

## IDENTITY METAMORPHOSIS IN NADIA HASHIMI'S THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL

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### ABSTRACT

*The spectrum of Adolescent Identity development has 4 statuses according to James Marcia and the journey along this spectrum differs for each individual. This paper traces the adolescent identity metamorphosis of the character of Rahima along the statuses of Identity Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium and Identity Achievement in the novel, The Pearl That Broke Its Shell written by, Nadia Hashimi, Afghani-American writer.*

**Keywords:** identity, adolescent, diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, bacha posh

Every human existing in this colossal world is labelled by his/her identity. Identity is the lens through which one perceives himself/herself as well as those around them. It is a social category which constitutes an individual's ideals, characteristics and behaviours. A person's identity undergoes notable changes as they gradually progress through life.

The changes in human life occur in varied stages like childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Childhood is the primitive stage of human development extending from ages 1 to 13. Adolescence is the second stage of human development ranging from 13 to 20 years. Significant physical changes, neuronal and hormonal developments, socialisation influenced by external and internal factors are some remarkable progression in adolescence. Adulthood is the final stage in human development categorised into early, middle and late adulthood covering the ages from 20 to late 60s. Peak physical abilities, cognitive and emotional advancements are noteworthy of this stage.

Social anthropologists insist on the significance of Childhood stage as this period determines the developmental trajectory of the individual. Adulthood, which displays the developed individual, is the resultant stage of Childhood and Adolescence. However, Adolescent period is the critical link between childhood and adulthood, characterised by numerous risk factors. Adolescence is a highly transitional period of an individual which brings about physical and psychological changes that contribute to the development of the particular individual. These changes lead to the formation of an 'identity' by which the individual defines herself/himself. Identity refers to "a set of characteristics that differentiates self from others and that persists over time" (Erikson 115).

James Marcia, a developmental psychologist, underscores how adolescents undergo certain crisis or an acute event that leads to the achievement of their identity. This crisis benefits the individual by giving them the freedom to modify, reject or even create elements pertaining to their identity. Marcia opines that the development of an identity can

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be categorised under four identity statuses namely identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. These statuses are vary depending on the individual's beliefs, values and goals.

Marcia does not universalise the complete progression of adolescents through all the four statuses. Based on several frames of references like culture, religion, work, and politics, some individuals may either pass through one or two statuses or may even reach the final stage of identity achievement. On the other hand, some adolescents may stay fixated at a particular status and believe that to be their identity for the rest of their life.

Marcia affirms that 'formed identities' are different from 'constructed identities.' When an individual gradually realises his/her position in the society and becomes aware of his/her characteristics identity is formed. Formed identity is known as a given or a conferred identity. This is a passive identity where the individual has no or less participation in the development of their identity. Identity is also constructed when an individual consciously makes decisions such as who they want to be, who they want to affiliate with, which belief to take upon, which occupation to choose and so on. They become active participants in the construction and possess a sense of participation in the self-directed construction process. Only very few individuals have a self-constructed identity.

In experiential terms, one becomes progressively aware of one's basic characteristics and one's position in the world... The experience of having an identity is that one has a core, a center that is oneself, to which experience and action can be referred. (Marcia 6)

Identity Diffusion is the first identity status asserted by Marcia, where the individuals have neither explored or attempted to know about themselves as well as others nor committed themselves to any specific identity and continue with whatever life offers.

Identity Foreclosure is the second identity status, where the individual commits fully to a certain identity without having explored other choices. Such individuals have their life sorted out by their parents or an authoritative figure. With no active participation they live accepting the beliefs and values of their family, culture and community without questioning their authenticity. Such foreclosed people live under the pretence that they know themselves well and have achieved a solid identity, but they just ape identity achievement. Marcia opines about this identity status as,

...mimics identity achievement, which occurs when a person had explored their values, beliefs, career interests, sexual orientation, political leanings and more to reach an identity that feels uniquely their own. (Fraser-Thill)

The third identity status is Moratorium, where the individuals are in the phase of exploring after having been subjected to an identity crisis. These individuals observe and explore different beliefs and values and experiment with them. They are in a constant state of confusion which dictates their behaviour. Therefore, individuals with a high degree of exploration without a hint of commitment can be identified belonging to the status of Moratorium.

Individuals in the process of constructing their identity, the Moratorium status, are rather like trapeze performers, holding on to the bar of the past while swinging toward that of the future, often with much of the vacillation, fear, intensity, and excitement connoted by the circus image. (Marcia 12)

Identity Achievement is the final status of identity continuum which produces constructed identities. These individuals, after having undergone active exploration and experimentation of their choices, choose and decide to adopt and live by certain values and beliefs. They exhibit a high degree of commitment to their set of ideals and beliefs. They set their priorities straight and distinctly

design their goals and objectives in life. They function well under stressful conditions and arrive at rational decisions. In the words of Jane Kroger, "The identity achieved individual has made important psychosocial identity-defining commitments, following a period of active exploration and decision-making (332)."

The theme of identity is specifically prevalent in the oeuvre of writers who have transcended borders. Nadia Hashimi is one such writer who unearths her Afghan identity in her novels. Hashimi is a Paediatrician and a novelist based in New York. She is also a former Democratic congressional candidate for the United States House of Representatives. She is a member of the US-Afghan Women's Council and continues to serve on the boards of organisations committed to educating and nurturing Afghanistan's most vulnerable children, and empowering the female leaders of tomorrow. Hashimi is the author of 3 international bestsellers – **When The Moon Is Low**, **The Pearl That Broke Its Shell** and **The House Without Windows**.

Nadia Hashimi, called as a Cultural Translator, brings in the plight of the Afghan women to the world through her words. Though she was born and raised in the States, her immigrant parents inculcated the significance of their root culture in Hashimi. Her novels reflect the past and the present situations in Afghanistan, with powerful women characters who strive to make their voices heard in a patriarchal society.

Hashimi's second novel, **The Pearl That Broke Its Shell** is centered on the **bacha posh** custom of Afghanistan. According to this custom, when families do not have sons, they dress up their youngest daughter as a son to help with the outdoor household chores that are primarily carried out by boys. The acute patriarchal society of Afghanistan considers it a bane to have a daughter because of the expensive dowry that is demanded for marriage.

The 'bacha posh,' a mere social product of Afghan carries out duties for her family as a boy and is bestowed with privileges like

attending school without restrictions, escorting her sisters, buying rations and groceries for the house all alone, working at shops, not having to cook and clean. Such 'exclusive privileges' can only be enjoyed till the bacha posh hits puberty. After that, she is supposed to unlearn the bacha posh ways and turn into a girl to get married.

Hashimi uses this bacha posh custom as the common thread in her novel, **The Pearl That Broke Its Shell**. In this novel, she has brought in two fabulous stories of two strong women characters. Hashimi beautifully blends the stories of Rahima and her great-great grandmother Shekiba through intercuts, thus juxtaposing the two life stories.

**The Pearl That Broke Its Shell** is often perceived from a feminist perspective as it has many powerful women characters like Kala Shaima, Shekiba and Rahima, who fight with all their might amidst all the ordeals. Rahima and her elder sisters Shahla and Parwin belong to a conservative, rural Afghan family. The opening of the novel exposes the predicament of the young girls in rural Afghanistan being denied education because they would encounter boys on the streets. Hashimi shows Rahima's father as a male chauvinist who harasses his wife frequently for failing to beget him a son. Rahima is made a bacha posh and is named as Rahim. Rahim enjoys her freedom as a boy and also carries out the outdoor chores.

Rahim grows too accustomed to being a boy because she was asked to remain a bacha posh even after her puberty as she was very useful to her mother. Nevertheless, this does not last long as Abdul Khaliq Khan offered to take Rahima's hand in marriage as his third wife. She becomes the fourth wife and is harassed every day to become a worthy wife and a useful daughter-in-law by her mother-in-law and her fellow wives. Rahima gives birth to a boy and names him Jehangir. When Badriya, Abdul's first wife is selected as a puppet leader to run the parliamentary elections as a woman representative of her county, Rahima is asked to accompany her to Kabul and help her with reading and writing.

During her stay in Kabul, her son Jehangir dies of an illness. Then with the help of some women acquaintances in Kabul, Rahima escapes home and joins a camp for abandoned women in Kabul.

This paper analyses the character of Rahima, traces her identity development through James Marcia's identity continuum and proves Rahima's is a constructed identity. It constitutes a detailed and close tracing of the character of Rahima based on the four identity statuses of Marcia.

Adolescence encompasses elements of biological growth and major social role transitions...delayed timing of role transitions, including completion of education, marriage, and parenthood, continues to shift popular perceptions of when adulthood begins...10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase and would facilitate extended investments across a broader range of settings. (Sawyer et al. 223)

Hashimi narrates her novel through a 9 year old girl, Rahima. Hashimi takes the readers through Rahima's journey as an adolescent. Bombarded by the major social transitions like marriage and motherhood, Rahima strives to keep up with the pace of her life.

Rahima as an adolescent is subjected to socialisation, which "is the process by which infants and children acquire the standards, skills, motives, attitudes, and behaviors that are appropriate for a particular society and culture (Parke R.D. et al. 224)." She is influenced by various agents of socialisation among which family and peer group have a great impact on her identity and behaviour. Her conservative Afghan family, devoid of sons, alter Rahima's identity for their comfort and prestige. Contrarily, her peer group as a bacha posh consists of adolescent boys who indulge in physical activities like wrestling. These external agents trigger her identity transitions.

Now that we were home, I was given the extra chore of bringing the groceries from the store. My older sisters were quarantined since they were older and noticeable. I was, thus far, invisible to boys and not a risk. (Hashimi5)

These lines show that Rahima did not have a strong sense of self. She avoids discomfort at the cost of their privilege to go to school. This proves that Rahima's identity status was Diffusion in the beginning of the novel. She has no serious thoughts and lives in the present trying to escape from her father's wrath.

Rahima enters into the identity status of Foreclosure when she was made a bachaposh by her mother. She was forced to take upon a new identity as a boy and was taught to talk, walk, play, run and speak like a boy. Through this identity imposed upon Rahima, she fully commits herself in being a boy and actually enjoys the freedom of this identity.

The more she worked, the easier it was for him to forget that she was a girl. He began to think of her as a son, sometimes even slipping and calling her by her brothers' names. (Hashimi20)

At one point of time, Rahima wonders, "Was that it? Was I a boy already? (Hashimi35)" This shows her full commitment to this foreclosed identity in which she enjoys mimicking the life of a boy. "I was a bachaposh but it had gone on too long, like a guest who had grown too comfortable to leave. (Hashimi85)" Rahima gets accustomed to the conferred identity although she had no involvement in her conferred identity. She fully accepts the conferred identity and performs all the expected roles without any resistance. This aping of an identity by Rahima distinctly shows that she has taken on a Foreclosed identity.

Rahima's marriage to Abdul Khaliq Khan as his fourth wife serves as a factor which creates an identity crisis in her. Now, she has to go back to being a girl and give up her foreclosed identity. Rahima is greatly affected by this state of transition from the foreclosed identity to the state of Moratorium. She has to