

# Original Research Article

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

### ABSTARCT

The *Shemagh* is the Scarf which is worn by Arabic Muslim people and some other Muslims from other countries. It has multiple symbolic features which denote the religious as well as social representation. In broader spectrum, it illustrates the attributes of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Muslim world. Anthropologically, it also exemplifies the current socio-political, ethnic, religious, social, and cultural identity and situation of the Muslim world. In this manuscript, *Shemagh* has been represented as the social phenomenon which wraps the Muslim Society. In this regard, it has been used in paintings to demonstrate the different features of the society and this painting depiction acquaints with Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Muslim community. Some of the paintings masterpieces with color and size have been evaluate the society with the Intangible Cultural statements. On the whole, this manuscript focuses the artistic masterwork with the amalgamation of Intangible Culture of the Muslim people.

**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 high fashioned worn by Arabic men as well as the men from other Muslim countries, 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, etc. Sometimes, it is also confused with Palestinian *Keffiyeh* (black and white), but due to color differences, it is ascribed as *Shemagh* (red and white) *Shemagh* traditions have been transformed from one generation to generation by people gestures. In the perspectives of ICH, the product of legacy is transformed either orally or by signs [1].

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So, *Shemagh* is the figurative wearing which is comprised the traditions which have been followed by the community. All the ICH products like customs, languages, music, rituals, dance, festivals, and some arts [2, 3] display a précised culture of any community or society. On the whole, *Shemagh* is the figurative wearing of ICH. And ICH shows unique and dissimilar stories of the [4]. Again discussing the dissimilarities between *Shemagh* and *Keffiyeh*, *Keffiyeh* has 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) [5]. So, this is a clear cut difference between *Shemagh* and *Keffiyeh*. There are many ways to display the attributes of cultural recognition of any society. Art is one of them. Through artwork, manufactures tries to convey imaginative ideas through the skills. These imaginative ideas cover the aesthetics of any society, specifically the ICH of that society. The character of the artwork exemplifies the aesthesis of the society [6]. And these aesthetics deeply denominate the ICH. In this manuscript, the Muslim societies have been highlighted with the depiction of artwork in general and paintings in précised. This is a unique and exclusive idea to portray the ICH of Muslim communities like Arabs and others. Through this writing, the ventures of artistic flaunt have been expressed in the sense of the presentation and evaluation of Muslim ICH. The use of oil and acrylic paintings on canvas has been formulated. This oil painting, with pigments and colors originated, which was first used in 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D [7] to depict the role of *Shemagh* in Muslim societies.

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## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Oil Painting

There are many types of paintings and 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 [8]. Oil was boiled with the resin and then varnishing and glossing process was done (Fig.1) with the size of 19' x 25', the actual photograph has only three men and the artist painted the ones in blue on to the snap to show that people in other countries typecast Pakistanis and place us all in the same frame.

### 2.2 Oil with black and white pigments

With the help of black and white pigments, different aspects of the *Shemagh* were formulated in the (Fig. 2). Size with 19' x 25', the paint was transported to the surface with the using of painting tools like brushes and palette knives. Here, again taken a black and white print of a *Shemagh* arranged to look like a flower and painted an image of two heads.

### 2.3 Acrylic on Canvas

Another valuable technique was used, called Acrylic on Canvas (Fig. 3) with the size of 4' x 5'. 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, were a basic and

preliminary vocation. Therefore, the well-liked surfaces for the process of painting are the acrylics on canvas. With the help of gesso, every surface can be painted through the acrylic.

#### 2.4 Oil on Canvas

Through this art, an artist used oil transported to canvas easily. With the help of oil pigments sticks, the masterpiece was created and stretched on canvas which needed few days to dry the oil painting. Afterwards, the varnishing process was done in later actions. In (Fig. 4), the process of oil on canvas was done with the size of 3' x 4'. This masterpiece is another symbolic art of *Shemagh* which was depicted in the style of oil on canvas.

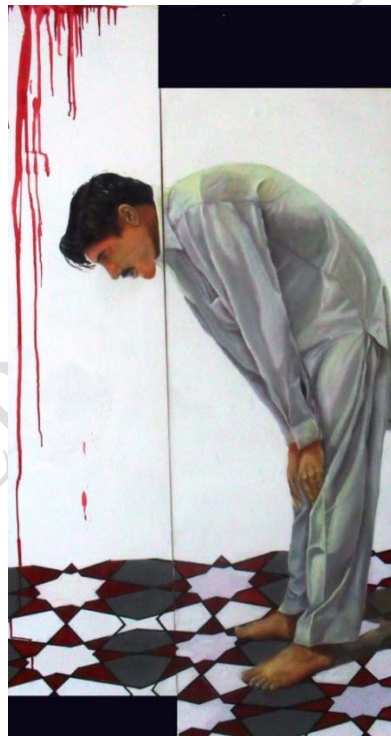


Fig.1. Oil on Black & White Photographic Print(3' x 4')



The Conflict Within  
Oil on Black&White Photographic Print  
Size: 19.5" X 23.5"

Fig2. Oil on Black & White Photographic Print (Adapted from Masuma Halai painting)

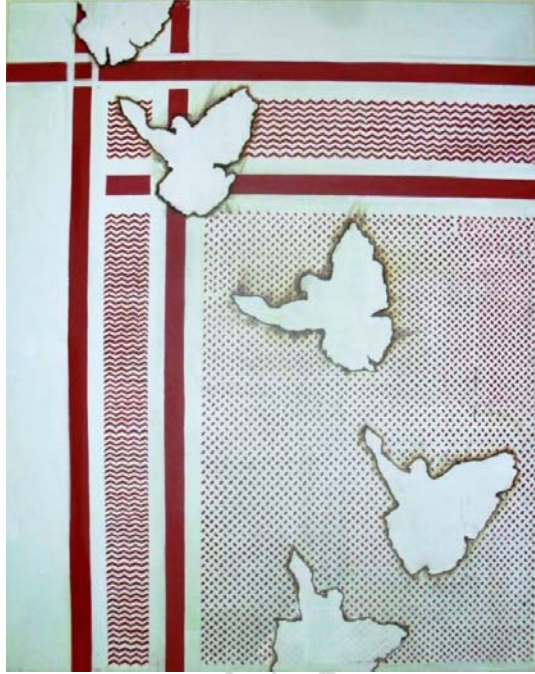


Fig.3. Acrylic on canvas with the size of 4' x 5'



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

### 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 *Shemagh* is the symbol of Power

In many Muslim countries, especially Arabs, a scarf called *Shemagh* or sometimes Keffiyeh is worn to demonstrate the ICH. In Pakistan, the *Shemagh* is called *Saafa*, which is worn by every respectful of a leader of the tribe or by the army. The Soldiers of the army used this *Saafa* for the protection from the Sun as well as prayer. In (Fig. 5), a display of a pathetic scene is painted. Almost heartbreaking for the army boots are much bigger than the little feet that have slid inside them. Notably, the child is also standing on a scarf. There is a symbolical depiction, a child is wearing army boots, and hanging his face down to look at them. In the future child, he will join the army, an establishment force which is the most powerful element in Pakistan's society and politics. The headscarf *Shemagh* used in paintings to represent the norms and traditions of Muslim identity which is appreciated when a soldier wore it and used it during prayer time. This is the depiction of the cultural harmony is religious, which is also the vital part of the ICH.

#### 3.2 *Shemagh* is the representation of Aesthetics

One of the easiest ways to transform negative energy into positive energy is by using color. In (Fig. 6) with the size of 3' x 4' which is based on a belief that everything in this world resonates with either a positive or negative energy; I have used positive objects such as red flowers, and blend in the environment in a positive way, 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. Oil and acrylics on canvas painted *Shemagh* in white and red color, white color is the symbol of peace and red color denotes the stirring of hearts and some emotions.

#### 3.3 *Shemagh* is the symbol of Islamic Norms

In this painting, I used the headscarf *Shemagh* as a base for painting and submerge it into the pasted one. In (Fig. 7), the *Shemagh* is formulated to depict the Islamic norms. Usually, after saying prayers, the *Shemagh* is kept on the sacred place, or sometimes, rosary or beads are also laid down on it. This also shows the state of the values and 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 [9].

### **3.4 *Shemagh* is the sign of Peace**

Through the depiction of the dove on *Shemagh*, which is mostly painted in white color, symbolizes the peace and harmony. But if we peep into past, the dove was also depiction dated back to 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C, where dove was a prominent bird, denoting the goddess of love and war [10]. Except for Islam, other religions also have linked to the depiction of the dove in different paintings and statutes. In Christianity, the Old Testament Book of Genesis gives the record of 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 [11] too.

### **3.5 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 rest of the Muslim countries too. From royal to soldier and from soldier to a laborer, it has been common in use. In Palestine, Yasser Arafat (a leader) was famous for the extensive use of *Shemagh* or *Keffiyeh* and after him; other common people continued this tradition which has become the ICH 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, showing sacredness and grandeur 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 [12].

### **3.6 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. But most prominently and evidently, wearing of *Shemagh* is considered as the symbol of Manliness because many of the army 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 civilians' protections from their enemies, so that; they have been noted as bold and powerful and given the titles of tigers or lions. 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 [13].

### **3.7 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. In China, the popularity of the *Shemagh* is another example which has been noted in the 2000s, depicting the popularity and production of it.

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Fig .5. Painted *Shemagh* displaying army boots worn by a child ( Adapted from Imran Quraishi Painting)

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Fig. 6. Painted *Shemagh* displaying flowers (3' x 4')

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Fig. 7. Painted *Shemagh* displaying Islamic State of Values (3' x 4')

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#### 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* is one of them. This tradition has been highlighted with some focused examples. And these examples cover almost every part of the Muslim Societies. Basically, *Shemagh* is the scarf which is worn by Gulf Muslims and some other countries of the world, but in deep meanings, it indicates the cultural social set up of the Muslim societies. Having various aspects of religion and Culture, it promotes the identity and gratitude of the Muslim world and the ICH. The knowledge about *Shemagh* through painting is innovative idea through which the characteristics of ICH emphasized. Consequently, the role and importance of the *Shemagh* painting with different tools or aspects like the oil painting, oil painting canvas, and acrylic on canvas, supported the message and importance of the *Shemagh* in the Muslim world.

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