

Subversion of Conventional Gender Roles in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

Abstract

This research analyzes the issue of subversion of gender roles by a Muslim girl, Khadra Shamy in the novel The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf by Mohja Kahf. More than a novel this is a Bildungsroman written by Kahf, who is a diasporic writer living in America. The protagonist of the novel, Khadra Shamy migrates along with her family from Syria to Indiana, America, where she is groomed in a devout Muslim family and taught to follow norms and values of the Quran. However, she rejects conventional notion of gender roles assigned by her religious community and succeeds to achieve her dream as a photographer. The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf accounts the journey of Khadra from a girl to mature woman who revolts against the patriarchal values and proves herself as the capable one to live her life freely. In this journey she encounters hardships but her perpetual courage and confidence takes her to desired life. Khadra Shamy, by rejecting the conventional notion of gender role subverts the role and makes her identity as a successful woman. This research project applies the ideas of Judith Butler and Simone De Beauvoir presented in Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity and The Second Sex respectively.

Key terms: Subversion, gender roles, religion, conventional, identity.

The research paper illustrates the subversion of conventional gender roles based in the character sketch of Khadra Shamy in the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf. The growing up experience of Shamy as a Muslim woman shows that she stands for herself; she prohibits herself to follow particular rules for women just to be defined as a good woman. Shamy challenges Muslim community and subverts the gender role by riding bike with boys, resists against her husband's

over possessiveness, aborts her pregnancy in order to continue her study, refuses to shift with her in-law's home and divorces to live an independent life. She even continues her dream of becoming a professional photographer and wears a tangerine scarf instead of black one. All her daring actions ultimately lead her beyond the conventional image of a Muslim woman. In fact, she becomes all alone but she fights with every hardships and proves her as a strong woman. These are the things which take her position beyond the particular gender definition of woman, beyond the position of gender subaltern and ultimately creates agency to speak her own voice which are the key concerns of research too.

As Muslim community is one of the marginalized communities all over the world where the condition of women is so pathetic in comparison to other communities even today. Women are more dominated, restricted and marginalized than men. Most of the norms and values are specially made for women are still threatening them to be confined in households where the freedom is just a day dream for them. This research paper works on the subversion of gender role in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf with reflecting upon the central character Khadra Shamy, who gradually breaks the conventional image of Muslim women in society. It cannot be devoid of the fact that Khadra is brought up in a typical Muslim family but she is a rebel from within and sets an example of a Muslim woman who prefers wearing tangerine scarf instead of wearing a black one. It is just not only about wearing the tangerine scarf rather it is her daring attitude to resist to the conventional gender role.

Different critics have discussed the same text by Kahf from multiple perspectives. Both Ruzy Suliza Hashim Nor and Faridah Abdul Manaf in *European Journal of Social Sciences* have reflected in Notions of Home for Diasporic Muslim

Women writers where Mohja Kahf's protagonist is quite unsettled regarding the issue of home because they migrated from Syria to America. They argue "Mohja Kahf portrays a realistic world in her novel. While acknowledging it is not easy for first and second generation migrants to fit in a new place, she is also saying it is not impossible to adapt and integrate without sacrificing one's belief and custom. TGTS is a positive book on transnationalism and integration" (22). This explores how protagonist is somehow able to maintain harmonious relationship in between where she migrated and where she is migrated. It is an exploration of Kahf herself who is diasporic writer.

Hansul Insani Djhor writes about the novel's protagonist Khadra as a cultural translator who plays a very significant role in between American and Muslim culture. She further adds, "The protagonist, Khadra fails to adapt mainstream American society. Although, she is American, she feels different from the main stream society because of her Islamic culture and faith" (24). She makes us clear in her review of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* Khadra's struggle for her rights, how she is bullied, insulted and one of her friends is killed by American extremists. Though, Khadra suffers a lot, she is portrayed as a cultural translator who challenges both Americans and Muslims and she is able to understand both cultures equally which we can find in Djhor's review of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.

Another review of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is analyzed in the light of Hijab perspectives by Carine Pereira Marques and Glaucia Renate Goncalves which explicates the issue of dress codes which differentiate between men and women in the novel. Furthermore, the review includes "A woman should cover up and wear a hijab after she menstruates, and Khadra in effect was enraptured by this imposition: Hijab was a crown on her head. She went forth lightly and went forth heavily into the world, carrying the weight of a new grace, hijab soon grew to feel as natural to her as

a second skin, without which if she ventured into the outside world she felt naked” (112-113). Khadra goes against stereotypical dress codes of Muslim women where she dares to wear those clothes and scarves which are not the suitable one for Muslim women.

Areen Khalifeh in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* argues Kahf’s novel with very positive attitude where we can figure out the veil as a symbol to symbolize religion, faith, revolution, love, forgiveness etc. The way Muslim women presented with veil as oppressed by western Medias is not the reality but veil has its own prominent role which not only convey the message of Islamic identity but stands for revolution itself. He further adds “In its extreme, Khadra's veil becomes political and revolutionary. For example, the black veil which she wore during her teen age years was a revolution against traditional Islamic scholarship, with its tedious, plodding chapters on categories of water purity and how to determine the exact end of menses” (150). At the time of wearing the black scarf, she and her friends started to applaud assassinations, cheer the Iranian Revolution, and hail the ideas of martyrdom. It seemed that Khadra wanted to be like this “one scarf-wearing woman” who took, with other men, some American hostages during the revolution. Khadra's black veil, in this period, was an expression for hating America and a willingness to attack it.

Unlike the above mentioned perspectives this research deals with the subversion of gender role by exploring the anti-normative gender role the protagonist performs throughout the novel.

This research paper aims analyze Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by highlighting the subversion of conventional gender role by applying the theoretical tools from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

which supplements the concept of male or female is not something inherent in us rather it is the outcome of following the repetitive actions which are taken for granted from the majority of people and these repetitive actions followed by male or female objectifies the gender roles. So, gender roles are not natural but it is naturalized by society, it is not something we get from our sexes rather it is constructed by our community. The identity of female is supposedly taken as fluid and relational because society cannot even expect female to be independent, commanding and as strong as man. Likewise, this project is also applying the theoretical tools from Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, it argues that someone is not born as male or female rather all the roles are constructed by society.

The Girl in the Tangerine scarf is just not a fictional work but it somehow reflects Kahf's experiences as a Muslim woman. The family, society teaches women to follow different roles as being submissive, nurturing etc. The rules and regulations are often made to dominate women in many aspects. Patriarchal society creates binary opposition as male and female and through this they dominate them. In this regard, Butler in *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* writes :

The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the 'specificity' of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations. (6)

The domination of women is done through binary opposition. The domination starts with childhood where a girl child is made to believe that she is not as worth as boys for physical stuffs like bike riding. In the same way, Kahf writes in her novel, "Before they got to Khadra's street her brother Eyad skidded to a halt and said, 'Get off

Hakim's bike and get on mine. 'Cause he's a boy and Mama might see you. Hakim used to give her handlebar rides all the time, but she was getting older now, and her mother said she shouldn't ride with boys anymore" (5). Khadra is taught to be a woman who has a boundary to live life. There is no specific roles which we get from birth rather the society draw a line which indicates who is a man and who is a woman. These lines are enough able to explain that the girl child is taught differently than boys. The family, society even the siblings are drawing a line which is a gender line where Khadra should accept the life with Barbie dolls, household materials to play with but not with riding bike and hanging around with boys to play with.

Judith Butler argues for the roles that are given by the society for boys and girls differently which is not natural but performed and naturalized. She says "after the birth of a child, in hospital the girl child is wrapped with pink blanket and the baby boy is wrapped with a blue blanket or with other colors" (112). The differences are created from the birth till the death to perform different gender roles. Khadra, a little girl is being treated in a particular way which is a border line to be followed by her to become a girl. Being a Muslim girl, Khadra has different stories than the other stories of American kids. Once, she asks for the permission to live one night at her friend's home but her mother restricts her. When she says, "Does she have brothers? How old? What is her father like? her mother said. 'Does he drink alcohol? Will he walk around in his undershirt and try to touch you? No? How do we know he won't? We don't know, do we? We don't know anything about these people. Khadra was allowed to go party but not to sleep over" (85). This may seem her mother's concern but it is more than this as the girls are taken as fragile, they are often taken as inferior who cannot take care of herself. The law of freedom for man and woman is different. Man can dwell wherever he wants, he can spend many days and nights outside his

home but a woman, even for a single night is not allowed to stay with her friends. Even if she dares there would be the raised eyebrows related to her character, her present and future too.

In a Muslim community after the first menstruation a girl has to cover her head with scarf. But one day at school, Khadra gets bullied by her friends and her scarf is also taken away by her friends. Then, she fears a lot not because of Allah but because of her mother's reactions. "Mama was going to freak out, Khadra knew. 'Where is your scarf? Why did you take it off?' Her father would say gravely 'But why were you talking to a boy anyway?' They didn't get it, they didn't get anything" (125). Khadra is restricted everywhere. She has to wear scarf otherwise she would get lots of torture and questions too. She is not in a comfortable environment where she could express herself without hesitation but becomes submissive and demure same time by her culture. In this issue, Butler explores in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, "when the relevant 'culture' that 'constructs' gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology but culture becomes destiny" (8). Similarly, in Khadra's community when a girl menstruates for the first time then she has to cover her head with scarf, it is established as her culture which is followed by all women. The compulsion of covering the faces of women are not only taken as a culture rather they take this tendency as biological destiny.

Generally, patriarchal society cannot expect to see a woman as mature as a man; woman is expected to be submissive, younger, down to earth. The same kind of thought process can be seen through these lines. "But more importantly, she's older than you. Ebtahaj jumped in after the long awkward pause. 'The woman should

always be younger, because girls are more mature than boys and women go downhill faster in old age” (83). Khadra’s mother wants a younger girl as her daughter in-law and it is just not her choice but a voice which clearly represents the patriarchal society. In this regard, Gwen Hunnicutt argues “Patriarchy is the term which evokes images of gender hierarchies, dominance and power arrangement. It is also useful that it keeps the gaze directed towards social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate” (554). Patriarchal society wants to maintain a gap between man and woman with power arrangement. In order to balance hierarchical relation among man and woman, Khadra’s mother prefers immature girl as her daughter-in-law. A woman is supposedly taken as weak, inferior, immature. In patriarchal society not only man wants such type of woman but woman also wants immature counterpart for her son.

Khadra, as a young girl wants to explore her own journey of life freely but she has to deal with lots of obstacles which are the outcome of male dominated society. Her mother and her family want her to be controlled in every way, so that, she could be perfect woman on their definition. Kahf writes:

What happened? Jihad asked. He’d missed the glance in the judge’s chambers and the whole drama. ‘Nothing.’ Khadra answered angrily. ‘Just me practicing my First Amendment right to freedom of expression.’ She added, under her breath. ‘What?’ Jihad pressed. ‘Shut up,’ Khadra said. ‘Don’t tell your brother to shut up.’ Ebtahaj said. And blew her nose again. (123)

Khadra is quite bold to express herself but her mother and brothers want her to be silent and tolerate more. They want her to react every time in a calm way just like other woman do in a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the woman who rebels often gets lost due to the rules and

regulations of the society. The woman who is different from other women of the Muslim community also becomes the same like by following the regular pattern of Muslim community. Khadra is totally shocked by hearing these lines from a lady, whom she expected to be a leader as commanding as man, “Well, really, the best contribution to an Islamic revolution for a woman is to educate her children in the true Islamic values” she said plaintively in her first trimester, dressed in a becoming, pale pink *shalvar-qamis* (155). These lines give a clear picture of ownership of patriarchy upon a woman who has a dream to become different. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* argues; “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (12). After all the possible dreams to be a freedom fighter and the woman simply has chosen to be a mother and to groom her children in a typical Muslim environment. Becoming a mother is not something to be degraded with but the woman who is rebellious and supposed to talk of other women’s right on behalf of them has simply chosen the role of a mother. The Muslim community wants a woman only to be confined in households and the woman chooses exactly that role which makes her community happy. Women are always taught that complete figure of woman is a mother, may be the psychology maintained by family and the society is finally succeeded in getting control over a rebellious woman too. The role constructed by society is accepted by her too.

Kahf’s novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* represents the harsh realities of Muslim community where women are deprived of many rights. She has tactfully shows how Khadra gets familiar with hidden realities of Muslim community in the visit of Mecca, Saudi Arabia:

How could you leave the house without permission- your parents, your hosts’?

Without telling anybody? Ebtehaj asked in an angry whisper behind closed

door. I—just—wanted—to—pray—fajr , Khadra hiccupped between sobs. ‘You can pray in the house’, Wajdy said. ‘But I didn’t want to pray in the house, Baba. The mosque is so near—the adhan was so beautiful—and it was calling to me, to me.’ ‘Well, women are not allowed to pray in the mosque here,’ her father replied. (165)

The reality which is never told to Khadra comes in front of her in such a way she cannot even believe that the women are restricted to pray in the mosque.

Khadra never gets familiar with such type of scenario where women cannot even go to the mosque. These lines further shocked little Khadra who is unknown about the bitter reality of Muslim world;

Wajdy said, ‘In most of the Muslim world, it hasn’t been the custom for hundreds of years.’... ‘But you said—you said—’ she whirled here to include her mother, ‘You always said it was a part of a Islam. What about the Prophet saying ‘You must never prevent the female servants of God from attending the house of God? I told the matawwa that hadith and he laughed—he laughed at me, and said ‘listen to this woman quoting scriptures at us!’ (167-168)

Her parents lied about the harsh reality of Muslim world even with daughter. In America, Khadra has never seen such bias on the basis of gender. It is so inhuman that the women are even today prohibited to the mosque in Muslim world. Now, she is disillusioned by the bitter reality.

Khadra tries to raise her voice which advocates the rights of women even there where people are totally ignorant about the equality and justice. The Quran clearly mentioned about the equality among men and women but the Muslim countries are still ignoring about the justice, which should treat everyone equally. These are the clear pictures which are reflecting the inhuman walls against women’s rights.

Kahf projects her protagonist Khadra who is rebellious and takes stand for women's right. Judith Butler argues in *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*:

Gender is not something that one is; it is something one does, an act... a 'doing' rather than a 'being'. There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results. If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

(26)

As Butler argues, gender roles are not something natural from our birth but it is the construction of our society and culture. Khadra Shamy, challenges the conventional gender roles which are the product of patriarchal society.

Khadra not only speaks for herself but raises her voice every time when there is the remarkable questions come under the identity and women's right. The conversation below in between Rose and Khadra show the Khadra's role to subvert the traditional type of concepts regarding the position of women in her community.

'Men should be men and women should be women,' Rose was saying on the porch. 'I don't truck with all this women's lib business. What do we need libbing from? You're with me, right, hon?' She said, looking at Khadra and Eyad, it goes against religion, am I wrong or am I right?' Eyad nodded, happy to find a common ground. Khadra said, with the mild protest, 'I think religion allows a little more flexibility than that, Auntie. I mean, the prophet used to help his wife with the housework, and Stina Aisha led a battle once.'

(192)

The western world often misread the Islam, and the people inside Islam somehow overshadowed the women's rights and equality. Here, Khadra brings reference from Quran which emphasizes on the important role of women not only in households but even in war where they successfully lead. The stereotypical image of woman is countered by prophet in Quran also; he helps his spouse in her work. Women are represented as fragile but there are women who lead the war, who has done everything being competitive to men and they have been proving themselves as strong as men. Khadra, being so respectful towards Quran and her seniors has proven she is the one who is not someone only to listen about the misrepresentation of women by people of Muslim community but a daring voice which stands against it.

The society categorizes women in two groups, one is 'Good woman' and another one is 'Bad woman'. Women who try to stand on their own feet are often misinterpreted by their family and society too. The woman who is commanding and tough in competition too has been demotivated often by her own family and other people too. She narrates:

'It's not that a woman's voice is *awrah* normally,' Eyad said. It's just –well, you have to admit, Khadra, your voice when you're reading Quran with all the tajwid stuff is pretty awesome. I heard some of the guys talking about it. Talking about you. It's almost like, is some girl's singing in a sultry voice. You wouldn't want to do that, would you? And I don't want to be put in that position, with guys listening to my own sister and getting, well, almost turned on. Do you want me to have to be in such uncomfortable position?' 'Of course she didn't want to be seen as a vamp. A Quran-reciting vamp. She quit doing the recitation. In fact, she stopped going to the CMC meetings

altogether for a while, in disgust.’ (204)

The men of the family mostly want the female under the surveillance of the patriarchy. Khadra’s own brother does not want his sister who reads Quran in front of youths strongly. He seems negative towards the recitation of Quran by Khadra, he demotivates his own sister instead of motivating her. He stops her positive vibes and energy to recite Quran in front of the mass rather he objectifies her voice as sultry. It can be understood vividly, her own brother is insecure of the remarkable position behold by Khadra in Muslim community. Many men feel threatened when there is a woman as strong and competitive one. The envy nature of male is visible here, who instead of promoting his sister’s positivity and confidence he defines Khadra’s voice negatively and stops her. The Muslim community where women rarely speak in front of mass but Khadra dares to do that confidently then gets stopped by her own family member. It clearly indicates that the woman who is strong and challenging is not even accepted by her own family.

Furthermore, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* unfolds the life of Khadra where different shades are reflected regarding the struggle of maintaining her position and identity. Khadra’s instructions of leading her life and the atmosphere around her are different than her own principle of living life. She is different than many other Muslim women in her community. Islamic communities do not support the idea; of abortion whereas Khadra being a Muslim woman clearly supports the idea of abortion. She says : “Yeah, well, Islamic law allows abortion up to four months,’ Khadra called out, pedaling harder to keep with Joy. Passersby looked up at the word *abortion*, their faces reflecting the strong and various emotions it stirred. ‘All the schools of thought allow it. The only thing they differ on is how long it’s allowed. Four weeks to four months. That’s the range” (225).The girl who is brought up in

Muslim devout family clearly arguing for abortion is quite unexpected to be familiar with. Whether a woman wants to give birth or not, the decision should be taken by her not by other people of family. Khadra seems to be opposing of many Islamic values and gives her own logical view on practical life.

The little girl now becomes a married woman, who gets familiar with many hidden sides of life and her husband too. She is a freedom lover, has her own principle of living life but now, has encountered with various situations which are breaking her and making her strong too. Her maternal house and in laws every time encourages her to have babies which she does not want without meeting her goals of life.

‘Still’, her mother told her at home, ‘You can have babies and finish college too. You can do it all. Look at me: I did’ and her father said, ‘You have a stable home, and your husband’s not poor, even if he is a student. What are you waiting for? Yes, birth control is allowed in shariah , but not indefinitely,’ he said gravely... Juma’s mother, on the weekly phone call from Kuwait, concurred. ‘Have just one,’ she cajoled. At least then you’ll know you’re able to love them...What Juma heard was: Real men don’t use condoms,’ and I her spermicide can make you impotent.’ (226- 27)

Khadra is pressurized by everyone to have baby in her late 20s but what she actually wants in her life is ignored by her family. The patriarchy defines a woman as ‘complete human being’ only when she becomes a mother. How can society define someone is complete without fulfilling her dreams and achieving her goals of life? Here, Khadra is all alone but still doesn’t give up her dreams. Though she is under the pressure of becoming a mother and keeping her dream aside, she beholds her dream. Despite being tortured in the name of a ‘good woman’ , ‘complete woman’ she takes stand for her rights which is beyond the expectation of patriarchal family and society.

Similarly, the steps taken by Khadra and the actions performed by her make Juma angry. Juma wants her to be culturally hegemonized and follow the repetitive actions which are followed by other women but she refused to be that. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* states argues “Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony”(189). Butler makes her point clear that the women in the society are bound with cultural hegemony. She rarely accepts the roles which are imposed upon her by Muslim family. She defines herself beyond the expectations of her husband, religion and her community. She recounts:

But he looked puzzled. She was an Arab girl, familiar with Arab customs. He hadn't expected her to be doing things that would embarrass him. If he'd wanted to have explained every limit of proper behavior, he'd have married an American. 'But someone might see you honey.' 'Of course someone might see me, honey. It's not a secret for anything'. 'No, I mean one of the Arab guys. Please, don't do it. Don't do it,' he begged. 'It's unIslamic to display your body,' he objected. But it was hard for Khadra to resist a bike on a fine spring day. '*Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they should not display their beauty and ornaments,*' he quoted. (227-28)

Khadra's husband expects her to be submissive, down to earth, traditional and weak but unlike his expectations of Arab woman, Khadra stands out as a bold woman who doesn't fear of conventional norms and values which are only meant to break the confidence and positive vibes of a woman. Juma has a problem with Khadra's biking

habit; he wants her to act like many Islamic women who hardly say no to their husband's command but Khadra resists against the command which confines her only in households. He even brings a reference which is made for women only to accept that they are not allowed to show themselves like the way men do. Women are taught to believe that their physical differences can tempt a man, so, for this reason they should cover their body including their faces with Burka. The religion and other norms and values are literally threatening women not to resist the roles given by them. They are under the control of religion, culture and other authoritative institutions; they cannot even think to dismantle the roles imposed upon them. But Khadra is exception.

Khadra's steps towards her freedom bring the various problems in her life. Her choices and own principles of living bring so much trouble between husband and herself. Biking is her right but her husband makes huge issue on it, he wants to stop Khadra but she doesn't even care. She laid a copy of the Quran in front of him, their wedding mushaf with the indigo and gilt Moroccan binding, the one they always read from together. Khadra argues with her husband, "Show me where in the Quran it says women can't ride bike in the public" (229). Why she is not even permitted to ride a bike by her husband? She doesn't tolerate the injustice and biasness in the name of religion and gender. She is not one who easily accepts what her spouse says rather she questions even on Quran and justifies her right to live freely as men live. She rides a bike and proves that she is the master of her life no other people who want her to be like puppet in the hand of patriarchy. She is highly active and breaks the image of inactive and passive role of women.

What if a woman resists performing the gender roles constructed by the society? Judith Butler argues gender is "a stylized repetition of acts which are internally discontinuous . . . so that the appearance of substance is precisely that, a

constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief”(127). The protagonist of the novel revolts against the typical gender roles. She refuses to follow the conventional gender roles and argues with her husband. Further these lines explain:

What’s for a dinner? I don’t know. Why you are asking me? Like I’m the one who’s supposed to know? Khadra groused. ‘Wel, uh,’ Juma looked around, ‘let’s see who’s the wife in the picture?’ Was he trying to be funny, Khadra wasn’t sure.’The prophet never asked his wives to do anything in the house for him,” Khadra snapped. ‘Seeking knowledge is more important than feminine tasks. The prophet wasn’t a graduate student. He wasn’t studying engineering’ Juma retorted. ‘Well, I have work-study on top of classes, you don’t. Her voice was getting shrill, but she didn’t care. ‘I’m not a woman—I don’t know How to cook!’ Juma shouted. ‘well, it didn’t come with my BOOBS!’ Khadra shouted back. ‘You can LEARN it! Here, I will show you!’ (240-41)

According to the society, there are certain roles which are specially meant for women such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, baby sitter and so on. Khadra rejects the particular roles which are always expected to be performed only by woman. Muslim women take their husband not less than a God but Khadra oppose the stereotypical notion. She denies cooking and challenges her husband to learn about cooking by mentioning that cooking skill doesn’t come up with her Boobs but she learns about it. Like, Butler’s ideas which supplement the idea of subverting the gender roles exactly can be seen here with the protagonist of the novel. The repetitive actions followed by women are nurturing, cooking, gardening, baby sitter, etc are rejected by Khadra to perform. Khadra subverts the idea of particular gender roles where a husband expects

a wife to performing not less than his mother. She stands against the conventional gender roles and raises her voice loudly against the domination of patriarchy.

Furthermore, males are taken as protective and responsible towards their wife and children. The lines mentioned under explains Juma is also seen as over protective and over possessive husband who takes unnecessary burdens about Khadra's every action:

'He wanted me to circulate the petition to the Muslim women. We'd talked about it at the planning meeting.' Khadra was CMC recording secretary this year. 'Anyway, it's none of your business what he wanted—he wanted to speak to me, not you.'... 'It's *always* my business what anyone wants from you,' Juma shouted. 'What the hell do you mean none of my business? You're my wife.' (242)

Khadra as an adult can handle herself in every way including her job and her relations with other people but Juma is so insecure regarding the relationship between him and Juma. His over possessive nature troubles Khadra a lot. As an Arab man, he is not able to accept the flaws of Khadra. He is not even ready to accept the carrier of Khadra and her competitive nature to everything which she wants to achieve in her life. The Islamic community is habituated to see a woman walking only with man, they want woman either on the surveillance of burka or under the control of man. May be because of all these reasons, Juma is more suspicious towards his wife and overthinking about minor problems. His over possessiveness nature shows the face of male dominated society.

The novel also deals with the issue of identity which is justified by the protagonist Khadra. In this respect, Simon De Beauvoir adds in her book *The Second Sex*, "It is perfectly natural for the future woman to feel indignant at the limitations

posed upon her by her sex. The real question is not why she should reject them: the problem is rather to understand why she accepts them.” (179) Islamic community which often confines women only inside the four walls of home; it suppresses women’s identity and freedom. Khadra shares her problems with her brother:

‘I just don’t know if I can stay married to him, Eyad. I feel like I can’t go on this marriage without killing off the ‘me’ that I am”, Khadra said to her brother. ... Pop psychology phrases like the ‘me’ that I am’ turned Eyad off. He knew about the bike thing. Khadra resented him using it like that. She said, ‘I don’t think I can stay with Juma without changing who I am. Who essentially deep-down I am.’ (242-43)

Like, Beauvoir says why a woman should accept all the things which overshadow her identity, Khadra is someone who every time takes stand for her rights, identity and freedom even if it cost lots of scarification and loneliness. She is tired of suspicious husband, frustrated because of the restrictions on unnecessary things by over possessive husband and decides this time is the right time to escape from all the psychological tortures which are on the basis of religion, culture and gender. Here, comes the question of identity which is undermined by Khadra’s own husband. She values herself, her flaws, her real self but that is not accepted by her counterpart. The Islamic community wants women to sacrifice everything including her preferences, identity and freedom but men can do whatever they’d like to do, they need no compromises and scarification. How can someone be expected to kill her actual self, her real identity? Khadra, is not like many other girls who sacrifices the real self for the sake of marriage, family and community. She is very much in to herself, identity and she wants to be all alone but not kneel down before anyone who wants to seize her actual self and freedom.

Similarly, the situations and circumstances around Khadra go against her dream, her aim. She gets tortured psychologically for not accepting the Juma's planning which demands her to leave her study, career and her actual self. Juma, after the completion of his Degree, he wants to go back Kuwait without even thinking about Khadra, who still needs a year to finish her college. These lines explain about Khadra's struggle for achieving her goals in life:

'What about me?' Khadra said. 'I've got one year to go.' They were driving to the Indianapolis. Khadra imagined a life in Kuwait. Giltzy glass buildings and lots of shopping, and a fairly luxurious standard of living but there were hidden costs. Was this what marriage amounted to, compromise after compromise, until you're frittered away all the jewels in your red box? She woke up one morning and felt as if the future is closing in, the horizon shrinking smaller around her. She threw up. (243-44)

Khadra wants to continue her study but her husband wants her to shift with him to Kuwait. Why marriage demands the sacrifice and compromises only from women? Her marriage becomes everyday torture to her; she neither can see pleasing present nor beautiful future. She only finds the misery of compromise after compromise which threatens her aim, her life. Juma cannot even wait for a year where Khadra leaves everything behind her in order to live whole life with him. Cannot a husband do compromise just for a year? The remarkable question is here, women are always expected to sacrifice and compromise but the case of men is totally different.

Furthermore, the novel narrates the story of a woman who has set her journey to live alone in order to fulfill her dreams and achieving her goals of life. Beauvoir argues, "Nature does not define woman, it is she who defines herself by reclaiming

nature for herself in her affectivity” (73). As Beauvoir argues, here, Khadra is not ready to be someone who is defined by other. The nature sets every one free but the chain created by religion, society bound people. Khadra is pregnant but d wants to abort to continue her study. It is not that much easy to stand for oneself when there are family members who want her to follow the Islamic rules and wants to see her as mother. The given lines further explain:

Khadra’s father said, ‘My mother died having me. A woman who dies in childbirth is considered as a martyr—goes straight to heaven.’ ‘Well, I don’t want to die in childbirth,’ Khadra said sarcastically. ‘I am not suggesting you do so,’ he said quietly. ‘I am saying my mother sacrificed everything for a child. Sacrificed her own self.’ ‘Well, I am not your mother,’ Khadra shot back. ‘I don’t want to be your mother.’ ‘I didn’t raise you to speak to me in that tone,’ he snapped, as he rarely ever did. ‘Yeah you did, Khadra thought sullenly. You raised me to go out and learn, but deep down you still want me to be just like your mother. So where did you think all these contradictions would lead me if not frustration, this tone of voice? But I am not going to kill myself to fit into the life you all have mapped out for me.’ (245- 46)

The above lines show the bold nature of Khadra, she speaks even against her dad and takes stand for her own self. Though, she is from a devout Muslim family but she resist to become a conventional image of a Muslim woman. Khadra proves herself as a strong woman who has a freedom whether to become a mother or not. The answer made by Khadra with in herself and the step taken by her is an unbearable slap on the face of patriarchy. The typical gender role is rejected by a woman who has been always taught of norms and values which are principles to follow for becoming the good woman. The subversion of gender role is applicable here because she rejects to

perform the repetitive gender role and made decision not for others but for herself. The religion, social construction also wants women with confined roles such as house wife, mother and so on. Her father wants her as a perfect woman in patriarchal society; he cannot even accept that his daughter does not want to become a mother rather she wants to be an independent woman by following her dreams and carrier.

Likewise, the struggle of becoming her own self goes on but she is all alone even at the time when she needs her family the most. Simon De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says, “Woman the most individualized of the females, is also the most fragile, the one who experiences her destiny the most dramatically and who distinguishes herself the most significantly from her male” (60). Just because the choice of fulfilling her dreams, to be an independent makes Khadra all alone to suffer in hard times. Her individual right leads her to lonely journey but she never let her hope to be scattered rather she keeps herself strong with the time. Kahf writes:

Her parents would not speak to her. Their throats knotted, and the silence on their end of the phone grew, and they did not come to Khadra. She awoke in the apartment the third night and thought she felt her mother’s hand smooth back her hair, stroke her damp forehead. It felt like the old days in square One. Khadra almost cried. No one was there. She steeled herself. Just get through.
(251)

The decision of Khadra made her all alone. She does not want to become a mother; she cannot even thinking of confining herself inside the four walls of home rather she wants to fly as a bird freely. When a woman rejects to be a puppet of patriarchy she is not even accepted by her own family. Khadra, during her most crucial time is neglected by her own family, who are supposed to be her back bone but the circumstances goes against of Khadra. The daring action which oppose the idea of

Muslim community, the step taken by her keeps her beyond the particular gender role which is easily followed by the majority of the women.

The passion of photography always makes Khadra more enthusiastic and courageous every time. All of all she wants is freedom to live the life as the way she wants to live. Khadra's new life is mentioned through given lines:

And now –with the Ottoman liras—Khadra had a new freedom. What did she want the most to do? Not to return to Bloomington and finish a degree she'd never use. Photography, what she'd wanted from the start, but had not even let herself acknowledges she wanted, because it was not in the Dawah program, in the Wajdy and Ebtahaj program. (315)

The protagonist, Khadra Shamy from devout Muslim community struggles a lot to reach her ultimate goals of her life. Finally, the daring attitudes of Khadra makes her a photographer.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf by Mohja Kahf narrates the story of a Muslim woman who fights almost every day to become who she is. The draw line created by Shamy's family, religion and her Muslim community has been directly challenged by her. The ups and downs in Shamy's life build her unbreakable. She enlarges the definition of woman from household to the world where she stands as an independent, dreamer, believer, a photographer. The history is made by her effort and dedication.

The Muslim community is one of the restricted communities regarding the issue of women's freedom, statuesque but it is no more able to confine someone who believes in her potentiality to create her identity, making her dreams come true. Khadra, as a Muslim girl has been able to achieve what she always wanted in her life. She pays a lot with her struggle to become an independent woman. No one ever could understand her but she always understand what her inner soul wants in her life.

Khadra Shamy, the central character of the novel raises the question every time when there comes the issue of identity of a woman, she raises her voice until and unless it is being heard by the people around her. Though she is brought up in devout Muslim family but she never fears of speaking up even against her elders and community when there is a threaten regarding the issue of women's freedom. She believes in Allah but never seems believing on the taboos of her religion which often made for women to be chained. She is faithful on humanity, she follows what Allah says in Quran but she refuse to accept the norms and values which are imposed upon only women.

Today, the position of women across the whole world is quite noticeable then before but still the third world countries are suffering a lot from the same subject. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Khaf unfolds the dark sides of religion which accustomed the boundaries for women in everyday life. It shows the condition of women in Muslim community. Though, the family shifts from Syria to Indiana, America but the terms and condition for women in their family is totally different in comparison to other American families. The instructions for women in the family are opposite to men. The teachings of family towards the girl child foreground the principle to become submissive, feminine and it prepares them as someone who says no to their family and counter parts. Khadra rejects the principle made for her only and makes her own principle to be free and happy indeed.

The roles of men and women is differently defined and have been followed since the ages but the particular roles which still confines women inside the four walls is rejected by Khadra. As the Butler argues roles are not something from our birth rather it is repeatedly followed by men and women in society but Khadra proves herself beyond the limited definition of women in society. Her family resists her from

biking but she continuously rides bike, she is expected to live a life as a house wife and as a mother but she divorces and aborts her pregnancy by going against her husband, family and whole Muslim community. Her family refuses to be with her even in the most difficult time but she does not let her to be scatter into pieces rather she focuses on what she wants to achieve in her life. She lives far away from her family, continues her study and becomes a professional photographer. She subverts the gender role by becoming free, independent and happy.

Khadra Shamy realizes the boundaries and discrimination between men and women; then she raises her voice against domination. She makes her point clear whenever there is the issue of women. She takes stand against all of the people who always try to control women in the name of religion, culture and community. She makes her bold in every situation which threatens her capability and identity. Though, she faces lots of hardships but she proves herself strong enough more than a man but not less than them. She projected herself against the stereotypical image of a Muslim woman. She challenges every limited role of women and subverts the gender role through different miseries and sufferings throughout the novel. Khadra stands there where the presumption of patriarchy and Muslim community fails and subverts the conventional gender roles.

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