



The Symbolic Attributes of *Shemagh* and Its Intangible Cultural Aspects in Muslim Society: A Painting Illustration

Iffat Tehseen Amjad¹ and Muhammad Azam Sameer^{2*}

¹*Department of Fine Arts, Nanjing University of the Arts, No. 74 Beijing West Road, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210013, China.*

²*Department for the History of Science and Scientific Archaeology, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei 230026, China.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The *Shemagh* is the Scarf which is worn by Arabic as well as other Muslim people who belong to other countries in terms of identity. It has multiple symbolic features which denote the religious as well as socio-political representation. In broader spectrum, it illustrates the attributes of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Muslim world. To highlight the Intangible Cultural Heritage, we represent the *Shemagh* in our painting with its applications and usages in the Muslim society to explore differences in symbolic language between the Eastern and Western cultures. Representation of *Shemagh* in the paintings juxtaposes the different features of the Muslim society acquaints with Intangible Cultural Heritage. The imprecise way of symbolic language has been chosen in the form of the *Shemagh* patterns, creating a new artistic perspective based on the generation of work in a

*Corresponding author: Email: mazamsameer23@gmail.com;

different geographic locations and imaginative thoughts as well. The Subjugation of different mediums and techniques of paintings are used to portray the subject matter, color palette, and symbolism of the painting. Through paintings, this paper examines the hidden meanings of transformation in our lives and modern blend by evaluating Muslim society with the amalgamation of Intangible culture aspects by exaggerating the print and colors of scarf or *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh*. In concluding statement, we analyze the attributes of *Shemagh* from past to present for emphasizing the Intangible Cultural aspects.

Keywords: *Shemagh; artwork; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Muslim Society.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Shemagh* is the turban of Saudi Arabia or called *Saafa* in other countries like Pakistan, is a symbolic wearing which signifies the cultural attributes of specific community and displays the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) too. In modern society, it is also a highly fashioned symbol worn by Arabic men as well as the men from other countries, especially the fashion icons simply called *Ajmi* (Non-Arabic). It has countless reasons to be worn such as protection from the Sun, religious display, illustrating manhood, exhibiting folk culture, fashion etc. Traditionally, the black-and-white fishnet-pattern *Keffiyeh* worn by Palestinian remains a symbol of Palestinian nationalism since the Arab Revolt nearly a century. Sometimes, it is also confused with Palestinian *Keffiyeh*(black and white), but due to color differences, it is ascribed as *Shemagh*(red and white).The *Shemagh* is comprised of different meanings and uses over time and depending on location and culture. The *Shemagh* traditions have been transformed from one generation to another by people gestures. But according to J.R. Bartlett, the *Keffiyeh* or *Kufiya* belongs to Kufa (a city in Iraq) which means *Shemagh*, *Ghutrah*, *hattah*, *chayyeh*, *ormashadah*, is a traditional headdress of West Asian country like Iraq [1]. *Keffiyeh* has a fascinating history dating back to Sumerians and Babylonians in Mesopotamia (West Asia) in 3100 BC [2]. It is fact that emblematic meaning, style, and color diverge from one country to another and even from one region to another. It is usually a scarf which is made of cotton or wool. In the perspectives of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the product of legacy is transformed either orally or by signs [3]. So, *Shemagh* is the emblematic wearing which is comprised the traditions which have been followed by the present communities both Muslims and Non-muslims. All the attributes of ICH like customs, languages, music, rituals, dance, festivals, and some arts [4,5] display a précised culture of any community or society. On the whole, *Shemagh* is the figurative wearing of

ICH and ICH shows unique and different stories [6]. *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* has also been used as a fashion in the 1980s in the United States of America(USA) and then, it became the trendy fashion of the Tokyo(Japan) and treated as camouflage (a style of clothing) [7]. The presentation of the *Shemagh* through art, in any form whether its painting or fashion icon, has been an exceptional way to display attributes of cultural recognition of the society. The aesthetics of any society depend on its creativity and imagination, especially the ICH of that society. The subject matter or idea of our artwork exemplifies the aesthetics of the society [8]. Aesthetics of the society deeply denominate the ICH. In this paper, the Muslim societies have been highlighted with the depiction of artwork in general and paintings in précised. Through our paintings, we tried to convey visual values or ideas of the Muslim society by using the symbolism of *Shemagh*. Visually approaching language of *Shemagh* used to portray the ICH of Muslim communities like Arabs and others. Through this paper, the ventures of artistic flaunt have been expressed by means of the presentation and evaluation of Muslim ICH. The use of oil paints and acrylics on canvas and directly on the cloth of *Shemagh* has been formulated. This oil painting, with pigments and colors originated, which was first used in 10th century A.D [9] to depict the role of *Shemagh* properly.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Oil and acrylic canvas: Most delicate and westernized form of painting is adopted by the world nowadays. Through Its medium one can achieve the realistic values of painting. There are many types of painting; oil painting is one of them, which is the progression of pigments, coloring process. Through this practice, visuals can be formulated that is an important part of oil painting [10]. Another medium was used, called Acrylic on Canvas (Figs. 1, 3). In this style of painting, a quick dry process was done. To set

up of the workspace as well as the strokes of the brush in the filling of canvas or a small print of Shemagh on canvas, was a basic and preliminary vocation. With the help of gesso, every surface can be painted through the acrylic.

Techniques of Paintings: Artist used original cloth of *Shemagh* as a representation in red and white color for the painting as a background in the (Fig. 4) and also painted over it by blocking specific area. Red and white printed background used to describe the language of painting with the help of different aspects of the *Shemagh or Keffiyeh* in the Paintings, the paint was transported to the surface by using of painting tools like brushes and palette knives. Afterward, the varnishing process was done in later actions.

Use of monochromatic palette: Artist chose the specific red palette to create her paintings related to *Shemagh* that was sinking in her imaginations and thoughts. Red color portrays the sensitivity of thoughts in a better way. Through her symbolic monochromatic palette in paintings, one can easily understand the sensitivity of the situation and the meaning of the symbolic representation of *Shemagh* and its Intangible Cultural aspects in Muslim Society. The choice of imagery and the selection of specific red color palette indicate the element of popular sensibility.

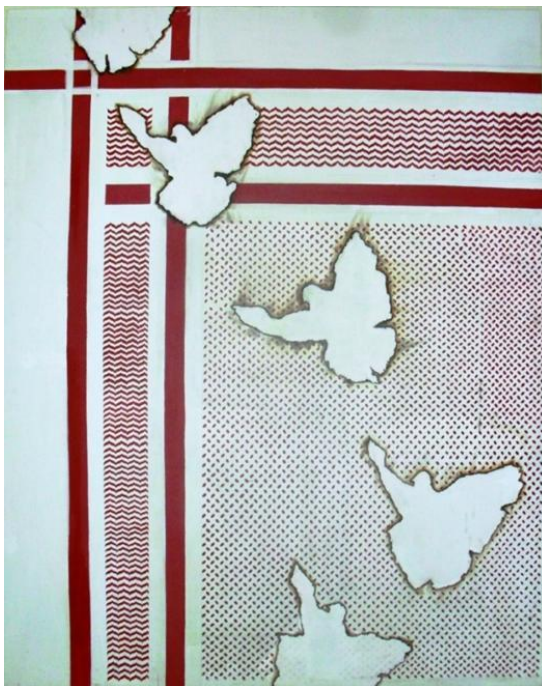


Fig. 1. Acrylic on canvas with the size of 4' x 5'

Fig. 1 Acrylic on canvas with the size of 4' x 5' documents the depiction of the dove painted over the background of *Shemagh*, which is mostly painted in white color, symbolizes the peace and harmony. But if we peep into past, the dove was also depicted dated back to 3rd millennium B.C, where dove was a prominent bird, denoting the goddess of love and war [11]. Except for Islam, other religions also have linked to the interpretation of the dove in different paintings and statutes. In Christianity, the Old Testament Book of Genesis gives the record of a dove with the story of Noah's Ark, where a dove plucked the olive-leaf in her beak which indicated the waters were halted and land appeared. So, the dove and olive branch have been symbolized as peace in Christianity [12] too. The painting depicts the strong compositional background, the choice of imagery in the foreground and the selection of specific red color palette indicates the element of popular sensibility. In the strong compositional background painted border with intersected straight red lines on the left side of the painting represents the cross-cultural influences. This body of work visually represents my experiences as a Muslim who has spent time moving between different cultures in the east and the west. Print of scarf suggests the state of mind of those who are destined to survive in the conditions. The use of the red color against the white background depicts the fear and bloodsheds, which has enveloped the lives of people in different regions nowadays. The black burnt dove scurrying across the surface represents exhausted peace, and the encompassing nature of the threat, which pervades the city. Peace or tranquility is a state of harmony characterized by the lack of violent conflicts. Dove symbolically represents it. The print of scarf had been burnt and forms the images of the dove. These burnt images of dove exhibit the destroyed peace of nations in the world.

Fig. 2 Oil on canvas with the size of 3' x 4' the pattern of *Shemagh* is not as abstract as it seems. It has small oval shaped print like droplets of blood, which are connected with the diagonal lines. Gradually the joined print opens and formed the shape of the blood droplets, which shows the transformation of the positive image of *Shemagh* into negative which were not the part of the culture. There is a boundary all around the canvas with red intersecting lines, which captures the composition in a specific area. Print of scarf suggests the state of mind of those who are destined to adopt this act. The

image portrays the untold negativities of our society. It documents the internal conflicts and a state of confusion. The choice of imagery and the selection of specific red color palette are indicative of the element of popular sensibility. It has been an elemental and subjective part of the painting and also descriptive in nature. The red color is linked with warmth, blood, feelings, energy, passion, love, and anger. It is perhaps symbolic of hidden latent and ambitions; or the sense of isolation, which exists in every artist's soul.

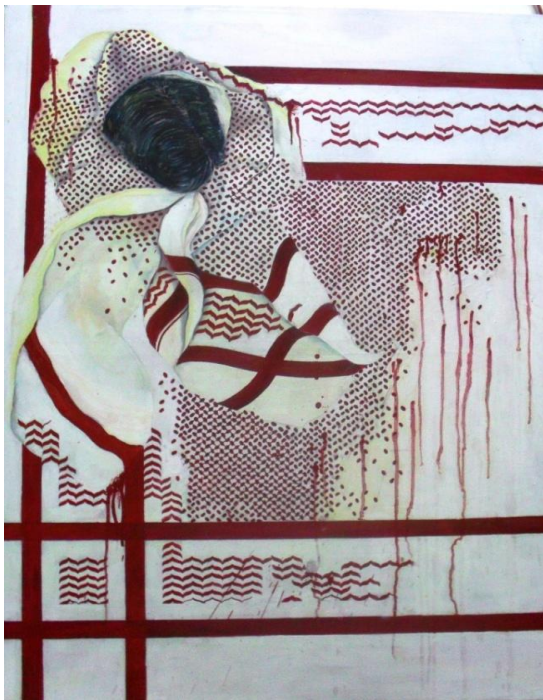


Fig. 2. Oil on canvas with the size of 3' x 4'

Fig. 3 untitled, Acrylic on canvas. 2' x 6', a rectangular piece of painting illustrates the identity issues of the people who adapt to wear *Shemagh*. Painting creates an illusion denote the cruel reality of a society in search of an identity, viz. So, I painted five different types of 'hollow/stuffed up men, head covered with *Shemagh*: he who lacks a soul and he, who lacks a real body representing both physical and spiritual emptiness. The image is repeated and divided into five sections that are immediately changing, losing its identity. Gradually, from top to bottom images are losing the color and the print of *Shemagh* and showing emptiness. Repetition is the most important and abundant feature in the composition of this painting. Not only does it connect different sections of the

painting, but it even appears within the same line. These images are placed in the foreground with submerging red color splashes with empty white background. The foregrounding can be defined as; the standing out of certain elements by several means.

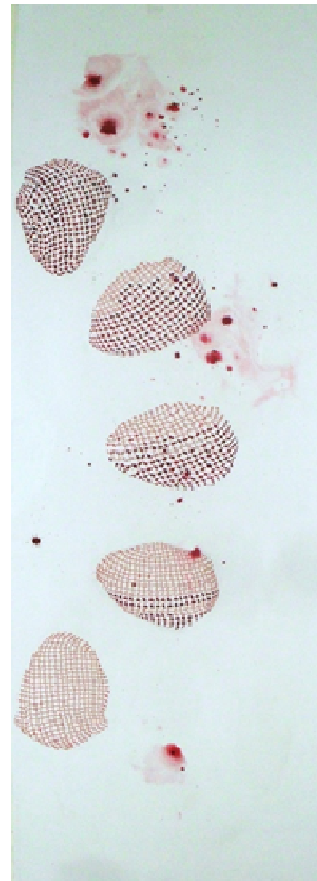


Fig. 3. 2' x 6'.untitled, acrylic on canvas

Fig. 4 2' x 6'.untitled, acrylic on canvas would investigate the message inherent in wearing a headscarf from the perspective of specific group who adopt this practice and targeting the positive symbolic representation of *Shemagh* by means of *ICH*. In this painting, The Arabic headscarf symbolizes the multiple rising religious fanaticisms in the society that are not supporting *ICH*. Arabic scarf used as a stretched background for my painting, specific are aware blocked on the upper right side and painted a covered face under *Shemagh* over it to illustrate the hidden identity of a specific group of people. It gives the impression that someone is hiding behind the scarf and targeted intangible cultural aspects of Muslim society. The language of headscarf "Shemagh" used in paintings to

represent the Muslim identity and symbols of revolution. The use of the *Shemagh* as a surface may be a deliberate attempt to tell that, intangible culture is an intrinsic part of our daily lives; that is inextricably woven into the fabric of our lives.



Fig. 4. 2' x 6'.untitled, acrylic on canvas



Fig. 5. Untitled. Oil and acrylic on canvas (3' x 4')

In asymmetrical, composed painting artist transformed negative energy into positive energy by using strong symbolic imagery of red flowers with the interwoven pattern of *Shemagh* that inherits the intangible cultural aspects as in (Fig. 5). Negative space in the composition of this painting resonates with either a positive or

negative energy. Red flowers would have been imaginatively blended in the environment with the print of scarf or *Shemagh* in a positive manner, to counterbalance negative energy. Red catches people's attention and is often used either in a negative way. Basically, red symbolizes strong emotions or things of strong emotions rather than intellectual ideas. The white color palette of Acrylic is used to paint the background of the painting. White refers to purity, peace, and calmness. In the foreground, a red color is used to paint the small oval-shaped pattern and flowers that are interconnected with small diagonal lines on the canvas that are portraying lost values of ICH.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Shemagh* is the Symbol of Islamic Norms

This also shows the state of the values and the norms of the Muslims. This is a summarize way to illustrate the norms and traditions. All norms and traditions in ICH sustain the society and its existence [13]. Through the representation of *Shemagh* in painting, the Islamic norms have also been evaluated. Some of the traditional and cultural Islamic norms can be linked with the wearing of *Shemagh*, such as covering the head, use it for different worships and festivals, a depiction of respect and honor, and demonstration of peace and calmness in the society.

3.2 The Use of *Shemagh* for Every Rank and File

The *Shemagh* has been used by every rank and file not only in Arabs but in other countries too. From royal to soldier and from soldier to a laborer, it has been common in use. In Palestine, Yasser Arafat (Palestinian leader) was famous for the extensive use of *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* and after him other common people continued this tradition which has become the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Palestinian people. In Pakistan, all religious people, as well as laborers, wear it during the religious ceremonies or festivals and during job sessions too. The Wearing of *Shemagh* denotes many benefits; protection for the Sun rays, cold, showing sacredness and grandeur, fashion symbol, and using it for prayers. In Gulf countries such as The United Arab Emirates, The States of Bahrain, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The State of Qatar, and The State of Kuwait, every person

belonging to different walks of life wear *Shemagh* that shows its vitality, uniqueness, and importance. With this, Jordanians and Iraqis also wear it too. But it is more valuable for the Palestinian people. During the 1930s, *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* became the symbol of Palestinian people [14].

3.3 The Art of Manliness

The *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* or sometimes called as *Ghutrah* has its origin in the Middle East which has been commonly used in arid regions to have protection from the Sun rays and also protect mouth and eyes from the dust or sand and in cold weather to keep the head warm. But most prominently and evidently, wearing of *Shemagh* is considered as the symbol of Manliness because many of the army people, priests or honorable people wear it during their duties. Army has been noted as the job of Manliness and has been called the job of bold ones. Usually, soldiers faced unfavorable circumstances and remained in sand dunes, mountainous regions, marshy lands, uneven paths, jungles, and deserts. So, they have to be bold and powerful to face such unfavorable conditions. With this, they also fight for civilian's protection from their enemies, so that; they have been noted as bold and powerful and given the titles of tiger or lion. They mostly wear *Shemagh* and consequently, the *Shemagh* has been considered the art of Manliness. Surprisingly, in the 2000s, *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* became common wearing in United States of America, Europe, Canada, and Australia [15].

3.4 The *Shemagh* is the Wearing of Fashion Trend

In the present Era, almost every country has different and unique wearing brands which are increasing the identity as well as the economy of any of region or country. Shoe brands, T-shirts, pants, or other wearing have become the trend and fashion of a young generation. The Same case also linked with *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* and its fashion has become prominent not only in Arabs but rest of the countries too. As above mentioned, United States of America, Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and other countries have the brands of *Shemagh* which are promoting this culture to other regions where this fashion is not followed yet. This fashion trend has been followed without political and religious biased. Nowadays, *Shemagh* is used by fashion icons in their videos, songs, and movies as a

symbol of the new fashion trend. In China, the popularity of the *Shemagh* is another example which has been noted in the 2000s, depicting the fame and production of it [16]. But on the whole *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* would have been recognized as the symbol of Palestinian culture in most parts of the world [17].

4. CONCLUSION

There are many attributes of ICH which promote the identity and recognition of any community. Some of the features of ICH denote the past traditions and folklore but the features which have been followed not only in past but in present too. Among these traditions, the wearing of *Shamgah* to represent Muslim identity is one of them. This tradition has been highlighted with some focused examples. And these examples cover some of the Muslim Societies. Basically, *Shemagh* is the scarf which is worn by Gulf Muslims and some other countries, but in reality, it also portrays the cultural, political and social norms of some of the Muslim societies. Having various aspects of tradition and Culture, it promotes the identity and gratitude of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Muslims. The analysis on *Shemagh* by means of the symbolic language of painting was an innovative idea through which the characteristics of ICH emphasized. Consequently, the symbolic attributes of *Shemagh* in literary language of painting with different tools or mediums on canvas, supported the cultural and traditional meaning and symbolic language of the *Shemagh* for the illustration or highlighting the Intangible Culture of Muslim communities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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