

**Gender Dysphoria and Identity Crisis: A Study of *Bacha Posh* Practice in
Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell***

**Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in
English Language and Literature**

University of Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram

2022

CONTENTS

Title	Page No.
Preface	i-ii
Chapter One : Introduction	1-20
Chapter Two : Quest for an Identity	21-31
Chapter Three : Conflicts in Gender Disguise	32-47
Chapter Four : Conclusion	48-53
Works Cited	54-55

Preface

Nadia Hashimi, an outstanding figure in the realm of historical fiction, has set her 2014 novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* upon the core issue of the age-old cultural practice of *Bacha Posh* in Afghanistan. It has been practiced since ancient times and still exists in some parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. *Bacha Posh* is a practice in which some families without a son clothe one of their daughters as a boy and impose a male identity upon her. This *Bacha Posh* can enjoy all the privileges of boys until she reaches puberty which is considered as her marriageable age. With the attainment of puberty, she has to change into her original female identity and its roles. Thereafter she would be forbidden from all the prerogatives of men and has to fit well with her female identity and the female roles.

This dissertation titled “Gender Dysphoria And Identity Crisis: A Study of *Bacha Posh* practice in Nadia Hashimi’s *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*” is divided into four chapters. The introductory chapter gives a detailed account on the atrocities facing by Afghan women, the strange practice of *Bacha Posh* and also deals with the selected text *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. The second chapter discusses the identity crisis experienced by various characters in the novel as a result of their changing identities as part of *Bacha Posh* practice and their quest for identity. The third chapter throws light on how this gender disguising and identity crisis can lead them to gender dysphoria, which is a sense of unease that these people experience because of the mismatch between their gender identity and biological sex. The struggles of the two central characters to fit with their frequently varying identities and the gender roles are also mentioned here. The final chapter concludes the

project with a brief summary, a subtle observation and an analysis which claims that the tradition of *Bacha Posh* is never a mean for women empowerment but rather another strategy to strengthen patriarchy. Therefore, this project strives to dispel the false belief that is still prevalent in Afghanistan.

Chapter One

Introduction

Everyone, regardless of gender, needs to have equal status and opportunity in society. While numerous groups around the world advocate for gender equality, one gender continues to be disadvantaged and underprivileged in the majority of the countries, and it is always the women who face discrimination and inequality. Although it is four decades since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), discrimination and the gender gap still exists commonplace in law and practice. Even though patriarchy has no single religion or culture, this gender gap is more evident in Muslim countries. The final twenty-three of the bottom twenty-five countries with the largest gender disparity are all countries with a majority of Muslims, according to the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Index. Additionally, it shows that approximately 65% of women in these nations lack literacy. According to the Arab Human Development Report, the high rate of gender discrimination and the lack of economic prospects for women are both present in Arab nations. The poverty rate in Arab countries also shows gender inequality and it is thirty two percent among women while nineteen percent among men. Inadequate ownership, education, healthcare, early marriage, female genital mutilation, employment possibilities, and other outdated laws and customs are frequent manifestations of the difficulties that women in Muslim nations confront. One can categorically state that discrimination against women is more pronounced in nations where Islam is seen as the source of legislation by using indicators related to women's rights. In Islamic countries discrimination and violence

against women are increasing day by day and yet it is not considered as a major concern. Surveys in Islamic countries like Iran, Palestine, Afghanistan, Egypt and Tunisia reveal that at least one out of three women is suffering from domestic violence by their husband and usually it is justified in the name of God or religion (Akeel *Aljazeera*).

Afghanistan, dubbed the “Heart of Asia”, is marked by gender discrimination, violence, never-ending war, and conflicts. The country’s 99.7% Muslim population makes it the world’s most populous Muslim nation. Since its founding, the region has experienced a number of military campaigns, including those conducted by Alexander the Great, the Maurya Empire, Arab Muslims, the Mongols, the British, the Soviet Union, a coalition led by the United States, and most recently, the Taliban invasion in 2021. In Afghan society people are known to be strongly religious and their family is headed and controlled by the patriarch. Because of this patriarchal nature, women in Afghanistan are oppressed and denied their basic rights. Women’s rights in Afghanistan have oscillated back and forth between various regimes. The equality that the women gained during the reign of King Amanullah Khan in 1920s were taken away in the 1990s by the Mujahideen and Taliban reign. Their rights gradually improved when Afghanistan became the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan under the United States. Again, the Taliban invasion reduced women’s freedom to minimum. Women in Afghanistan experience many forms of violence. According to the World Health Organisation’s report of 2015, 90% of Afghan women had experienced at least one form of domestic violence.

United Nations Human Right Council have reported that at least one or two women commit suicide every day in Afghanistan and it is still the worst place in the world to be a woman. The customs and traditions of Afghanistan are influenced by centuries-old patriarchal rules, and it is always the women who are suffering and suffocating under these rules. Women in Afghanistan are simultaneously the victims of patriarchy as well as the religion. They suffer from the fear of war, extreme poverty, unspeakable violence and discrimination. If they try to raise their voice against these inequalities, they will be threatened or attacked for speaking up. They are not only denied and excluded from decision making or the positions of power but also confined within the four walls of their house. Birth of a girl child is not welcomed in Afghan families and they consider it as a disgrace to the family while having a male child is seen as a pride and they believe male are desirable to carry on the family's legacies. The women are held responsible for giving birth to sons and those women who don't give birth to a male child are seen as lacking something and considered as an incomplete one. In 2012, there had been reports of 240 honour killings involving women, which is a high number considering how frequent these crimes are there. The most of these, 21%, were committed by their husbands, followed by their siblings, 7%, dads 4%, and the rest by other family members. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan claims that the great majority of those who committed these honour killings did not even get any punishment.

Afghan society and culture give value only to men and not even consider women or their dignity. They live under the male oppression without any dignity or an identity. There are plentiful accounts of oppressed women in

Afghanistan. Violence against women is a consistent feature of Afghanistan. Most of the Afghan women and girls experience violence and abuse in their lifetime. They are forbidden from their basic right of education and occupation. 75% of Afghan women have no formal education or are illiterate. The literacy rate of women in Afghanistan is merely 24.2%. Without a job and income, they have no other way but to depend on their husbands. Lack of education and unemployment are the reasons why the empowerment of Afghan women remains unfeasible. Nobody could blame someone if they thought it was a curse to be a woman in Afghanistan. Afghan women are the direct and indirect victims of all the conflicts in the country. The ideologies of various regimes in power and the different phases of their conflicts have contributed much to the suffering of Afghan women. Life as a woman in Afghanistan is a challenging one. Girls are allowed to attend elementary school in some families across the nation, while in others, they are not required to attend school. In Afghanistan, child marriages are still common. Afghanistan has a legal marriage age of sixteen. More than half of Afghan females are pressured into early marriage. By the ages of twelve and sixteen, 50% and 60% of girls, respectively, are either engaged or married. Most of the teenage girls marry a man older than their father. Many families insist their girls to get married at a younger age because of the lack of security, risk of kidnapping and rape, and also to avoid poverty and the cost of caring for them. The man's family comes with a huge amount to pay as a bride price to the girl's father. These girls would remain illiterate, as they couldn't continue their education after marriage. They would have babies at a very young age, which could affect the mother's health. Sometimes it can cause the death of

the mother and the child, because pregnancy under the age of fourteen is very risky (Shemm *The Borgen Project*). Afghan laws are also gender based which discriminate against women. It is legal for the male citizen to marry non-Muslim or foreign girls while it is treated as illegal for female citizens. Under Afghan law, a man is allowed to divorce his wife without her consent but the opposite is not allowed. According to the law, if a woman seeks for divorce, then she needs the approval of her husband and she has to produce witnesses who can testify that the divorce is justified in the court. Afghan also has lots of widows and thirty-five is the average age of an Afghan widow. It is because most of the girls are compelled to marry older men and another reason is that many men were killed due to the endless war conflict.

Afghanistan was under the Taliban reign until the US Army invaded in 2001. With this, many women could come to the mainstream from religious confinement. But these privileges were only for the elite and middle-class women. Most of the women in rural areas suffered under the religious as well as patriarchal norms. In 2021, after 20 years, Taliban gained power again in Afghanistan and in the present scenario, there are strict rules of Taliban in Afghanistan that concern anyone who had the misfortune of having been born as a woman. They enforced their religious laws which targeted women to carry out atrocities of the worst kind. They strictly follow the Islamic Sharia laws and it became their foundation to decide the gender roles. There are no inheritance rights for females and they must be dependent on their husbands. Girls were banned from studying, working, politics, leaving house without a male chaperone, showing any skin in public, doing makeup, meet male doctors and indulge in forced marriage and rapes. The punishments for breaking these

rules were immediate and brutal, such as shooting a fifteen-year-old girl for daring to go to school and having her political opinion. If a woman is accused of adultery, she would be stoned to death. She would be flogged on the spot, if even an inch of her skin was visible or if she was spotted trying to study. They would cut the woman's finger tips off, if her nails were exposed or she used nail polish. The woman who protests against Taliban's rules would be punished and burned alive. The penalties for burqa-wearing women who wear cosmetics or white socks include being thrashed with cutting wire or splashed with acid and punishment for stealing was amputation of hands and feet. A woman was beaten to death by the Taliban militants on 12 July 2021 and her house was set on fire, since she worked outside her home. In August 2021, Taliban militants killed an Afghan woman in the Balkh province because she was wearing tight clothing and was not being escorted by a male relative. The Afghan women who had uncovered their faces in 2001, to breathe in the air of freedom, have begun to suffocate in 2021 under the imposed Taliban laws. Under the Taliban rules, women had literally disappeared in Afghanistan; without rights, without freedom, without dignity and without hope (Bhattacharya *India Today*).

In a time when Afghan women have fallen from the world's knowledge and priorities, certain writers have stepped forward to reveal the true face of Afghanistan to the entire world through their writings, either as an act of protest or out of despair. One of them is current Afghan-American novelist Nadia Hashimi, who uses her works to expose how Afghan women are denied access to basic rights and struggle to live honourably. She is undoubtedly one of the outstanding figures in the realm of historical fiction. She emerged as a

key figure in the literary scene with the publication of her debut novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. The growth of Afghan culture remained as a part of Nadia Hashimi's life and is quite visible in this novel, which was set in the middle east of Afghanistan. She is a paediatrician turned novelist and the author of three international bestselling novels; *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, *When the Moon Is Low* and *A House Without Windows*. She draws her Afghan culture to craft her novels. Even though she was born and brought up in New York and New Jersey, she was fortunate to be surrounded by a large family of aunts, uncles and cousins, keeping the Afghan culture an integral part of their daily lives. After years of avid reading, she began crafting stories that drew on her heritage and the complex experiences of Afghans. Her novels span generations and continents, taking on themes like forced migration, conflict, poverty, misogyny, colonialism and addiction. She has also published two children's books and is also known for her works *One Half from the East* and *Sparks Like Stars*. With the translation of her works in seventeen languages, she is connected with readers all around the world.

Several pre-Islamic customs, such as *bacha bazi* and *bacha posh*, are still practised in Afghanistan despite the fact that it is an Islamic nation. In contrast to *bacha posh*, *bacha bazi* targets boys while *bacha posh* targets girls. *Bacha bazi*, which translates to "boy play," is a behaviour that involves having intercourse with younger adolescent males or boys. Sexual enslavement and child prostitution are frequent components. The age-old cultural practice of *bacha posh* is the core issue upon which Nadia Hashimi has set two of her novels; *One Half from the East* and *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. *Bacha posh* is neither a sexual abuse or sexual slavery like *bacha bazi*. This practice

is gender based where one gender identity is imposed upon another gender. Their biological sex would remain the same but their gender identity varies with different gender roles.

“In Afghanistan there are girls, there are boys, and there is the *bacha posh*, a temporary third gender for girls who live as boys” (Hashimi). The life of a woman in Afghanistan becomes impossible as she is subjugated and segregated, and this is how a *bacha posh* is born. The term “*bacha posh*” in Dari language means “a girl dressed like a boy”. *Bacha posh* is not a novel tradition in Afghanistan as it can be traced back to the twentieth century. King Habibullah Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1901 to 1919 kept women in men’s attire to guard his harem. This initiation of cross-dressed women came from the king’s concern that assigning males to guard the harem could be hazardous to women’s chastity and the royal bloodline. These cross-dressed women may be seen throughout many periods of both Eastern and Western history, and they primarily played the role of warriors. Identical to *bacha posh* in Afghanistan, these women adopted a male identity for similar reasons. Some sought to support their family's financial requirements, some wanted to eradicate gender discrimination, and yet others wanted higher education because it wasn't available to women. The phenomenon of women cross-dressing into the opposite gender gradually declined by the nineteenth century. Several customs similar to *bacha posh* existed in other parts of the world such as the age-old practice of ‘sworn-virgins’ in Northern Albania and Montenegro. This practice also emerged as a consequence of a highly patrilineal and patriarchal society where children are thought to stem directly from father’s blood, and the mother was considered inferior and merely as a

carrier. Thus, *bacha posh* cannot be considered as exclusively an Afghan practice but similar customs existed in other parts of the world.

Many writers, other than Nadia Hashimi, have written about this practice of *bacha posh* and the women who were *bacha posh* during their childhood. *The Underground Girls of Kabul* by Jenny Nordberg, *I Am a Bacha Posh: My Life as a Woman Living as a Man* by Ukmina Manoori, *Bacha Posh* by Chaitanya Vyas, *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis, *A Different Kind of Daughter: The Girl Who Hid from the Taliban in Plain Sight* by Maria Toorpakai, etc are some other authors and books deals with this cultural practice of *bacha posh*. It is a still existing cultural practice in some parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has been practised since ancient times. According to this custom, some families without sons pick one of their daughters to live and act like a guy until puberty. The girl will change her name, dress like a boy, and cut her hair short to look like a boy for this. The *bacha posh* girl has to hide everything that can make her appear feminine in public, act like a boy, and erase her gender. When she transitions to being a *bacha posh*, she must learn to follow a new set of guidelines. This enables the girl to behave more freely; she can attend school, work around the home, play with boys, sit cross-legged in a room of men, look them in the eye while they speak and escort her mother and sisters in public. She will be allowed to do all the things men are allowed to do and even those which are restricted to women. This newly created boy can enjoy equal freedom like normal boys. She would not be allowed to do cooking, cleaning or other household work like other girls. It becomes hard to imagine that there were girls in Afghanistan, who enjoyed equal freedom as boys. For economic and social

reasons, many Afghan parents, without a son, practised this long-standing tradition of disguising girls as boys. This custom might have started during the time of war, when women disguised themselves as men either to fight in the battle or to protect themselves from other men. The social norm in Afghanistan that every family needs at least one son to uphold the family name and inherit the father's possessions has led to the practice of *bacha posh*. In Afghan society, having a son is very significant since it is a source of pride. This procedure offers social relief and helps the family avoid the social stigma that comes with not having a boy. When parents make their daughter a *bacha posh*, they are giving her the freedom she lacked because of being a girl. There is also another belief exists in Afghan society that a *bacha posh* child will lead to the birth of a male child in the next pregnancy of her mother. It is not difficult for the parents to make their daughter into a *bacha posh*, since there are no religious or legal formalities against this. Since women in Afghanistan are denied their basic rights, *bacha posh* practice can be seen as a struggle for a little freedom for girls in a highly patriarchal society. Even though this practice encourages parents to dress up their daughters as sons for a better future, it only makes their life harder.

Most of the people argue that *bacha posh* helps to empower women and liberate girls from their constrained position but in fact it is not a liberating force. An analysis of *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, one can understand that *bacha posh* practice makes their future life worse. They have to sacrifice their entire life as a compensation for a little freedom they experienced for a short period. So, one couldn't consider this 'freedom in disguise' as actual 'freedom' because this freedom was limited for a short

period as these girls have to eventually return back to being normal girls once they reach puberty. When they get older and puberty discloses their biological sex, life becomes even more difficult to them. They have to switch back to their female gender, get married, become mothers and follow all the rules for women in Afghanistan. There is no information about the accurate number of *bacha posh* in Afghanistan due to the secret nature of the practice. As it a secret practice, the *bacha posh*'s biological sex would be known only to the close family, family friends, and some health and education officials. Every Afghan family keeps the *bacha posh* child very confidential within their family. If their true identity is discovered by others, they often face harassment and humiliation. They sometimes face assaults similar to that experience by the transgender community. According to Women for Afghan Women, an Afghan advocacy group, there are at least two cases of *bacha posh* women coming to women's shelters in Kabul every year. They suffer humiliation, harassment and separation from their community, but often they don't want to start living as women in a country that gives them little possibility after experiencing all kinds of privileges of males. It is difficult for them to adopt the gendered cultural restrictions from a particular point of their life: they must learn how to cook for the entire family, how to sit properly, how to live under a burqa and lower their voice and gaze among strangers. At some point in their life, they would realise that it is not possible for them to be boys anymore and at that time nobody would accept them as girls. This can lead to depression, identity crisis, gender dysphoria and even alter their mental stability.

Nadia Hashimi discusses this strange practice of gender disguising in Afghanistan through her novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. She released her debut novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* in 2014. It is an international bestseller and was a 2014 Goodreads finalist in the categories of Debut Author and Fiction. It has been translated into many languages including Italian, German, French, Turkish, Norwegian and Hungarian. She beautifully portrays the condition of Afghan women and the real background of Afghan society through this novel. In this novel, we can find many women who are struggling under the patriarchal system and the Islamic rules. This work of fiction portrays how the Afghani women were ill-treated and oppressed by the patriarchal society for centuries. It explores the themes of gender norms, family, morality, powerlessness, fate, yearning to have a voice in one's own destiny, and the ability to adapt and overcome hardships. Through this novel, the author exposes the vulnerability of women due to the rigid patriarchal structure in Afghanistan and also defines the place of an Afghan woman in the face of violence both within and outside her home. This novel portrays the story of two women in one family, tied by blood and tied by the unchanging inequality of the sexes through more than a century. The central characters in the story, Rahima and Shekiba, worked up the courage to break these rules and changed their fate. Even though it was not their own decision, one of the ways in which these women escape from their inferior position is by the practice of *bacha posh* custom. They disguise themselves as males in order to survive in a patriarchal society. The story alternates between the life of these two women, both separated by a century; Shekiba in 1900 and Rahima in 2007. Rahima is a young girl and Shekiba, her great-great grandmother. Shekiba's experiences

were told to Rahima by her aunt, Kala Shaima. Kala Shaima uses the story of Shekiba to instil the real meaning of empowerment in Rahima. Though Rahima has a brave personality, she chooses to remain submissive to her fate in life. But at some points in life, she realises that she deserves a better life, which she needs to fight for. Unlike Rahima, Shekiba does not think to escape from her reality and she remains more passive in the way of choosing the purpose of her life. Both these characters experience similar crises and situations in life. But Rahima refuses to remain inferior towards oppression, while Shekiba remains inferior and she embraces the patriarchal system as her survival. Their different responses are because Rahima has people around to support her, whereas Shekiba has nobody to support her. The structure of the novel interweaves Rahima's present-day story with Shekiba's story from the past. So, the plot moves back and forth between these two characters, chronicling their lives and the obstacles they have faced under an oppressive patriarchal regime. Almost a century apart, Afghan women are still facing discriminations on gender and are oppressed by the patriarchal society.

This story revolves around the life of Rahima, a nine-year-old girl, in an Afghan family full of daughters. All of them wanted to attend school but with no brothers, their ability to leave the house, attend school or earn money was limited and also, they weren't allowed to do these things as instructed by their drug addicted father, Arif. As a semi solution for not having a son, Kala Shaima recommended that Rahima become a *bacha posh*, or a girl dressed as boy, so that she can attend school as well as run errands for the family. She soon learned from Kala Shaima that she was not the first girl in their family to embrace the *bacha posh* custom and also learned about her great-great

grandmother and their family history. As a *bacha posh*, her female name "Rahima" is replaced by the male name "Rahim". As Rahim she felt free, being able to wear pants, cut her hair short, attend school, chaperone her sisters and also, she was allowed to play with boys of her age. According to this ancient custom, she would be treated as a boy until she reaches her marriageable age. She seemed uncomfortable with the approach of older men, including Abdul Khaliq, a warlord, who had his eye on her. She chose to stay a bacha posh for longer than expected, as it gives her freedom and independence. Her father becomes angry when Rahima gets into an argument with her mother. Even though he barely pays attention to his family, he felt shamed by this inappropriate behaviour of his daughter and wife. Then, Abdul Khaliq, to whom Rahima's father feels indebted, approached him with a huge bride money for marrying Rahima. Her father decided to marry off Rahima to Abdul Khaliq, as well as his elder daughters, Parwin and Shahla to Khaliq's cousins. The women of the family were unable to accept this as the girls were very young and were devastated when he arranged the triple wedding. Kala Shaima told the girls about the story of their great-great grandmother Shekiba, as their nikkah day approaches, to empower them. Shekiba, the name means "gift", but as the story goes, we realise that a gift is not anyone's possession and it will be passed from one person to another. She had a family with her parents, two brothers and a sister. When she was two, accidentally some hot oil from a pot fell on and melted half of Shekiba's cherub face into blistered and ragged flesh. These scars on her face deformed her for the rest of her life and led her to be rejected by everyone except her family. Even her extended family shamed her and her cousins named her "Shola face", as her skin resembled the

lumpy soft rice, and “Babaloo” which is a monster. Her family tried to keep her shielded from all the comments and stares. But another disaster came to her life in the form of cholera in which she lost her mother and siblings. She worked along with her father in their family land and did all the hard physical labour usually a man does. Thereby she became her father’s daughter-son. When their extended family came to know about Shekiba’s father’s death, they took over the land and made her their servant. After several days of torture, they sent her as a gift to pay their debt to another man named Azizullah and she becomes their servant.

Before marriage, Rahim turned back to Rahima and now she is restricted from everything she was allowed to do as a *bacha posh*. Her life with Abdul Khaliq as his fourth wife was miserable and she was terrified by the commands and punishments of her husband, mother-in-law and his other wives. Her life, from a girl who was treated as a boy with all kinds of freedom to a wife who is denied and restricted from all these was difficult for her to accept. Shahnaz, Abdul Khaliq’s third wife was her house-mate. She was jealous towards Rahima and had no sympathy for her. However, she was not as jealous as Abdhul Khaliq’s first wife, Badriya. Rahima’s only solace in the compound was Jameela, his second wife, who was kind towards Rahima. Rahima was embarrassed when she met Hashmat, Badriya’s son who mocked her about her *bacha posh* days. At the same time, she missed those good *bacha posh* days of her life. Rahima was treated as a servant for her mother-in-law and Badriya, who considered her as an embarrassment to the compound and she was regularly punished for violating the traditional gender roles. When she

was pregnant, visitors were allowed for her. Kala Shaima and Parwin occasionally came to visit her and then she continued to hear Shekiba's story.

For a long time, Shekiba served for Azizullah's family until they lost trust in her, when she shamed the family by attempting to obtain the land left to her by her father. They tried hard to get rid of her and finally gifted her to the king so he can use her as a *bacha posh* guard for his harem. Shekiba felt awkward when she put on the guard uniform, but free in pants as it is completely different from skirt. Her name was also changed from Shekiba to Shekib. She was comfortable in that place since it seemed to be out of harm's way and she was not restricted from doing things which are restricted to women. She was also thankful to be away from her cruel grandmother and that family. As a guard she did all the chores for the women in the harem, but they treated her rudely. As she was shown to have strength like a man from her days of working in her family land, she was given with heavy tasks in the harem. One night when Shekiba was on duty, she noticed a man escaping from the harem, which was restricted to men other than the king. She couldn't recognise who it was but she let the other guards know this, so that they could try to find him. The man continued sneaking in and out of the concubine, but the guards were unable to catch him or to find whom he was visiting.

Rahima bore a son, whom she named Jahangir. Abdul Khaliq reduced beating Rahima, since she gave him a son, which he considered as a pride. Rahima also noticed that Abdul Khaliq cared special for her son as she saw him having special moments with Jahangir that he didn't show with his other sons. She was occasionally allowed to visit her sister Parwin who lived next to her house and she was also unhappy with her marriage. They were not able to

visit their elder sister Shahla since she was farther away from there. One day Rahima thought of visiting Parwin but put it off because of her household duties and later she came to know that Parwin had set herself on fire. On a visit, Khala Shaima suggested Rahima to seek permission from Badriya, to accompany her when she goes to Kabul for the parliament sessions, so that she can help Badriya with some paperwork. Rahima wondered what she could do with the little education she had received as a *bacha posh* and Kala Shaima insisted that Rahima's education would serve her well in future. Rahima also wished to see Kabul as it was the place where her great-great grandmother lived. So she built up the courage to ask Badriya if she could accompany her as an assistant, since Badriya can't read or write while Rahima can. Jahangir was looked after by Jameela since he was not allowed to accompany his mother. She enjoyed her time in Kabul and helped Bidriya with her work. She also attended a resource centre for the women parliamentarians to improve their reading, writing, English and computer skills.

Rahima continued gaining strength from Shekiba's story. Shekiba saw and was attracted by the king's son, Amanullah. She made a plan to be the one he chooses as his wife, which is that she told everyone she interacts with in the palace that she came from a long line of women who bore mostly males. She told this also to Agha Baraan, one of Amanullah's advisors and his trusted friend. All her plans were ruined when one of the women, in the harem, Fathima, falls ill. When other women attempted to shift Fathima into Benafsha's room, they found a man's hat on the floor and they discovered that Benafsha had been having an affair with someone. Gafoor, a *bacha posh* guard went to share this matter with the king and she brought back the news that the

king had asked for Shekiba. When Shekiba approached the king, she realised that Gafoor had blamed Shekiba for the entire situation that happened in the harem. She was accused and it means that she would be given the same punishment as Benafsha, who committed adultery. It was imprisonment and then being stoned to death.

Rahima was devastated with Jahangir's death during one of her visits to Kabul. When she came back home, she found out from Jameela that Jahangir fell ill soon after his mother left for Kabul. But his grandmother, Bibi Gulalai thought she could cure his illness with her herb tea and soup , so she didn't allow Abdul Khaliq to take his son to the hospital. After his death, Rahima no longer saw any purpose in her life with Abdul Khaliq. She was blamed for the death of her son by her husband and mother-in-law, and therefore got harsh beating from Abdul Khaiq as well as verbal rebukes from Bibi Gulalai. She mourned for her son long after the religiously-mandated forty days of mourning and returned back to Kabul to assist Badriya at parliament. She shared her tragic story with two women, Sufia and Hamida, she had befriended in the parliament who escorted Rahima to the resource centre in the hope that Ms. Franklin, the teacher, could help her.

During imprisonment, Shekiba asked Benafsha why she had committed this crime and she answered that Shekiba wouldn't understand, because it was for love. Shekiba overheard that her punishment has changed and in fact it was because someone has requested her hand in marriage. She again turned back to a female, from Shekib to Shekiba. She thought it was Amanullah who requested to marry her. Even though she escaped from stoning, she had to be presented for Benafsha's stoning and then she received

a hundred lashes on her back. During her recovery, she was brought forth for her nikkah and she learned that it was Aasif Baraan, Amanullah's friend, who had requested her hand in marriage as his second wife. She knew that he was Benafsha's secret lover and after marriage she realised that he felt guilty for his deeds and since he couldn't save Benafsha, he saved Shekiba. Another reason for marrying Shekiba was that she had bragged about being from a family which bore more sons. He and his first wife, Gulnaz, had no children. Aasif married Shekiba and brought her to his home in the hope that his shame of childlessness would be erased when Shekiba bore him a son, which she eventually did. Shekiba had a happy life in that family and she was thankful to be living in a house, where she was not beaten and where there was only one wife with which she had to coexist. She was glad to have taken the decisions and risks she had taken in life, as they had led her to a safe, sure life.

On her last visit to Kabul, Rahima pretended to be ill and stayed in the hotel room while Badriya attended the parliament session. She cut her hair short and dressed up as a boy. She finally succeeded in escaping from her guard and the hotel. She makes her way to the town where the bus would take her to the proper town which was far away. She was nervous of being caught by Abdul Khaliq and fortunately she found the proper bus, reached at the previously planned stop and walked across the street to meet Ms. Franklin. She brought Rahima to a local women's shelter, where she was safe and secure from her husband. Finally, she wrote a letter to Khala Shaima about her new freedom, of blues skies and singing birds, and she signed it "Bibi Shekiba".

This book serves as a window into the current hardships faced by Afghan women. In one way or another, every one of the female characters in

the book battles the rigid patriarchal society. In a place like Afghanistan, women are only seen as a means of sating men's sexual appetites and boosting the population. In this book, Nadia Hashimi has conveyed this idea quite clearly. The practice of *bacha posh* and the difficulties of those women after their transition back to their biological sex can also be seen through the characters of Rahima and Shekiba. Because of this frequent transition between various identities, *bacha posh* find difficulty to acquire a permanent identity. The identity crisis of the *bacha posh* and their struggle to gain an identity is presented through these two characters. Hashimi demonstrates how this identity crisis in these two characters as a result of the imposed *bacha posh* identity led to gender dysphoria. Hashimi's critical stance on this practice is also visible in this novel.

It is considered that *bacha posh* practice empowers girls through the access to education, employment, economic independence and freedom. But in reality, the empowerment offered by this practice lasts only for a short time period. After the time span, they have to come back to the reality and the miseries of womanhood in Afghanistan. In fact, this practice makes their life more wretched. Most importantly it is an unnatural practice as Jenny Nordberg calls it 'nature versus nurture' experiment (Nordberg 110). This project analyses Nadia Hashimi's novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* in an effort to understand the *bacha posh* practise, which is still common in Afghanistan, and investigate how it can negatively impact the psychology of girls who had endured it.

Chapter Two

Quest for an Identity

In Afghanistan, there are still behaviours that promote gender inequality and discrimination. In a largely patriarchal society, *bacha posh* enables the girl to experience some degree of freedom while temporarily escaping these discriminations. Families in Afghanistan are expected to have a son, therefore those who don't are obliged to raise one of their daughters as a *bacha posh*. There are various other reasons for the parents to make their daughter a *bacha posh*. Some people consider it as a status symbol because a family without a son is considered a disgrace in Afghan society. Some families are forced to do this because of their social and economic needs. And some people believe that a *bacha posh* child will bring good luck that the next child will be born as a boy. When a girl reaches puberty, her rights as a *bacha posh* typically terminate, and she must return to her female status. But this change is not that simple. Women who were raised as boys have a hard time adjusting to the limitations placed on them by convention. According to developmental and clinical psychologist Diane Ehrenstaft's theory, *bacha posh* girls who act like guys are simply living up to their parents' expectations rather than expressing themselves. While the majority of *bacha posh* females enjoy their independence as boys, others would rather remain as girls and find it uncomfortable with boys. They believe they have lost their girl identity and recollections from their upbringing. After being *bacha posh* for a while, the majority of them find it difficult to engage with girls and prefer to hang out with dudes. The fact that they were given male roles to play during their formative years is one of the reasons why the *bacha posh* kids find it difficult

to go back to being girls. So, their personality develops with more masculine traits. In fact, they get a short-term freedom with the cost of losing their own identity. Losing their own identity is the price these girls pay for a little freedom; to study, to work, to earn some money and to move freely.

Since they fluctuate between genders, it becomes difficult for them to establish a stable identity. The conventions, duties, and behaviours connected to being a man or a woman are just social constructs known as gender. What is masculine and feminine, as well as their gender roles, are determined by culture and society. Gender identity is the individual's subjective perception of their own gender, or how they experience and communicate their gender. This is mostly related to gender roles, which is an outward manifestation of one's personality (Ghosh *Medscape*). An identity crisis is a developmental event which involves a person questioning his own sense of self or a place in the world. When everyone questions one's sense of self from time to time, he/she may have an identity crisis. For the *bacha posh*, their identity would be *questioned* by others as well as by themselves because of their changing identities and roles in the society. These girls might suffer from an identity crisis as they couldn't place themselves within a particular identity because of their recurrent shift between gender and identities. When they are converted to *bacha posh*, their female identity suddenly shifts to male identity and after puberty, they have to switch back to their female identity. Not only their physical appearance but their names and gender roles also change with this practice. Through this practice these girls lose their identity. They are constantly shifting from one identity to another, so they couldn't assume a permanent identity. The transformation of these girls into *bacha posh* or the

transformation of their identity at a tender age is solely their parent's decision. As decided by their parents, these girls have to perform the assigned gender role like a mere puppet. Even after their transition into girls, society will not accept them either as girls or as boys. Society would consider them only as the other. They face the dilemma in identifying their place and roles in the society. They are born with a female identity but after becoming *bacha posh* their identity changes, through their societal interaction, from a biological female to a culturally defined male. The momentary liberty because of the isolation from their biological sex, that they experience as part of *bacha posh* practice creates gender identity conflict in them. With puberty, they again return back to the female identity and then they face difficulty to place themselves within the female identity (Menon *Acad publ*).

In this novel, one can see that the characters who had undergone this *bacha posh* practice, suffer from identity crisis. They are forced to shift from one identity to another. When the Taliban ruled over the streets of Afghanistan, it became difficult for Rahima and her sisters to leave their house without a male chaperone. It was her mother's decision to make Rahima a *bacha posh* in order to mend the absence of a son and to absolve the family from stigma. She gave her a new identity of a boy and changed her female name to a male name. "*Bachem*, from now on we're going to call you Rahim instead of Rahima" (Hashimi 35). Outward appearance of Rahima easily changed to Rahim, by cutting her hair short and by wearing pants and shirt. She also imposes the new identity of Rahim to her other daughters and insists them to forget about Rahima. "She is now your brother Rahim. You will forget about your sister Rahima and welcome your brother. Can you do that,

girls? It's very important that you speak only of your brother, Rahim, and never mention that you have another sister." (Hashimi 36). Once Rahima was imposed with the *bacha posh* identity, she had to adjust herself to accommodate into the new identity and the new gender roles. It became problematic for her to accept the new identity and felt difficulty to interact with people in the opposite sex. She lived as a girl till the age of nine, so after her transition to *bacha posh* she had to readjust her body and mind to a completely different psychosocial expectation. She had to unlearn the things that she had learned as a girl for nine years and learn new language and behaviour of boys. This sudden change was tough for her to welcome. Her mother frequently advised her to attune her body to the masculine gender behaviour, and this advice was a complete contradiction to what she used to say to her daughters.

"Listen, Rahim-*jan*. You should be out with the boys, playing.

That's what boys do- do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes, Madar-*jan*, but sometimes I just don't want to. They... they push each other a lot."

"Then push back."

I was surprised by her advice but the look on her face told me she was serious. Here sat my mother telling me the exact opposite of what she'd always said. I would have to toughen up. (Hashimi 68)

She was expected to play outdoor games with boys and to run the errands of the family instead of doing the household chores. Initially she felt it hard to adopt the imposed identity and the expected male gender roles as it was

against what she had learned so far. She couldn't interact with other girls because of her male appearance and felt difficulty to interact with boys because of her female gender. This difficulty of Rahima shows the dubious identity of 5 because they have to enact masculinity with a female body. Rahima gradually adopted the masculine body language and behaviour, and loved her *bacha posh* identity as it gave her freedom to attend school, play with boys, run through the streets, that she had been deprived of as a female. Though 'Rahim' was an imposed identity on her, she had been able to naturalise her body to the masculine gender role as there were no restrictions for the males similar to females. Nobody would stare at her even if she behaves inappropriately in her disguised identity. She felt quite comfortable in the imposed identity as it offered her much freedom.

My walk turned to a jog as I realised I didn't have to be demure and proper. I tested an old man walking by. I looked directly at him, meeting his squinted eyes and seeing that he didn't react to my forwardness. Thrilled, I started to run faster. No one gave me a second glance. My legs felt liberated as I ran through the streets without worrying about chastising eyes. I was a young man and it was in my nature to run through the streets (Hashimi 48).

Both her body and mind adjusted with the male identity imposed upon her. She was like a caged bird, confined within the house. She was not permitted to go outside without a male companion. *Bacha posh* offered her a new kind of freedom which released her from all confinements. In the masculine perspective, she has access to everything and is free to travel on her own. She

was permitted to go to school, play soccer with boys, chase them around the field, kick the ball, and wander the streets. As a *bacha posh*, she relished her independence and came to understand what it's like to be a boy. She enjoyed the freedom she felt inside the forced identity, which was like a breeze on her face. In the end, she abandoned her femininity and accepted her male identity. This disguised male identity indeed provided her with the benefits of male privilege, but she knew very well that such benefits are temporary. She could only enact the male roles but could never be a man. Also, society does not consider *bacha posh* as pure masculine but perceived it only as a subordinated masculinity. This disguised identity can never be a liberating force. It can only complicate her future life as a woman. Four years of her *bacha posh* life created a male identity in her. But she couldn't remain in her *bacha posh* identity for a long time. She desired to live in the masculine identity until her death but she was aware that like the *bacha posh* identity imposed on her, her parents would again transform her back to a girl. With her marriage, 'Rahim' changed back to 'Rahima'. Her life became more problematic because of the frequent reversal of identities and gender roles imposed upon her. Even after her transition back to her biological sex, she could not place herself within the female identity. She faced an identity crisis between these constantly changing gender identities and realised that there was no place for her anywhere to express herself or her identity. She underwent a difficult situation where she couldn't identify herself either as a female or as a male. After slipping back to her feminine identity, she was not accepted as a male by others and as a female by herself, but with her marriage she got a new identity of a wife. She was aware that she couldn't remain in her male identity

anymore but she was unable to perform the role of a wife or a woman. She even hated her husband's presence and she hadn't any womanly feelings for him. In her husband's house also, she faced humiliations for her *bacha posh* identity. Her mother-in-law considered her neither as a girl nor as a boy, but as a wild child as Rahima was not completely able to eliminate the masculine personality in her. "A bacha posh at this age! No wonder she has no clue how to carry herself as a woman. Look at the way she walks, her hair, her fingernails! Her mother should be ashamed of herself" (Hashimi 176). As a new bride she faced many verbal and physical assaults in her husband's house. She felt ashamed and humiliated when her identity was questioned by one of her husband's sons.

Oh. Yeah, I heard about you. You're... hey, aren't you... you're Abdullah's friend, aren't you?"

I didn't know how to respond. I fidgeted and looked to Jameela. I knew this looked strange to everyone. No girl my age should have been referred to as "Abdulla's friend".

"You're a girl?" he exclaimed. "What kind of girl are you? That's you, isn't it? That's why you're not answering! Look at that! You've even got short hair and everything! What kind of bride are you? You've been running through the streets with Abdullah and his gang. No wonder you guys couldn't score a single goal!" Saliva sprayed out when he spoke with excitement. I covered my face with my veil, wanting to hide from his wet assault. (Hashimi 183)

She realised that everybody would look at her and would laugh at the girl who used to be a boy. It seemed to her that she had no identity, after her transition to a girl, either as a girl or as a boy. She tried to carry herself properly as a woman, but her masculine gender identity made it difficult. She lived with the masculine identity for four years. At that time, she was so self-assured and thought she could do anything. But in the female identity she felt ridiculous, like someone pretending to do something she was not. She felt annoyed and irritated within the female dress, female roles and female identity. Even after the birth of her son, she couldn't place herself within the female identity, but she identified herself as a mother. She did everything for her son and fitted well with her identity as a mother. But all her identities were momentary. She lost her son as well as her identity as a mother. Her distress feeling for her changing identities can be seen in her mourning for her lost identities. "I was a little girl and then I wasn't. I was a *bacha posh* and then I wasn't. I was a daughter and then I wasn't. I was a mother and then I wasn't. Just as soon as I could adjust, things changed. I changed." (Hashimi 384). Life provided her with multiple identities and each time when she attempted to accept and accommodate herself to that identity it would alter and then she would be assigned with or imposed to another identity. After the death of her son, she realised that she couldn't continue in her female identity anymore. She decided to escape from her sufferings as Abdul Khaliq's wife and from her female gender roles. Abdul Khaliq himself claimed that he couldn't make a proper woman out of her and even after several years of life with him she couldn't change her *bacha posh* personality. "A *bacha posh*. I should have known better. You still don't know what it is to be a woman" (Hashimi 408).

Finally, she succeeded in escaping from the female identity and roles that she played laboriously for many years. She cut her hair short, cross-dressed herself in male attire and once again transformed her identity from Rahima to her male persona, Rahim. Her constant struggle between various identities ended when she took up this male identity

Shekiba is another character in this novel, who also faced identity problems similar to Rahima. Her life made her shift from one identity to another. Her constant shift between identities was necessary for her in order to survive. Since half of her face was disfigured, she was known by the name “*Shekiba-e-shola*”. She lived like a son to her father and did all the work that a son would do. She was assigned with the female gender roles suddenly after the death of her father. This transition of her identity from a daughter-son to a mere girl was difficult for her to adapt. Because of her female identity, she was also forbidden to inherit her father’s property. She carried herself as a male, so she felt difficulty to find even a single reason to consider her as a female. “But I have always been my father’s daughter-son. My father hardly knew I was a girl. I have always done the work a son would do. I am not to be considered for a wife, so what is the difference? What of me is a girl?” (Hashimi 85). She also suffers difficulty like Rahima, to adopt the female body language and behaviour. She had been given away from one person to another and from one identity to another and finally reached the king’s palace as a *bacha posh* guard. This conversion from her natural identity to an imposed identity initially felt awkward to her but gradually she adjusted with it. In fact, she was freer in her new male identity as Shekib than Shekiba, her female identity. The male identity and the male uniform were like a liberating

force for her as it gave her confidence to move freely. Most of the *bacha posh* guards tried to be content in their imposed identity as it offered them much freedom, but one of them was dissatisfied with the male identity and the expected roles. She wished to live the rest of her life with the identity she had been given at the time of her birth.

I wonder what the palace will do with us. How long will they keep us here? I want to be married. I want to have children and a home. I want to live somewhere else, don't you?"

Tariq, dressed as a man, was a woman after all. Her voice was nearly cracking. Shekib understood better than she let on. She had to protect her own plan.

"I don't know. We have a comfortable life here."

Tariq sighed heavily. "It's comfortable, but this can't be it. I'm not like Ghafoor. Or even Karim. I don't want to wear pants for the rest of my life. I was happy as a girl. (Hashimi 230)

Like Rahima, Shekiba's identities were also momentary. It constantly shifted with situations. Her *bacha posh* identity ended with her marriage to Aasif Baraan. She had to switch back to the female identity again. Sekib converted back to Shekiba. Even though she couldn't spend more years as a *bacha posh*, she was captivated by the freedom that the disguised identity offered her within a short span of time and she started to identify herself with the male identity. So, it was hard for her to return back to her female identity and she was suffocating under these inconsistent identities. Her female identity and female clothes felt heavy for her. She had lived like a man and enjoyed the privileges of a man. So her body and mind refused to accept the female

identity and to play the role of a woman. Shekiba's identity was questioned by her husband and made her ashamed, when she had not conceived a child even after five months of their marriage. "A harem guard! Did you like being a man? Maybe that's what it is! You liked being a man so much that now you refuse to be a woman! What are you? You are not a man! You are not a woman! You are nothing! (Hashimi 381). She did not have an identity because of the *bacha posh* practice. Even her husband humiliated her for the conflict of identity. She realised that the disguised identity and its freedom couldn't do anything better for her future. Being in a skirt or pants did not change anything in the end. When it mattered, *bacha posh* was as vulnerable as any other woman. With the birth of her son, she got her permanent female identity and she no longer wanted to shift between different identities.

At the end, both Rahima and Shekiba attained a peaceful life and established a place for themselves in the society with a consistent identity. These two women were the victims of the cultural practice of *bacha posh* as it affected their life miserably. This is not only the case with these two women but most of the girls who had undergone the *bacha posh* practice suffer similarly. Nadia Hashimi portrays these two characters as the representatives of the majority of women in Afghanistan. Hashimi uses these characters to show that *bacha posh* is not always liberating the girls but it can cause severe atrocities in their life. Majority of girls who undergo this practice suffer from an identity crisis as a result of their frequent shifting from one identity to another and this would make their life miserable. This identity crisis of *bacha posh* can sometimes lead to gender dysphoria, which is an emotional and psychological trauma that a *bacha posh* goes through.

Chapter Three

Conflicts in Gender Disguise

The custom of *bacha posh* is one that enables girls to access the more liberated male world in Afghanistan, a country that has a strong patriarchal system that views women as subhuman. This practice allows girls to enjoy a variety of privileges that are typically reserved for men. Even when they don't want to, girls are frequently coerced into becoming *bacha posh* in order to provide for the family. The future of their daughter is unimportant to these parents. These children are born as females, brought up as males and at some point, in life, they return back to their biological sex. As a result, they may suffer from psychological and mental trauma, gender identity crisis and depression when they transform from one gender identity to another. This *bacha posh* custom can be seen as another form of victimising women in Afghanistan. *Bacha posh* is never a liberating force which releases the girls from the codes of restrictions and subjugations attached to the female body, rather it complicates the subject position of the girl who disguise into a male identity. It reflects the sordid position of the female body in a male centred society. They follow the decisions of their parents in the belief that whatever the parents will do is best for them and unknowingly become the agents of patriarchy. So, these girls lack the ability of freethinking and their psyche works according to the dominant belief system. When one gender is privileged and dominant while the other is unwanted and not even considered as human beings, there will always be a tendency for the marginalised gender to pass to the other gender. Initially most of the girls are not comfortable with this cross dressing or disguising. Eventually they start loving it, since it offers much

freedom to them. However, they always have the fear of switching back to their true identity. Some *bacha posh* feel missing their lost childhood memories as a girl but most of them enjoy all the freedoms that they would not get, if they live as normal girls. The controversy over the *bacha posh* practice is that, we couldn't come to a conclusion, whether this practice empowers women or it is psychologically damaging to women. While *bacha posh* practice is viewed as a necessity for families without a son, the mental security of the *bacha posh* girl is scarcely taken into account. The *bacha posh* girl experiences psychological traumas after her transition from a girl to a boy and then again back to reality. This gender disguise and identity crisis cause the girls to undergo the psychological traumatic condition called gender dysphoria ("Gender Dysphoria" *Mayoclinic*). It is a term that describes the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose biological gender is different from their gender identity. Those who experience gender dysphoria may feel discomfort with the mismatch between the sexual characteristics of their physical body and the way they feel and think about themselves. The consequence of gender dysphoria varies from person to person. Persons with gender dysphoria may cope with the discomfort either by altering their gender expression and gender representation or by making adjustments with their physical appearance. People with gender dysphoria have a strong desire to be in the opposite gender. They often feel discomfort with the gender roles and expression of their biological sex. This discomfort might manifest in their behaviours like dressing as their preferred gender, prefer toys and other things associated with the opposite gender and refusing several gender stereotypical behaviours. Gender dysphoria usually associate with transgenders but not

everyone with gender dysphoria identifies as transgender. In the book *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing culture*, gender dysphoria is defined as:

Gender dysphoria refers to the experience of having a psychological and emotional identity as either male or female, and that your psychological and emotional identity does not correspond to your biological sex- this perceived incongruity can be the source of deep and ongoing discomfort. Specifically, gender dysphoria is on the one hand the experience of being born male (biological sex) but feeling a psychological and emotional identity as female. Similarly, gender dysphoria is the experience of being born female (biological sex) but feeling a psychological or emotional identity as male. (Yarhouse 19)

Yarhouse analyse gender dysphoria as a transgendered concept but the gender dysphoria experience by the *bacha posh* is not a genetical disorder because *bacha posh* is an imposed identity upon girls to perform the male roles. With the imposition of the *bacha posh* identity, these girls begin to grow up with masculine traits which in turn create confusion about their own identity. This confusion, which results from the non-conformity between the masculine gender role that they have to enact, and their female body create a kind of gender dysphoria in them. The American Psychiatric Association states that "gender dysphoria involves a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify". According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the main characteristics of gender dysphoria include the feeling that they are in a

different gender from how the world perceives them, discomfort in one's own body and the desire to change their body. During puberty, most of the people with gender dysphoria might be very uncomfortable with their body or sometimes being uncomfortable with the expected gender roles of their assigned gender. Most of the people with gender dysphoria prefer to live a life that expresses or matches their gender identity rather than the identity they are assigned with birth. Gender dysphoria is not actually a mental illness, but it can sometimes lead to mental health problems. Through the cultural practice of *bacha posh*, most of the Afghan girls feel gender dysphoria at the time of their puberty because they identify themselves with the male gender identity and after puberty, they are assigned with female gender roles. They would feel emotionally and psychologically as males or they identify themselves as males, which is opposite to their biological sex. They come into a difficult situation in life, when the changes happening in their body and mind are not in coherence with each other. They couldn't adjust with their female gender and remain in a confused state where they are unable to place themselves in the larger society in general and women in particular. These girls struggle to find out what is happening around them and show the symptoms of irritation and anger, once the 'privilege' that they enjoyed so far, is about to be snatched away from them. The experience of gender dysphoria as a result of this imposed identity triggers unease by isolating them from their family as well as from the larger mainstream society. This sense of unease and distress sometimes become so intense and it can lead to depression, gender conflict and anxiety which would harmfully affect their daily life. In the case of *bacha posh* girls, their biological gender is female while their gender identity is of

male. These girls struggle from emotional and sex-based difficulties that persist long after their transition back to their biological sex. Having lived their entire childhood with freedom, it's very difficult to transform into submissive wives and mothers. Readapting the life as a woman in Afghan society is often impossible for a *bacha posh* and some choose to remain in the disguised identity even after they attain puberty. Though they try to remain in their male identity, their female body would remind them of their true gender. These girls have to follow certain kinds of strict rules till the time they become *bacha posh*. When they enter into this disguised identity, they would be taught by another set of rules, and when they reach puberty, they must unlearn these rules and follow the earlier one. While the new identity offers newfound liberties for the young Afghan girls, who gain increased freedom and mobility outside their home to do activities they were restricted from, this practice of *bacha posh* and its privileges change the psyche of the children and they resist to transform back to their biological sex when they attain their marriageable age. This transition from girl to boy and again back to girl can be quite traumatic as it imposes an identity crisis on the young psyche. There would be permanent psychological scars left after the *bacha posh* transition to reality. Sometimes people with gender dysphoria may be uncomfortable with their biological gender and prefer the gender with which they identify themselves, and some people find difficulty in the expected roles of their gender identity. The vast gender gap in Afghanistan causes many women to hate their own gender and to desire for being in the dominant gender. For a *bacha posh*, it is very hard to change back to their earlier identity as a girl, because they were boys at the time of developing their personalities. So, their boyish personality

would remain in them forever. If the girls continue in their boy's life even after attaining puberty, the society would turn against them, treat them as other people and they become marginalised in the society (Kashyap *DUGES*) .

One can observe from this book that the characters who were *bacha posh* did not want to follow this practise; rather, circumstances pushed them to do so, and they continued to live in the disguised identity even after reaching adolescence. Rahima was insisted by her mother to become a *bacha posh* in order to meet the economic needs of the family and to help her father. Shekiba became her father's daughter-son when there was no one else to help him on the farm. She later became a *bacha posh* guard, when she had no other choice. Other guards in the harem were also abandoned by their parents and they had no other option but to disguise their identity and become bacha posh. Initially, Rahima was shocked by this strange idea, but her mother convinced her by reminding the opportunities that this practice would bring her.

“I think it would be best if we let you be a son to your father.”

“A son?”

“It's simple and it's done all the time, Rahima-jan. Just think how happy that would make him! And you could do so many things that your sisters wouldn't be able to do. We could change your clothes and we'll give you a new name. 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. How does that sound?”

It sounded like a dream to me! I thought of the neighbours' sons. Jameel. Faheem. Bashir. My eyes widened at the thought

of being able to kick a ball around in the street as they did.

(Hashimi 23)

Once the male identity had been thrust upon her as a *bacha posh*, she had to adjust her mind and body to fit herself into the new gender role. For this, she had to learn a new set of rules about the language and behaviour of boys. The conflict between her biological sex and her new gender identity is visible, as she felt much difficulty to adjust with her new identity as Rahim. She always had the female instincts in her, so she had to remind herself to behave like a boy in public. She tried hard to keep her shoulder straight and look into other men's eyes while talking. But it seemed quite impossible for her as it was completely against the laws which she had followed till then. Like most of the *bacha posh*, it became problematic for her to enter into the new identity. As a *bacha posh*, she was permitted to pursue her education and, in the school, also she felt awkward to interact with other boys. It was strenuous for her to adjust with the male identity.

Now I have to adjust to the changes in mine. I had to learn how to interact with boys. It was one thing to play soccer with them, running alongside them and bumping elbows or shoulders.

Abdullah and Ashraf would pat me on the back, sometimes even sling an arm around my neck as a friendly gesture. I would smile meekly and try not to look as uncomfortable as I felt. My instincts were to jerk back, to run away and never look them in the eye again. (Hashimi 67)

Rahima was fascinated by the newly found freedom, which would be denied if she lived as a normal girl. So, she continued to remain a *bacha posh* even after

attaining puberty. But her body and mind started showing signs of femininity in her, which her disguised identity couldn't conceal. She was attracted to one of her male friends and she wished to be together with him always. But being a *bacha posh* with a male identity it was impossible for her to express her love. Even if she remained as a girl, she would not be allowed to have a love affair, because in a country like Afghanistan adolescent love is considered as wrong. Also, a girl is considered as the property of her father and she is not permitted to make decisions regarding her life, even about her life partner. Rahima was conscious about her interest in Abdullah but feared about her transformation back to her true gender. As time went on, the female characters in her body became more visible and she took steps to hide it from others. The body showed signs to remind her that she couldn't live under this disguised identity for long.

Abdullah and I stayed close together. In our circle of friends, we had something different. Something a little more. His arm across my shoulder, he would lean past me and tease Ashraf. I was a *bacha posh* but it had gone on too long, like a guest who had grown too comfortable to leave. I had started wrapping a tight cloth around my breast buds. I didn't want the boys to notice them or comment on them. It was awkward enough that my voice had not begun to change as theirs had. (Hashimi 85)

Rahima had more independence than the average young woman of her age, both within and outside of her home. In her assumed gender, she felt entirely at ease. She was free to go to school, wander the streets, interact with boys, play, work, and make money. But each of these benefits was only

intended to be used temporarily. She was in a distressed state with the realisation that it was time to take away all her freedom. She worried that her mother would change her back to a girl. She was not ready to accept this transition and wondered how her friends would react if they knew she was a girl. Simultaneously, she hated to be away from them and also scared to be with them. She lived as a boy during the time of her personality development. So, she identified herself as a male though her biological sex was female. She thought that her transition to a boy would give her protection from all kinds of atrocities like staring of other men, oppression and discrimination. With the marriage proposal from the warlord, Abdul Khaliq, she understood that this protection wasn't permanent and in fact, it was not really a protection but a curse. It was because of this gender disguise that the man was able to see her and which made an interest in him towards her. Soon after this her mother insisted on turning 'Rahim' back to 'Rahima. From now she had to follow all the rules meant for women, which would restrict her from things she was allowed to do as a *bacha posh*. It was arduous for her to put on the new identity of a woman and a submissive wife.

In the meantime, Madar-jan had to undo what she had done to me. She gave me one of Parwin's dresses and a *chador* to hide my boyish hair. She gave my pants and tunics to my uncle's wife for her boys.

"You are Rahima. You are a girl and you need to remember to carry yourself like one. Watch how you walk and how you sit. Don't look people, men, in their eyes and keep your voice low."

She looked like she wanted to say more but stopped short, her voice breaking. My father looked at me as if he saw a new person. No longer his son, I was someone he preferred to ignore. After all, I wouldn't be his for much longer. (Hashimi 138)

Since she had spent years performing as "Rahim," it was challenging for her to reassume her body as "Rahima," the feminine persona. As a result, she found the shift back to womanhood to be challenging. She had to unlearn the skills she had developed as a boy and adapt to the feminine body language and gender norms as Rahima. She preferred to live her entire life as a *bacha posh*, but the circumstances forced her to return to her natural gender. She begins implementing the new gender roles. Rahim's external look was simple to change into Rahima, but Rahim's psychological legacy was more difficult to erase. It would be challenging for *bacha posh* youngsters to adhere to oppressive female gender roles because they were exposed to freedom and luxuries. Additionally, women didn't want to get married because they thought that if they did, their husbands would oppress them, abuse them, and harass them. In fact, this fear of oppression is because of the Afghan cultural hierarchy, which gives importance only to men. Another problem is that, since they grew up as males, they were not allowed to do the typical household works by women like cooking, cleaning, washing and other domestic works. They didn't even learn these necessary things that a woman in Afghanistan must know. This could also make their married life more miserable. Rahima was also similar to all other *bacha posh* girls. After marriage, she found difficulty in holding a broom and felt it awkward to sweep the floor. She

always reminded herself to fold her legs and sit like a lady. She hated to wear female clothes since it seemed unnatural and awkward to her. Ever since she had converted into a *bacha posh*, she had been relieved of all cooking duties and when she was asked to prepare lunch for the entire family, she was terrified because she had no idea how to make even a simple meal. Her *bacha posh* memories haunted her whenever she saw boys playing in the compound. She was reprimanded and physically assaulted by everyone in her husband's home in order to teach her correct bride behaviour and housekeeping skills. Rahima's mother-in-law constantly watched over her so that she could get used to her feminine responsibilities and effectively perform the role of a wife.

She had to learn several new things and unlearn whatever she had learned so far. She carried herself as a boy for many years and it was hard to live like a woman from a particular point of time. So, everyone around her found everything wrong with her. Even though she wanted to be a *bacha posh* forever, she was embarrassed when anyone reminded her of the past. She felt dejected with her married life and longed to go back to her good-old *bacha posh* days. She also experienced gender dysphoria since her transition back from Rahim to Rahima. She wanted to live like a man because she identified her gender as a male. Her sense of unease, because of the mismatch between her biological sex and gender identity, could be understood from her distress to play the role of a woman in her husband's house. Her discomfort with her female body is also visible, when she said

Shahnaz would watch me suspiciously, as if waiting for me to do something wrong. And somehow it seemed I did everything wrong. I sat wrong, I cook wrong, I cleaned wrong. All I

wanted to do was get back to school and back to my family, my friends. I felt clumsy in a skirt, my breasts pointy in the brassiere my mother had purchased for me before my nikkah. I wanted to tie my chest down again. A lot of days, that's exactly what I did. I wrap a long strip of fabric around my chest and pin it tight, trying to prevent full womanhood from setting in.

(Hashimi 173)

She even kept the things which reminded her of her privileged days. She used one of her ratty blue housedresses for a long time because its navy-blue colour made her remember a pair of blue jeans she used to wear during the *bacha posh* time. In that denim she had been free to run down the block, to walk with her best friend's arm around her shoulder, to kick a soccer ball. Nobody else knew the value of that ratty blue housedress, but for her it was her freedom flag. It brought back memories of her boyish life. She wished to live her entire life as a boy and she always found solace in the reminiscence of her *bacha posh* days. It was strenuous for her to live like or to fulfil the duties of a woman because she was unable to perform the submissive role, as she had enacted the dominant role for nearly four years. Once her parents imposed a foreign identity on her female body and when she identified herself within the imposed identity, they again imposed the female identity on her. But it seemed impossible for her to live with the female identity as her body and mind accepted the male identity during the time of her personality development. The psychological scar which caused by the gender transition remained even after she became a mother. She was so determined and brave in her masculine identity but lost her confidence when she tried to fit with the female identity.

Though she was a woman, in the female identity she felt like she had been pretending to be something she was not. She felt discomfort in wearing the female dress and doing the female roles. For others, she was merely a woman, but she identified herself as a man. So what she wanted was to live like a man without any restrictions. *Bacha posh* practice resulted in an identity crisis in her and it eventually led to gender dysphoria. She was uncomfortable with her female body and the assigned gender roles. She experienced the conflict of the mismatch between her gender assigned by birth and her gender identity. Through many struggles and oppressions, finally she succeeded to embrace her gender identity by disguising herself as a man and attain a peaceful life by escaping from her husband.

Shekiba also faced similar problems with the two gender identities. After the loss of her mother and siblings, she lived like a boy and worked beside her father day and night. The more she did, the easier it was for her to forget that she was a girl. She tried to conceal her femininity by doing heavy tasks, which were normally assigned to men. But her body reminded her about her gender when she started to bleed. She felt difficulty in hiding the stained rags behind a sack of logs, away from her father and from her own consciousness. She experienced a sense of unease because of the mismatch between her female body and her male identity. After her father's death she had been handed over from one person to another. She lived as a son for her father, but it couldn't bring any benefits to her. She eventually realised that she was neither considered as a male nor a female. They made her work like a man but treated her like a woman. Even though she grew up as a son to her father and did all the work a son would do, she was denied the right to inherit

her father's property because of being a daughter. Though she lived as a man, they considered her merely as any other women in Afghanistan, so they scolded and punished her for doing improper things to women. "Sit up straight and watch your legs. Although you may not know it, you are a girl and you should sit like one." Bobo Shahgul snapped her stick against her granddaughter's arm. Shekiba flinched and straightened her back as best she could. (Hashimi 42)

When she was assigned with the role of a *bacha posh* guard in the palace, her hair was cut short and her name had been changed from 'Shekiba' to 'Shekib'. Initially she felt awkward to accept the male appearance and to wear pants since the shape of her limbs would be so visible in pants. She had only seen women in skirts, draped enough to disguise the curves of the body. Even though she felt discomfort with the uniform initially, she soon realised that there is something liberating about the new clothes. The uniform allowed her to lift her arms and her legs grew more confident in pants. It concealed her female body as well as her femininity. In order to be there in the palace, all she had to do was to give up being a woman. In fact, she was more comfortable with the male identity and the male gender roles. This disguised identity gave her confidence to make eye contact even with strangers. Prior to meeting Amanullah, the king's son, she felt entirely at ease in her assumed gender. She then yearned to revert to her former gender and wed Amanullah. But in a single night, everything changed. With her marriage to Aasif Baraan, she once more regained her femininity. Shekib had to emotionally and physically revert to Shekiba. After enjoying all the pleasures and freedom of being a man, it was terrible for her to accept her new identity as a woman and a wife. Her

female body and female clothing felt disgusting to her. She finds it difficult to accept her female body since she identifies herself as male and she tries to conceal the femininity of her body.

She felt terribly out of place. And she was now a woman again. Her dress felt cumbersome and heavy. She had just about forgotten how to keep her head scarf in place. She had left her guard's uniform in Benafsha's room but took with her the corset used to bind her breasts. She could not tolerate their jiggling, even though the corset chafed her raw wounds.
(Hashimi 361)

Shekiba experienced the conflict between her biological sex and her gender identity. She went through gender dysphoria with her frequent transitions from one gender identity to another. Being brought up as a boy by her father, it was difficult for her to adapt to the gender roles and manners of a woman. She was again assigned with the roles of a man, when she became a *bacha posh* guard. She finally attained a permanent gender identity of a woman with her marriage. She felt it terrible in the female identity and with the female body. Initially she faced difficulty to perform the role of a woman as well as a wife. She had been scolded by her husband because of her inability to perform the role of a wife and to fit well in a woman's role. Soon after the birth of her son she realised that she could no longer float between genders like a kite carried by the wind and she didn't need to bind her bosom to disguise her figure. She finally tried to fit in the female identity and hence relieved from identity crisis and gender dysphoria by accepting her biological sex and the female roles. During their transition, the majority of *bacha posh* girls struggle with this

sensation of uneasiness regarding biological sex and gender identity or regarding gender identity and the anticipated role. Because it might have a negative impact on females' mental health, this gender concealment cannot be seen as a relief for everyone. A brief era of *bacha posh* advantages turns into a protracted period of misery in the remaining years of life. Hashimi illustrates this point using the figures Rahima and Shekiba.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Half of the world's population is made up of women and girls, who have tremendous potential. However, there is still widespread gender inequality, and women are consistently the most disadvantaged members of society. From the minute a girl child is born, there is disparity in the world. The majority of people, even in highly developed countries, prefer sons to daughters. The birth of a girl child is not even welcomed and is solely seen as a burden in traditional patriarchal societies where only men are respected. In almost all the countries, the status of women is inferior to men. Millions of women and girls around the world are experiencing some kind of violence and discrimination, every year. The patriarchal society has limited the position of women under man. Their rights and opportunities have been denied in the name of traditions and religion. Most of the countries have some kind of tradition which victimises women. One of the countries which can be considered to be the worst place to be a woman is Afghanistan, because of its gender inequality and discrimination. In Afghanistan, women experience physical and psychological violence. All its traditions and rituals are based on their religious laws, which prevent women from empowerment.

Bacha posh is one of the still-practised traditions in Afghanistan that erases the identity of women. Some of the families participating in this custom would select one of their daughters to serve as a *bacha posh* while concealing their true gender. Cross-dressing is frowned upon in the majority of nations, but in Afghanistan, it is the only way for girls to exercise any degree of freedom. This practice allows the girls to experience the freedom and

privileges of the dominant gender. There were plentiful accounts of *bacha posh* in Afghanistan and there were various reasons behind this disguised identity. Some girls were changed by their parents at the time of their birth, some were changed during the time of education, some chose to become *bacha posh* in order to access more freedom, some parents did it to strengthen their girl child, some were forced to do so to earn an income for their family even though they didn't want to become *bacha posh* and some parents did this experimentation to get a male child in the next pregnancy. *Bacha posh* have to live and behave like boys until they reach their marriageable age. As they attain puberty, which is considered as their marriageable age, religion restores the natural law. Then these girls have to embrace their true gender, get married, give birth to many children and most importantly, they have to give up their freedom. Through the *bacha posh* practice Afghan parents are playing with the identity of their girls. Though this practice seemed to increase the mobility and the position of the girls in a highly patriarchal society, it would only damage the psychological stability of the girls. After their transition from the imposed identity to their biological identity, they would suffer from anxiety, depression, identity crisis, gender dysphoria, etc.

Though the body of literature produced with this theme is limited, yet there are some writers who have written about the predicament of Afghan women and the pathetic conditions of these girls with hidden or disguised identities. Nadia Hashimi is one among the writers, who threw light into the darkest side of Afghan society with her writings. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* is one of her historical fictions in which she portrayed the still ongoing struggles and atrocities faced by Afghan women. This novel looks at

patriarchy as the prominent reason for women's subjugation and also examines how Afghan's patriarchal society oppresses women. She also questions Afghan society's patriarchal structure which values men and allows them to move freely while setting rules and standards to isolate women within the house. The novel is mainly concerned with the challenges of Afghan women. She addresses various women's issues in Afghanistan, through the characters Rahima and Shekiba, such as the right to education, occupation, mobility, freedom and so on. These two girls were forced to disguise their identity as males in order to access some privileges in a highly patriarchal society and became the victims of *bacha posh* practice. Shekiba was Rahima's great-great grandmother who lived a century ago but both of them experienced the same kind of troubles. It means that nothing has changed much in Afghanistan even after a century. There still exist child brides like Rahima, girls are still forbidden from education, girls still cannot move freely without the escort of a male, women still cannot go outside without completely covering their body and face, women's role is still limited to wifedom and motherhood, they still face the adversities of being women. While most of the Afghan women surrendered under the powerful and dominant gender, the two central characters in the novel, Rahima and Shekiba fought courageously to break the shackles of patriarchy and altered the direction of their lives.

In a place like Afghanistan, girls can only have some degree of independence if they hide their gender, or being a *bacha posh* is the penalty they must pay for that freedom, as well as for their education and careers. In light of this, the only way for girls to exercise their rights and some measure of freedom in a largely patriarchal society is through *bacha posh*. They are

conscious that their advantages and freedom are transient, and they are continually concerned that when they hit puberty, their true identities will be exposed. If anyone learned of their genuine identities, they would be rejected. Reverting back to their biological sex can be distressing for the majority of *bacha posh* girls because they are abruptly forbidden from what they have previously enjoyed. Comparable to becoming a caged bird after being a free bird. They do not know how to behave like a girl, how to perform the role of a wife, how to cook or to lower their gaze and how to control their manly impulses. They undergo a state of confusion and psychological trauma as they find difficulty to accept the changes happening to their body and mind. The temporary liberty they experience as a *bacha posh* because of the isolation from the gender assigned at their birth can create a gender identity crisis in them.

It is considered that the *bacha posh* practice is a way of ensuring equality for girls as similar to boys in Afghanistan. But it can only widen the gender gap since the girls are disguising into male identity and their femininity have been kept invisible. So, what we can interpret is that this custom is not at all liberating or empowering but it simply strengthens the patriarchal set up which values only men. The aim of this project is to study the pernicious consequences of *bacha posh* practice in Afghan girls with reference to Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. This novel exposes the complexities faced by the feminine body as a result of participating in the *bacha posh* practice. Nadia Hashimi, through this novel, exposes the vulnerability of women in a highly patriarchal society and demonstrates how the Afghan girls suffer from Identity crisis and gender dysphoria because of the imposition of

male identity in them. Both Rahima and Shekiba in this novel came under the situations of identity crisis, gender dysphoria, otherness and marginalisation as a result of *bacha posh* practice. Nadia Hashmi suggests that this *bacha posh* practice could also be a recipe for gender dysphoria. Through this cultural practice, most of the girls feel gender dysphoria at the time of puberty or at the time of their transition to their biological sex. They had to unlearn their gender defined identity, their speech, their way of walking and their mobility outside their home. This transition is like a new birth in that they have to learn everything from the beginning itself. This practice in some way empowers women and at the same time it is psychologically damaging. This cannot liberate girls from the codes of restrictions and subjugation attached to their female body, but it can only complicate the subject position of the girl who disguised her identity. This practice of disguising gender is not a liberating force but it enforces the tragic gender inequality between girls and boys in Afghanistan. The Quest of Rahima and Shekiba in the novel to place themselves into the masculine gender identity and their hatred towards their birth gender grows from the subordinate position of women in the highly patriarchal Afghan society. But they finally come to the realisation that by enacting masculinity, they can never liberate themselves from oppression, rather it causes further subordination of their bodies.

Bacha posh is not a practice which strengthens the position of women or ensures equality of women in Afghanistan rather it is another way of victimising women to strengthen its patriarchal nature. The argument presented by this practice is that independence is exclusively reserved for men and that women must adopt a male demeanour in order to enjoy any form of

freedom or benefits. One can only hope that this gender imbalance and the *bacha posh* custom will be abolished in the future and Afghan girls will be granted the same benefits and rights as Afghan boys.

Works Cited

- Akeel, Maha. "The case for gender equality in the Muslim world."
Aljazeera, 26 Apr. 2017,
<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/opinions/2017/4/26/the-case-for-gender-equality-in-the-Muslim-world>.
- Bhattacharya, Sujay. "The curse of being a woman in Afghanistan."
India Today, 17 Aug. 2021,
<https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/news-analysis/story/the-curse-of-being-a-woman-in-afghanistan-1841672-2021-08-17>.
- Diksha. "Bacha Posh: The Invisible Girl." *languageinindia*, 9 Sep. 2019,
<https://languageinindia.com/sep2019/mkuliterature2019/diksha.pdf>.
- "Gender dysphoria." *mayo clinic*, 26 Feb. 2022,
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gender-dysphoria/symptoms-causes/syc-20475255>.
- Ghosh, Shuvo. "Gender Identity." *Medscape*, 9 Dec. 2020,
<https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/917990-overview>.
- Hashimi, Nadia. "Afghanistan's Female sons: The Tradition of Bacha Posh." *Foreign Affairs*, 13 Apr. 2015,
foreignaffairs.com <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/>.
- . "Nadia Hashimi introduces The Pearl That Broke Its Shell."
You Tube uploaded by William Marrow, 24 Apr. 2014,
<https://youtu.be/pfGbDQ4Jw3U>.
- . *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2014.
- Kashyap, Mridula. "Gender and Disguise: Representation of Bacha Posh

in Nadia Hashimi's One Half from the East and The Pearl That Broke Its Shell." *DUGES*, 30 Sep. 2020,

<https://www.duges.co.in/p/gender-and-disguise-representation-of.html?m=1>.

Menon, Rajasree. "Identity Crisis Among Afghan Girls as a result of Bacha Posh Practice: A Cultural Study of Nadia Hashimi's Novels The Pearl That Broke Its Shell and One Half from the East." *acad publ*, 15 Apr. 2018,

<https://acadpubl.eu/hub/2018-119-15-4/603.pdf>.

Nordberg, Jenny. *The Underground Girls of Kabul: The Hidden Lives Of Afghan Girls Disguised as Boys*, UK, Virago Press, 2014.

Shemm, Gwen. "Bacha Posh Girls: Fueling Gender Inequality." *The Borgen Project*, 5 Nov. 2019,

<https://borgenproject.org/bacha-posh-girls/>.

Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria:*

Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture, USA, InterVarsity Press, 2015.