? (Hashimi, 2014, p.272). Her husband like any other Afghani dislikes Europe but admits that Europeans are progressing day by day. And if Amanullah would be the next king the things will be different for Afghanistan (Hashimi, 2014, p.273).

Fatima Mernissi in her book, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (1996), explores that how men tried to misread the verses of Qur'an that unmitigated the undeniable rights to women (Mernissi, 1996, pp.13-16). Louise Marlow in her text, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (1977), argues that Muslim intellectuals has justified hierarchal models of kingship in a society whose Scriptures celebrated egalitarianism by reducing the impulse of equality in some traditions. Asma Berlas says that reading of Qur'an as oppressive, unjust, and patriarchal should be seen as misreading because it attributes to God unjust and oppressive against women. Reading of Qur'an as in support to men for subordination and subjugation of women must be reexamined in the totality of the Qur'an's teachings about the equality of the sexes.

4. Conclusion

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

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

It is clear that *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* (2014) is a feminist work which focuses on the issues of women in male-dominated society and depicts women as subaltern category. This novel also highlights the struggle of women characters, struggle for freedom and struggle to unshackle the chains of patriarchal norms. It does depict women as active members of society who are aware of their subalternity and try to break their shells. Following lines shows that women are politically active and trying to speak and they are conscious of everything going around.

I will not be silenced! I have had enough of their nonsense! Which of you will speak up if I do not? Call me what you like but you know I speak truth and it is you all that are damned for what you're doing! (Hashimi, 2014, p.299)

Active participation of women and their struggle to get freedom in the novel present that woman as subaltern can speak



and can resist against patriarchs of society. Spivak says that education and consciousness is necessary for subalterns to restore their identity and history. Hashimi in the novel also shows the importance of education, khala Shaima always motivates her nieces to learn especially Rahima. It is only because of Rahima's ability to read and write that she finds an escape for herself. "I'm sorry, Khala-jan. I'm sorry I never thanked you for fighting for me, for everything you taught me, for the stories you told me, for the escape you gave me" (Hashimi, 2014, p.450).

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