

## THE GIRL IN THE TANGERINE SCARF: A STRONG OPPOSITION TO PATRIARCHAL DISCOURSE

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### **ABSTRACT-**

*The present research paper aims to study the notions regarding Islam and veiling. Though, feminist women writers think Hijab as a symbol of suppression and dominancy of patriarchy Mohja Kahf considers this as a symbol of culture and unique identity. She willingly accepts the practice. Her power of resistance is admirable. The novel provides the positive approach to see Muslim women in Hijab. The adaptation of veiling as a symbol refers from religious to social pressure and associated with political ideologies. The present article explores the writer's strong opinion regarding the fact of veiling.*

### **Key words –**

*Islam, Veiling, Culture, Patriarchy, Muslim Women*

### **Introduction:**

Mohja Kahf was born in 1967. Her family has involved in Syrian opposition politics. Her novel "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" portrays the various issues attached with this. Her work especially deals with cultural dissonance. Her experiences in the United States have given her the opportunity to see the world with a different perspective. She strongly supports her religion. Throughout her life she is torn between ancient culture and modern attitude as an American citizen. Her novel is loaded with her personal experiences. Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Noor Fardidah Abdul Manaf in their article, "Notions of Home for Diasporic Muslim Women Writers", describe Kahf's writings as "Kahf is known for being critical of Muslims who refuse to see any faults with their communities. Very often her criticism against pretensions of Muslims is seen as attacks against Islam itself. Kahf has always fought against any form of marginalisation of Muslim women, especially, of the mosque. However, Kahf also goes beyond politicking of the veil". (European Journal of Social Sciences:2009)

Mohja Kahf's protagonist Khadra Shamy is a strong woman. She stands as an image of revolt against stereotype images of Muslim women. She strongly refuses to play the role of traditional housewife and nourish herself according to the will

of her husband. Kahf's novel deliberately objects to the patriarchal and hegemonic discourse which is attached to the meaning of veiling. The novel deals with the important events that affect the U.S. after 9/11. Khadra's struggle is inward and outward. Her struggle especially deals with her Arabness, Americanness and Islamness. The hegemonic structure of the U.S. creates obstacle in the process of self-realization of Muslim women. Hence, Mohja Kahf explores the notion of veil as a symbol of Muslim women's empowerment.

Headscarf is the personal choice based on their faith in Islam. They consider wearing Hijab is their feminist identity which is totally far from political and social issues. Arab culture was influenced by Bedouin values, which consider 'honour' means control over female sexuality. Veiling or Hijab is more cultural presentation than religious obligations. Dress code creates clarity between binding towards religious values. Some Muslim countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia advocate the principle that Muslim women should cover their body and face while stepping out the home whereas Orientalist consider this as a sign of Muslim women's suppression.

The Islamic practices are based on the notions of 'ijjat' and 'sharum.' Unfortunately, these notions are applicable only to women, whereas, Men are enjoying more freedom than women. 'Veil' or 'burqha' is the symbol of Muslim women's suppression. Muslims are following the manly interpretation of 'shairya.' Now-a-days, more importance is given to the 'fatwas,' rather than real Islamic values. Hence, there is a need to understand the principles of Islam. Quran has highly stressed on the principles of equality between men and women. Many Quranic verses support women's freedom and education. Hence the Quran says: *And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them. According to what is equitable, But men have a degree (of advantage) over them And God is exalted in Power, wise (2.228)*

In modern times, Muslim feminists like Fatima Mernissi and Aziza Al-Hibri have tried their best to offer feministic approach to Islam. They insist to focus on the reinterpretation of Quran which could

highly contribute to Muslim women's empowerment. They strongly assert that Islam is gender neutral.

In the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* Mohja Kahf has given a different perspective to look towards veiling. According to her, veiling is a symbol of resistance and it reveals Muslim woman's autonomous identity. For the support of her modern perspective she creates the images of strong and aggressive veiled women. Through the protagonist Khadra, she deeply analyzes the inner working of Muslim women. These Muslim women have fought against the obstacles like race, culture, gender, religion, and veiling etc. Though Khadra is an aggressive woman, her husband Juma wish to control her personality by the help of his rigid notions regarding womanhood. He once asks her "What's for dinner?" to which Khadra responds "I don't know. Why are you asking me? Like I'm the one who supposed to know?" Juma's answer to her is quietly rude. He says, "let's see, who's the wife in this picture?" (241) But Khadra's strongly replied, "I am not a woman I don't know How to cook!" Juma shouted, "well, it didn't come with my Boob's!" Khadra shouted back, "You can LEARN it! Her, I'll show you!.....put chicken in the pan. Put the pan in the oven. It's that simple. Okay? Now Leave Me Alone" (241). Thus, through her ability to oppose prejudiced notions, Khadra emerges as an aggressive woman. The novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* opposes to the patriarchal interpretation of Islam. Kahf holds the view that Muslim women are suppressed by traditional Muslim men as well as western feminist who cannot interpret the struggle beyond veil. Abdurraqib comments that:

"By overlooking the particularities of their veiling practices (or of their actual oppression) and reinforcing the boundaries between western women and the other, veiling practices are linked to universal practices or oppression, sexual control and nationality." (2006:59)

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, the novel presents the images of empowered women who refuse to be passive. Kahf highlights a new meaning of veiling which strongly opposes the traditional negative meaning. Khadra's process of self-realization ends with her multiple identity as an American, An Arab, and a Muslim.

Khadra faces internal agony when she meets various Muslim people and their experiences. She comes to know that her family wants to control her body. In Syria she stops veiling and she realises that unveiling is a kind of transformation. She gets her new identity. She goes for her personal choice regarding clothing. She starts to put on a headscarf to show her attachment and respect towards her culture. She strives to assimilate her identity with American culture.

Through the various incidents in the novel, Kahf highlights the functioning of U.S. hegemony. Muslims in America are struggling to prove their faith and identity towards nation and Islam. The issue of Islamophobia is depicted through the behavior of various characters. The innocent and moderate Muslims in America are the victims of hate crimes. Khadra is obliged to decide between veiling and unveiling. Her education and modern attitude permits her to hold the veil for the sake of preserving culture. Her decision is free from any prejudiced opinions. She holds the veil as a symbol of choice. Thus, through her protagonist, Kahf attaches positive meaning to veil.

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