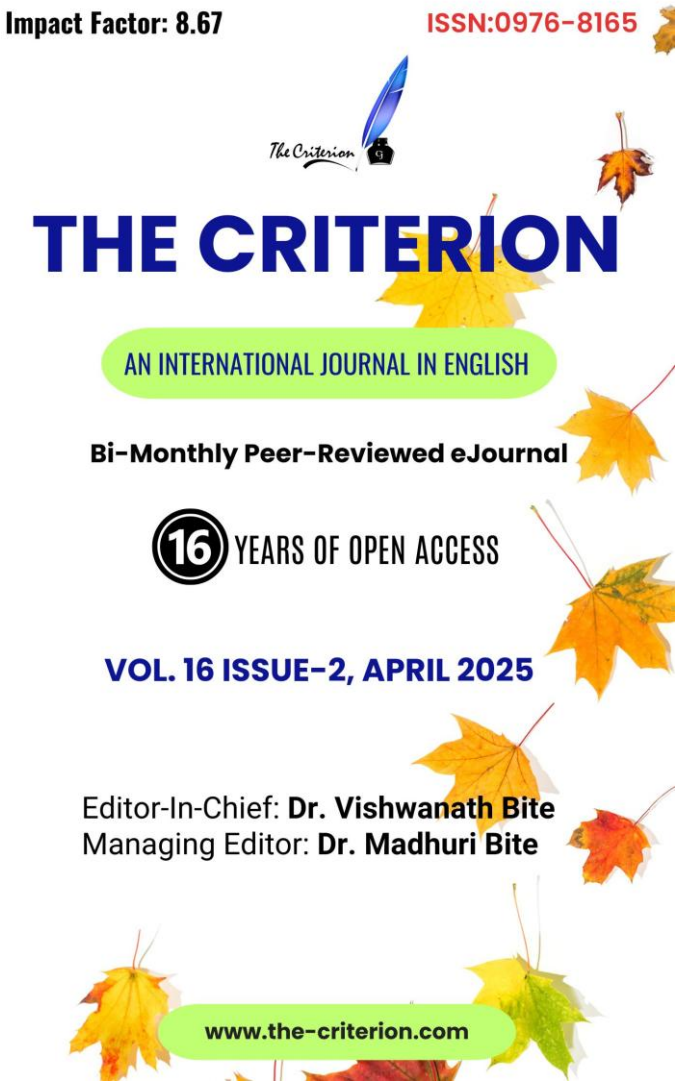

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The Shifting Sands of Identity: A Comparative Exploration of Gender Performativity and Liminality in Bacha Posh and Tomboy Narratives

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Abstract:

This article aims to understand and compare how gender fluidity and liminality function within the narratives of Bacha Posh in Afghanistan and the Western narratives that portray tomboy characters. This is accomplished by utilizing the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler and the idea of liminality given by Victor Turner. Patriarchal system demonstrates its extreme misogyny through Bacha Posh because this cultural practice only allows girls to gain agency through adopting male roles. In contrast, the tomboy characters in Western literature usually express individual opposition to gender resistance that lets them experiment with male-coded activities for personal freedom. The two accounts demonstrate how femininity experiences devaluation while liminal states simultaneously let women display resistance briefly yet force them back into gender norms. This article critiques gender systems while promoting the creation of a new gender paradigm which embraces gender identity fluidity instead of viewing it as a momentary deviation from the entrenched frameworks.

Keywords: Bacha Posh, Tomboy, gender, fluidity, liminality, transition, in-betweenness.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do Bacha Posh and Tomboy accounts portray the ways that affect or sustain gender binary systems in their respective cultural settings?
2. How ideas or concepts of gender performativity and liminality affect both these practices?
3. How the structural and cultural motivations of the two practices are similar and different from each other?

INTRODUCTION

Gender has consistently been a domain involving some negotiation, at almost all degrees, both as a lived experience and as a societal construct, shaped by countless cultural expectations and individual personal agencies within all fluid spaces. Women have been marginalized and subordinated to men throughout history and across different geographical locations, which is mirrored by Simone de Beauvoir in her statement: “She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 26). In multiple societies, people attempt to conform to the already defined gender roles and the expectations associated with them; occasionally, they attempt to bend or eventually break these roles and expectations so that they can live, fight back, or merely exist as they wish to. Over time, different cultures worldwide have established transitory practices which attempt to break predefined gender norms because these practices constantly show how identity can change across people. This article investigates two cultural events or practices, namely Bacha Posh in Afghanistan and the tomboy behavior depicted in literature from the West, to understand how societies balance gender cross-pollination with their traditional systems and how it resists the predefined structure. Bacha Posh is originally a Dari word which means “a girl dressed as a boy”. This practice enables families who do not have a son to

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present their daughters as sons in front of the world. It is usually done for a variety of reasons: to uphold the prestige of the family, economic benefits and escorting the other female members of the family whenever they had to move outside. This was barely recognized in literature until 2014 when Jenny Nordberg brought it to the forefront through her work *The Underground Girls of Kabul,* where she narrated the experiences of many women and girls who were or are a part of this practice. She even goes on to say: "Having a girl's son was way better than none" (Nordberg, 2014, p. 24). Living as a Bacha Posh required girls to become males in order to meet their family demands under a highly patriarchal system. In contrast, the concept of "tomboy" behavior is considered to be an experience that girls undertake as a temporary and transient phase of male expression. Whenever we hear Tomboy, an image of a girl comes to mind with boyish clothes, short hair, and of someone who is far removed from the traditional notions of femininity both in behaviour and in appearance. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a tomboy as "a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish". However, this definition appears to be vague and ambiguous. Etymologically, the word is divided as Tom+boy meaning a "wild, romping girl, girl who acts like a spirited boy" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019). This could also mean a "strumpet, bold or immodest woman" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019).

This article explores Afghanistan's practice of Bacha Posh and the Western depiction of tomboy behaviour. These narratives provide ways to understand how gender identity can be treated as a flexible entity and not something that is predefined for an individual based on his/her biological sex. These two cultural processes previously existed or currently exists in entirely different geographical locations which serves to challenge but also in a way reinforce gender divides. Although both the practices involve girls taking on male-coded behaviors and identities, their cultural contexts, motivations behind the practice, and implications differ greatly, showing how

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gender standards are both reinforced and weakened when firm social limits exist. Through the processes of liminality and performativity, this research article will aim to understand how gender identities can be flexible, overlapping, an agent of control and how it functions in different contexts.

This analysis will involve the use of Judith Butler's gender performativity theory and Victor Turner's idea of liminality, which brings forward the ways and extent to which societies and individuals view and use temporary gender non-conformity as "pressure outlet valves" before again being reinforced with the usual predefined binary framework. This essay demonstrates how cultural environments direct and control both the objectives and activities of gender liminality and flexibility and its resultant impacts. Bacha Posh developed as a result of system constraints, as a sort of "survival tactic" for females in Afghanistan, which contrasts with tomboy behaviour that lets people freely test gender boundaries within unrestrained societies, both of which ultimately reveal the continuing dominance of gender constraints. The research methodology of comparative analysis breaks down universal perspectives on gender, and uncovers the complex relationship between how people define themselves and how society controls gender reform in the current process of gender transformation.

The concept of liminality was first coined in French by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work *Rites de Passage,* which was intially published in French in 1909 and translated into English as *The Rites of Passage* in 1960. The term was made popular by anthropologist Victor Turner in the 1960s when he translated Gennep's work into English. The term liminality is a Latin word which etymologically translates to 'threshold' meaning a predefined condition to be achieved or a limit that has to be crossed for an action or phenomenon to occur. In other words, it marks the boundary of the sphere of a particular action or phenomenon, the crossing of which will lead one to enter

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into another sphere of action. Therefore, we can say that this place of crossing is a place of change and "it would be unusual to think of it as a place to stay, a place of permanent existence." (Chakraborty, p.145). Since then, it has become an important term in anthropology studies. Turner describes it as a sort of middle stage that is "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). This is a stage of 'in-betweenness' where individuals usually exist outside of the conventional roles that society has assigned to them based on their biological sex. People occupying this 'middle stage' may embody specific characteristics of both genders at the same time.

Judith Butler explicated the concept of gender performativity in her 1990 work *Gender Trouble* in which she attempted to distinguish between the concepts of gender and sex. According to her, gender is not a predefined entity that one is born with and is not necessarily related to sex. Instead, it is defined by the "acts" performed by an individual throughout his or her life. Therefore, it is not something that one *is*, rather it is something that one *becomes*. She explains this in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*: "Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex." (Butler, p.9). Butler also utilized the statement of Simone de Beauvoir taken from her distinguished work *The Second Sex* (1949): "One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman." (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 14) to further understand the nuances of sex and gender. According to Butler, Beauvoir's statement argues that there is a sense of authority as well as cultural coercion in the process of becoming a woman, and this is not necessarily related to sex. Instead, it is built into the language that shapes gender as a comprehensible identity that carries meaning.

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METHODOLOGY

This research uses comparative analysis method and textual and cultural analysis focusing on Bacha Posh and Tomboy narratives that demonstrate 'in-betweenness' of gender identity experiences. The research focuses on two processes that stem from distinct social environments, yet offer the same insight into brief experiences of gender transition.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

1. Gender performativity and liminality in Bacha Posh narratives

   Afghanistan is a country that has a history of systematic subjugation of women in almost all fields of activity, which continues even in the present day, in which women are not permitted to go to schools and to take up any form of employment, have to completely cover themselves up with a burqa whenever they move outside and that too compulsorily accompanied by a male member of the family. The practice of raising girls as boys among Afghan families, which is named as Bacha Posh in Afghanistan is a testament to the fact that how societies establish certain defined and regulated liminality to manage and maintain gender restrictions. This short-term gender change developed by patriarchal tradition enables girls to take advantage of male benefits, which women do not have access to within Afghanistan's strictly defined gender norms. This transition usually happens against a person's will because societies and families burden girls with these methods of survival. When Bacha Posh girls take up male names and clothing and engage in masculine behaviors, they enter an ambiguous state that undermines traditional gender binaries while still embodying their social norms. These sorts of practices both nullify and legitimize the strict gender boundaries. In such cultural environments, gender non-conforming behavior

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is tolerated in limited contexts by patriarchy to sustain its dominant position; however, this tolerance ends as soon as patriarchal structures are threatened.

In compliance with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Bacha Posh girls develop their masculinity by repeatedly performing actions such as cutting their hair, changing their voices, copying male social habits, earning money for the family, etc. Their masculinity depends on executing these performance acts that gain validation from social acknowledgement. *The Underground Girls of Kabul* (2014) by Jenny Nordberg is a non-fiction work that includes interviews of many women who are or were bacha posh at one point in their lives. In this work, readers learn how Zahra moves through Kabul while disguised as a boy and how she experiences freedom through bicycling and educating herself by going to school. She continued to resist patriarchy even after reaching the age of puberty. However, she also in a way considered the male gender to be more powerful and prudent which is evident when she says- "being a boy is much more simple in dressing; boys are talking less, and avoiding gossip" (2014, p.104). Therefore, it justifies our claim that this practice of Bacha Posh operates both for and against the patriarchal system in which it is based.

Ukmina Manoori's *I Am a Bacha Posh: My Life as a Woman Living as a Man in Afghanistan* (2014) is a memoir in which the author describes her journey as a bacha posh and how she decided to remain a bacha posh for the rest of her life, defying the rules of religion and patriarchy and eventually fighting as a warrior against the Russians and assisting the Mujahideen. She felt that becoming a bacha posh would be the best choice for her. However she was not ignorant of the sacrifices she had to make for this purpose and also recognized that this would not be an ideal choice for all women in Afghanistan to

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make: “Living in men’s clothing has given me a certain freedom. A life as a woman in Afghanistan is a life of destruction. You saw where I come from, and where am I now? But I do not forget what I had to give up. For me, this is not a weight, to not get married, to not have children, to grow old alone ... but, for others? I would not advise anyone to become a bacha posh.” (Manoori, p.80)

This performance of “cross-dressing” does not initially originate from personal choice since families require these acted skills to fulfill their needs. However with time, the Bacha Posh girls come to prefer their life as a male because it provides them with freedom and choices which were not initially available to them as girls or women in Afghanistan. At puberty, physical changes such as menstruation reveal the futility of gendered performances, thus demonstrating how collective power structures control people who deviate from expected behaviours.

Following the concept of liminality given by Victor Turner, the Bacha Posh experience represents a ritual transition which requires girls to occupy gender-neutral spaces to meet societal demands. In this phase, they accept temporary male privileges and perform tasks like escorting other female members of the family and working in male-dominated spheres even though Afghan culture would not allow this. This period of transformation exists within strict boundaries since families initially chooses the transition but girls’ return to femininity follows an abrupt forced re-entry at puberty through marriage or home detention.

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1.1 The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014)

As an Afghan-American writer and paediatrician, Nadia Hashimi is a crucial figure who uses the Bacha Posh tradition to explore gender issues alongside cultural and resistance themes in her literary writings. The writer links her Afghan immigrant roots to explore the intricate dimensions of male control systems in Afghanistan and female empowerment dynamics. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi established itself as a significant literary achievement by combining stories of Bacha Posh traditions with two parallel tales of Afghan women. This novel follows Rahima who assumes a modern male identity, and then shifts to Shekiba, Rahima's great-great-grandmother, who survived abuse by pretending to be male in early 20th-century Afghanistan.

Hashimi uses her sensitive writing skills to present Bacha Posh as an important survival method in addition to exhibiting intense misogyny throughout society. At one point in the novel, Rahima's father pours out his anger on her mother and starts abusing her because she could not bear a son and that they were burdened with only daughters. The inability to conceive a son was seen as the woman's fault. His frustration is evident in the lines: "If I had a son, this would not be happening! Goddamn it! Why do we have a house full of girls! Not one, not two –but five of them!" he would yell. Madar-Jan would busy herself with housework, feeling the weight of disappointment on her shoulders. (2014, p.5). Sons were regarded as assets, while daughters were often seen as a burden for the family. However, daughters are also eventually transformed into sons through the practice of Bacha Posh. It was as if only "becoming" a male, be it

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by imitating or copying, was the only way for girls and women to survive in such a highly patriarchal system.

In her perspective, Hashimi rejects any idealization of the practice because she reveals that it functions as a sexist agreement which offers brief independence to women but continues their overall devaluation. Through her multigenerational tale, the author demonstrates through the stories of Shekiba and Rahima how gender oppression has remained consistent from the past to the current era by connecting historical and modern developments in female suppression.

In *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Nadia Hashimi connects the lived experiences of two Bacha Posh characters across two generations. Throughout Rahima's narrative, Hashimi examines how girls gain limited independence by pretending to be males but eventually lose their freedom after being pushed back into traditional female roles. The novel juxtaposes Rahima's transitory independence against her violent marriage and domestic abuse by her husband while showing that Bacha Posh offers both protection and self-deception. The narrative shows how Afghan women throughout different generations use perseverance and deceptive practices to deal with patriarchal limitations while enduring a continuous oppressive system.

1.2 The Breadwinner (2000)

In her novel *The Breadwinner*, Deborah Ellis traces the journey of an eleven-year-old Afghan girl, Parvana, as she takes on masculine traits to stay alive during Taliban-ruled Afghanistan- "The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school" (2000, p.7)- while

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illuminating extreme societal force for gender fluidity. Through her adoption of the male persona 'Kaseem', including the processes of transforming her hair and changing clothes and adopting masculine gestures, Parvana demonstrates Judith Butler's gender performativity theory that identity develops from repeated actions and not from nature. Parvana puts on male clothing out of necessity because the Taliban occupation had caused economic ruin and threatened the survival of her family, which is evident as they were not able to go outside to buy the basic necessities because of the sole reason that there was no male member in the family after her father got arrested by the Taliban. This necessity is portrayed by her mother when she says- "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" (2001, p.63). Her portrayal of masculinity remains tenuous because she needs to monitor herself constantly for signs that might expose her female identity, thus demonstrating the unstable nature of gender identity under authoritarian rule. When she went into the market disguised as a boy, she "kept waiting for people to point at her and call her a fake. No one did. No one paid any attention to her at all." (p. 70).

Like Kaseem, Parvana exists in a transitional space between genders because her situation enabled her to access freedoms denied to Afghan women while maintaining a secret identity. Such a transitional space lacks structure or safety. Her work opportunities and mobility depend on her assumption of a male identity. However, her situation remains precarious because she must uphold the manufactured makeup of gender throughout the Taliban-controlled regime. According to the book therefore, liminality exists as an uncertain strategy for survival.

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2. Gender performativity and liminality in Tomboy narratives

Tomboy narratives found throughout literature and media adapt perfectly to observe Judith Butler's gender performativity theory and examine Victor Turner's liminality theory. Multidimensional tales showcase characters who temporarily practice male-identified behaviours to confront gender standards and break social expectations. The choice of clothing, along with physical activities and assertive behavior, illustrates to readers that gender is constructed through repeated actions rather than inherent biological differences. Potential transition exists as a border zone which allows traditional gender norms to become temporarily suspended before being monitored through both cultural and temporal restrictions.

2.1 *Little Women* (1868)

Little Women explores gender rebellion through the character of Jo March. Her rejection of typical female attire, the prospect of marriage, and her literary inclinations towards writing demonstrate Judith Butler's ideas regarding gender performance. Her self-identity emerges through purposeful anti-social behaviour that minimizes rigid gender boundaries. Throughout *Little Women*, the character Jo exists between the liberty of being a girl and the constraints of becoming a woman, a dynamic that Victor Turner describes as the 'in-between' state of social order. Because it simultaneously promotes and restricts gender rebellion through cultural expectations, *Little Women* provides a gripping exploration of this phenomenon.

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From the very first chapter, Alcott presents Jo as an unconventional woman, possessing traits that are not typically associated with young girls. She is described as having “round shoulders”, “big hands and feet” (p.7). Jo portrayed her inner struggle through her dislike of feminine characteristics. "I hate to think I’ve got to grow up and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China aster!"(p.6)- through her refusal to follow societal norms of adult femininity demonstrated through "long gowns" and primness, Jo exposes the restrictive performance requirements women are compelled to fulfill. At this stage of life, Jo March strongly opposes donning the adult role of "Miss March" because she exists in an uncertain position. She even displays her aversion towards her name as she considers it too feminine. She objects to Laurie when he addresses her as “Miss March” and says, “I am not Miss March, I’m only Jo” (2010, p.39). Her assumption of the name Jo instead of Josephine March can be viewed as a sort of protest against established notions of femininity. This quote reveals how Jo's rebellious nature functions as both a form of disobedience and a sign of her growing up because it showcases the conflict between social expectations and personal freedom.

Jo experiences liminality during her adolescent years, a transitional phase in which she fights against becoming a full-fledged adult woman. The nickname she adopted despite her real name being Josephine, along with her short hair, symbolizes her in-between state and her rejection of typical feminine standards of her time. Throughout the novel, the character’s liminality presents itself as a brief interlude before her return to societal norms, illustrating how Turner perceives liminality as part of a guided transitional process.

Through her actions of climbing trees along with writing sensational texts, Jo March demonstrates gender performativity. Her performance of assertive behaviour alongside her

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ambition challenges Victorian expectations of passive femininity and proves Butler's theory about gender as an act rather than a natural trait. Through her passion for writing, Jo challenges the traditional limits placed upon women in literature because she enters an exclusively male-dominated profession. Aunt March, along with Meg, enforces conventional women's roles from time to time to restrict Jo March's performative resistance against the gender norms of their society. Shawna McDermott states,"the tomboy's gender defiance is acceptable to society as long as she is culturally and biologically understood as a child" (2019, p.135). This indicates that Jo was eventually married off and made to comply with the norms of traditional Victorian society.

This novel leads its audience toward understanding why society accepts limited breaks from established norms while opposing sustained changes they propose to gender norms. Jo's historical significance derives from her persistent fight for self-expression even though her story depicts the uncompleted struggle for feminist equality, which persistently strikes all societies.

2.2 *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee demonstrates the analysis of gender performance and transitional spaces with the help of the main character, Scout Finch. The story investigates the conditions that dictated conduct of female behavior during the 1930s in Maycomb, Alabama. Scout, throughout the novel, shows deviant gender tendencies when she decides to dress like a boy and behave in ways not accepted for females. This suggests an alignment with Judith Butler's theory of gender

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performativity. Scout seems to occupy a transitional or liminal space where she moves away from the strict gender constraints of society.

Scout exhibits the stage of liminality during her childhood because social norms temporarily break down during this transitional period. Being an innocent girl who was yet to face adult pressures, allows her to explore Maycomb with a boyish spirit freely. Through her liminal stage, she challenges conventional norms because she can observe them from a perspective of childlike purity. Her liminal state remains fragile because Miss Caroline and Aunt Alexandra force her towards femininity, which symbolizes a future loss of personal independence. However towards the end of this novel, there is no indication of the loss of her tomboyish character. This may be because, at the end of the novel, Scout is only nine years of age and has not yet faced the challenging decisions of adolescence. Therefore, we can assume that the author does this because she wanted readers to focus on the development of Scout's character as a child. Scout Finch continues to act and behave as a tomboy throughout the novel, even after encountering various feminine conventions of that time. In this case, we can say that Scout is not like a typical or conventional tomboy as she resists and continues to defy the traditional gender conventions of society.

3. Similarities and differences between Bacha Posh and Tomboy narratives

Female experiences in Bacha Posh and Tomboy narratives follow similar themes about girls who use masculine appearances to overcome gendered obstacles. The practices exist in transitional zones that allow girls to cross boundaries of restricted femininity to gain access to male benefits like schooling and freedom of movement. This, in turn, grants them increased independence, especially in the case of Bacha Posh. Bacha Posh and Tomboy

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stories show how girls perform actions typically associated with boys, thereby challenging standardized gender expectations, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Under the Bacha Posh tradition, Afghan girls get the opportunity to participate in male roles as a temporary solution for them and their families to receive benefits such as education and the ability to venture into public spaces. On the other hand, western literature features tomboy characters like Jo March from *Little Women* who reject feminine dresses to participate in masculine semblances usually out of their own will, which is not the case with Bacha Posh girls who are mostly initially forced by their parents to take on masculine semblances. The narratives establish liminal borders beyond gender constraints, enabling females to break free from restrictive notions of femininity. The transitional space does not persist indefinitely because social norms ultimately compel girls to adopt traditional female roles. This illustrates how gender functions through social expectation-based performances. By adopting masculine acts, Bacha Posh and Tomboy characters demonstrate Judith Butler's idea of gender performance by breaking socially accepted gender norms and conventions. The narratives demonstrate how society allows transgression temporarily but simultaneously applies social pressures for females to eventually fall back into conforming to feminine standards.

Bacha Posh represents a traditional social custom because families without a male child disguise their daughters to perform tasks typically assigned to men, such as earning money to support the family. It acts as a survival tactic for such families. The practice follows a set timeline since puberty marks its end when girl children have to move back to complying with the standard female roles, usually by force (this happens in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* where Rahima, a Bacha Posh, is forcefully married off at a young age to a much older

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man named Abdul Khaliq). Contrary to this, western cultural views portray tomboyism as a choice of self-expression whose motives stem from personal preferences rather than familial rules and responsibilities. These characters have no familial obligations concerning their adoption of male behaviour. It is solely based on their own will. The non-conformist behavior of tomboy characters occasionally faces social pressure to perform feminine behaviors; however, this societal influence does not become institutionalized or develop formal action plans. The characterization of tomboyism through Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrates how characters demonstrate individual control as they question traditional gender roles.

The practice of Bacha Posh differs fundamentally from tomboyism, primarily due to its origins in cultural background and the motivation behind it. Bacha Posh functions as a social and cultural practice in Afghanistan since male absence forces families to use this practice for economic and social needs. It exists as an essential family practice rather than an individual choice. The practice of tomboyism mainly functions as a personal defence against gender conformity. Scout Finch chooses a tomboy style in *To Kill A Mockingbird* because she prefers it and not because her family forces her to accept it. In contrast, Parvana in *The Breadwinner* had to cross-dress and take on male responsibilities because her family had no other option in order to survive. The contrasting development of these narratives arises from structural patriarchy in Bacha Posh communities, versus the social tensions between individuality and conformity that characterize liberal societies regarding male-centered behavior.

The results of these stories display significant differences. The outcome in Bacha Posh culminates when parents force their daughters into gender identity transitions, which

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removes their independence and places them in marriage or domestic roles that frequently result in physical and mental trauma. After puberty, former Bacha Posh girls experience a profound loss of personal identity. In Tomboy narratives, however, the results differ as individuals either follow expected norms (for example, Jo March in *Little Women*) or continue to challenge gender norms (for example Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*). Both practices contribute to patriarchal systems because they establish masculine characteristics as superior conduits for dignity. Under the system of Bacha Posh, individuals only achieve respect and freedom by pretending to be a male, while tomboy narratives generally promote masculine traits as superior to feminine ones. Therefore, we can infer that the degradation of feminine traits extends across nations due to global cultural attitudes.

The stories of Bacha Posh and tomboys analyze strict gender boundaries, although each follows distinct historic paths and ends. Bacha Posh shows how structural patriarchy operates in non-Western regions, whereas tomboyism demonstrates personal resistance under liberal social systems. The two stories unite as global evidence of gender equality conflicts, which demonstrate the necessity for permanent solutions instead of short-term ones.

CONCLUSION

Gender fluidity practices in Bacha Posh and Tomboy narratives thus function as a sort of transitional space or a space of change through which women and girls simultaneously undermine and accidentally uphold patriarchal structures. In Afghanistan, the culturally accepted practice of Bacha Posh enables girls to take on transitory male personas as a

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solution to their family's and society's constraints, thus displaying how misogyny exists in the system through its masculine connections with agency and freedom. Despite being seen as independent choices in Western societies, tomboy-like behaviour challenges gender rules through unconventional expressions. However, individuals exhibiting such behaviour often encounter rejection and exclusion as they attain adolescence. Limited freedom from binaries emerges during liminal periods, but these moments inevitably end in order to maintain the social boundaries that compel Bacha Posh girls to experience forced re-entry into femininity and force all tomboys to conform to conventional norms. This paradox illustrates that society needs to overhaul its gender framework, recognizing fluidity as a stable and enduring paradigm rather than a temporary exception.

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