



SUFFERING OF THE CHILDREN DURING THE TALIBAN REGIME IN DEBORAH ELLIS' "THE BREADWINNER"



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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to analyse the unbearable suffering of the children of Afghanistan in Taliban regime reflected in the novel "The Breadwinner" by Deborah Ellis. Through this novel, Deborah Ellis portrayed the fact of life of the children of Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

In The Taliban regime people were dominated in many ways but among all those children suffered a lot. The fundamentalist in Afghan forbade children from going to school, women were banned to go to work, wandering anywhere without a male companion from family, forced to wear the burqa. Many people lost their lives in blast by the Taliban who were the head of the family. The Muslim communities have a patriarchal tradition, men run their families. With the killing of the head of the family, the real suffering of the children took place on large scale. The women and the children were helpless.

They had lost their shelter. In some of the families, there were only girls, no boys to earn and take care of the family. In such families, there was a question of their livelihood as no one was there to earn or even to go out to bring the daily needs.

Having no breadwinner left in the family, lack of income the family started to suffer economically and was unable to fulfill their basic needs, children died in starvation. The fundamentalist Taliban forced childhood marriages, Taliban soldiers exploited the young children, many children became the victim of the terrorist attacks and were handicapped, and several children became orphans as well as lost their childhood and happiness. So there was no end to their suffering in the Taliban regime.

KEYWORDS

Breadwinner, Child Marriage, Child Exploitation, Taliban Regime, and Fundamentalism

RESEARCH PAPER

INTRODUCTION:

Afghan children have suffered from the scourge of wars and conflicts for a long time. These wars and power struggles have harmed Afghan society, specially the female children. Taliban regime was considered the worst period in Afghanistan's history in terms of the violation of the basic human rights and oppression of the Afghan people.

The people were forced to Taliban's tyrannical laws and orders. Taliban forced women to leave their jobs, not to go outside excepts with a male relative, wear a burqa, also women were not allowed to go by bus, buy things from the shop without a man with them from their family. The children were not allowed to go to school. School teachers were attacked in the schools by the Taliban soldiers.

The Canadian writer Deborah Ellis inspired readers by highlighting the suffering of the children and their plight through the novel, "The Breadwinner". The title is closely associated with the protagonist an eleven-year-old girl, Parvana and her role as a breadwinner of her family after her family lost their breadwinner due to the Taliban. The novelist conducted many interviews and visited the refugee camps for the Afghan families and effectively presented the reality of the suffering of the children.

On forsaking Afghanistan of the Soviet Union, The Taliban established their rules considering the religion foremost and became the supreme power. The Taliban fundamentalist put many restrictions on the Afghan people, especially the women. The condition of the women and female children were none the less than the slaves.

In the present novel an eleven years old girl, the protagonist named Parvana lives with her family in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Her father was a teacher and had lost his one leg when the Taliban bombed the school building. So she helps her father to go to the market for his work of reading and writing letters for people. Parvana even supports him to come upstairs and go downstairs to their house. Her father was the only breadwinner in her family. But, once Taliban soldiers arrested him yanking towards the door stating "*Why did you go to England for your education... Afghanistan doesn't need your foreign ideas!*". (Ellis, *The Breadwinner*: p. 34) and put into jail.

Here, the real suffering starts of the family and especially Parvana. Because they could only survive for three days with whatever was left in the house. Now no man was in their family to fetch the things from the market and earn some money for their livelihood. Here Parvana was the only source. She was sent to the market to fetch the things, Taliban soldiers warned her not to come to the market alone for being a girl. They chased to catch her but she escaped by them.

The biggest question was to survive without a man in the family as her father was in jail. Then her mother and Mrs. Weera decided to disguise her as a boy. They cut her hair, give a cap and the Salwar of her brother, Kaseem, who was died in the landmines. Then after being disguised as a boy she brings the things from the market without having noticed by anyone. She starts to continue her father's work of reading and writing letters in the marketplace to earn money for her family. Parvana with her classmate named Shauzia, starts to work to earn more money for the family. Shauzia was also disguised as a boy to become a breadwinner for her family as her father was also died. Both of them work hard and even go to the cemetery to dig the bones and sell them in the market to get more money.

Parvana and Shauzia both were Breadwinners for their families and being children also they were taking the responsibility of their families, like Parvana and Shauzia many children were suffering a lot and working hard for their families to survive.

The Taliban forbade children from going to school and even destroyed the school buildings. Like Parvana and Shauzia most of the children left their schooling in between due

to the Taliban's policies. Nooria, Parana's elder sister and Mrs. Weera once started a secret school in their locality to educate the children. Nooria wanted to learn more like her father but she was unable to study further at the current place. So she accepted her marriage proposal to continue her education at a new place.

"I will be going back to school," Nooria said. "Didn't you listen to anything Mother was saying last night? I will be living in Mazar-e-Sharif, in the north. The Taliban aren't in the part of Afghanistan. Girls can still go to school there. Both of his parents are educated. I can finish school, and they'll even send me to the university in Mazar". (Ellis, p.119)

Child marriages were so common practice in Afghanistan. Though some of the parents were not willing to marry their children in childhood but they were not having any option, because of the Taliban's threatening.

Generally, Taliban soldiers were taking away the young girls from their houses and used to exploit getting married to them. Shauzia, Parvana's classmate was about eleven years old was also forced to get married by her family. So, to avoid this, she decides to leave the current place, Kabul. There are many examples in the country that the girls were forced to get married without their wish and faced several health issues.

The worst condition of the young girls in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule is proven with the survey report of humanism organization as –

Between 2000 and 2009, almost 40% of young women, when interviewed, confided that they were given in marriage before the age of 18. These early marriages could result in serious health problems among young women, especially when these young women are not yet ready to go through the experience of pregnancy. (<https://www.humanium.org/en/fundamental-rights-2/health/>).

Due to the presence of numerous landmines in Afghanistan, many children lost their lives, most of them became handicapped. Especially, young children fail to understand the landmines and lost their lives in the explosions.

Parvana's fourteen years old brother named Kaseem was also a victim of the landmine and had lost his life. Due to that Parvana's family suffered more. Because of the continuous explosions of landmines, common people lost their lives and, their children became helpless and orphans. Due to the continuous conflicts, thousands of people lost some parts of their bodies. Parvana's father had also lost his leg and was using an artificial leg like many other people. Their economic condition was so worst that Parvana's father had to sell out his artificial leg too to a customer, in return for a good amount.

CONCLUSION:

At the end of the study, it is concluded that the children are the future of every country as it is stated, 'Today's children are the leaders of tomorrow'. The Future of any country depends on what we train the young generation today for. But if we see the condition of the Afghanistan in Taliban era, really it's the worst in the world. In childhood, children are supposed to go to school, learn new things, play with their friends, wander freely and happily but instead of these they were forbidden from schools, forced to work for earning, exploited by the Taliban soldiers, forced to get married in early childhood, forced to take the responsibilities of the families as breadwinners like Parvana and Shauzia. Even children were punished badly and suppressed by the Taliban soldiers and there was no one to make their condition better. The children of Afghanistan as reflected in the present novel are not lucky enough to enjoy and have all those things that they are supposed to get as a child. Children of Afghanistan were suppressed and exploited in many ways. Their lives are full of struggle and suffering.

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