

Tribhuvan University

Transition and Transformation of Position of Women in Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
in English

By

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Kirtipur, Kathmandu

March 2019

Tribhuvan University
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Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that Binod Prasad Acharya has completed his thesis entitled
“Transition and Transformation of Position of Women in Debroah Ellis’ *The Breadwinner*”
under my guidance. I recommend this thesis to be submitted to the Research Committee for
final examination of viva voice.

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Tara Lal Shrestha, PhD

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Transition and Transformation of Position of Women in Deborah Ellis’ *The Breadwinner*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Binod Prasad Acharya has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research committee.

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Date...../...../2019

Acknowledgements

I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Tara Lal Shrestha, PhD, Tribhuvan University who provided me constructive suggestions and concrete assistance, as a thesis supervisor, to lead this study to the existing shape. This thesis would stand undone unless he offered due guidance.

I would like to express my gratitude to Anirudra Thapa, Head of the Central Department of English, Kirtipur, for approval of this thesis in this present form. My special thanks go to other teachers, Dinesh Bhandari, Hem Lal Pandey, K.P. Subedi and Man Bahadur Bhandari for their valuable suggestions. I would like to thank all the teachers of the Central Department of English for providing me constructive guidelines and valuable suggestions.

With due respect I would like to express my gratitude towards my family members father, Tanka Prasad Acharya and mother Tulasa Devi Acharya whose continuous support and encouragements motivates my study. I would give thanks to my sister Lila Acharya and my wife Gita Sharma for their support during the study. At last, I express my gratitude to those authors and researchers, whose works have been consulted in preparing this thesis.

March, 2019

Binod Prasad Acharya

Abstract

The present study attempts to analyze the transformation of female's position that they are surviving by their own ways in Islamic countries in the novel The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis. It focuses on the process of transition and transformation on females' position in Muslim countries from pre Islamic period to recent time. Thus, this study aims to establish the search of females' status and position in Islamic world that had been made invisible in the world of dominance in the name of Islam and the misinterpretation of religion by the male authority and the society to gain the goal of gender equality. Therefore, from Qur'anic point of view, Qur'an clearly states men and women as equal and they will earn both rewards and punishment equally. But after misinterpretation of Qur'an and the entry of Taliban, the situation of women becomes worse. They lost all their rights, opportunity and freedom in their own societies. So the females' characters of the novel are transforming themselves from the meek characters to strong freedom fighter just only to survive in the Taliban rule. So this research tries to explain search for the rights and freedom of females, freedom to dream anything under powerful Islamic communities which is affected by the war and the strict rules of the Taliban society just to achieve the goal of improving on human injustice and gender inequalities in the Islamic countries.

Key Terms: patriarchy, gender, justice, freedom, Qur'an, liberty, rights, war and equality

Islamic feminism is orthodox and related to Qur'an. Islamic feminists use Islamic sources to show that full equality between men and women granted by god. The Qur'an clearly states that men and women are equal when it comes to religious duty and that they both earn the same rewards and punishment. But it is the society who has divided the position of females in two different sex from pre-Islamic period to

recent time. Islamic feminist is a movement that supports women's rights to achieve the goal on social justice and gender equality from Islamic point of view. In the past Afghanistan was peace and beautiful. Parvana's father and mother used to say that, "Kabul was the hot spring of central Asia" (82). It means that the Afghans used to walk down the streets at midnight, do anything they want and so on. Parvana remembers that, "Afghanistan was the city of light, progress and excitement" (82). It means that Afghani peoples were treated and respected equally. Everyone come to take over the Afghanistan such as Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, British and Soviets. But Parvana's father said that, "We Afghans had kicked them all out again!"(8). Later, after the entry of Taliban militia the situation of women become worse. War has affected both the life of Afghans people and the country. According to Parvana's father, "The Taliban are not making Afghanistan a kinder place to live" (9). Thus, Islamic feminist concludes on the low status of Muslim women in Islamic communities is because of misinterpretation of Qur'an by male authority and the society. Here, Qur'an gave both man and woman equal rights and major place to woman in both public and private sphere, where the Taliban create chaos towards women in the name of Islam in Muslim communities. They lost all their freedom, opportunity and their rights in their own societies. They were not allowed to go outside without male members and have to wear burqua covering the whole body, where the burqua symbolizes the loss of freedom of females. Islamic women were extremely deteriorated by the society. But after the endured of the domination; the women are fighting back in Muslim communities such as Parvana and Shauzia being a Breadwinner for their families and for Parvana's mother being a writer in a newspaper and for Nooria being a teacher in a school which was secretly opened. They are struggling for their freedom, liberty and rights and gender equality under

Islamic society. So the female characters are transforming themselves from meek character to strong freedom fighter from pre-Islamic time to recent days to achieve the goal on gender equalities.

Parvana sits in the market with her father, and considers the family's history including the death of her brother Hossain. Parvana completes her chores and helps to prepare dinner, and her father tells the story of Malali. Taliban soldiers burst in and take Parvana's father away, beating and terrorizing the rest of the family. Parvana and her mother Fatana, go to the prison and demand her father's release, but are beaten by the guards until they leave. After returning from the jail without rescuing Parvana's father, Fatana sleeps for a number of days. Eventually the food runs out, and being a small girl Parvana, Nooria tells to her she is the only one who can buy more for the family. Parvana goes to the market to buy food, but is confronted by a Taliban soldier for not wearing a burqua. The Talib boy says that, "you must covered up" (31). It means that girls and women's are not allowed to go outside without male members and without wearing burqua. She escapes and runs into Mrs Weera, who comes home with her and helps to clean and order the house and get her mother dressed. The women transform Parvana into a boy by cutting her hair and dressing her in Parvana's death brother Hossain's clothes saying that " Parvana is a boy now" (49). It creates the scene that she is able to buy food without hesitation. Parvana sets up stall in the marketplace selling household goods and reading/writing letters. Her first customer is a Taliban soldier, who is brought to tears by a letter that belonged to his dead wife.

One day, Parvana discovers a school friend, Shauzia, being a girl who has also disguised herself as a boy just to survive in Taliban rule. Shauzia and Parvana discuss about the business and Parvana invites Shauzia to visit her house. Mrs Weera, along with Mother and Nooria, has decided to start a secret school for girls. Then,

Shauzia tells Parvana about her plan to escape to France the following spring. Parvana begins to worry about her situation, but tries to make the best of it. She hears a physical fight in the nearby house. The secret school is started, and Nooria is the teacher. Then her mother tells her Nooria is getting married. Mother, Nooria and the little brother go to Mazar for Nooria's wedding, leaving Parvana behind with Mrs Weera. One day, Parvana is caught in a rainstorm and hides in a building, where she hears a woman crying. She takes the woman Homa, home with her and they discover she is a refugee from Mazar, which has been taken amid scenes of extreme violence by the Taliban. One day, she returns to the flat to find her father is alive and has come home. Parvana and her father decide to go to Mazar to look for the rest of their family in the refugee camps. Mrs Weera and Homa decide to go to Pakistan. Shauzia has plans to go to Pakistan with a group of nomads. Shauzia and Parvana make a promise to meet in 20 years' time at the top of the Eiffel Tower.

So, this research attempts to explore the position of the Muslim women transforming themselves from meek character to strong freedom fighter through pre-Islamic period to recent time where females are trying to live within. The males are always powerful and the women are taken as weak and inferior beings. The Taliban have been treated the females as second object in the society which is guided in the name of Islam. Male ideology and dominant patriarchal mindset have left adverse effects in their process of being women. That is why women have suffered age long pathos of men's suppression and restriction though there are no rules that could justify the natural hierarchy between sexes in the society. Women always have to bear all forms of domination, confinement or oppression. So the characters Parvana and Shauzia along with her mother Fatana and her sister Nooria search for their freedom, status, position and gender justice in Taliban society which is followed in the name of

Islam just to survive in the society by doing the job that they are not allowed to do. Therefore, this research talks about how the characters transform themselves to get the freedom of the females by correcting actual social inequalities and injustice that is created in the Muslim communities in the name of Islam by Taliban rule. Not only it represents the position of the characters but also represents the actual girls and females that they are living under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan nowadays in contemporary time.

Since its publication as a novel and production as a movie, *The Breadwinner* has got so many criticisms. Similarly many critics argue about the novel that how the novel makes the audiences and the writer to feel pity and sympathy towards the status and position of female that are living in the Muslim societies under Taliban rule which is guided by the name of religion. The critics argue most of their ideas based on position, status, rights, liberty and gender relationship of the females living under patriarchal male-dominated society. Likely, according to Amani Hamdon, review on *Mud City* by Deborah Ellis, published by Professor World Peace Academy in a *International Journal on World Peace*, highlights on the issue of females position living under Taliban rule such as given below:

The book opens more in-depth discussion of the plague of women and young girls in Afghanistan. *The Breadwinner* novel by Deborah Ellis provides an unbiased account of the female struggle under the Taliban rule. It navigates that the interaction of characters whose lives have become emotionally enveloped in situations such as war and poverty. Although her purpose is not to fictionalize the lives of women and girls there, Ellis highlights how the reality there is doomed by closing all girls schools and loss of reaching towards freedom. (109)

The above quote explains that the character's life represents the life of Afghani girls which have emotionally enveloped in situations such as war and poverty. So it is the stories of children whose lives are unimaginable to most of us: girls who can't go out, who deny their femininity to be safe, who see their families and friends are beaten and starved, who are prohibited from attending school because of the cruel law of Taliban rule which guided in the name of Islam .

Similarly, for Helen Harper in his review on *Studying Masculinity(ies) In Books About Girls* published by Canadian Society for the Study of Education in a Canadian Journal, talks about the adopting a male persona and the character as Parvana and Shauzia are successful in adopting and performing masculinity. "The performance of masculinity in a strategic act of cross-dressing is the key to narrative in Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*" (513). This quote explains that, Parvana accepts the masculinity and able to secure food for the family as "Breadwinner." Her mother indicates, "As a boy you'll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you" (36). Moreover, her sister Nooria warns that "If you're going to be a boy outside, you should be a boy inside" (42). This creates the scene that the masculinity was adopted and performed successfully by the character Parvana. She becomes a Breadwinner for her family by accepting her male persona and helps the family when they are needed the most. Similarly for Shauzia, she also performs her masculinity as a tea boy in the market and able to secure food for her and her family as, "the tea boy was a girl from her class" (53). Shauzia talking with Parvana as, "the same as you, silly" (54). It creates a scene that being the girl Shauzia serves as a tea boy in the market. She also accepts masculinity and performs successfully in her own way to get the position and freedom in Taliban rule. So, the

females of Muslim societies are forced to survive by becoming the breadwinner for their families in the powerful Taliban rule which is guided in the name of Islam.

Moreover, being a western education teacher when her father returns home, the most traditional patterns of gender could return indicating that; “now you are both my daughter and son” (91). This creates the scene that the females are struggling in the religion guided powerful society being a girl at home and being a boy in the outside world just for their freedom, equal rights and gender justice such as, “The blurring of gender boundaries in this comment and Parvana’s successful performance of masculinity; and her pleasure in experiences potentially opens up a moment for reflection on what constituted and limits gender identity” (513). Thus, the above quote explains that the character presents and adopts the male persona successfully. The novel portrays the search of freedom, liberty and the rights of the female characters which is presented clearly by the female characters in the novel such as for Parvana, her mother says that, “As a boy you’ll be able to move in and out of the market” (36). Similarly, for Fatana being a writer in a newspaper as, “Fatana, you are a writer” (26). Likely for Nooria becoming a teacher in a secret opened school as, “Nooria is a teacher” (74). Along with searching freedom and rights of females, the female characters try to achieve the status and the positions of gender justice in the Taliban society by doing the job that they are restricted to do. So, the novel talks about the freedom, liberty and equal rights of gender of the females that are living in Muslim communities under the powerful Taliban rule.

Similarly, the betraying of the masculinity through the growth of the female body is also shown in the novel when Parvana’s friend Shauzia who is also disguised as a tea boy, worries that “I’m starting to grow. My shape is changing. If it changed too much, I’ll turn back into the girl and then I’ll stuck here” (71). It agrees on the

scene that, Shauzia is searching for her freedom under Taliban rule. She has become the victim of the law and culture of Islamic countries how the females are treated. So to be free from the Taliban society she wants to escape the France in spring.

Therefore, in her own way Shauzia also takes hardest way to search for her freedom by adapting and performing masculinities (changing herself as a boy from girl) in the Taliban rule which is powerful.

In the same way, Thomas W. Bean and Helen J. Harper for instance, in *Exploring Notions of Freedom in and through Young Adult Literature* published on Wiley on behalf of the International Literacy Association, comments this novel as the source to achieve the freedom. Education must be given to females in the Muslim society, where the females are living under heavily restricted by the law of the Taliban rule. The females are doing the job that they are not allowed to do. The females are searching for their position, status and their freedom and rights under the Islamic society which is ruled by Taliban law. Thus Thomas W. Beat and Helen J. Harper highlights on:

Although given less attention in the novel, Parvana's mother, in developing an underground women's newspaper, and her sister, in providing formal education to young Afghan girls, make powerful attempts to subvert Taliban law. Such efforts allow for the collective naming and renaming of experience against what has been normalized and legalized in order to inspire, to create change, and to open opportunity to find freedom. (99)

This above quote explains that, after living in the Taliban rule and the arrest of her father a story based on fact that tells of a young girl in Afghanistan who has to earn money to sustain her ill mother and infant sister. All the female characters try to get freedom in their own way. For the case of Parvana, she dresses up as a boy so that she

can go into the city and sell bread, something a girl should not do as, “As a boy you’ll be able to move in or out of market” (36). It means that, Parvana achieves anonymity and a large measure of freedom by making her femininity invisible. The women's accounts of life under the Taliban are horrifying. They are not allowed to study education and walk street without male members. The novel starkly depicts forces of good and evil but with great complexity represents both the suffering and resistance of Parvana and her family such as, “Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer from a Kabul radio station” (6). It means that the suffering and hardships incurred by the Taliban's restrictions on the education, careers, dress, and mobility of females in this novel speak most obviously to the importance of freedom. So, the characters Parvana and Shauzia challenge the powerful male dominated society by becoming breadwinner for their families under Taliban rule. Similarly, for Fatana being a writer in a newspaper as, “ Fatana you are a writer” (26). So, in the case of Nooria becoming a teacher in a secret opened school as, “Nooria is a teacher” (74). Therefore, all the female characters are trying their best to get their freedom, position and status in the Taliban rule which had made the female invisible in the world of male domination.

Similarly, Cyndi Giorgis and Nancy J. Johnson argues on *Children's Books: Multiple Perspectives* published by Wiley on behalf of the International Literacy Association focuses on the novel that focuses on the females that are living under Taliban rule which is the cruelest for females. Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner* is set in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. A strong heroine and the book's topical issues are enhanced by a map, glossary, and an author's note providing timely background on and context for contemporary Afghanistan. Thus, the females are trying to get their

freedom and they are doing the job that they are not allowed to do. Therefore, education plays the vital role to gain freedom of females which is also shown in the novel. They continue to argue that:

“When 11-year-old Parvana's father is arrested by the Taliban simply because he is a scholar, her family is left without anyone to earn money or shop for food. Because females are forbidden to work, attend school, or go out in public without an escort, Parvana must dress as a boy and become The Breadwinner for her family. While Parvana's disguise is risky, it affords her a measure of freedom and allows her to do whatever is necessary to keep her family alive, including reading letters for illiterates and digging up and selling the bones of her ancestors”. (493)

This above quote explains that the issue that arises in the text is the search of female's freedom and transformation of position of females under Muslim society. The character Parvana struggles a lot to help her family when her father is arrested and at the age of eleven she is forced to become Breadwinner for her family. The novel talks about the freedom of the females like, Thomas W. Bean and Helen J. Harper review on the *Exploring Notions of Freedom in and through Young Adult Literature*. All the critics talk about the freedom of the females that the females have lost the identity of freedom, education and equal rights of both male and female but especially the females that they are living in Muslim communities under Taliban rule. The society has to change the concept towards the females and must create the position of females as the equal rights and must be given equal opportunity to do the work that the males are allowed to do.

In the nutshell, this novel *The Breadwinner* is the story focused on the issue based on transforming the position of the female in the Muslim society to achieve the

goal of gender equality. The character Parvana plays an important role challenging the ideologies created in the name of religion by Taliban society. *The Breadwinner* offers a valuable lesson on how powerless people can be threatening for their survival by powerful people. Through Parvana, we get to know that a life of many girls endures during a difficult period in Afghanistan, treated badly in their daily lives in Taliban rule. Parvana's story shows that how the girls are neglected from their education, freedom and liberty and gender violated as, "Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school (6). Many girls are forced to dress up as a boy in the country where they are known as breadwinners for their families as for the case of the character Parvana " As a boy, you'll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need ,and no one will stop you," (36). It shows that the novel highlights on the struggle of females under the Taliban rule where the girls are accepted male persona and tries to improve their position, status, freedom, liberty and rights of all females. It also portraits that they must be treated as equal and must be given equal opportunity and tries to survive in the powerful patriarchal Muslim society under Taliban law which is guided in the name of Islam.

This research is primarily text-based and online researcher, and with the help of library consultant and the professor's advice. Although, this novel has been critiqued from different perspective by different scholars such as: Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud and Ziba Mir Hosseini. The researcher wants to explore the process of transition and transformation of the female's position from pre-Islamic period to recent time. All the critics argue on gaining the goals on female's status, position, freedom and gender justice in the Muslim communities which is legitimated in the name of Islam from Islamic feminist point of view. For Fatima Mernissi, well known as for Islamic feminist elaborates in great detailed on how Qur'an accorded equality

to women and expressed the holy commandment relating to gender equality. Her theory is that Islam is going through “Identity Crisis” and that the veil is a symbol of “Protection”. She further talks about the male elite have been misinterpreted the Islam and gave the position to the women in Islamic communities. Similarly, for Amina Wadud states her theory on an attempt to uncover whether the actual inequality of women and men in Islamic societies was “a function of Islam”. She furthermore argues on the position of women from pre-Islamic period regarding rights and roles of women just to achieve the goal on gender justice. Likely for Ziba Mir-Hosseini elaborates his theory based on female’s rights and gender relations in their own societies and a new gender discourse that argues for equality within Islamic framework. Thus, all the critics try to explore the position of Muslim women from their own perspective. Therefore, Islamic feminism is defined by Islamic scholars as being more radical than secular feminism, and being anchored with the Quran as its central text.

Likely, for Fatima Mernissi well known as for Islamic feminist supports on the freedom of women in Islam societies. Fatima Mernissi is the scholar of Islamic feminism, gender equality and human dignity as seen from a female eye. She challenged herself, and her tradition, to embrace a larger human self. She would clarify her views based on the tradition itself to unveil the patriarchal and cultural additions that have burdened the Muslim message and the perception of man and woman. She clarifies with the Islamic message which she considers to have given full equality of man and woman. She dreams of reclaiming the message of Islam related to equality and justice. Fatema Mernissi’s first work *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society* was published in 1975. It has become a classic on Arab-Muslim and Mediterranean socio-anthropologic work on women. According to

the preface of book she says, “Paradoxically, and contrary to what is commonly assumed, Islam does not advance the thesis of women’s inherent inferiority. Quite the contrary, it affirms potential equality between the sexes” (12). This above quote explains that it is to affirm the women’s emancipation where traditional Islam recognized equality of potential of females. Parvana was not really supposed to go outside without male members like many other women living in Afghanistan because of Taliban law that is created in the name of Islam as, “The Taliban had ordered all the girls and the women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes” (6). It creates that the desegregation of the sexes violates the Islam’s ideology on women position that women are considered to be under the authorities of father, brother and husband. Females have to be under the control of males in both public and private sphere. Moreover, she talks about the position of females as the enemies of males. If the females argue with the family members, then they get punished. According to the Islamic religion punishment means the violence against human beings where the females are treated more badly and brutally than males.

According to feminist scholars, such as Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud and Ziba Mir-Hosseini concerns their idea with the position of women from Islamic point of view that both Islamic countries and the people living in it are affected by war and poverty in the name of Islam. In the past, Arabian countries such as Afghanistan was quite a beautiful place in the whole world. Nooria remembers at first our country as, “Kabul had once been beautiful. Nooria remembered whole sidewalks, traffic lights that changed color, evening trips to restaurants and cinemas, browsing in fine shops for clothes and books” (10). It means to say that in the pre-Islamic period everyone were treated equally and didn’t suffer from the war. Similarly parvana’s father says to parvana about the past of Afghanistan as, “Kabul was the hot spot of central Asia”

(82). It means to say that all people of Muslim countries were living as peaceful life before war and the Taliban rule. But it radically changes because of the entry of Taliban. Afghanistan along with the position, status of women also gradually changed. Most of the country was controlled by Taliban rule. Parvana's father used to say that, "the word 'Taliban' meant religious scholar that religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder but the Taliban are not making better place to live" (9). Similarly for the position of women, Qur'an clearly states men and women are equal when it comes to religious duty and they both earn same rewards and punishment. The situation for women becomes worse after the entry of war and Taliban rule. The Taliban soldiers do not have the feelings and sorrow like other human beings. Parvana has seen that, "What they did especially to women, the way they would whip and beat someone they should punished" (6). It creates the scene that they beat women and arrest any people without any reason. They treat women as the second object and they only think about the consequences how to win the war. The Taliban soldiers only create chaos in the name of religion. Mother was fond of saying that "The Taliban has said we must stay inside, but doesn't mean we have to live in filth" (14). This means that the females are trying to get their freedom, liberty and equal rights in the Taliban society by fighting back by doing the jobs they are not allowed to do such as for Parvana and Shauzia being the Breadwinner for their families and for Fatana being a writer in a newspaper and for Nooria being a teacher in a secret opened school. So, the female characters of the novel are transforming themselves from meek character to strong freedom fighter just to survive in the Taliban rule. It focuses on transition and transformation of female's position from pre-Islamic period to recent times. So, exploring the issues on the freedom of females this novel represents the transformation of women position and

how the women are challenging the powerful society by correcting actual improvement of the females position of human injustice and gender inequalities by breaking the law that the Taliban has created in the name of Islam.

Islamic feminist argues that domestic violence, loss of identity, freedom and the rights of women is the key to the Quran concept of ideology. Here, after the entry of Taliban rule the women are forced to live inside the house doing the inside works and the pleasure of sex for males. They are not allowed to go outside without male members. They are restricted from education, women rights, opportunity and the freedom. Women can't celebrate the women's day in the Taliban rule when that occurs the Taliban soldiers cut their legs and sometimes kill the females. So, the violence occurs as the simple issue in Afghanistan as, "Afghans cover the earth like stars cover the sky" (7). It is said by the father when the family was moved from one place to another due to the war that occurred in the Afghanistan by the Taliban. Similarly in the novel the violence occurs when Parvana and her mother go alone to search her father; "Released my husband!" (25). and "I'm here for my father" (24). They were beaten mercilessly while arguing to release her husband from Taliban soldiers. Similarly without wearing burqa , Parvana is chased by Taliban boy as, "You must covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband?" (31). Similarly, when Parvana tries to revolt against Talib soldier saying; "Stop hitting me!" (32). It makes Talib boy surprised and creates the scene that the violence against the women is most cruel in Taliban rule and nowadays the females are challenging the powerful Taliban society by their own ways in Afghanistan and Islamic countries.

Likely, domestic violence, war has also affected as the violence towards females in the Muslim communities. Deborah Ellis has collected the voices and stories of scores of women from *Women of Afghan War* who have been affected by

the war in Afghanistan. According to the Review of the work of Deborah Ellis *Women of the Afghan War* by Carol Anne Douglas agrees on the female status on war. The critic argues on as,

“Taliban men force themselves into homes and, if they see a girl they want, insist on marrying her and threaten to kill her parents if they object. The Taliban government says that girls are ready for marriage by age eight and should be married by age nine. Taliban has killed gay men, and presumably would kill lesbians if they knew of them”. (17)

This quote explains that the situation before Taliban and after Taliban has caused the drastic effect upon the position of females in their own society. Muslim women were suppressed and oppressed by the Taliban law and the society so Ellis uses “The word ‘affected’ though of course it is too weak for most cases, because Ellis begins at the outside and works in for the most part sick, depressed, in dreadful poverty” (17). It means that powerless people are always be dominated by powerful people.

Afghanistan's Islamic fundamentalist Taliban government is the cruelest in the world to women as, “The Taliban threatened to cut the legs off any women who celebrated International Women's Day” (17). It creates the scene that, girls cannot go to school, women must wear burqas that cover everything but not their eyes, and, even wearing burqas, they are not supposed to leave their homes except in the company of a male relative. Even then, they are not allowed to talk loudly or laugh in the streets.

Windows of houses must be painted so that men on the streets cannot see women through them. The females who don't follow the Taliban law are given punishment as, “Women who defy these laws are beaten or worse” (17). Therefore war affects not only the character of the novel but in reality it also reflects the actual people of Afghanistan who are living in a war zone under Taliban rule.

In the same way, not only war has affected to the women from the collected story by Deborah Ellis' but also has affected the characters under the Taliban rule. Deborah Ellis, being a Canadian author who writes socially engaging novels about children living in the environment of conflict that has been known as anti-war activist and feminist from early age. She wrote the novel after spending time in Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan. The ensemble of stories inside Parvana's world as the main character reflects a life of struggle in war zones and the effects on children and women. So Ellis skillfully illustrates the difficulties and opportunity that many Afghans experienced. Here because of war, Parvana's life has been affected as, "Bombs had been part of Parvana's whole life. Every day, every night, rockets would fall out of the sky, and someone's house will explode" (9). It means this is because that the war never ends when there are the people who are against the powerful people. The situation of Afghanistan has been a war-zone because of Taliban rule as, "Kabul has more land mines than flowers" (62). The women of Afghanistan have lived their lives in the war zone rule as "There had been a war going on in Afghanistan for more than twenty years" (9). Afghans and foreigners have mined the countryside, bombed the cities, raped and mutilated mothers and daughters, destroyed homes and farms as, "Land mines are as common rocks and can blow you up without warning" (62). It means that the people living in Afghanistan are facing the difficult experiences under Taliban rule. Here Parvana's father was dragged out from her house and taken to prison without any reason such as, "he had nothing done wrong" (18). It means that, it was screamed by Parvana's mother for his innocence. One of the Taliban soldiers does not agree on the western education of the father as, "Afghanistan doesn't need your foreign ideas" (18). The replied of Parvana's father to the Talib soldier as "Afghanistan needs more illiterate thugs like you" (18). It creates

the scene that war only search the soldiers not the educated people. So, in this way the people living in Afghanistan have more misery and sorrowful life under Taliban rule.

Similarly, Ellis supports on the position of female and struggle of the female in war zone afghanistan. Both male and female characters are been affected by war and poverty by their own way. But the characters are surviving by fighting back in the Muslim countries. Similarly, for Parvana and Shauzia being The Breadwinner for their families. For Fatana, being an educational scholar as, “Fatana, you are a writer” (26). Similarly, Fatana along with Mrs Weera who are working together announcing that, “we are going to start a magazine” (47). Moreover for Nooria through Fatana and Mrs.Weera’s women’s group starting a secret school and teaching a small group of girls as, “Nooria was the teacher” (74). It creates the scene that through the help of the education, the females character are moving forward searching for their freedom, position, status only to survive in the Taliban rule to gain the goal on improving the social injustice and gender inequalities.

Thus, Fatima Mernissi tries to change the position of the Muslim women and also tries to change the nature of the males and the societies from her own perspective. She continues to give her argument on ‘Identity Crisis’ of women's position due to the misinterpretation of Islam by male elite and the society as follows:

Muslim society is not the emancipation of women (if that means only equality with men.), but the fate of the heterosexual unit. Men and women were and still are socialized to perceive each other as enemies. The desegregation of social life makes them realized that besides sexes, they can also give each other friendly and love. Muslim ideology which views men and women as enemies tries to separate the two, and empower men with institutionalized means to oppress women. (13)

This quote explains that the females are not equal to men and they are not accepted by the society. According to the Islamic ideology, Muslim women are the enemies of the males, tries to separate the two sexes only to oppress the women. Thus Fatima Mernissi, concludes on the ideology of the females as the problematic position of Muslim women in Muslim communities. Moreover, she argues on as, "It is the result of male-dominated misinterpretation of holy texts of Islam rather than of the essence of Islam itself" (108). It supports that pre-Islamic Qur'anic verses gives women equality with males but later verses gives women male domination which is the result caused by the misinterpretation of religion Islam. Similarly, she furthermore concludes on the position of the women is determined by male elite as, "It is neither because of Koran, nor the prophet, nor the Islamic tradition but simply because those rights conflict with the interest of a male elite" (78). It means that the male elite has manipulated the sacred texts as false traditions to oppress women in the Muslim countries and made invisible in a world of domination. When the issue of female arises the status of women in Islam is one of the most controversial and serious issues of our time, not only among Muslim women and those who represent them in the area of women's rights in the Islamic world. Parvana whispered, " She'd like to be able to run around the market, to know its winding streets as well as she knew the four walls of her home" (7). It means that Parvana want to live an ordinary peaceful life. Some cover Islam's achievements for the woman, maintaining that it was Islam that gave the woman her rights and honor, where Parvana's father looked at Parvana, "I'd rather see you running around a school yard" (7). While others blame all the disadvantages in the position of Muslim women on Islam as Talib sees when a girl and the females are seen without male members. When Talib sees Parvana and says that, "You must covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband?" (31). It means to say that

women are not allowed to go outside without male members. Similarly, when Parvana and her mother Fatana, go alone to search her father arguing, one of the Taliban soldier as, “Released my husband!” (25). For, Parvana asking the Taliban soldier as, “I’m here for my father” (24). The female characters were given a mild beating as “stop hitting me!” (32). So this novel, portrays the issue on the freedom of gender justice, position and the status of females through the eye of Islamic feminist scholars from traditional time to recent time.

Similarly, for Amina Wadud known as Islamic feminist scholar supports the Muslim women to gain their position which had been lost in their own society. She furthermore talks about on correcting actual social inequalities and injustices perpetrated in Muslim communities in the name of Islam. Her main argument is that the status and position of Muslim women is determined by the male members and the society which is different from Qur’anic perspective that Wadud has present in her text, *Qur’an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*. According to her text it is not the Qur’an who had gave the place to women as inferior. She also talks about the position of Muslim women from pre-Islamic period to recent time. Wadud furthermore talks that the Qur’an gave women equal rights, opportunity and freedom with men as

“The Qur’an provides women with explicit rights to inheritance, independent, property, divorce and the rights to testify in a court of law. Women and men equally are required to fulfill all religious duties and are equally eligible for punishment. Finally women are offered the ultimate boon: paradise and proximity to Allah”. (25)

This quote explains that ‘Allah’ is the word known as the guardian of all humanity in Islamic society. The word ‘Allah’ is considered being destructive elements not only

for females but also for the males also. ‘Allah’ gave equal rights to both men and women and has same equality for reward and punishment. Thus, Wadud continues to clarify that it is the society and the male authority that have made the differences in two sexes because of misinterpretation of Qur’an.

Moreover, Islamic feminism talks the ideas about equal rights of women in Muslim communities. It is about every woman’s right to make her own choices about how she wants to live her life. The religious principle of full equality of human beings is the core of Islamic feminism which aims to increase women’s right, opportunity and choices. If we look in Qur’anic perspective women and men are equal and when it comes to religious duty along with rewards and punishments. So Wadud continues talking her argument on the perspective of women in the Islamic society as :

Most men have at one time or another heard, or perhaps even believed, that women are “inferior” and “unequal” to men. I worked against the backdrop of common prejudices and attitude among Muslims towards women which have not affected the position of women in Muslim societies but also affected the interpretation of the position of women in the Qur’an. (7)

This above explains that the women’s position is determined not only by the Islamic society but also by the misinterpretation of religion. The women are portrayed as the inferior and unequal by the society. They always have to be under the authorities of male members. So, Wadud portrays her argument considering the female’s position is always dominated by male and the society where women have been excluded from history and made invisible in a world of male dominance.

Similarly, Wadud in her text, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*, she has been a major figure for scholar and activist around the Muslim world seeking out values of status and equality in Islamic society.

According to the preface of the book, Amina Wadud continues on the position of women as weak and different sex that the Islam has agreed as, “Women are not deemed as important as men in Muslim majority and minority communities, Muslim women do not enjoy a status equal to men. If the definitive basis for what Islam means is determined by what Muslim do, then women and men are not equal” (ix). This quote explains that how Muslim society portrays the position of Muslim women in their own society. Amina Wadud agrees on the position of females are been taken as the disaster form; because of the rules and regulation that is created in the name of Islam. Thus, the novel *The Breadwinner* is based on the struggle of the female characters and to transform themselves from meek characters to strong freedom fighter in the Muslim communities to gain the goal of gender equality from pre-Islamic period to recent time which is the main issue that is raised in the novel.

Similarly, Wadud continues to support the females arguing that, “Muslim women’s enjoy full respect in the society; now they want to control the society (by participating in everything) which is the major flaw in her thinking” (22). This creates the scene that the Muslim women are moving forward breaking the law that Taliban has created to gain the goal of gender equality in their own society. The situation of the story telling becomes the means of strength and supports the woman that was passed by the history long time ago. Story telling gives the strength towards the powerless people who are inferior, weak and poor. By the help of the story telling the meek characters make themselves as the freedom fighters in the story. So in this novel, the characters present the story telling methods to gain the strength to fight with the powerful people. Before the arrest of her father he tells Parvana a story of a strong girl Malali; “A history of the Afghans fighting with British and they were losing the battle and the little girl appears in the battlefield and cried not to give up,

we can win this battle” (17). Here, it shows that the courage given by the little girl makes the Afghans win the battle which makes the lesson that the women’s of Afghanistan are brave and have a lot of courage. The lesson my daughters, Parvana’s father looked from one to other saying, “Is that Afghanistan has always been the home of the bravest women in the world. You are all brave women. You are all inheritors of the courage of Malali” (17). Therefore this quote explains that the story telling was continued from past to past generations of history of Afghanistan to gain courage and strength for survival in Taliban society. Similarly, Parvana’s father teaches bravery to his family saying that about afghan people as, “Everybody comes to Afghanistan to try to take over but we afghans kick them all out” (16). Parvana’s father tells the story of Malali because he wants his daughter to be brave and does courageous work as Parvana accepts her male persona and her wife Fatana along with Mrs. Weera working together announcing that, “We’re going to start a magazine” (47). And for Nooria as the teacher of the secret school in the Afghanistan as, “Nooria is a teacher” (74). The female characters are trying to challenge the powerful society by their own way that was created in the name of Islam by Taliban. Story telling gives the strength towards the characters of the novel to challenge the male dominated society for their freedom, liberty and women rights which represents the actual women that are now a days facing in the Afghanistan.

According to Wadud, the Muslim women are affected mainly because of the law of the Taliban rule. Wadud states an attempt to uncover whether the actual inequality of women and men in Islamic societies was a function of Islam where the women are fighting back for the position, status, and freedom in Muslim communities. Here, the character Parvana fights back in her own way when there is no male member around, which creates the scene that Parvana’s fighting to survive in

the Taliban society and the law that the Taliban has created. So she dresses up as a boy and moves forward like, “As a boy, you’ll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need ,and no one will stop you” (36). It means that, after the hiding the feminity of her own she finds herself as the freedom fighter for her and her family’s survival. She meets another character Shauzia who also dresses up as a tea boy being a girl as, “the tea boy was a girl from her class” (53). It creates the scene that, no one in her family as the breadwinner she becomes the breadwinner for her family which helps to know that Shauzia is also fighting for survival for her and her family in her own way. Similarly, for Fatana being a writer in a newspaper magazine saying that “Fatana, You are a writer” (26). Fatana along with Mrs.Weera working together as, “we are going to start a magazine” (47). For the case of Parvana’s sister Nooria as a teacher in a secret school as, “A secret school, for small number of girls a few hours a week” (56). It creates that the characters are trying to challenge the patriarchal society by their own ways. Shauzia plans to go away from the Taliban patriarchal society arguing that she is going to leave the Afghanistan by herself before turning to girl as she argues that; “France. I’ll get on a boat and go to France” (71). It means that the equality and freedom is given both equally to males and females in France. Similarly, Parvana and Shauzia work hard as tea boy, selling cigarette and dig up graves to sell to a bone broker and earns many money which helps to survive for them and their families with the basic supplies for daily survival.

Not only the females are fighting back for their freedom, gender and liberty but they have the freedom to dream and to do anything they want. The dreams of Shauzia and the meeting of two girls in Eiffel tower in 20 years as, “The top of Elite Tower” (92). It symbolizes that the women or the girls have the freedom to dream and do anything they want. They are not inferior by birth but the society made them to be

so. Shauzia talks with Parvana as a promise to be with each other after twenty years as, “We will meet again on the first day of spring, twenty years from now” (92). So the main issue arises that the females are suppressed under the patriarchal male dominated society. The people of Afghanistan gathered to the market place to see the act of Parvana digging to plant in the spot of the market but someone said that; “Those flowers won’t grow in that soil, there is no nutrients in it, even if they grow, they will be trampled” (90). This quote explains that in Afghanistan the Taliban had made the life of Afghans in misery, sorrow and in fear of law. So the people are living in fear and the females are the most affected there. It creates the situation that why the females are not allowed to go outside and wear the burqua covering the whole body as, “The Taliban decreed that women must stay inside” (10). It is because the society has divided that males are for the outside work and females are for the inside work, breeding children and pleasure of sex for the males.

Similarly, for the case of Parvana that she seems to be dreamt for an ordinary childhood remembering that, “I want to sit in the classroom and go home and eat food that someone else worked for. I want my father to be around. I just want a normal boring life” (9). It suggests that it is because the fear of the war, the peoples of Afghanistan has lost all their freedom and dream to live in a peace world. Parvana just want an ordinary life for her and her family but because of the war by Taliban she had gone through a lot as, “Bomb had been part of parvana’s whole life” (9). She dreams of being a free person in Free State but it is impossible because of the Taliban rule as, “The Taliban are not making Afghanistan a kinder place to live” (9). First there was a peace in the Afghanistan but after the entry Taliban it has been the war zone. The law that society has create by the Taliban rule are different from first of the Afghanistan as, “Women were not allowed to go into shops. Men were supposed to do all

shopping, but if women did it, they had to stand outside and call in for what they needed” (31). It means that, the women were treated as the other and the freedom is not given to walk alone without male members, not allowed to education and wear burka when there is need to go outside. The wearing of burka is the loss of freedom. The Taliban soldier asked to Parvana not wearing a burqa as, “You must be covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will punish for letting you walk the street like that!” (31). As most feminists know, Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban government is the cruelest in the world to women. Parvana had seen, “Shopkeepers beaten for serving women inside the shops” (31). Ellis' book is an outstanding work, though a fine review in the *Women's Review of Books* and *Women of the Afghan War* says it is problematic that Ellis does not identify the tribal identities of the women she interviewed because those are very important in Afghanistan, where different tribes have very different attitudes toward women. One woman Ellis quotes says, "Afghan women are like the walking dead” (17). It creates the scene that, they have nothing, they can do nothing and only they can feel the domination of the males. The Taliban treat women as filth object where Parvana had known as, “What Taliban did especially to women, the way they would whip and beat someone they thought they should punished”(6) . It means that the Taliban treat women as second class citizens and place them under men’s domination in the name of religion Islam and made them invisible in the world of male dominance .

In the same way, for Ziba Mir- Hosseini known as an Iranian-born legal anthropologist, specializing in Islamic law, gender and development of the family, women’s rights in Iran. He considers the issue on the gender roles and women’s position in Islamic societies. He continues the argument based on the female rights and the gender relation in the society where the females are not given the equal rights

with the males. He argues the question that why the females have no position in her gender relations? He also concerns that a new gender discourse that talks for equality within Islamic framework seems to be the main argument of the Ziba Mir- Hosseini in his work *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*. He continues the argument on the gender relation of females in Muslim communities as:

My own initial premise is that gender roles and relations, and women's rights are not fixed, not given, not absolute. They are negotiated and changing cultural constructs, produced in response to lived realities, through debates that are now going on all over the Muslim world, through the voices of women and men who want either to retain or to change the present situation. They exist in and through the ways in which we talk about them, both publicly and privately. (6)

This above quote explains that the women's position in Islamic society is the cruelest. They were treated as outsider both publicly and privately. Hosseini also argues on the relation of gender roles of females under the society. The male dominated powerful patriarchal society creates the position of females by them. No female is born as the inferior but it is because of the society which creates the position and the status of females in the society. Thus, Hosseini focuses on the status position and freedom of the females to gain the gender equality that they are living under the Muslim communities created in the name of religion by Taliban.

Likely, females in these contexts are encountering the tradition based on their respective cultures, needs, priorities, and resources, creating a well-rounded picture of a global movement in which women create their own path to knowledge and move forward with it. Parvana adopts a male persona and never gets to hesitate to go outside. When Mrs. Weera advises Fatana to go outside with Parvana's brother

Maryam as; “Parvana is a boy now” (49). And in yet other contexts, by creating an inclusive space to pray, worship, and be with God. It also applies in the novel that the characters Parvana , Fatema , Shauzia and Mrs. Weera find themselves an education scholar where Parvana finds herself as reading a letter of a Taliban soldier asked by Taliban soldier as “you are a letter reader” (44). Similarly, Mrs. Weera along with Fatana as an scholar announcing, “we are going to start a magazine” (47). For Nooria, being a secret school teacher Fatana talks with Parvana as, “ Nooria is a teacher” (74). The women character Homa finds her to pray and worship the god to be free from evil dictator named Mazar as, “I escaped from Mazer-e-Sharif just after the Taliban captured the city” (84). Here, we can see as the strong and weak characters in the novel as Mrs Weera, Fatema and Noorie opens a secret school for girls in Taliban rule as a strong freedom fighter, and where Homa she is the refugee Mazar, as the weak character, which has been taken amid scenes of extreme violence by the Taliban; “The Taliban has captured the Mazer; they went house to house, looking the enemies. They came to my house. They grabbed my father and my brother and took them outside; they shot them right in the street” (84). So, in this way it focuses on the two different women: first the strong freedom fighter women who seems to be strong by the education and second the meek women who cannot do anything but only prays to god for freedom. So the situation of females in Taliban rule is the violence based and lacks of freedom, and search for gender equality which is constructed in the name of Islam by Taliban.

Similarly, Hosseini furthermore argues on the issue, “Two core issues around which feminism discomfort with religion is articulated: one is the claim that religion is largely a male enterprise and second is historically granted women a subordinate position two sex” (19). This above quote explains that the Muslim women are divided

as two cores as to determine their position in the societies. First is the male ideology which means ‘the husband is held completely responsible for the support of his wife and children’ and second is the position of females that is created by religion as second class citizens and place under men’s domination which means ‘wives presumably must have their husbands’ permission to enter “male space” that is go to work, walk in the streets, enter public places and those misinterpretation of Islam creates the position of female as invisible in the world of male dominance.

Furthermore, Islamic society had caused a lot of troubles and domination against Muslim women in the name of Islam. The struggles facing women do not only impact women, but all of society, as this is the area in which greater abuses of Islamic theology are most evident. The authorization of Islam that gave rise to radical movements like the Taliban has made it their special mission to totally control women, promoting education for all children, women, peoples as males and adults of Afghanistan and more especially girls and women such as, “The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go outside” (6). The Taliban soldiers arrest Parvana’s father suspecting as given a secret education to females in the family which creates the violence in Parvana’s family as, “Father’s books were English books about the literature and history; they were kept hidden because the Taliban burned the books they didn’t like” (19). The same structures and core principles used to oppress women are used to promote terrorism and hatred in Islam's name, and therefore the good that comes from confronting and challenging those structures goes much further than women alone. After the arrest of Parvana’s father she hears the sound of bombs exploding in the night which makes her afraid and loneliness without her father and imagines as, “Parvana imagined every single noise to be either father or the Taliban coming back.

Each sound made parvana hopeful and fearful at the same time” (21). Here in the novel the character lives struggling in the war zone Afghanistan where she treated as badly by Taliban soldiers and the landmines as, “Bombs had been part of Parvana’s whole life. Every day, every night, rockets would fall out of the sky, and someone’s house would explode” (9). It agrees on that the war had affected the country Afghanistan because of the Taliban rule. Not having any male members from the family, she accepts the male persona and becomes “Breadwinner” for her family only one purpose just to survive. “Someone has to able to go outside, and you are the one most likely to look like a boy” (37). And after accepting as a male persona continues as; “As a boy, you’ll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you” (36).

Parvana is the fictional character created by Ellis. The struggle of female characters on war zone represents actual girls of Afghanistan that they are living under fear of Taliban law. So the situation of female characters and the females of Muslim communities have been worse and they have been neglected from their rights of education jobs and extra curriculum activities and so on as, “Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station” (6). It creates the scene that they are not supposed to go outside or rather take any education or jobs and beaten mercilessly doing the work that they are not allowed. Without wearing burqua and without male members the positions of females were other and treated badly as; “you must covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will be punished for letting you walk the street like that!” (31). So this novel, *The Breadwinner* portraits the issue on the transformation of females that they are surviving in the Taliban society by their own ways from pre-Islamic time to

recent days. Therefore, all the critics argue on the females' position, status and the gender roles that are dominated by the patriarchal Islamic societies. Likely all critics argues their argument on the position of females, *The Breadwinner* also presents the females struggle and tries to explore the issue on achieving the freedom, status, liberty, gender relations and the position of females under the Taliban rule by improving the position and status of females in the Muslim communities which is guided in the name of religion.

So the whole novel, *The Breadwinner* depicts the position, status of the female in the Muslim society where they have been subordinated and victimized by the hands of Islam. The transition and transformation of position of women in the Muslim countries provides the detailed argument that how the females are treated in their own societies. Qur'an gave the women equal respect and rights, there were no boundaries what to do and what not to do but the situation of women became worse when the Taliban rule and the war entered in the Muslim countries. In the name of Islam, the women became inferior and remained under male ideology. They have to do duties and responsibilities as set by the society. While doing tasks they are thought to remain silent. The society does not behave women as the members of the society. Parvana, Shauzia, Nooria, Mrs Weera and other females living in Muslim communities are victimized in the hand of patriarchal mindset. The Taliban soldiers seem strong, whose activity makes Parvana and her family to suffer. Her freedom and rights are torn because of being a girl. She is rejected to go to school and never gets permission to study or go outside without male members of the family. She never reacts because she is a girl on the one hand and boy on the other hand. She has always been targeted by the Taliban rule. She also has to lose her freedom of femininity because she has to become breadwinner for her family. Thus, in the name of Islam the Taliban has

created the position of females as invisible in the world of dominance but the female characters fight back for their position of gender equality in the society. The equality is the most important part for the Muslim women of Islamic countries which is dreamt by every Muslim female and tries to achieve it by struggling in the Taliban society which is the effect of misinterpretation of religion.

Religions and myths have been heavily affected the females which are the product of patriarchal mindset. The patriarchal society is not satisfied with women. It cannot see the women's progress. The females had been trapped by the rules and regulations made by the Taliban and the society. Therefore, they are exploited, subordinated and discriminated by family, society and of the whole surroundings. Not only the religious and myths affect the females but also the women are affected by the war of the Afghanistan. So this research tries to explain the freedom, status and position of the females which is legitimated in the name of Islam. Similarly, nowadays in contemporary period by the fall of Taliban, women regained many of their basic rights that had been denied them nowadays. They walk freely outside without the male members. They are allowed to do any kind of jobs as doctor, engineer, teacher, and writer and so on which is another progress on the position of females in contemporary Afghanistan. So, the whole novel focuses on the position and status of females under Muslim communities for gender equality and must have to be equal opportunities as men which are the dream of every Muslim woman who have become the victims of discrimination and domination by the name of the Islam and the patriarchal society that Taliban has created.

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