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The Depiction of Afghan Women under the Taliban Regime

***The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis as a Case Study**

**An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a
Master degree in English Language, Literature, and Civilization**

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Dedications

To my precious parents,

*Without the sacrifices of my father and the support of my mother, I
would never be here.*

To my brother and sister, thank you for being by my side

And to everyone who stood next to me... I really appreciate it.

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Abstract

During the Taliban regime, Afghan women were subjected to extreme oppression and discrimination. Basic human rights like: education, work and healthcare, to name but few, Afghan women were deprived of making their lives incredibly challenging. This is due to the Taliban's misinterpretation of Islamic law and their disregard for human rights making Afghan women often subject to violence and abuse. Accordingly, the present study, addresses the depiction of Afghan women under the Taliban rule in Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* providing a poignant portrayal of the struggles faced by women under this oppressive regime. Through the character of Parvana, Ellis takes readers on a harrowing journey of survival, as a young girl and her family navigate the challenges of life in a society where women are denied basic human rights. Hence, the primary aim of this study is to depict the protagonists' status under the Taliban rule and their struggle against social and political norms to put an end to their discrimination and to correct the image of women in Islam and the rights they enjoy, which they are in fact bereft from under its name. Ellis' vivid and evocative writing captures the strength, resilience, and humanity of the Afghan people, and offers a compelling reminder of the human rights that women are missing to, under the shadow of religion.

Key words: Afghan women, discrimination, struggle, Taliban regime, religion.

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General Introduction

"Women in Afghanistan are like grapes that grow on a vine. They can be sweet or sour, but they are always together, always close. Only when they are plucked from the vine do they lose their strength, their resilience, their flavor."

Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon is Low*

Literature has the power to reflect the profound connection between artistic production and the historical and cultural realities. One can stress the idea that within a literary work lies the force that transports the reader towards the depiction of women in a society. In this regard, feminist postcolonial literature is the threshold of some of the realities which shape the lives of colonized women in the third world, namely their struggle to challenge rigid cultural structures such as patriarchy in order to achieve self-realization. Literature written during colonial and postcolonial eras replicates women's firm resistance to get equal rights to participate in both social and political life. For instance, girls in particular regions in the third world are exiled from their communities because they are initially excluded from the educational realm. Indeed, it can be quite problematic for women in such politically and socially unstable regions have a proper self-identification since their existence is not even acknowledged.

The Canadian author Deborah Ellis, whose literary production frequently centers on the pain of children and women who are persecuted in the Third World. Deborah's *Women of the Afghan War* (2000) *The Breadwinner* (2001) *A Company of Fools* (2002) *Parvana's Journey* (2002) are part-historical fiction, part-social commentary novels which tackle sensitive themes such as gender stereotyping, immigration, patriarchy as a

social system, women's oppression under Taliban rule, the Taliban's misuse of religion, colonialism and a verity of other profound subject matters. Nevertheless, the role of women is a central theme in *The Breadwinner*. Ellis makes her readers witness physical suffering and emotional longings experienced by the female characters; all in what it seems like a lesson in history that unfolds before the reader eyes.

Ellis, as a female author, has written *The Breadwinner* to shed light on the plight of women in Afghanistan. Ellis' work is described to be extremely compelling and marked by disturbing accounts of suffering which reflects in her narrative.

This novel in particular has succeeded in capturing the sentiments of readers and academics alike due to the continuing dehumanization and degradation of women during the long, troubled history of the war-torn Afghanistan. Moreover, within societies deeply penetrated and governed by religious and social codes, discourse is also derived from interpretations promoted by dominant patriarchal hegemonies which often situate women in a weaker position than men (Azzi 82). For this reason, discussing Ellis' *The Breadwinner* through Islamic feminist lens will offer a broader understanding about gender stereotyping at the backdrop of overlapping oppression of patriarchy and misuse of religion in the Afghan society.

The Breadwinner introduces the diverse life experiences of Parvana and other Afghan girls. The heart of this novel is how circumstances, fate and tragedy bring these women together to struggle against discrimination. Their lives intersect and grow to become very intimate and close due to their shared victim status, and their mutual hatred for the Taliban. The story is about a young girl whose her father was arrested by the

Taliban and her life completely changed when no man left in the house, and her attempts to help her family under the oppression of Taliban. The background is the upheavals in Afghanistan which in many ways shape the lives of these women. Through her narrative, the author captures an authentic image of Afghanistan and its culture as kaleidoscope constantly changing and evolving. Hence, it can be argued that successive rulers and political powers; namely the Soviets, the Mujahedeen, Taliban regime and finally the controversial American presence in the country brought about a radical shift in the perception of women within the Afghan society. As such, the author's center of focus is the status of the female protagonists as they endure cultural and social exile as well as political marginalization. The intricacy of Parvana, Shauzia and Homa's life experiences construct them as subalterns condemned to maintain a position of struggle.

The study highlights the impact of cultural, social and political dimensions on the construction of gender roles in the novel. Indeed, the Afghan society has witnessed a wide range of alterations, most of which are reflected in the deteriorating position of women. In addition, women have to act in accordance to a specific set of codes and beliefs deeply rooted in the Afghan community which in many ways contribute to their Subalternity. Women's most celebrated role is stay at home under any circumstance, and furthermore, the female body is forced to bear extra spiritual, religious and social underlying connotations such as the Taliban ordered.

Due to these additional meanings, the female body is rendered an object under the unimaginable pressure of conflicting ideologies. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the powerful impact of patriarchy as a social system on the formation of gender roles in

Afghanistan throughout three decades of war. Moreover, the representation of the subaltern voice and women's rebellion in Ellis' *The Breadwinner* will be put under scrutiny.

The Taliban have banned women from working outside the home, begging on the streets, laughing loudly, wearing high heels, or even wearing nail polish. They have closed down schools for girls and have forbidden women to be seen in public without a close male relative. They will beat women who do not follow their rules, and sometimes they even stone them to death. The Taliban weren't content with simply forcing women out of the public sphere; they were on a mission to destroy the idea of women altogether. "They didn't want women to exist, not anywhere, not outside of the home. They didn't want women to be educated, or to have jobs, or to have any kind of agency or independence." (Husseini).

During the rule of the Taliban, which lasted from 1996-2001 in Afghanistan, women were subjected to strict and oppressive rules and regulations. Girls were barred from attending school, and women were forbidden from working outside the home or leaving the house without a male escort. The Taliban also enforced strict dress codes, requiring women to wear a burqa or full-body covering when in public. Women who were caught violating these rules were subjected to harsh punishments, including public floggings and executions. Additionally, women who were accused of adultery or moral crimes were often subjected to stoning or other forms of brutal execution. Overall, the Taliban's rule had a devastating impact on the lives of Afghan women, severely limiting

their freedom and opportunities and subjecting them to constant harassment, violence, and discrimination.

Indeed, this study endeavors to better understand the experiences of Afghan women in a particular context, such as during a time of conflict or political instability. And to exploring the lived experiences of Afghan women within their families, communities in order to better understand the challenges that they face and the opportunities that might be available to them. And certainly to examining the impact of different policies or interventions on the lives of Afghan women, in order to identify strategies for promoting greater gender equality and empowerment. This study is conducted with sensitivity and respect for the perspectives and experiences of the women themselves.

Ellis' writings have been a subject of interest for countless of researchers, especially *The Breadwinner*. This novel in particular is acknowledged for its profound treatment of heavy issues related to Islamic feminism such as gender stereotyping and patriarchy and the women's struggle under an oppressive rule. Among the researchers who have attempted to discuss the issues by Ellis is Helen Harper in his review on *Studying Masculinity(ies) In Books About Girls* published by Canadian Society for the Study of education in a Canadian Journal, talks about the adopting a male persona and the character as Parvana and Shauzia are successful in adopting and performing masculinity. "The performance of masculinity in a strategic act of cross-dressing is the key to narrative in Deborah Ellis *the Breadwinner*" (513). In addition, he points out the way in which Ellis has taken help from the conditions of the refugee camps she went to, to highlight the impact of Taliban's religious indoctrinations on the lives of the Afghan

female characters. The physical and psychological violence which the female characters are subjected to is clearly illustrated in this study.

Aiming at providing a thoroughly coherent and analytical work, it is crucial to highlight the questions raised in this research. The main question that this dissertation attempts to answer is: How does Deborah Ellis demonstrate the status of Afghan women under the Taliban rule in the novel *The Breadwinner*? This study also endeavors to answer a set of sub-questions: How did the Taliban oppress Afghans in general and women in specific through Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*? Which forms of struggle did Afghan women adopt in the novel, and what were the obstacles?

It is hypothesized that the oppression against women is reverting to cultural and political aspects, and the Taliban uses the excuse of applying Sharia to be able to practice its persecution. The second hypothesis is that Afghan women rejected the Taliban oppressive regime and created ways to raising awareness and fighting the authority.

For the purpose of answering the earlier stated questions, the novel *The Breadwinner* will be thoroughly analyzed. Subsequently, the study will be divided into three main chapters.

The first chapter is to begin with the socio-historical context puts into perspective the impact of more than three decades of political instability in addition to cultural and social dogmatism on the construction of Afghan woman within her community. And the conditions in Afghanistan that paved to the rise of Taliban. On the other hand, the theoretical framework deals with the theory of Islamic feminism and its major features.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the novel by discussing the Taliban's

Oppression regime. This chapter also attempts to examine the Taliban's perception on women. Moreover, it transferred the conditions of education during the Taliban rule and preventing women from learning and providing examples from the novel about the Taliban's violation of human rights.

The last chapter is going to analyze the forms of female characters' struggle against discrimination and against the Taliban oppressive regime; it deals with the influencing motives of struggling that Ellis had found among the Afghan refugee camps, and the attempts of the protagonist as an Afghan young girl to help her family to survive.

In the conclusion, I will synthesize all the steps of my research, trying to interrelate between each part's findings to demonstrate the results of my research to set my final answer about this important issue in Ellis' novel *the Breadwinner*.

Chapter One

Socio-Historical

Background

Talking about Afghanistan leads to talking about the Taliban, whose mere mention leads to discussing the status of Afghan women and the violation of their rights.

This chapter will provide an immensely background on the establishment of the Taliban and will attempt to chronicle the history of Afghanistan before the Taliban rule and then Afghanistan during the last decade of the twentieth century. Additionally, it aims to provide a brief background on the activity of the feminist movement in the Middle East and the most prominent reasons that led to its formation there and the formation of the term Islamic feminism.

1. The Rise of the Taliban

The term Taliban was first used in the fall of 1994 when a group of religious students (Taliban) took control of the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. (Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul).

The Taliban movement quickly spread to other parts of the country, and by 1996 they had taken over the capital city, Kabul, and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. (Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul).

1.1 The Concept of Taliban

The Taliban is a Sunni Islamist militant group, adhere to a strict interpretation of Islamic law and seek to establish a government based on their interpretation of Sharia law. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, when they were overthrown by a US-led coalition after the September 11 attacks. The group continues to carry out attacks and wage an insurgency against the Afghan government and international forces in the country. (Harper).

The term Taliban is derived from the Pashto language, which is spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It means students or seekers (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan). in the sense of religious students or seekers of knowledge. The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s as a movement of religious students who sought to maintain order and enforce their interpretation of Islamic law in Afghanistan. Over time, the group developed into a militant organization that gained control of much of the country and imposed its strict interpretation of Sharia law on the population. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

1.2 Taliban in Afghanistan

The rule of the Taliban began in 1996, after a long period of civil war and chaos in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. The Taliban emerged from religious schools (madrasas) in Pakistan, where many Afghan refugees had fled after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The group gained support from conservative Pashtun (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan). tribes in southern Afghanistan, who were tired of the lawlessness and fighting among the various factions that had emerged in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

In 1994, the Taliban began a military campaign to take control of Kandahar, a key city in southern Afghanistan. They succeeded in taking control of the city the following year, and quickly expanded their control to other parts of the country. By 1996, they had captured Kabul, the capital city, and declared the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. (Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul).

The Taliban enforced a strict interpretation of Islamic law, imposing harsh punishments for crimes such as theft and adultery, and banning music, television, and most forms of entertainment. They also severely restricted the rights of women and girls, banning them from most forms of education and employment, and requiring them to wear full-body coverings (burqas) in public. (Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul). The Taliban's rule was marked by her persecution of human rights.

2. Afghan Timeline

Afghanistan is a country located in South Asia and is bordered by six countries: Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Afghanistan has a long and complex history, which can be traced back to ancient times. It has been influenced by various empires and civilizations, from the Achaemenids to the Mauryans, and from the Greeks to the Mongols.

In the 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state between the British and Russian empires, and it gained independence in 1919. In the 20th century, Afghanistan was ruled by the monarchy, followed by a communist government, and then by the Taliban. (Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress).

2.1 History of Afghanistan

Afghanistan joined the non-alignment movement after the war, having won its independence from the British in 1919. Although the nation was agnostic to both the East and the West, it nonetheless received aid from both. Afghanistan's history has been marked by poverty due to a long period of feudalism that divided the country into petty fiefdoms and established Kabul as the center of power. The Soviet Invasion of 1979

resulted from a succession of significant power changes in Afghanistan. There were indicators of development for women prior to the invasion. Women were attending school in Afghanistan's urban areas, there were several women in the government, and there were female officers in the police force. (Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress).

At this time, Afghanistan was limiting Parcham's influence in the government, which definitely infuriated the USSR. Daoud Khan was influenced by this break in relations to downplay the Pashtunistan issue, mend ties with Pakistan, establish contacts with Iran, and forge links with Western nations. He expressed his desire to lessen the influence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan by outlawing all other political parties after founding his own Mili-Ghorzang. This dealt the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which had support from the USSR and was gaining ground as a result of the consolidation of the Afghan Parcham and Khalq parties, a fatal blow. After having a contentious conversation with USSR President Brezhnev and announcing that "Afghanistan will never allow The Soviet Union dictating to us how to run our country, and whom to employ in Afghanistan," (Neamatollah). Daoud made it plain that he wished to deteriorate Afghan-Soviet relations. He ordered the arrest of PDPA officials for subversion in order to emphasize his political choice. This ultimately resulted in the PDPA's coup d'état and the murder of Daoud and his family. (Neamatollah).

The USSR-backed administration, known as (The Saur Revolution) which was headed by Babrak Karmal, the Parcham division's leader, and Nur Mohammed Taraki, the head of the PDPA's Khalq faction, desired radical change in Afghanistan. They started using women's rights as a political tactic during this time period. (Gosh 7).

The administration employed showy gestures like supporting female entertainers rather than making long-term, significant efforts to empower women. Prior to the PDPA administration, the groom was obligated to give the bride a mehr (cash or property), which would be in her name, as part of the wedding ceremony. Under the dictatorship, a woman's mehr could only be valued 300 Afghanis, which made women's finances even more precarious. The PDPA even went so far as to set a ceiling on wedding costs, even snooping around events and plundering venues. This profoundly violated the right to free speech and association for the Afghan people. Additionally, the PDPA tried to enforce its programs by coercion. Women were forced, for instance, to participate in a literacy program. In one night, hundreds of people were killed when government agents encountered opposition in Kuner Province. (Yahi 36).

A jihadist faction opposed to communist political expansion was growing at the same time that the PDPA was organizing, and they chose Islam as their preferred political doctrine. The mujahideen prohibited formal schooling as a reaction to the PDPA's actions after seizing control of the region. During that time, the Middle East experienced the expansion of pan-Islamic ideologies, the ascent of religious national leaders in Iran, and the Islamization of Pakistani President Zia. Despite the fact that Afghanistan was not a member of neither the Eastern Bloc nor a really socialist nation, the USSR still saw it as a neighboring Soviet state. The PDPA continued to promote the appearance of women's empowerment within the party throughout this time. The PDPA emphasizes the high enrollment of Afghan girls while ignoring the diminishing enrollment of Afghan males as many of them leave Kabul to avoid being executed by the in power communist dictatorship. (Yahi 36).

The first Soviet aircraft entered Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. The Soviets declared that they had made the decision to accede to the urgent appeal of the PDPA. Outrage at the invasion spread outside of the communist globe. The US perceived a clear rejection of the West and a flagrant contempt for détente in the invasion. The timing of the Soviet invasion increased American concern about Soviet motives. (Gosh 6).

The Soviet invasion challenged Americans' perceptions that the Soviet Union was exploiting the United States' waning role in the region as a result of Iran's Islamic Revolution. The Soviet Union's control of Afghanistan raised U.S. concerns that it would be a significant step toward gaining land access to the Indian Ocean and gaining control of the Asian subcontinent (Yahi 36). When the invasion occurred, the Soviet conquest of Afghanistan posed a danger to the safety of the Persian Gulf's oil reserves. A more complete plan with instructions for the CIA to give military supplies and humanitarian help to the Afghan Freedom Fighters (Mujahideen) was approved by the US four days after the invasion. (Yahi 42).

The Carter Doctrine's underlying principle is that "any attempt by external forces to control the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an attack on the vital interests of the United States and will be repulsed by any necessary means, including abuse of power." (Neamatollah). Carter's strategy sought to thwart Soviet advances in the third World but it also acknowledged that American security had grown dependent on the security of Western Europe, the Far East, and other regions. Additionally, the US pursued diplomatic measures to enrage the Soviet Union even more. Carter underlined the invasion's respect for human rights in an effort to win over the Europeans. (Neamatollah).

Pakistan played a crucial role in launching the CIA's clandestine assistance to the mujahideen. The first shipment of deadly weaponry from the United States to Pakistan took place in January 1980. By January 1981, as the Carter administration came to a close, Pakistan was serving as the conduit for about \$60 million in annual military aid provided by the United States to Afghanistan. (Harper). As the US receives financial assistance and has political interests in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been crucial in assisting the US. 80 percent of the CIA's annual covert operations budget was spent on President Ronald Reagan's ongoing clandestine war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. (Harper). In an effort to instill Pakistan with confidence in the United States' commitment to its security the Reagan administration suggested providing \$3.2 billion in aid. Tens of thousands of Mujahideen fighters were then trained there by the Pakistani Secret Service between 1984 and 1987 in return. (Harper).

The United States has received help from several Middle Eastern nations, including combatants, in the training and provision of jihadists. Guerrillas in Afghanistan are trained by Egypt, and the mujahideen are trained and supported financially by Iran. Israel sold the United States hundreds of tons of Soviet weapons it had taken during its 1982 invasion of Lebanon to be sent to the Mujahideen. (Harper). Additionally, China sells several weapons to mujahideen fighters via Pakistan. In this way, the United States and its allies back the jihadists. Saudi Arabia also enlisted in the anti-Soviet alliance due to its readiness to enhance US support for the mujahideen. Saudi Arabia contributed \$60 million annually for American expenditures in Afghanistan during the Carter administration, this presents a rare chance for Saudi Arabia to expand its influence in the area and promote Wahhabism, an ultraconservative branch of Islam (Harper). Over time,

Saudi Arabia emerged as the primary Middle Eastern ally of the United States, and Wahhabism grew in popularity in the refugee camps they supported. (Harper).

The mujahideen were at the moment utilizing Afghan women as political pawns, much as the PDPA. Only their weapon is political Islam, not communism. People began to feel uneasy during this period of terrible guerrilla fighting around the nation. Many Afghan families sell or are forced to marry off their daughters due to insecurity or lack of resources, which has exacerbated poverty throughout the nation. When they are prevented from going back to their families due to societal stigma, women who have been abducted by militants can experience double harassment. The majority of the invasion has been experienced by Afghan women despite the country's general physical vulnerability. As weapons of war, their bodies were used. Asserting that they will protect Afghans and their women, mujahideen militants take advantage of Afghan women's vulnerability to sell the world on their vision for Afghanistan. (Harper).

There has been a massive migration of Afghan refugees into nearby nations and the Western Hemisphere as a result of years of harsh conflict between communism and the mujahideen. (Harper).

2.2 Afghanistan in the late 1990s

Afghanistan in the late 1990s experienced a great deal of political and social upheaval. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and this led to a decade-long war. This war resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the displacement of millions. The rise of the Taliban in the 1990s further destabilized the country, and their strict interpretation of Islam led to the suppression of women's rights and other freedoms.

Overall, it was a difficult time for the Afghan people. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

The 1990s was a time of great turmoil for the people of Afghanistan. The country was in a state of civil war, with various factions vying for power. The Taliban emerged as a dominant force towards the end of the decade, imposing a harsh form of Islamic law and severely restricting the rights of women and minorities. It was a difficult time for the Afghan people, with high levels of violence, poverty and insecurity. However, many people also showed incredible resilience and courage in the face of adversity, working to support their families and communities in any way they could. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

The Taliban is a militant group that has caused significant destruction and loss of life in the country. They have engaged in acts of violence and terrorism, and their control has led to the displacement of many people and the destruction of infrastructure. It is important that the international community continues to work towards peace and stability in Afghanistan to prevent further destruction. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

In 1994, Afghanistan was in a state of political turmoil. The Soviet-Afghan War had ended in 1989, leaving the country with a weak and fragmented government. As a result, a number of factions were vying for control of the country, including the Taliban, a hardline Islamic group that had emerged in the early 1990s. The Taliban had made significant gains in 1994 and had captured the city of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

They were able to consolidate their position and rapidly expand their control over other parts of the country. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

The Taliban's rule was characterized by strict interpretations of Islamic law, which included the suppression of women's rights, the closure of girls' schools. They also implemented harsh punishments, such as amputations and public executions, for those who violated their strict codes. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

The situation in Afghanistan in 1994 was therefore one of instability and conflict, with various groups vying for power and control, and the Taliban emerging as a major force on the political and social landscape. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

In September of 1996, the Taliban had taken over Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, and had established their rule over most of the country. Under their regime, Afghanistan had become a strict Islamic state governed by a harsh interpretation of Sharia law. The Taliban's government was highly centralized and authoritarian, with a strict hierarchy and a strong emphasis on Islamic law. They were known for their brutality and had a reputation for executing their enemies in public. They were also linked to international terrorism, and they provided a safe haven for groups like Al-Qaeda. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

In 1996 also, The Taliban's regime was characterized by severe human rights violations, particularly against women. They enforced a strict interpretation of Islamic law that severely limited women's rights and freedoms. The Taliban's human rights violations and

support of terrorist groups led to widespread international condemnation and sanctions from several countries. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

And In 1996, Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda, fled Sudan for Afghanistan. He would eventually establish a strong presence in the country, using it as a base of operations for his terrorist activities. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan).

The Taliban's rise to power exacerbated the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan, which had been raging since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The Taliban fought against various other factions, and in 1998, there were a series of events in Afghanistan including the outbreak of civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, the Taliban captured the city of Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998, leading to increased fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. (Taliban: political and religious faction, Afghanistan). The civil war in Afghanistan between the Taliban and Northern Alliance started in the early 1990s after the fall of the Soviet-backed government. The Taliban, who emerged as a political and military force in the mid-1990s, captured the city of

Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998 in a surprise attack, which was considered a significant victory for the Taliban. (Bradsher). The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif to the Taliban resulted in a massacre of thousands of Afghan civilians, primarily ethnic Hazaras, who were considered enemies of the Taliban. The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif further escalated the violence between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, which was composed of ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, who opposed the Taliban's rule. (Bradsher). The Northern

Alliance, led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, launched counterattacks against the Taliban, which resulted in increased fighting across the country in the following years. (Bradsher).

Also, The U.S. embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam: On August 7, 1998, suicide bombers, believed to be affiliated with al-Qaeda, attacked the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing over 200 people and injuring thousands. (Harper).

The U.S. cruise missile strikes on Afghanistan and Sudan: In retaliation for the embassy bombings, President Bill Clinton ordered cruise missile strikes on suspected al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan on August 20, 1998. (Harper).

The escalation of violence between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance created a significant humanitarian crisis, causing the displacement of millions of Afghans. The conflict continued until the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which resulted in the removal of the Taliban from power. (Harper).

3. Arab and Islamic Feminism

The feminist movement in the Middle East is a complex and multifaceted topic. There are many different organizations and individuals working to advance women's rights and gender equality in the region.

Some key issues that the movement is focused on include ending gender-based violence, improving access to education and healthcare, increasing women's political representation, and challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Despite

significant challenges, including cultural norms and legislative barriers, there is a growing momentum for change and progress in the region.

3.1 Feminist Movement in the Middle East

The feminist movement in Afghanistan emerged as a response to the country's restrictive social and political environment, which has historically denied women the rights and opportunities afforded to men. Afghanistan has a long history of patriarchal attitudes and practices, and women have traditionally been seen as subordinate to men. This has been reinforced by conservative interpretations of Islam, which have been used to justify gender-based discrimination and violence.

The emergence of the feminist movement in Afghanistan can be traced back to the 1960s, when a group of educated women began advocating for greater rights and opportunities for women in the country. (Mernissi). This movement gained momentum during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, as women took on new roles in society and became more politically active. (Mernissi).

However, the situation for women in Afghanistan deteriorated significantly following the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. The Taliban implemented a harsh interpretation of Islamic law that severely restricted women's rights and freedoms. This sparked a new wave of activism, with women's organizations working to resist the Taliban and advocate for women's rights.

3.2 Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism is a subset of feminism that focuses on the status of women in Islam

and seeks to ensure that all Muslims, regardless of gender, enjoy full equality in both public and private life.

It is about being rendered invisible in the patriarchal world in the name of Islam and via the misrepresentation of religion by male authorities and society, and to achieve the aim of gender equality. As a result, from a Qur'anic perspective, the Qur'an explicitly declares that men and women are equal and that they will receive the same rewards and punishments as Allah said in Qur'an: "So their Lord responded to them: "I will never deny any of you—male or female—the reward of your deeds. Both are equal in reward." (Ali-imran 195). And in another surah: "Women have rights similar to those of men equitably, although men have a degree 'of responsibility' above them" (Al-baqarah 228). Which means that (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses) similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect) to what is reasonable; this Ayah indicates that the wife has certain rights on her husband, just as he has certain rights on her, and each is obliged to give the other spouse his due rights. Muslim reported that Jabir said that Allah's Messenger said:

Fear Allah regarding your women, for you have taken them by Allah's covenant and were allowed to enjoy with them sexually by Allah's Words. You have the right on them that they do not allow anyone you dislike to sit on your mat. If they do that, then discipline them leniently. They have the right to be spent on and to be bought clothes in what is reasonable.

Bahz bin Hakim said that Mu`awiyah bin Haydah Al-Qushayri related that his grandfather said, "O Messenger of Allah! What is the right the wife of one of us has" The

Prophet said: (To feed her when you eat, buy her clothes when you buy for yourself and to refrain from striking her on the face, cursing her or staying away from her except in the house.) However, the situation for women has gotten worse as a result of Qur'anic misinterpretation and the entrance of the Taliban. In their own societies, they lost all of their independence, privileges, and opportunities.

Islamic feminists cite Islamic texts to demonstrate that God has granted men and women complete equality. Men and women are treated equally in the Qur'an when it comes to performing religious obligations, as: “Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will surely bless them with a good life” (Al nahl 97). And in another surah: “But those who do good—whether male or female—and have faith will enter Paradise and will never be wronged ‘even as much as’ the speck on a date stone). (El-nisa 124). Assuming that both of them receive the same rewards and penalties. But from pre-Islamic times to the present, it is society that has split the roles of women in the two sexes. Islamic feminists are a group that advocates for women's rights in order to advance social justice and gender equality from an Islamic perspective.

Islamic feminists come to the conclusion that male authority figures and society's misinterpretations of the Qur'an are to blame for the low position of Muslim women in Islamic communities. Here, the Qur'an accorded equal rights and prominence to both men and women.

In Muslim societies, the Taliban cause havoc toward women in both the public and private spheres while claiming to be acting in the service of Islam. They lost every opportunity, independence, and right within their own societies. They had to wear

burquas, which covered their entire bodies and symbolized the loss of women's freedom, and they were not allowed to leave the house without male family members. The society had severely damaged Islamic women. But now that they have survived the oppression, Muslim women are rising up and taking action. (International Congress on Islamic Feminism).

From an Islamic feminist point of view for well-known Fatima Mernissi, all of the critics fight for achieving goals regarding women's status, position, independence, and gender justice in Muslim societies. (International Congress on Islamic Feminism). As for Islamic feminism, they go into great depth about how the Qur'an gave women equality and embodied the divine commandment enforcing gender equality. According to her thesis, Islam is experiencing a "Identity Crisis" and the veil is a representation of "Protection." She goes on to discuss how the male elite misread Islam and gave women in Islamic communities the role. (International Congress on Islamic Feminism). Similar to this, Amina Wadud explains her theory in an effort to determine whether the real disparity between men and women in Islamic civilizations was (a function of Islam) She also makes an argument for the pre-Islamic situation of women in terms of their rights and functions in order to advance the cause of gender justice. Based on women's rights and gender relations in their own societies as well as a new gender language that promotes equality within an Islamic framework, (Wadud), Likely for Ziba Mir-Hosseini develops his thesis. As a result, each critic makes an effort to examine the situation of Muslim women from their particular point of view. As a result, Islamic scholars describe Islamic feminism as being more extreme than secular feminism and having the Quran as its primary book. (Hosseini).

Feminist scholars contend that both Islamic nations and their inhabitants are impacted by conflict and poverty in the name of Islam. This argument is based on the situation of women from an Islamic perspective. Afghanistan and other Arabian nations used to be among the most beautiful places on earth. It intends to imply that, prior to the conflict and the Taliban regime, all citizens of Muslim countries were leading peaceful lives. But the Taliban's arrival has caused a significant upheaval. Afghanistan's position and the status of women both altered steadily. The Taliban ruled over the majority of the nation. Similar to how men and women are treated in regard to religious obligations, the Qur'an makes it very plain that both genders get the same rewards and punishments. After the start of the conflict and the Taliban's authority, the situation for women gets worse. The Taliban troops don't experience emotions like sadness or grief like other people do. They see women as a secondary item and are solely concerned with the outcomes of winning the war. The troops of the Taliban merely spread disorder in the name of religion. (Wadud).

Islamic feminists contend that the Quran's definition of ideology is with domestic violence, identity loss, freedom, and women's rights. After the Taliban took over, women were compelled to reside inside the home and perform domestic duties as well as sex acts for men. They cannot leave the building without male members. They are denied access to opportunities, independence, education, and women's rights. Under Taliban authority, women are not allowed to celebrate International Women's Day. If they do, Taliban soldiers will occasionally kill the ladies and cut off their legs. (Hosseini).

Fatima Mernissi attempts to alter both the status of Muslim women as well as the nature of men and communities from her own point of view. She goes on to make the following points regarding the "identity crisis" that women are currently experiencing as a result of how the male elite and society have misinterpreted Islam:

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

Afghanistan has undergone significant changes in recent years. The rise of the Taliban has had a major impact on the country's political and social landscape. The timeline of events in Afghanistan has been tumultuous, with various groups vying for control and power. Amidst this, there has been a growing movement of Islamic feminism which seeks to promote gender equality and women's rights within the context of Islam. Overall, it is clear that Afghanistan is a complex and dynamic country with a rich history and diverse culture.

Chapter Two

Taliban's Oppression Regime through Ellis's *The Breadwinner*

Through Deborah Ellis's novel *The Breadwinner*, we are given a harrowing glimpse into the oppressive regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The main character,

Parvana, is forced to disguise herself as a boy in order to provide for her family as women are not allowed to work or even leave the house without a male escort. The Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law leads to severe punishments for even the slightest infractions, such as cutting off a person's hand for stealing or stoning a woman for adultery. Education is also forbidden for girls, leaving them illiterate and unable to pursue their dreams. The book serves as a powerful reminder of the dangers of extremism and the importance of fighting for human rights and gender equality.

1. The Taliban's Perception on Women

The Taliban's perception on women is widely known to be highly conservative and restrictive. Under their rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, women were prevented from going to school, working outside the home, and even leaving the house without a male escort (Afghanistan: Taliban tell working women to stay at home). The Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, is often cited as the reason for such restrictions, with the belief that women should be subordinate to men in all areas of life. While the Taliban has claimed to have softened their stance on women's rights in recent years, their actions have not always reflected this rhetoric, leaving many skeptical about the group's true intentions towards women's liberation

1.1. Women's Appearance

During their rule in Afghanistan from 1996-2001, the Taliban enforced a strict interpretation of Islamic law, which required women to cover themselves from head to

toe in public. This included wearing a burqa, a full-body covering that includes a mesh screen over the eyes. Women were also forbidden from wearing makeup or nail polish, and were required to wear dark-colored clothing that did not attract attention (Report on the Taliban's War against Women). However, it's important to note that Afghan women found ways to resist these rules and still express themselves through their dress and appearance.

The novel of *The Breadwinner* is a detailed explanation of the women status under the Taliban regime as; when Parvana's family runs out of food after the Taliban imprisoned her father, Nooria tells the young Parvana that she is the only person who can buy extra food for the family. When Parvana visits the market to purchase food, a Taliban soldier confronts her for not donning a burqua. The Talib boy says that, “you must covered up” (Ellis 31). It basically means that women and girls aren't permitted to leave the house without male companions and without wearing a burka.

The primary problem in a patriarchal, male-dominated society is the suppression of women. The majority of those impacted are women, who are so living in fear. It creates the situation that why the females are not allowed to go outside and wear the burqua covering the whole body as, “The Taliban decreed that women must stay inside” (Ellis 10). Males are assigned to outside work because of how divided society is, while females are assigned to indoor tasks like caring for children and providing sex for men.

The Taliban's control resulted in a different set of laws for society than those that existed in Afghanistan at originally as, “Women were not allowed to go into shops. Men were supposed to do all shopping, but if women did it, they had to stand outside and call

in for what they needed” (Ellis 31). It implies that women were not treated equally to males and that they were not permitted to go for walks alone without male companions, attend school, or don burkas when going outside. Burka wearers are giving up their freedom as, “You must be covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will punish for letting you walk the street like that!” (Ellis 31).

As most feminists are aware, the Islamic Taliban government of Afghanistan is the world's cruelest to women (Hosseini). Parvana had seen, “Shopkeepers beaten for serving women inside the shops” (Ellis 31).

Ellis' book is a superb piece of work, a good review in the *Women's Review of Books* on *Women of the Afghan War* notes that it is problematic that Ellis does not identify the tribal identities of the women she interviewed because those are crucial in Afghanistan, where various tribes have very different attitudes toward women. One woman Ellis quotes says: “Afghan women are like the walking dead” (Ellis 17). It sets up the situation where they are helpless, powerless, and the only ones who can experience masculine dominance are them. Where Parvana had lived, the Taliban treated women like soiled objects as, “What Taliban did especially to women, the way they would whip and beat someone they thought they should punished” (Ellis 6). It indicates that, in the name of Islam, the Taliban treated women as second-class citizens, subjected them to male rule, and rendered them invisible in the realm of male dominance.

The novel examines the subject of women's status in Islamic countries as well as gender roles. *The Breadwinner* continues the discussion of gender relations and women's rights in a society where women do not enjoy the same rights as men. The subject of why

women have no place in their gender relations is argued in the book. It is particularly troubling because Deborah Ellis's main thesis in *The Breadwinner* appears to be a new gender discourse that advocates for equality within an Islamic framework.

It even went further the appearance; the Taliban had made it a crime for women to make noise while they walked as:

Parvana could hear their footsteps echo along the narrow corridors. She was about to tell the woman to walk more softly, that the Taliban had made it a crime for women to make noise when they walked, but she changed her mind. If the Taliban caught them out after curfew and with the woman without a burqa or a head covering at all, the noise they were making would be the least of their problems. (Ellis 136).

1.2 Violence against Women

The Taliban's violence against women in Afghanistan has been a long-standing issue; women are being denied their basic human rights and freedoms, including their right to education, work, and even their right to leave their homes without male accompaniment. The Taliban's brutal treatment of women, including forced marriages, sexual assaults, and public executions, has caused significant harm and suffering. It's essential to raise awareness and work towards creating a safer and more equitable society for women in Afghanistan and globally.

The Taliban's violence against women in Afghanistan is deeply concerning and has been widely documented by international human rights organizations. Women and

girls have suffered under the Taliban's brutal interpretation of Islamic law, which dictates that women must remain fully covered in public, must be accompanied by a male relative when leaving the house, and must not mingle with men who are not their family members. The Taliban have also banned girls from attending school past the age of 12 and have imposed severe punishments on women who do not comply with their strict rules, including public beatings, stoning, and execution. (Douglas).

Taliban soldiers rushed in and kidnapped Parvana's father, beating and terrorizing the family. Parvana and her mother Fatana went to jail and demanded their father's release, but were beaten by guards before they could leave, "One of the soldiers snatched the photo of Parvana's father and tore it into pieces. Another started hitting her mother with a stick" (Ellis 39). And when her mother kept calling to release her husband, the soldiers continued beating her as:

Release my husband!" her mother kept saying

Another soldier joined in the beating. He hit Parvana, too.

Although he did not hit her very hard, Parvana fell to the ground, her body covering the pieces of her father's photograph. In a flash, she tucked the pieces out of sight, under her chador. Her mother was also on the ground, the soldier's sticks hitting her across her back. (Ellis 39).

And this scene was happening repeatedly in the novel reflecting the violence toward Afghan women, when four Taliban soldiers burst through the door "Nooria covered herself completely with her chador and scrunched herself into a small ball. Young women

were sometimes stolen by soldiers. They were snatched from their homes, and their families never saw them again” (Ellis 28).

While Parvana being in the marketplace, she used to face many cases similar to this, one afternoon, she heard sounds coming from above her as, “A man was very angry. He was shouting at a woman who was crying and screaming. Parvana heard thuds and more screams” (Ellis 123).

One day, Parvana was caught in a heavy rain and hiding in a building when she heard a woman crying. She brings home the woman Homa, who they discover is a refugee from Magyar, which has been taken amid scenes of extreme violence by the Taliban, Homa repeated the scene when the Taliban captured Mazar-el-sharif and entered her house as, “They shot them right in the street. My mother started hitting them, and they shot her, too” (Ellis 139).

2. Education during the Taliban Rule

During the Taliban rule, education was severely restricted, especially for women and girls. The Taliban regime implemented strict codes of conduct that restricted the freedom of people to engage in various activities, and education was no exception.

The Taliban banned education for girls beyond the age of eight and closed down schools for girls (Bean). Only a handful of religious schools remained open for boys, and even then, the curriculum was limited to religious studies, with no other subjects being taught. (Bean).

2.1 Preventing Women from Learning and Working

The Taliban's policy towards education was driven by its strict interpretation of Islamic law. They believed that educating women and girls was contrary to Islamic teaching and that it would lead to moral decay in society. As a result, the majority of the population, especially women and girls, were denied the opportunity to gain an education, which is a fundamental human right;

She wasn't really supposed to be outside at all. The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school. Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class, and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. (Ellis 7).

It was all the fathers' wish to take their girls to school; Deborah portrayed this wish when Parvana wanted to run with the tea boys in the marketplace as, "Her father turned to look at her. I'd rather see you running around a school yard." (Ellis 10). The poor girls too want to go to school, to learn and to have friends;

Parvana frowned. It wasn't her fault she wasn't in school! She would rather be there, too, instead of sitting on this uncomfortable blanket, her back and bottom getting sore. She missed her friends, her blue- and-white school uniform, and doing new things each day. (Ellis 10).

When the Taliban force was in charge of the nation, they were Afghans and had extremely strong opinions about how government should operate. Parvana wasn't particularly upset when they first took control of the Afghan capital city of Kabul and

prohibited girls from attending school. She hadn't studied for her next arithmetic test, and now she was getting in trouble for talking in class once more. The Taliban took control before the teacher could write a note to her mother. She was even excited to take a break and told this to her sister Nooria; "I think a holiday is very nice." (Ellis 11). In a few days, the Taliban would surely permit them to return to school, according to Parvana. By that time, her teacher would have completely forgotten about writing her mother a snitch note. But her older sister knows it is impossible; "You're just stupid!" Nooria screamed at her." (Ellis 11). It was her missing dream too to finish her studies and goes to the university;

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 119).

Afghan women lost their career too, Parvana's mother Fatana was a writer before the Taliban took control of Kabul, "Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station" (Ellis 7).

2.2 Afghans Suffer from Illiteracy

The Taliban also destroyed many schools, colleges, and universities, which contributed to the severe deterioration of the education system in Afghanistan. Afghan people especially suffered from illiteracy during the Taliban rule due to the severe restrictions on education. The Taliban regime's policies led to the closure of schools and

universities, leaving many children and young adults without access to education and hindering their ability to read and write.

Parvana's father was an educated man and used to read and write letters for costumers in the marketplace as, "Now the customer asked her father to read his letter again. Read it slowly, so that I can remember it for my family." (D. Ellis 8). Most of afghan people were not able nor to read neither to write, "Her father finished reading the man's letter a second time. The customer thanked him and paid. "I will look for you when it is time to write a reply." (Ellis 9).

The Taliban's policy towards education was a major setback for the progress and development of Afghanistan, illiteracy rates increased, Afghan was denied the opportunity to receive a form of education. This lack of education was a significant obstacle to their ability to participate fully in society, including accessing job opportunities, healthcare, and political participation;

Most people in Afghanistan could not read or write. Parvana was one of the lucky ones. Both of her parents had been to university, and they believed in education for everyone, even girls. Customers came and went as the afternoon wore on. Most spoke Dari, the same language Parvana spoke best. When a customer spoke Pashtu, she could recognize most of it, but not all. Her parents could speak English, too. Her father had gone to university in England. That was a long time ago (Ellis 9).

Moreover, the Taliban regime's strict interpretation of Islamic law meant that many books and forms of media were banned, further limiting people's access to knowledge and

information. This restriction on information and education was a significant blow to the progress and development of Afghanistan and its people. Parvana's father hides his books in a secret place afraid of capturing by the Taliban as, "Father's books! At the bottom of the cupboard was a secret compartment her father had built to hide the few books that had not been destroyed in one of the bombings. Some were English books about history and literature. They were kept hidden because the Taliban burned books they didn't like"

(Ellis 30).

Taliban also took Parvana's father to the jail because of being an educated man, not in the way they allowed, he was a teacher who finished his university in England as, ""Why did you go to England for your education?" the soldiers yelled at Father. "Afghanistan doesn't need your foreign ideas!" They yanked him toward the door" (Ellis 29).

3. Taliban's Violation of Human Rights

The Taliban's rule in Afghanistan has been marked by flagrant human rights abuses. They have a long history of oppressing women and girls, prohibiting education and employment opportunities for them, and forcing them into marriages.

The group has also targeted religious and ethnic minorities, often subjecting them to arbitrary detention, torture, and execution.

3.1 Taliban's Crime toward Afghans

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.

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.

Many people lost their lives and the majority of them developed disabilities in Afghanistan as a result of the widespread use of landmines. Particularly young children are unable to comprehend landmines and perish in blasts.

Husseine, Parvana's fourteen-year-old brother, also died as a result of the landmine. The family of Parvana suffered more as a result. Landmine explosions caused normal people to lose their lives and leave their children defenseless and orphans. Thousands of people lost body parts as a result of the ongoing battles. Like many other people, Parvana's father had also lost a leg and was walking with an artificial one.

Father had owned an artificial leg, but he sold it. In the market, there were many false legs available for purchase. Many husbands got out their wives' false legs after the Taliban ordered women to stay inside as, "You're not going anywhere, so why do you need a leg?" they asked." (Ellis 15).

Also Parvana found a girl who called Homa, this young woman was escaping from Mazar-el-shari to Kabul, trying to save her life from death in a brutal passage that Deborah Ellis wrote it:

The Taliban is in Mazar," Homa repeated. "They went from house to house, looking for enemies. They came to my house. They came right inside! They grabbed my father and my brother and took them outside. They shot them right in the street. My mother started hitting them, and

they shot her, too. I ran back inside and hid in a closet. I was there for a long, long time. I thought they would kill me, too, but they were finished killing people at my house. They were busy killing at other houses (138; 139).

Over the years they have committed many crimes, including the murder of innocent people and the abuse of women and children. The Taliban in particular has a history of carrying out targeted assaults on members of ethnic and religious minorities as well as journalists, activists, and human rights defenders. Numerous people have suffered greatly as a result of these activities, which have also contributed to the region's continuous instability. The corpses of Afghans were covering the land, “There were bodies all over the street. Some soldiers drove by in a truck. They forbade us to move the bodies of our families, or even cover them up. They said we must stay inside” (Ellis 139). This quote explains the horror Afghans were living under the Taliban rule, and the inhuman activities that Taliban practiced during here existing.

3.2 Oppressions under the Shadow of Religion

Parvana’s father used to say that, “the word Taliban meant religious scholar that religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder but the Taliban are not making better place to live” (Ellis 9). The Taliban soldiers only create chaos in the name of religion. Deborah Ellis depicts how religion is being used inaccurately to discriminate against women through the characters.

The misunderstanding of the Qur'an by male authorities and society is the reason of the low position of Muslim women in Islamic communities. The Qur'an granted men

and women equal rights and a significant presence in both the public and private spheres; they are exactly equal, as: “O humanity! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it He created its mate” (El-nisa 1). And in another surah: “And ‘it is’ Allah ‘Who’ created you from dust,1 then ‘developed you’ from a sperm-drop, then made you into pairs” (Ftir 11). Nonetheless, the Taliban inflict violence on women in Muslim communities under the guise of Islam. They lost every opportunity, independence, and right within their own societies. They had to wear burquas, which covered their entire bodies and symbolized the loss of women's freedom, and they were not allowed to leave the house without male family members. The society had severely damaged Islamic women.

Females of Muslim societies are forced to survive by becoming the breadwinner for their families in the powerful Taliban rule which is guided in the name of Islam. Moreover, being a western education teacher when her father returns home, the most traditional patterns of gender could return indicating that; “now you are both my daughter and son” (Ellis 91). This paints a picture of how women struggle in a powerful, religiously based culture to maintain their independence, equal rights, and gender justice while living as girls at home and boys outdoors.

The Breadwinner is focused on the issue based on transforming the position of the female in the Muslim society to achieve the goal of gender equality. The character Parvana plays an important role challenging the ideologies created in the name of religion by Taliban society. Through Parvana, we get to know that a life of many girls endures during a difficult period in Afghanistan, treated badly in their daily lives in Taliban rule. Parvana’s

story shows that how the girls are neglected from their education, freedom and liberty and gender violated.

Religion has a big influence on women as a product of patriarchal thought. Patriarchal society is not satisfied with women. It doesn't see the advancement of women. These women are trapped by the Taliban and the rules and regulations of society. This is why they are exploited.

Because of the subordination and discrimination by family, and the society and the environment as a whole, the breadwinners try to explain the freedom, and status of women legalized in the name of Islam. So the whole novel focuses on women's status and status in Muslim society, striving for equality and equal opportunities with men, which is the dream of every Muslim woman who has suffered from Islamic discrimination and domination, And the patriarchal society created by the Taliban.

The Breadwinner portrays the status and place of women in Muslim society, where they have suffered victimization at the hands of Islam, throughout the entirety of the book. The evolution and change in the status of women in Muslim nations provide a thorough justification for how women are treated in their respective civilizations. The Qur'an granted women equal respect and rights; there were no restrictions on what they could or could not do. However, when the Taliban ruled and war broke out in Muslim nations, the situation for women deteriorated. The women were made to feel inferior and were still subject to male ideology in the name of Islam. They are required to fulfill the obligations laid forth by society.

Female residents of Muslim villages like Parvana, Shauzia, Nooria, Mrs. Weera, and others suffer at the hands of patriarchal thinking. The Taliban warriors appear to be capable, and their actions cause suffering for Parvana and her family. Her rights and freedom are violated because she is a woman. She is not allowed to attend school and is never given permission to study or leave the house without a man in the household. She never responds since she is both a boy and a girl at the same time. The Taliban's reign has always been aimed towards her. She also had to give up her femininity because she must support her family financially.

The Taliban has so positioned women as invisible in the world of dominance in the name of Islam, but the female characters fight back for their place of gender equality in society. The most significant aspect of equality for Muslim women in Islamic countries is something that every Muslim woman hopes to accomplish and fights for in the Taliban culture that results from misrepresenting religion.

To identify their place in the societies due to Taliban, Muslim women are split into two groups. The first is the patriarchal ideology, which states that "the husband is held entirely responsible for providing for the support of his wife and children (Yahi). And the second is the religiously imposed subordination of women, which states that wives presumably must have their husbands' permission to enter male space (Yahi). Which includes going to work, walking in the streets, and going into public places, and those misinterpretations of Islam create the position of female as invisible in the world of male dominance.

In addition, Islamic society had oppressed and produced many problems for Muslim women in the name of Islam. Women's issues affect not only women but the entire society because this is the field in which Islamic doctrine is most frequently misused. As a result of Islam's endorsement, extremist movements like the Taliban have made it their unique goal to completely dominate women. They do this by advocating for education for all Afghan children, women, men, and adults, but especially for girls and women. Examples of such women and girls include: "The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go outside" (Ellis 6).

The good that results from addressing and questioning those institutions goes much beyond than women alone because the same structures and fundamental ideas that are used to oppress women are also used to support terrorism and hatred in the name of Islam.

Following her father's detention, Parvana hears the sound of bombs detonating in the night, which fills her with dread and loneliness as, "Parvana imagined every single noise to be either father or the Taliban coming back. Each sound made parvana hopeful and fearful at the same time" (Ellis 21).

Everyone agrees that Afghanistan suffered from the war due to the Taliban's rule. Since there are no male family members, she adopts a male persona and works as the family's breadwinner for the sole goal of ensuring their survival. "Someone has to be able to go outside, and you are the one most likely to look like a boy" (Ellis 37). And after

accepting as a male persona continues as; “As a boy, you’ll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you” (Ellis 36). And because of gender discrimination that Taliban forced it under the shadow of religion, many families kept starving.

Applying rules in the name of religion wasn’t an exclusivity only on women, the Taliban controlled even men as, “When the Taliban first came and ordered all men to grow beards, Parvana had a hard time getting used to her father's face. He had never worn a beard before. Father had a hard time getting used to it, too. It itched a lot at first” (Ellis 25).

But the using false pretences under the name of religion, doesn’t stop to only the appearance of both males and females, it let the Taliban committed crimes in public. One day Parvana and Shauzia went to the stadium trying to buy more stuffs there, but Parvana was confused as more men entered the field, but they weren't soccer players; some were brought in with their hands bound behind their backs; two soldiers carried out a large table; one of the men was freed; he bent over the table; several soldiers held him down; his arms stretched out across the table-top as, “All of a sudden one of the soldiers took out a sword, raised it above his head and brought it down on the man's arm. Blood flew in every direction. The man cried out in pain” (Ellis 111). A man tried to explain: “These men are thieves,” the soldiers called out to the crowd. “See how we punish thieves? We cut off one of their hands! See what we do!”(Ellis 112). Parvana saw a young Talib man who was too young to have a beard just before she departed. He was displaying a rope

that had four severed hands strung along it like beads. He was giggling while flaunting his bottom in front of the crowd. Taliban was committing those crimes alleged it was applying Quran rules.

Taliban's rule in Afghanistan has been marked by significant violations of human rights, especially when it comes to women and education. The Taliban's perception of women is highly conservative, and they have imposed strict rules and restrictions on women's lives, including their ability to receive an education or work outside the home. During their rule, education was limited to boys, and girls were not allowed to attend schools or universities. This has had a significant impact on the country's development and progress. Additionally, the Taliban's violation of human rights extends beyond their treatment of women, including harsh punishments, suppression of free speech, and the use of violence against civilians. Overall, Taliban's rule has been a challenging period for Afghanistan and its people.

Chapter Three

Forms of Female Characters' Struggle against Discrimination

Afghan women have long been subjected to oppression and discrimination under the Taliban regime. However, they have also been at the forefront of the struggle for their rights and freedoms, even at great personal risk. Many have spoken out against the oppressive policies of the Taliban and advocated for greater gender equality. Some have even defied the ban on education for girls by setting up secret schools and teaching girls in their homes. Ellis in her novel detailed these strong forms of struggle through her characters, such as Mrs. Weera.

Despite facing numerous challenges and threats, Afghan women have shown remarkable resilience and courage in their fight for a more just and equal society. Their struggle continues to inspire and empower women around the world, which is clarified in *The Breadwinner*.

1. Influencing Motives of Struggle

The women's struggle against the Taliban in Afghanistan has been driven by a variety of influencing motives. One of the main motives is the desire to preserve and protect their basic human rights, freedom, and dignity.

Women have been subjected to numerous atrocities like forced marriages, domestic violence as the woman living near to Parvana's place in the market, Parvana could hear the woman cried every day. The desire for education and equal opportunities is also a significant motive as many women were denied access to education under the Taliban regime.

Additionally, the women's struggle is driven by the desire to have a say in the political and social decisions that affect their lives, and to have a voice in the future of

their country. Overall, the women's struggle against the Taliban is a courageous and inspiring movement that is driven by a deep sense of determination and hope for a better future.

1.1 Storytelling

Fables are a very popular form of storytelling in Afghanistan. Fables are folk tales that are passed on orally from generation to generation. (Neamatollah) Storytelling allows Afghans to share valuable insights about their values, beliefs, history, practices and customs.

Classic stories are not only extremely entertaining, but also play an important role in emphasizing and portraying the character of the characters. For centuries, fables have played an important role in conveying shared stories, reinforcing cultural values and drawing attention to important traditions. (Neamatollah) Storytelling can also help to clearly see human weaknesses and shortcomings that may not be easy to see in the human character. This allows better understanding their surroundings and the people's behaviors and situations they may encounter. (Neamatollah)

The readers can gain a better knowledge of how to deal with difficult situations and potentially implement those lessons in their lives when they see the results of bad actions in a fable.

In the case of Parvana, storytelling was an essential influencing motive to make her strong through hard situations and to face her fears several times. Her father used to tell her the story of Malali; the fictional character that struggle to save Afghanistan and Parvana was too influenced by this last. Parvana's father once said: "The lesson here, my

daughters," he looked from one to the other, "is that Afghanistan has always been the home of the bravest women in the world. You are all brave women. You are all inheritors of the courage of Malali."(Ellis,27). His words and his way to retelling the story, were dug on Parvana's mind, and gave her a sense of responsibility and a strength, when the soldiers came to take her father to prison, he gave her a strength potion before he was gone as: "she heard her father say, "Take care of the others, my Malali." Then he was gone." (Ellis 29).

The storytelling was never just a means of entertainment, the female characters of *The Breadwinner* found it an influencing motive to resist against Taliban as: "Malali wouldn't be afraid, Parvana knew. Malali would form an army and lead it in a storming of the prison. Malali would lick her lips at such a challenge. Her knees wouldn't be shaking as Parvana's were." (Ellis 38).

The storytelling was an engine to raising awareness, through listening to novels Afghans learnt more about their past and how they should stand to get their independence. The father teaches his daughters Parvana and Maryam a lot of things and taught them how they need to resist as:

Now he was telling stories from history. He had been a history teacher before his school was bombed. Parvana had grown up with his stories, which made her a very good student in history class. "It was 1880, and the British were trying to take over our country. Did we want the British to take over?" he asked Maryam. "No!" Maryam answered. "We certainly

did not. Everybody comes to Afghanistan to try to take over, but we Afghans kick them all out (Ellis 25).

Another important case of storytelling in the novel was the character of Mrs. Weera who played a big role in influencing the little girls and Parvana's family through her motivating stories. Mrs. Weera had been a physical education teacher before the Taliban made her leave her job. "'You're not afraid, are you, Parvana?" She didn't wait for her answer. "Fetch the bucket, girl. Do your bit for the team. Here we go!" Mrs. Weera still talked like she was out on the hockey field, urging everyone to do their best." (Ellis 54). She bossing them as they were a team "That's no way to keep up team spirit," (Ellis 56). Parvana passed her days listening to Mrs. Weera stories as, and listened to Mrs. Weera's stories. "They weren't as good as her father's stories. Mostly they were descriptions of field hockey games or other athletic events. Still, they were entertaining, and Mrs. Weera was so enthusiastic about them that she made other people enthusiastic, too." (Ellis 114). This quote explains how important her stories were, even if they were less valuable than her father's stories, but they were necessary to keep them cheerful and excited. "Evenings were spent reading and listening to Mrs. Weera's stories." (Ellis 130).

People were so sick of the Taliban regime and their life was so heavy, but the storytelling was a push to resist during these circumstances "Parvana got out of bed and carried on as before. She did her work in the market, fetched water, listened to Mrs. Weera's stories and got to know Homa. She did all these things because she didn't know what else to do" (Ellis 141).

1.2 Cooperation

During the Taliban rule, Afghan women were subjected to extreme oppression and discrimination. However, they managed to find ways to cooperate and support each other despite the challenges.

They formed networks to provide each other with emotional support and share resources, such as food and medicine. Some women even risked their lives to stand up against the Taliban and fight for their rights. Despite the difficult circumstances, Afghan women showed incredible strength, resilience, and solidarity.

Deborah Ellis portrayed this form of struggle many times in her novel as: “Seeing the pain in her mother's face, Parvana put her anger away and quietly helped get supper ready.” (Ellis 24). Each character in *The Breadwinner* had his own troubles but they are always sure that they are standing next to each other, and helping for getting better. Mrs. Weera had her own business too, but she offered help immediately when she knows about Parvana’s mother being mad as: “When they were almost at the top step, Parvana turned to Mrs. Weera."About Mother. She's not been well.", "Then it's a good thing I'm stopping by to take care of her!"” (Ellis 53). She moved to Parvana’s house and helped the little girls and their poor mother to get well as:

She made seven trips. Mrs. Weera met her outside the apartment at the top of the steps and took the first two full buckets from her, emptied them inside and brought back the empty bucket. "We're getting your mother cleaned up, and she doesn't need another pair of eyes on her (Ellis 55).

Also Parvana found a lost girl and put herself in danger in order to help her as:

Parvana didn't know what to do. She couldn't stay in the building all night, but this frightened woman clearly did not want to be left alone. Groping in the dark for her tray, she found two little bags of dried fruit and nuts. "Here," she said, handing one to the woman. "We'll think better if we eat. (Ellis 134).

Parvana decided to take the strange woman with her just because she didn't want to let a helpless woman alone outside while she knows very well what the Talibs could do if they found her, "Parvana chewed and thought and finally decided what to do. "This is the best suggestion I have; this is what we'll do. We'll wait until it gets very, very dark. Then we'll head back to my place together." (Ellis 134).

Parvana wasn't the only one helping the others, she herself gets help from a strange woman that she didn't even see her face; during her existing in the marketplace to sale things, there was a woman living in the house near to the wall that Parvana used to set next to, and this woman wants to help the little girl in earning more money by throwing her some stuffs from her window as, "A few days before they were to leave for Mazar, Parvana was sitting on her blanket in the marketplace when something hit her on the head. It was a tiny camel made out of beads." (Ellis 148). This woman also took the risk by helping Parvana; women during Taliban rule were not allowed to stand next to windows, actually the Taliban painted all the windows of Kabul in black, so no one could see anything neither from the street nor from the houses, even the sunlight couldn't enter:

It was a small square of embroidered cloth, no more than two inches long and an inch wide. Parvana had never seen it before. As she wondered

where it had come from, her eyes went up to the blacked-out window where she thought she had seen a flicker of movement a few weeks before.

There was no movement now (Ellis 86).

2. Education and Raising Awareness

The key to empowering Afghan women and bettering their lives has been education and awareness-raising. Girls were not permitted to attend school during the Taliban, and women were not permitted to work outside the home or take part in public life.

Women organized secret schools to educate girls, shared information about their rights, and advocated for each other's safety and well-being.

In addition to formal education, it has been crucial to educate Afghan women about their rights and how to access services and resources. Women have taken part in community workshops and activities designed to increase their understanding of social, legal, and health issues. They had become better informed and more capable of making decisions that affected their own life and the lives of their families as a result of this.

2.1 The Secret Schools

The few number of educated women in Afghanistan was interested in teaching the young girls, in *The Breadwinner*, Deborah used the character of Mrs. Weera as a sample of the people caring about educating the little ones as; “I've been thinking of starting up a little school here,—Mrs. Weera said to Parvana's surprise. A secret school, for a small number of girls, a few hours a week. You must attend.” (Ellis 92). Although it was really

hard, they were facing the Taliban who will never allow this to happen, and other challenge as what they could teach the young girls when they had no books or a proper classrooms, Ellis explained this in the next following lines:

What about the Taliban?

The Taliban will not be invited." Mrs. Weera smiled at her own little joke.

What will you teach?

I could teach arithmetic and history, Nooria said. Mrs. Weera could teach health and science, and Mother could teach reading and writing. (Ellis 93;94).

Many difficulties were facing them, they were afraid of the Taliban and the number of the students was very few that not all the families could send their children to the secret school as;

Through Mother's and Mrs. Weera's women's group, a secret little school was started. Nooria was the teacher. The Taliban would close down any school they discovered, so Nooria and Mrs. Weera were very careful. This school held only five girls, including Maryam. They were all around her age. They were taught in two different groups, never at the same time two days running. Sometimes the students came to Nooria, sometimes Nooria went to the students (Ellis 122).

The quote above explains the hard situation of opening a secret school during the Taliban rule, and how afghan women struggle to educate their children and for raising awareness.

2.2. Writing Magazines

Afghans wrote magazines during the Taliban rule as a means of resistance and expression of their beliefs and ideas. Despite the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedom of speech and independent media, many Afghans continued to produce underground magazines to share information and ideas about the Taliban regime, human rights, and other social and political issues. These magazines served as a form of communication and solidarity among those who opposed the Taliban's oppressive policies.

By using the development of the events in the novel, Ellis made the educated characters like Mrs. Weera and Fatana Parvana's mother starting a magazine, a secret one in order to inform the world about what happened inside Afghanistan as: "'Mrs. Weera and I are going to work together," Mother announced. "We're going to start a magazine.'" (Ellis 77). women were collecting the stories of the other people and mentioned in the magazine what they are passing through as: "'We must pay her mother a visit," Mother said. "I'd like to get her story for our magazine.'" (Ellis 93).

Additionally, the biggest challenge was how to publish those magazines while the Taliban prevented any form of media and writings, so the characters had to find a solution as: "'How are you going to publish it?" Parvana asked. Mrs. Weera answered that. "We will smuggle the stories out to Pakistan, where it will be printed. Then we'll smuggle it back in, a few at a time." (Ellis 93). Even this was so hard because of the risk they would take to send the magazine to Pakistan, women themselves can't transfer the writings so they need someone else to do, by virtue of the cooperation of afghan people and their aim to reach the freedom, women can benefit the help of their husbands, in the

end, not all afghan men were against women's education and work, Ellis describes this in the following lines:

"Who will do the smuggling?" Parvana asked.

"Other women in our organization," Mother answered.

"We've had visitors while you've been in the market. Some of our members have husbands who support our work and will help us." (Ellis 93).

Women were putting so many efforts in writing magazines, and they were glad by their achievement as: "'Look at what's here!" Mrs. Weera said. After making sure the coast was clear, she took several copies of Mother's magazine out from under her burqa. "Isn't it beautiful?" (Ellis 151).

Members of the secret organizations in *The Breadwinner* whom reflected afghans women, were so careful to avoid the Taliban, in case the Talibs captured anyone having any form of media as books or magazines, they will take them to jail or even kill them specially if it was in English, Deborah portrayed this fear as: "Parvana flipped through the magazine quickly before hiding it again. "It's wonderful," she said." (Ellis 151).

3. Parvana and Shauzia's Struggle

Parvana's and Shauzia's courage and strength to struggle against discrimination are not solely found that way. Their consciousness, education, and friendship are what encourage them to struggle.

Moreover, working together in the same marketplace has made Parvana and Shauzia influence each other. The educated Parvana influences Shauzia and on the contrary, the patient Shauzia also does the same. They struggle against discrimination by working together in the marketplace, Parvana selling things and reading and writing letters, and Shauzia as a tea boy to escape from Kabul and run to Pakistan then to her dream place France, and Parvana to feed her family in while her father was arrested then to buy him medicines.

3.1 The Bacha Posh

The term bacha posh originated in Afghanistan and refers to the cultural practice of dressing young girls as boys; it is a tradition in Afghanistan is a coping mechanism that has been used for many years by families who have daughters but no sons. (Harper). In a society where gender roles are strictly enforced and girls are often seen as inferior to boys, dressing a daughter as a boy can grant her privileges and freedoms that are otherwise unavailable to her.

In some regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, a daughter is chosen by families lacking a son to dress and live as a guy until puberty. This is done to address gender imbalances and fulfill the need for a male heir in the family. After puberty, the bacha posh reverts to living as a female.

In *The Breadwinner*, the novelist employed this term in the way Parvana turns to a boy in order to bring food to her family in the absence of her father. When the Taliban arrested Parvana's father the family left without any adult man who can work and bring food and money, the only mature people who remain in the house were the mother Fatana

and Nooria Parvana's older sister, both could not be outside without an escort, the only solution left was to transform the young Parvana to a little boy, then she can be outside without an escort and go to the marketplace and buy from the shops. "They were going to turn her into a boy. "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," Mother said. "It's a perfect solution," Mrs. Weera said." (Ellis 58-57).

This choice as much as it was necessary and nice for the benefit of the whole family, it was very tough on Parvana; when Mrs. Weera suggested this solution Parvana was shocked: "Parvana stared at the three of them. It was as though they were speaking a foreign language, and she didn't have a clue what they were saying." (Ellis 58). The little girl can't easily accept leaving her body as a pretty child and cutting her hair as a boy, and wearing male clothes all the time. "'It won't work," she said. "I won't look like a boy. I have long hair. "You're not cutting my hair!" Parvana's hands flew up to her head." (Ellis 59).

Parvana even tried to convince her mother to make Nooria a breadwinner instead of her, she was tired of holding responsibilities bigger than her age, and working at the time she supposed to be playing and having fun with other children as: "'Cut Nooria's hair! She's the oldest! It's her responsibility to look after me, not my responsibility to look after her!" (Ellis 59). Unfortunately this was not an available option, they need to use Parvana since she is a young child that has not yet the characteristics of a grown woman body, otherwise the Taliban would recognize and either beating the bacha posh and take him to the jail, or even shot him or her basically, as: "'No one would believe me to be a

boy," Nooria said calmly, looking down at her body. Nooria being calm just made Parvana madder." (Ellis 59).

Parvana like many other girls around Afghanistan, found herself in a hard situation between throw over their femininity, childhood and appearance, or starving with her family)-until death. Ellis explains this situation in:

It has to be your decision," Mrs. Weera said. "We can force you to cut off your hair, but you're still the one who has to go outside and act the part. We know this is a big thing we're asking, but I think you can do it. How about it?. "All right," she said. "I'll do it. (60).

Parvana affirmed Mrs. Weera was right. They could restrain her and shave her head, but they required her cooperation to do anything else. In the end, she was the one who made the choice, and absolutely she will not give up on her family in this circumstance.

Parvana was not the only girl who was obliged to transform herself to a boy in Afghanistan, and not the only in the chosen novel too; Shauzia a classmate of Parvana before the Taliban had closed the schools, find herself in the same position, one day while Parvana was in the marketplace she met her and hardly recognized her as:

Parvana was laughing and looking the other way when a tea boy tripped on something near her and spilled a tray of empty tea cups all over her blanket. The boy sprawled in the dust in front of Parvana. She helped him gather the cups that had rolled away. She handed him the tray and saw his face for the first time. She let out a gasp and slapped a hand across her mouth. The tea boy was a girl from her class. (Ellis 87).

The bacha posh was not only about dressing as a boy and cutting hair, the little girls need to change their names too ; “"Shauzia?" Parvana whispered. "Call me Shafiq. And what do I call you?" "Kaseem"” (Ellis, 87). The little girls in Afghanistan, lost their real characters and acted exactly the same as boys did, as; “Parvana sat there stunned, watching her old classmate blend in with the other tea boys. It was only by looking at them very carefully that Parvana could distinguish her friend from the others.” (Ellis 88).

This practice has taken on a new urgency in recent years with the rise of the Taliban, which enforces strict dress codes for women and restricts their mobility and access to education. In response, many families have resorted to the bacha posh tradition to enable their daughters to attend school and move around more freely. While this strategy can provide temporary relief from the oppressive restrictions imposed by the Taliban, it is not a sustainable solution and can put the girls and their families at risk if they are discovered. Despite the challenges they face, these girls continue to fight for their right to education and equality, and their bravery and resilience are an inspiration to us all.

3.2 Parvana’s Struggle and Attempts to Save Her Family

Parvana as a principle character in *The Breadwinner* struggled a lot to help her family especially when her father had been arrested, she went every day to the marketplace for work to bring food, and put herself in face of the danger of the Talibs, many times she thought she will lost her life or being arrested while she was outside alone, each day was a horror movie to Parvana, running out from the Talibs and be careful from the landmines.

Ellis through her novel portrayed the attempts that Afghan women and girls did for their families and how they were under the Taliban regime, being oppressed but still struggling and helping. The child Parvana did all the various works to help her family from the daily domestic tasks to the dangerous ones. For a tiny little girl fetching water every day from a far place was risky and exhaustive as:

We need water," Nooria said. "Can't I sit down for a while first?" Parvana asked her mother. "You will rest better when your work is done. Now go. The water tank is almost empty." Parvana groaned. If the tank was almost empty, she'd have to make five trips to the water tap. Six, because her mother hated to see an empty water bucket.(18).

This simple task was a whole complex one for Parvana and her family, no one else could fetch water otherwise they will be stuck in the dirt and stay thirsty, Parvana did a necessary job every day to bring water and keep her mother and sister in safe as:

Maryam was only five, and she couldn't carry an empty bucket downstairs, let alone a full bucket upstairs. Mother and Nooria had to wear burqas whenever they went outside, and they couldn't carry a pail of water up those uneven broken stairs if they were wearing burqas. Plus, it was dangerous for women to go outside without a man. (Ellis 19).

Young girls are not supposed to hold heavy things or put themselves in risk, they could get harm or be captured by the Taliban, as: "She kept hauling water. Her arms were sore, and the blisters on her feet started to bleed again, but she didn't think about that. She

fetched water because her family needed it, because her father would have expected her to.” (Ellis 55).

Parvana does not help only her mother and sister, she used to be next to her father all the time before the Taliban had took him away, she helps him to walk, to carry his things and in work, as “Parvana did get out for a few hours most days to help her father walk.” (Ellis 7). And they need to explain why she was being out each time the soldiers saw her as: ““I need this girl to help me walk,” her father would tell any Talib who asked, pointing to his leg.” (Ellis 8). The Talibs prevented young girls from being outside and she needs to face them and convince them every day, as: ““I have no son at home, except for an infant,” he would explain.”(8). Parvana had been afraid all the way going to the marketplace and stressed all the day until they come back, as:

Parvana would slump down further on the blanket and try to make herself look smaller. She was afraid to look up at the soldiers. She had seen what they did, especially to women; the way they would whip and beat someone they thought should be punished” (Ellis 8).

She helped her father every day to walk from the house to the marketplace, then to come back home which was harder than going because of the flights stairs, she was only 11 and with an old man leaning on her was more difficult as:

Now Parvana and her father slowly made their way up the steps of their building. They lived on the third floor of an apartment building. The stairs were on the outside of the building, zigzagging back and forth on their

way up. They had been damaged by the bomb, Only some parts of the staircase had a railing. (Ellis 17).

In order to help her family, Parvana challenged all the danger outside and all the fear, she faced the Taliban every day in the marketplace as: “a voice behind her shouted, "What are you doing on the street dressed like that?" Parvana whirled around to see a Talib glaring at her, anger in his eyes and a stick in his hand.” (Ellis 50). The helpless girl found herself each day in the risk of being arrested and beaten, she needs to run and to hide in every time she saw talibs touring with sticks, as: “"You must be covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will be punished for letting you walk the street like that!" The soldier raised his arm and brought his stick down on Parvana's shoulder.” (Ellis 51). She is not supposed to be outside without covering herself from top to down and without an escort, even when she was only 11, and they asked her about her husband because young women used to be taken by the Taliban and married to someone they choose.

For the sake of her family, Parvana endures not only the danger of Taliban, but she experienced a lot of things that caused her an emotional harm, as when she was obliged to earn more money so she went to dig bones to sale them, she went to the graveyard and face walk between the graves, Parvana was scared and feeling that she was doing something wrong all the time, “They were going to dig up bones. “I'm not sure this is a good idea," Parvana said to Shauzia the next morning.” (Ellis 96). Parvana was terrified as: “They walked over to the nearest grave. "What if...what if there's still a body there?" Parvana began. "I mean, what if it's not bones yet?" (Ellis 97). She even felt it was inhuman to dig people’s graves, the most of those dead people where afghans who

killed by the Taliban and who died under bombs or above landmines, they can't even find peace after death, Parvana thought it was wrong as:

Do you think they'd mind us doing this?" Parvana asked. Shauzia leaned on her board. "Depends on the type of people they were. If they were nasty, stingy people, they wouldn't like it. If they were kind and generous people, they wouldn't mind." "Would you mind?" Shauzia looked at her, opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again and returned to her digging. Parvana didn't ask her again. (Ellis 99).

This quote shows how much it was complicated for young girls and how hard they lived; they were facing terrible things just to struggle under the rule of Taliban, and did so many attempts just to be able to feed their families.

Women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule faced significant discrimination and oppression. Despite these challenges, there were different forms of female struggle against discrimination, including education, activism, and cultural expression. Women who were educated and had access to resources were able to advocate for their rights and challenge oppressive policies. Additionally, some women used creative methods, such as writings and magazines, to express their experiences and resistance. Overall, while the struggle against discrimination and oppression was challenging, the resilience and determination of Afghan women to fight for their rights and freedoms is truly inspiring.

General Conclusion

The present study explored the depiction of Afghan women under the Taliban rule, in Ellis' *The Breadwinner*. It employed the Islamic feminism theory to examine different context which portrayed the Taliban's oppression against women by the misuse of religion. Thus, analyzing Ellis' novel brings insight into diverse life experiences of Afghan women in the midst of struggling against the Taliban's persecution. The socio-historical context in which this study is produced shows that the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan was a result of many previous political issues, and the position of women changed since the Taliban took over the rule of the country, and reveals that the Taliban as a religious association applied rigid rules on Afghan people in general and on women in specific by the name of Quran and executed oppressive regime under the shadow of religion, and it clarify that the gender discrimination within the Afghan society is reverting to cultural, social, religious and political dimensions. Indeed, the govern of Taliban over Afghanistan offers a fertile ground for women's oppression, By focusing mainly on the plight Parvana and Shauzian and their environment, this study unveiled the truth concerning the status of women under the Taliban regime.

Islamic feminism attempts to correct the concept of the status of woman and to defend her appearance and rights, through their transmission of the importance of her role among the society and her capacities. For Ellis, it is of crucial significance to shed light on the diverse cultural experiences of Afghan women in order to identify their status. In other words, Ellis rejects the Taliban's perception on women as weak and as objects; this is evident in her portrayal of Mrs. Weera the free spirited woman whose education and consciousness reinforce her desire to revolt against the Taliban oppressive rule.

Additionally, the novelist emphasizes her displeasure with the cultural customs that she believes hinder rather than help Afghanistan's general development. As a result, the research looked at how hegemonic forces utilize interlocking religious, social, and cultural rules like body covering and escorts in order to marginalize the female body and obscure its manifestations. For instance, it is frequently viewed as an insult of native culture to refuse a forced marriage. Additionally, women were not permitted to attend schools or pursue any form of education and were expected to marry young.

The issues and themes tackled in *The Breadwinner*, represents the Taliban's violation of human rights, and its crimes toward Afghans. Ellis broadly in her novel expresses the issue of education among Afghan people; she mentioned the arresting of educated people by the Talibs, and how the citizens suffered illiteracy. The author definitely specifies preventing women from education and working; then she developed their revolting against oppression and discrimination.

It can be concluded, that the women' struggle against the Taliban regime took diverse forms, such as the secret schools and magazines, and the dressing as boys in term of the pasha posh. Deborah Ellis in her depiction of Afghan women insisted to transmit the cooperation among them and portrayed those oppressed females as sharing the same trial and abuse, and even the same ambitions in different ways.

This study aimed to examine the Ellis' demonstration of women' status under the Taliban rule in the novel *The Breadwinner*. Ellis masterfully depicted the position of Afghan women and their resistance through the characters of the short story, and the

previous chapters of this research analyzed these themes; by describing the characters' position and rebel.

By analyzing *the Breadwinner*, and trying to indicate the oppression of Taliban on Afghan people and women in particular, this study intended to answer the research questions raised previously. As a modest answer for the first question which was about the Taliban's oppression on Afghan women and people in general, this research reached that Taliban regime was considered the worst period in Afghanistan's history in terms of the violation of the basic human rights; Taliban prevented women from education and working and from being outside without an escort, women also must be completely covered wearing burqua and be married at a young age, additionally practicing physical violence on them in houses and streets. And this violence is encroach to men by being arrested for no reasons or just for being educated as in the case of Parvana's father in the sample novel, Taliban murdered and punished Afghans under the name of applying sharia.

The second question was related to the forms of struggle that Afghan women had adopted against the Taliban oppression, and the answer is as following: the females characters in *The Breadwinner* reflecting Afghan women had created divers and powerful struggling shapes; such as the secret school aiming to raising awareness within Afghan women and young children, and creating secret magazines and transmitted it to Pakistan in order to have their voice heard and tell the world about the suffering from the Taliban's presence.

All in all, Afghan women have come a long way in fighting Taliban oppression. To some extent, they succeeded in making their voices heard and educating their girls.

After the fall of the regime in 2001, Afghan women were able to continue their education in schools and universities, and returned to occupy important positions in the health and education sectors. Even were able to hold some political positions and participate in decision-making. Unfortunately, women in Afghanistan did not enjoy this situation for a long time, and with the return of the Taliban to rule the country in 2021, it brought back with it the era of oppression of women and depriving them of their most basic rights, which are more basic human rights than additional privileges that women demand and the issue of the oppression of Afghan women remains, (like its counterpart, among the issues of women affected by the misguided interpretation of religion and its misuse), at the mercy of the world and in the hope of struggle.

Synopsis

Synopsis 01

About the author

“We create the world we want to see.”

Deborah Ellis



Deborah Ellis CM is a Canadian novelist and. Her topics frequently center on the pain of children who are persecuted in the Third World. She was born August 7, 1960, she had 62 years now.

Deborah Ellis is a feminist, a peace activist, and a prize-winning author. Deborah is the author of numerous difficult and exquisite works of fiction and non-fiction about kids from all over the world, including the international bestseller *The Breadwinner* 2000. Her most recent book *Sit*, chronicles the lives of nine children and the circumstances in which they find themselves many times through no fault of their own. Each tale features a

child who makes a choice and acts, whether it's a small deed or a decision that changes their entire life.

Deborah has written more than thirty books. She has received numerous honors, including the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the Middle East Book Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, and the Vicky Metcalf Award for a Body of Work. She has been honored to the Order of Canada and awarded the President's Award for Exceptional Achievement by the Ontario Library Association. The Breadwinner made its premiere as a full-length animated movie in 2017.

Deborah is an ardent supporter of the marginalized. She "walks the talk," giving the majority of her royalties to deserving organizations including UNICEF, Street Kids International, the Children in Crisis Fund of the International Board on Books for Young People, and Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. She has given away more than \$1,000,000 in royalties from just her Breadwinner books.

Synopsis 02

THE SUMMARY OF DEBORAH ELLIS' *THE BREADWINNER*

Parvana, an eleven years old girl, lives in Kabul, Afghanistan which is ruled by the Taliban group. She lives with her parents, two sisters and an infant brother. Her elder sister, Nooria, is in high school while her younger one is Maryam who is still five years old. Her infant brother is two years old named Ali. Taliban group creates some regulations that severely limit the freedom of women including female children. It restricts women's actions to go outside, pursue an education and get a job as well. All women and female children are obliged to stay inside of the house. When they urgently need to go outside, they must wear burqa, a piece of clothes which completely covers their body except for breathing and seeing, or they should be escorted by male.

Parvana always helps her father who loses his feet because of bombing to work in the market. She is allowed to only use a chador since her body does not look alike a growing woman yet. Besides, she always fetches the water outside of their home since no one of her family members is able to do that.

One day, the Taliban soldiers come to her place and take her father out of their home. They blame her father for the foreign education he receives in England. In order to save her father, she and her mother walk through the street until they finally come to the

prison where her father is put into. Their effort is useless because the Taliban soldiers beat and banish them.

Since the incident happens to her father, there is no man in Parvana's home except Ali. Parvana's family needs to survive. Thus, her mother's relative, Mrs. Weera, and her mother suggest her to disguise as a boy. She refuses to do that action at first. Yet, considering her family's condition, she finally agrees to do a disguise.

In her disguise as a boy, she becomes the breadwinner for her family. She becomes a letter reader, a job which her father used to work as. She also sells the goods that her mother gives to her to be sold. In the market, Parvana meets her classmate who also disguises as a boy, Shauzia. She makes a good friend with her. Shauzia also experiences a difficult time in her life. She needs to fulfill the needs of her many family's members. Therefore, Parvana and Shauzia have a plan to earn more money by selling some goods on trays. In order to buy the trays, they collect money from digging the bones.

Finally, they can buy the trays and sell cigarette, matches and chewing gum. Sometimes, they are so tired in doing this thing. Sometimes, they feel desperate because there is no better change in Kabul. Nooria decides to marry a man in Mazar because she can no longer bear the harsh time she experience in Kabul. Her mother urges Parvana, Maryam and Ali to come along with Nooria. Yet, Parvana refuses to go. She insists to stay in Kabul to wait for her father to come back. Even though her mother hesitantly leaves her alone, she is comforted by Mrs. Weera who wants to accompany Parvana.

Parvana keeps working and struggling to live in Kabul. She is lonely because she is separated from her family. Finally, what she has been waiting for so long comes back. Her father comes back after some people take him home. His condition does not seem well. Hence, she patiently takes care of her father.

When she is going back home after working, she meets a girl, Homa, who escapes from Mazar. She brings her home and takes care of her with Mrs. Weera. Homa says that she leaves from Mazar because the Taliban group has captured the city. After listening to Homa's story, she begins to worry about her family in Mazar. She plans to go to Mazar with her father since he has regained his health. She also finds an idea for Homa to go outside of the country with Shauzia and Mrs. Weera. At the end, Parvana and her father proceed their way to go to Mazar and she feels so confident to face another story ahead.

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Glossary of Terms

PDPA: People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

USSR: The United Socialist Soviet Republic

USA: United States of America.

CIA: The Central Intelligence Agency

Sharia: Islamic Sacred Law

Al-Qaeda: The Base," was developed by Osama bin Laden and others in the early 1980's to support the war effort in Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union.

Burqa: a long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women in many Muslim countries.