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## Across Forbidden Terrains: Spatial Transgression and Empowerment in The Pearl That Broke Its Shell and The Shadow of the Crescent Moon

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### Abstract

*The present study discusses the socio-spatial marginalization of Pashtun women in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* and Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. The discussion focuses on identifying Pashtun women's positionality in Pashtun normative geography. The present study employs Tim Cresswell's theorization of spatial marginalization, normative geography, and spatial transgression. The study finds that there is a binary division of public and private space, which leads to the spatial marginalization of Pashtun women. In Pashtun normative geographies, women are spatially marginalized because the geographies are shaped by socio-spatial standards. The paper concludes that the female characters are constantly engaged in spatial transgression within the Pashtun patriarchal normative geography.*

**Keywords:** *Transgression, Pashtun Women's Spatiality, Women's Empowerment, Spatial Marginalization*

### Introduction:

The discussion in the section revolves around two parts. Firstly, I analyze Hashimi and Bhutto's portrayals of socio-spatial and socio-cultural normative geography in *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* and *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* as an attempt to highlight Pashtun women's marginalization by the male-dominated societies. Secondly, the study analyzes the female character's socio-spatial Transgression from the socio-spatial and economic-spatial dominant normative geographic structures. In this section, the analysis focuses on Pashtun women's efforts to cross the rigid boundaries and their efforts to subvert the imposed traditional gender roles within public and private spaces. Furthermore, Hashimi and Bhutto's portrayals of the rigid spatial boundaries of traditional Pashtun societies are deeply woven into a narrative that depicts the intersection of power hierarchies, spaces, and places, and traditionally imposed gender roles. Through the lives of female characters Rahima, Shekiba, Mina, and Samarra, the present study illustrates the ways in which they resist power dynamics and cross the rigid spatial boundaries. The study analyzes that their spatial Transgression also serves as a means of subversion of traditional gender roles. By examining the way in which the female character transgresses the patriarchal socio-spatial boundaries, the study concludes

that the characters transform the rigid and restrictive spatial normative geographies and landscapes of their lives in the patriarchal societies. Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* is a life narrative of the protagonist Rahima and her great-great-grandmother, Shekiba, narrated by the protagonist Rahima herself, a young Pashtun. The narrative deals with multiple issues experienced by Pashtun women in traditional Afghan patriarchal societies. On one hand, the story deals with the hardships and troubles the women came across. In the rigid socio-spatial scenario, on the other hand, in a broader context, the narrative deals with Rahima and Shekiba's struggle to cross the socio-spatial boundaries. The study deals with the two protagonists' Transgression of the gender boundaries and subversion of traditional gender roles. Their struggle is against the power hierarchies and the Pashtun patriarchy and for the freedom of women from the confined domestic space of the home.

### **Literature Review:**

According to Bukhari, Rafique, and Tabassum (2021), Hashimi portrays Rahima, a girl's pain, suffering, and life struggles without a male member in her family. To fulfill her parents' wishes for a male heir and to be accepted in society, her parents disguised her as a boy. The researchers argue that, under a disguised identity, Rahima begins to live a comfortable and honorable life in her society. The events afterward reinforce Butler's notion of destabilized gender for survival. The disguised identity of Rahima gives her an opportunity to live an independent and valued life in her village (Bukhari, Rafique, and Tabassum, 2021).

According to Kumar (2022), Hashimi's depiction of the struggle of the female protagonists, namely Rahima and Shekiba, two ladies separated by centuries joined by the same fate (Kumar, 2022). In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the absence of a male heir (son) compels parents to adopt the Bachaposh tradition and disguise their daughters to avail the survival opportunities (Kumar, 2022).

Amelia Febrianingraum and Suci Suryani (2022) explore the issues of women as victims of sexist oppression through the character of Rahima in the text. The study focuses on the practice of sexist oppression in Hashmi's *The Pearl that Broke its Shell* to maintain patriarchal authority. Hashimi brilliantly depicts how women experience discrimination based on gender or sex, which leads to exploitation and subjugation (Febrianingraum and Suryani, 2022).

Muhammad Sheeraz and Abdullah Jan Abid (2019) examine the style and degree of Pashtunization of English at the lexical level. The researcher employs the conceptual framework under the domain of linguistics criticism, post-colonial and structural framework in the era of world Englishes, to show how the English language goes through diverse changes its different linguistic levels in various regions of the world.

Abubakr Ahmed, Mahrosh, and Muqadas-Un-Nisa Tariq (2024) examine the intricate problem of forced migration in tribal regions, with a main focus on the effect of the war on terror on these regions. The researcher analyzes the novel through the perspective of the theory of migration given by Everett Lee, to explore how the different factors compel people to migrate somewhere else to seek refuge and abandon their hometown.

### **Spatial Transgression and Empowerment in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon***

In addition to this, Bhutto's *The Shadow of Crescent Moon* deals with the normative ongoing war on terror in Mir Ali in the 21st century. On the one hand, the narrative deals with the suffering and miseries of Pashtun women and their homeless identities due to the war on terror. On the other hand, it deals with characters like Samara and Mina engaging in

out-of-place actions and transgressions of the socio-spatial boundaries in patriarchal society. The study elucidates that the spatial Transgression of the female character also serves as a means for subversion of traditional gender roles. Samara transfers the domestic boundary and shows resistance to the political power hierarchies, which are traditionally considered taboo and suitable for a Pashtun woman. Both characters struggle against the power structure and Pashtun patriarchy and for the liberation of Pashtun women from the confinement of the suffocated and marginalized domestic space. They challenge the traditional roles of women and the power dynamics.

According to Cresswell, the notion of space and place is used to construct a normative geography; it can also be used to challenge that normative geography. This challenge of normative geography or power hierarchies leads to the notion of transgression. Cresswell maintains that Transgression literally means “crossing a boundary” and is often defined in geographical terms (Cresswell, 1996, p. 21). In simple words, Transgression refers to crossing a line in a particular normative geography. For instance, when a woman leaves her domestic place and goes out to the public sphere, she has committed Transgression in that specific normative geography. Furthermore, Transgression involves entering a reserved place for a specific group or gender; crossing a line sometimes means engaging in taboo or inappropriate actions that are against the established norms of a geographical location. Transgression acts are not in line with the traditional socio-cultural norms and gender role expectations.

For instance, McDowell maintains that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon; therefore, its characteristics vary not across cultures and societies but in different spaces and interactions (McDowell, 1999, p. 15). Gender roles are not something that cannot be changed over time and space. For instance, in Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, the protagonist Rahima temporarily crosses the geographical boundary of her domestic place due to certain socio-cultural factors, being a young girl. Rahima is not allowed to navigate the public space or be part of it. She and her sisters were “pulled out of school” (12) by her father because they had no brother to accompany them. Due to the societal pressure of not having a son, her mother decides to disguise her as a boy” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 43) and transform her identity. Her disguised identity allows her to cross the domestic boundary of “home and experience the outer public space. “My legs felt liberated as I ran through the street” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 55). It reflects that her Transgression introduces her to the dichotomy of public and private space. Whatever the reasons for her crossing a geographical boundary, it gives her an opportunity to go beyond the rigid boundaries and experience life within it; later on, her temporary Transgression sets the stage for her permanent socio-spatial Transgression. In the public space of the market, Rahima experienced that “There were no nine-year-old girls who would walk determinedly from shop to shop” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 13). It elucidates that her Transgression triggers the realization of women's spatial marginalization in the “Khaki village” normative geography; the girls could not walk determinedly because the public space is male-specific geography. Furthermore, being Rahima, she performs traditional male gender roles. “My first errand as a boy was an exciting one. I was to go to the market for oil and flour” (Hashimi, 2014, 53). “When my sister’s shoes came undone, I took them to the old man down the street. I brought bread from the baker and chased the stray down the street” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 55). It shows that her Transgression gives her an escape from the restrictive socio-spatial boundaries and roles imposed upon her as a woman. Her errand outside the “Home” reflects the subversion of traditional gender roles as she begins to work in the “Agha Barazkazai” shop (80) and becomes a “working boy” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 81). By subverting

traditional gender roles and crossing a geographical boundary, Rahima gains access to spaces and places that are denied to them as a woman. In Khaki village in general and in Pashtun society in particular, a woman is not allowed to be part of the economic space. Therefore, Rahima's subversion of gender roles introduces her to a male-dominated space. For instance, Rahima narrates that "part of me knew I was being a brat, but everything I was experiencing was new, and I wanted to enjoy it. I ignored the shadow of guilt and headed out if the stray dog had returned for another game of chase" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 56). It elucidates that her Transgression of domestic boundaries and doing masculine roles liberate her in socio-spatial surroundings. The phrase "headed out" clearly depicts her struggle to be part of public space and to cross the domestic boundary permanently. Moreover, Rahima can get an education when her mother says, "Your father has decided to send you to school this year; you are one of the boys" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 56). And Rahima thought, "It would be different. I understand Khala Shaima's plan had worked well within the confines of our family compound and even in my trips to the bazaar (Hashimi, 2014, p. 56)". It was her aunt Shaima's plan to disguise her as a bacha posh because she wanted her nieces to break the geographical boundary and liberate them spatially. Rahima's temporary transgression deepens her sense of spatial marginalization and later on changes her life. Her Transgression helped her to do an action that would be quite impossible for her as a woman within her patriarchal society. In essence, her actions and boundary-crossing subvert patriarchal dominance somehow, yet they do not fundamentally challenge the power hierarchies. Therefore, her father objects to her Transgression and warns his wife, "She should not be a bacha posh, and the longer she is a young woman, the more shameful it is to have her out on the streets and working with Agha Barakzai at this age (Hashimi, 2014, p. 129). This only reflects women's positionality; rather, it also represents the division of labor based on gender. Being a girl, it is not expected from her to work outside the confined domestic boundary. Her mother undoes what she has done for her daughter's spatial liberation. Her father's reaction proves that her struggle to maintain her disguised identity and explore the public space is a threat to the power hierarchy and a kind of crossing of the geographical boundary of his village's normative geography.

In addition to this, in *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, Shekiba experiences spatial marginalization in her domestic space, which motivates her to cross the spatial boundary. For instance, Shekiba crosses the spatial boundary of home and accompanies her father to his field. Her father has a "lot with such fertile soil that his share of crops would be granted" (Hashimi, 2014, 21). It shows that she belongs to a male-dominated agrarian clan where women have no role in the public space. Later, Shekiba also became part of the economic space and "worked beside him day and night" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 24). Her work in the field elucidates her crossing of the spatial boundary. It is his transgression act because it challenges the traditional norms of her village's normative geography, where women are not allowed to work in the field. She crossed the spatial line that was traditionally not meant to be crossed and which separated women's domestic places from public male-dominated places. Due to her crossing of the domestic boundary, "The clan did not want to be associated with them" (Hashimi, 2014, 24). The clan criticizes her act of Transgression because her action challenges the power hierarchies and would change her spatial position in her village. Shekiba became her father's daughter and son. Her hard work makes him believe her as a son, reflecting her struggle to dominate the patriarchy. She wants her father to believe Shekiba is a son so that she can claim her right to the property. Her work in the field also allows her to escape from

the confinement of domestic space. Even though the laborious task ached back at the end of the day, it yet provided spatial liberation to her in the rigid Khaki Village normative geography. She affirms “her father’s confidence in her ability to manage the farm” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 27). Her ability to manage masculine work and space represents her struggle to destabilize her spatial marginalization within Pashtun's normative geography. Therefore, she accompanied her father “to the field to help him manage their plot of land. She hoed, she slaughtered, and she chopped as a strong-backed son would do” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 27). Her Transgression at the wake of her realization of spatial marginalization in her normative geography. She enters into the lot and agricultural fields, which are traditionally public spaces dominated by patriarchy. Her presence in the fields challenges the dichotomy of public and private space and male-reserved spaces in general.

Furthermore, through her work in the public space, she rejects and resists the patriarchal norms and expectations that shape women's roles in the domestic sphere. Traditionally, women are expected to keep the household, yet Shekiba goes beyond these expectations by transgressing the domestic boundary. Her struggle in the public sphere reflects her will to liberate herself spatially and economically. She wants to break traditional norms. Similarly, her labor as a strong-backed son depicts the subversion of traditional gender roles beyond the domestic boundary. Her chopping the fields proves that a woman has the capability to do masculine chores and physical labor. In a nutshell, Shekiba's transgression into public space makes her a threat to power hierarchies. Her uncles and the villager’s criticism makes it evident that she had defied power structure expectations and challenged their power to maintain women's spatial marginalization. She shows resistance and struggles to reclaim women's space and place with Pashtun rigid patriarchal normative geographies. After her father's death, she “continued to toil in the fields as if her father were at her side” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 36). It represents that she continues to keep control of her lots and continues to cross her domestic boundary without a man on her side.

In *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, Samarra Afridi, from a very young age, begins her journey of crossing geographical boundaries. By accompanying her father to the “Samarra camps to Chitral” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 4), Samarra defies the patriarchal expectation that confines young people in domestic places (home) and dictates their roles and responsibilities within domestic space and place. For instance, in Chitral, Samara falls in love with Aman, Erum. She can meet Aman in her camp, which serves as her home for a few days. There, she is not allowed to cross the domestic boundary. Therefore, she secretly met Aman and “sneaked out of their father’s tents at midnight around the local bazaar, which smelled of charcoal until late into the night” (Bhutto, 2013, p. 2). Her sneaking out is an attempt to cross the geographical boundary to live a life of her own. Her transgressive act of meeting an unknown person outside her home boundary is an attempt to experience public space. She challenges the patriarchal expectation by doing masculine activities. For instance, “she wore jeans and played cricket and rode horses and shot pellet guns and did everything she had seen her father do” (Bhutto, 2013, p. 2), which is traditionally expected of men. On the one hand, all her actions reflect the subversion of traditional gender roles and her engagement in activities that challenge the traditional patriarchal beliefs that certain roles are male-specific. On the other hand, and in more broad terms, his participation in outdoor activities such as playing cricket, horse riding, and gun shooting elucidates her claim to public space. Moreover, in Pashtun socio-cultural setups, activities outside domestic places are considered unsuitable for women. Her presence in the male-dominated public space and doing masculine activities,

Samarra challenges the spatial marginalization of women, which restricts women's participation and access to public domains. Through the subversion of gender roles and becoming part of public space, Samarra opposes the power hierarchies and patriarchy. Similarly, in Mir Ali, Samarra plays with the children in the streets and secretly meets Aman and Erum. She crosses her home boundary, and "Samarra and Aman met later on their own behind the Ibn-e-Qasim Road Mosque and walked together." They "walked slowly through the alleyways" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 26). Her presence in the street marks her Transgression of domestic space. She does not cross the line of her domesticity only to meet Aman, Erum; rather, it highlights her effort to navigate the male-dominated space. She defies the patriarchal expectation that restricts women's mobility in the public places of streets and alleys. Her struggle blurs the boundary between public and private space for her.

Cresswell (1996) argues that transgression acts are judged to have crossed a line that was not meant to have been. It shows that Transgression is regarded as an unusual or out-of-place action that is not allowed to be performed within a geographical boundary. The power structure judges those acts as a violation of norms and rules of geography. Transgressive acts are considered unacceptable, deviant, and inappropriate; therefore, transgressive acts receive shocking reactions and responses. In other words, Transgression is considered as crossing a forbidden line that should not be crossed. This reveals the consequences of crossing a line in reference to the geography of the act; the deviation from an established boundary is unacceptable by the power hierarchies. In addition to this, Cresswell asserts that "transgression is not judged by those who transgress a boundary but rather by those who react to it" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 23). To put it another way, the reaction to Transgression highlights the power hierarchies established norms and expectations regarding a particular normative geography. Those who cross a geographical line may not perceive it as something deviant or inappropriate. However, it's the power structure that labels an individual's actions as transgressive acts in geography. For instance, a woman in a public space may not be aware of her act of crossing a line; rather, it is the socio-cultural and socio-spatial factors that label her presence as rebellious and deviant acts. The reaction to Transgression highlights the importance of those who cross a geographical boundary.

For instance, in Hashimi's *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, Shekiba was confined to the conventional private space of the Azizullah home. She, being discouraged from constituting her own space or claiming her right on her father's lot, was not allowed to enter into the public space. However, Shekiba continues her quest for her liberation from the spatial marginalization through crossing the boundary of Azizullah's home. Shekiba's Transgression of domestic boundaries comes from her existential outsidership in her grandmother's house and also from her detachment from Azizullah's house when she experiences that "she was not truly part of any home; she would be sheltered by these walls only" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 73). She does the traditional gender roles of cooking and washing (73). Due to certain circumstances, she travels to different homes and leaves them. Despite living there, she does not feel any authentic sense of place. She realizes that "part of her was still hoping to return to that house, to live there independently" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 63). She realizes that it is her father's land, which can make her spatially independent and hold her identity. When she realizes that the land holds her true identity, she thinks, what would happen if she were to try to claim the land? Imagine that a young woman trying to claim her father's land, snatching it from her uncle's greedy claws, tried to imagine taking the deed to the local judge. What if he listened to her? Maybe he would think it was her right to have her father's land" (Hashimi,

2014, p. 89). She begins her struggle to claim her land, but it seems impossible to her in the patriarchal socio-cultural setup. She exclaims her true, authentic experience in the lands when she says, "I lived alone on that land for months. It didn't feel absurd; it felt like home" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 90). She asked Azizullah's wife about her claim on the land, and she said, "You are his daughter. You are not his son. Yes, the laws say that daughters may inherit a portion of what the son would inherit, but the truth is that women do not claim land" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 89). Her statement makes Shekiba realize that it is not the law but rather the tradition and patriarchy that deprive her of her fatherland. It is the patriarchy that has made her spatially marginalized and dependent on them. Therefore, she decides to "find a way to make a life of her own; she realizes that officially she had a right to claim at least a portion of her father's land" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 97). If she were confined to a domestic place of home, she thought, "How would she get to all these places?" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 98). It shows her goal to visit all the places and end her spatial marginalization. She somehow manages to look at the deed" from her own home; whatever the consequence of her crossing a domestic boundary, she decides to do it once and for all; as she states, I have to get to the hakim; that's my only chance. Shekiba tucked the deed into her dress and crept out of her room at first light" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 131). Her crossing the domestic boundary clearly reveals her venturing into the public male-dominated space and her rejection of the spatial restriction on women. When other men saw her in the street all alone, they called her act of transgression "this is truly bizarre" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 133). It shows that it's the patriarchy and power structure that label her presence in the public space as ridiculous and beyond the socio-cultural norm. Furthermore, she still stays firm on her decision and successfully reaches Hakim's place and says, "I am only here to claim what is rightfully mine! I am my father's daughter, and that land should belong to me" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 136). By claiming her right to an inheritance in front of the hakim and Azizullah, Shekiba challenges the traditional mindset that prioritizes men over women spatially. It is a challenge and a threat to the norms of that normative geography set by the power hierarchies. She crossed the boundary that was not meant to be crossed by the patriarchy. Furthermore, she challenges the male superiority over the lands and questions women's exclusion from the public domain. Her act of crossing domestic space and, above all, her challenging of patriarchal authority receives a severe response from the patriarchy. On the one hand, Shekiba receives physical torture as Azizullah comes after her and explains, "We have fed her and housed her, and look at how she treats us! A kick to her flank, Shekiba yelled, "What kind of girl sneaks out of a house? Have you no shame?" He turned to Shekiba and landed another kick into her side" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 131). Moreover, Azizullah had dragged her back to the house and beaten her for an hour; every time his strikes slaved, he would yell and huff about the humiliation she had caused him. Her lip was swollen and scabbed; her legs and back bore multiple bruises, and each breath yanked her ribs in different directions" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 148). It represents that patriarchy reacts violently to her crossing a domestic boundary and entering into public space. Azizullah's violent reaction elucidates the power structure's struggle to maintain spatial dominance and authority. Through physical violence, the patriarchy dominates women spatially and deprives them of their mobility to public spaces and places. Her physical beating is an attempt of the power hierarchies to suppress women's voices and their desire to achieve spatial liberation within Pashtun patriarchal normative geographies. In addition to this, "this hakim sighed heavily and clacked his tongue. "Girl, you know nothing of tradition, he said and tore the deed into pieces" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 136). In other words, this reference directly

refers to the codes of pakhtunwali, which deprive women of their right of inheritance. Officially, a woman has the right to claim a portion of her father's land. Even religion has given the right of inheritance to women; traditions prioritize men and discourage inheritance rights, which can spatially and economically make them independent, and that is a threat to patriarchal spatial authority and supremacy.

According to Cresswell, transgressive acts are considered out of place by the powerful (Cresswell, 1996, p. 23). In this context, any action that is inappropriate and not in line with the spatial norms is a transgression. Transgressive acts break away from the established authorities. Therefore, Cresswell believes that Transgression is a threat to common sense and normality (Cresswell, 1996, p. 37). In other words, Transgression in its very sense is labeled as challenging, out of line from the natural, taken for granted, and normality, which maintain order in a specific normative geography. For instance, when a person engages in transgressive activities, he/she crosses a boundary and does unacceptable actions that are considered against "common sense." However, it highlights that crossing a boundary exposes the flaws and biases in established norms and rules of a normative geography. The reaction to Transgression helps the transgressor to confront his own values and achieve spatial liberation. In a nutshell, crossing an established spatial boundary is considered threatening to normality because it affects those in the patriarchy (power structure) who are taking benefits from the "status quo." For instance, in *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, Mia came across the same dilemma; her Transgression of the domestic boundary comes at the wake of her emotional detachment from her husband's home. After her son's death, her feeling of confinement at home grew faster. On the one hand, her husband wants to keep his hold on his wife's mobility as "He imagined his wife at home in bed, under the cover, watching Indian soap operas on cable television or cooking shows on the Pashto channels. Maybe she cooked a bit, inspired by the recipes on television, or perhaps she visited the tailor to get a shalwar kameez stitched, something warm for the winter" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 37). It elucidates a patriarchal mindset that wants to confine women to the home and satisfy their sexual desires. The women's presence in bed shows a man's desire to physically dominate women. Furthermore, "The Indian soap" shows how to keep a household and be a good wife and daughter within the domestic space. He wants her to learn domesticity from the soaps, and he wants her to learn cooking from food shows because, traditionally, it is expected of a woman. All these are indoor activities. Therefore, he would be easily able to confine her within a domestic space, and she would not be a threat to patriarchal dominance. On the other hand, she goes beyond the boundary and against patriarchal standards. She rejects their autonomy and begins her struggle for spatial liberation. For instance, "Mina, who had not told her husband she had any plans that day, instructed the Hazara kitchen boy to take her to the address she had torn out of that morning's paper" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 34). It shows that she crossed the domestic boundary without her husband's permission and entered into another normative geography. She rushes "from funeral to funeral" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 66). He is going from one place to another is against the status quo and power structure, Traditionally, in Pashtun society, it is considered against the norms of their spatial boundary. She freely enters into the funeral places and asks questions to the grieving mothers and fathers. Therefore, "people took proper notice of Mina, and adults of varying degrees of patience and distance were called upon to get rid of the funeral crusher, Mrs. Mina. They called Sikander at work, demanding less patiently that he come and fetch his wife" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 37). She is considered a funeral crusher because of her presence in a forbidden space for her. The people demand to take her from the place, representing the

patriarch's struggle to control women's access to specific places and confine her into the domestic place of home. She became a threat to the established patriarchal authority. In a similar vein, she also subverts the traditional gender roles. She enters unknown people's houses, becomes oblivious to men, and "has taken over the duty of preparing the dead stranger for burial" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 54). She washes a boy's body and bathes the dead boy tenderly, stopping her recitation of poetry and only murmuring the fateha prayer over his head" (Bhutto, 2013, p. 56). Traditionally and religiously, a man gives a bath to a male, whereas a woman is supposed to wash the body of a female. In such a scenario, Mina giving a boy a bath shows the subversion of traditional gender roles and opposes the status quo. His action is out of place and inappropriate according to common sense and norms. Furthermore, her action also reflects that patriarchy is dead to her. Her husband struggles to hide the funeral from her to restrict her mobility in the public space. In addition to this, in *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, the protagonist Rahima feels existential outsidership and confinement in her husband's home. In her husband's home, she is again and again reminded of her geographical boundary and the violent consequence of crossing the domestic boundary of home. She is being told that "The women of this family don't travel much; get used to these walls" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 17). Despite her confinement, she dared to cross the line of home; that action was not allowed to her. Rahima narrates that I was forced to do traditionally feminine roles such as cooking and household chores. She states that "I tried to focus on the domestic chores, but my eyes kept drifting to the kitchen window, with a view into the courtyard. Several boys, two of them looking to be almost my age, were kicking a ball around. I felt my heart race, wanting to be with them instead of bent over a metal pot with potato peels stuck to my finger" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 177). It shows that she wants to bridge the gap between public and private space; she deserves to engage in outdoor activities to achieve spatial liberation within Pashtun society. Her desire to play with the boys reflects her wish to break the societal constraints and end her spatial dominance. She feels restless in the domestic space and "hates it over there" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 195). She decided to meet her sister, which is considered inappropriate in the Abdul Khaliq compound. She struggles to "manage to get out of the compound" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 191). Furthermore, she narrates that "I moved closer and closer to the front gate; don't hesitate, I told myself and opened the gate to walk out" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 191). It elucidates that her going out of her husband's compound and entering into another domestic boundary is labeled as "grotesque, inappropriate," and against normality. By doing an out-of-place action. She challenges Abdul Khaliq's authority in the compound. She snuck away from his spatial authority. She crossed the boundary with the hope that she would be able to get liberation from the domestic confinement she got physical violence from her mother-in-law, who reinforced patriarchal authority in her absence. Rahima narrates that by doing an inappropriate action, "I had invited this round of punishment" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 198). Her physical violence reflects the suppression of women's voices by the patriarchy. In a nutshell, her crossing of the domestic boundary challenges the dichotomy of public and private space. She tries to break out of the spatial restrictions imposed upon women by traditions.

Cresswell maintains that "Transgression is important in itself as an example of possible tactics for resistance to an established norms. No hegemonic structure is ever complete, Transgression foregrounds the ways in which powerful structure can be challenged. (Cresswell, 1996, 21). In other words, the deviation from established norms helps the "margin" to redefine its position and status in society. For instance, a transgressive act of a

girl disrupts dominant discourse and can lead to a counter-narrative that can give voice to the voiceless. It is a powerful tool to oppose and transform hegemonic structures; Transgression helps to change one's social positionality. Cresswell maintains that what is considered "Peripheral", absurd and not in line with the established social norms holds "Symbolic" significance for the "margin". It shows that change and order coexist within a particular socio-spatial context. Therefore, Transgression provides a lens to see the symbolic significance of the social peripheral or the "margin".

For instance, in *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, Rahima, from Shekiba's story, learns that Kabul could end her spatial marginalization, and she saw an opportunity for spatial liberation. Therefore, she decides to transgress her home's domesticity boundary because she believes that "Everyone needs an escape" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 253). She wants to escape from the restricted norms and patriarchal dominance. Her aunt Shaima tells her that life in Kabul is different. This motivates her to bridge the gap between Kabul and her village's normative geography. She encounters emotional detachment from her husband's village's socio-spatial setup. Rahima aspires from Shekiba's story and desires to "See the place she's seen. But I wanted more than she had too. I did want to be a pawn the way she had been, I wanted to be bolder. I wanted to make my naseeb, not have it handed to me". (Hashimi, 2014, 255). It reflects Rahia's strong will to change her position and create new spatial narratives. She begins her journey to redefine the relationship between women, geography and power hierarchies. In Kabul, she saw an opportunity to change her destiny and narrates that "I decided that night I would do whatever I could to make it the best Naseeb possible. I am not going to miss any opportunity." (Hashimi, 2014, p. 56). She realizes that she must release herself from the gender spatial marginalization of Pashtun's socio-cultural setup. She decides to go to any extent to change her spatial position within a patriarchal society. Only Kabul can spatially liberate her. When she manages to visit Kabul, she finds the place "amazing" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 278). In her quest for spatial emancipation from spatial marginalization, she came to know about a women's "resource centre" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 283) in Kabul. She narrates that "The idea of instructors and lessons excited a part of me that Abdul Khaliw's compound had buried" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 283). She hails this learning in the institute as an opportunity that might end her spatial marginalization. She experiences her true self, which has been suppressed by Abdul Khaliq's authority. Abdul Khaliq has confined her to a domestic place, leading to the suppression of her own will and desire. When the other women ask her to join the institute, Badriya objects to her decision to join the other. Badriya, who is conditioned to patriarchal authority, reinforces patriarchy. Despite her objection, Rahima states that "her heart lightened at the talk of classes. I was starting to taste the possibility of change here" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 284). Moreover, Rahima tells her that 'I will go to the resource center" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 316). It represents her will to go against patriarchy and oppose the restricted spatial norms set by Abdul Khaliq. It also shows her claims to access knowledge, learning, and information, which initiatives towards learning as a step towards her spatial liberation and breaking the norms. Her quest to go to the resource center, reflects her supervision of traditional gender roles; being a Pashtun woman, from her childhood, she was not allowed to get an education or learn something new. When she left to the institutes "with no one" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 316), it made her "feel more free than alone" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 316). Furthermore, she narrates that "I was getting more and more excited at the thought of returning to a classroom. Even if nothing came from the lessons" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 316). It shows that the focus is on spatial Transgression rather than the activity. She

became part of the public space, challenging her husband's authority, which excluded her from entering into the public sphere. In the resources center, she begins to learn computers and excels in learning the English language. However, she feels “free” because she is away from the confinement of domestic boundaries.

In addition, when she returns to her husband's compound, she compares the place “home” with Kabul. She experiences restlessness and suffocation within the home space and feels the differences between home and Kabul. That taste of independent even the possibility of it, “made me year to go back” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 324). Her desire to transgress the spatial boundary comes in the wake of her emotional detachment in her home, and also due to her experience of spatial emancipation in Kabul gives her this hope to confront patriarchal authority and achieve autonomy. On the one hand, the “Home” separates her from the outer world, and she is treated as a “toy” there. On the other hand, Kabul introduces her to the world of knowledge and spatial autonomy. She existentially experiences the spatial independence in Kabul. Kabul is a much better place for her than her husband's compound after her son's death. She became more restless and alone in her husband's home. The confinement haunts her, and she narrates that “in a house full of people, I still felt totally alone” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 393). She believes that she needs an escape from her domestic confinement. Rahima's distinguished identity relieves her from domestic confinement and escapes the restrictive spatial constraints that govern women's lives. Once, she distinguished herself as “Rahima, the Bacha Posh” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 452) and sneaked away from the hotel in Kabul. By running from home and hotel, she challenges Abdul Khaliq's authority. In the end, she narrates that “It was only because I was literate that I was able to join Badriya in Kabul. It was only because I could hold a pen with a purpose that I was able to be her assistant and feel comfortable joining Hamida and Sufia in the resource center. ‘I’m sorry Khala-Jan, for everything you thought me, for the stories you told me, for the escape you gave me.’” (Hashimi, 2014, p. 460). Eventually, she gets rid of the domestic restriction and successfully transgresses the spatial boundary. Her “deviation” helps her to achieve spatial emancipation. She becomes the “Pearl” that successfully “Broke its Shell”. She resists and challenges patriarchal authority and dominance, seeking spatial liberation and breaking the authorities’ barriers that marginalized her.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter explored how spatial transgressions function as acts of resistance against deeply embedded patriarchal and socio-political power structures in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. Through a close textual analysis, it was demonstrated that the female characters in both novels do not merely inhabit physical spaces—they contest, redefine, and often defy them. Whether it is stepping into forbidden terrain, crossing literal or metaphorical boundaries, or simply occupying spaces traditionally denied to them, these women challenge the normative geographies shaped by customs, politics, and gendered expectations.

Drawing from Allan McKee’s formulation of textual analysis, the study illustrated how metaphors, similes, and physical settings operate not only as narrative tools but as symbolic landscapes of power. These spaces, often marked by surveillance, confinement, or danger, become the very arenas where women assert their agency and seek autonomy.

The narratives under discussion portray space as both a constraint and a possibility. The protagonists' journeys through and beyond their culturally sanctioned boundaries reflect the complex interplay between space, identity, and resistance. By stepping out of place,

sometimes quite literally, they engage in a form of spatial disobedience that reshapes not only their personal trajectories but also the sociopolitical contours around them.

In doing so, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* offer more than stories of individual emancipation; they serve as powerful critiques of spatial marginalization and the systems that sustain it. The chapter concludes that spatial transgression, in these narratives, is not simply a plot device; it is a profound commentary on the struggle for voice, visibility, and transformation in contexts bound by tradition, war, and gender control.

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