

## THEME OF VEIL IN THE WORKS OF ARAB WOMEN WRITERS: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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**Abstract:** Since the realization of Western education, culture and technology accounted for the European strength in the Western world, it led to the modernizing reforms among the women of the Arab World. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the colonization by the British and the French, the Arab World was under the realm of Western ideas. Women's education became a corner stone in making Arab women stand up for their equal rights and status in the society. By the late nineteenth century women launched journals and articles advocating new women's role. The debates on women's issues, which started in Egypt and spread all across the Arab countries where voices of modern Arab Feminism began to grow. Women started participating in arts, poetry, press and most importantly in the National Liberation Movement. The proliferation of women's discourses were maintained by a large number of books and magazines. They wrote on issues of education, work, suffrage, gender equality etc... This paper will study the use of theme of veil in the works of Arab women writers. The literary history of the Arab has always been a moving force in the emancipation of women in this region. This paper will argue on the literary themes of Arab women writers as being the guiding light for women empowerment, justice, freedom and national struggle. Activist and writers like Nawal Al Sadaawi and Assia Djébar put enormous efforts in creating a paradigm for women development through their literary theme of veil and religion.

**Introduction:** The craft of writing by Arab women embarked at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Lebanon and Egypt became bastions of women's journalism, women writers from the Levant or the Arab Eastern world began to grow and rapidly spread all across the Arab lands. The style, quality and modes of expression of the Arab women displayed an increasing professionalism in capturing and portraying social realities of greater complexity.

The noteworthy fact on the writings of Arab women is their reflection of the socio-political beliefs of their societies. Whether they are religious, western worldviews or social ills, the writings often come with a narrative of some kind of problem or diseases of the Modern Age. Writers like Therese Awwad and Fadwa Touqan, reflect in their writings the themes of loneliness and freedom.

The period of consequent growth of Arab literature was the post-colonial era, in which women amplified their voices and sketch their issues in their writings. The concept of veil was not new to the Arab world but it was popularized even more by the newly enlightened women of the post-colonial era. The theme of religion and women status has always been the topic on the tables of oriental as well as western scholars who took keen interest in the lives of women of the Arab world. After the Arab renaissance the Arab scholars changed their lenses to view a broader picture of Feminist literature arising out in the Arab world. The western scholars had an assumption of the Arab women of being suppressed and victimized in their native societies and at the same time religious scholars of the Arab world used the name of religion to put asunder the Arab women out of the main stream literary, political, economic and social arenas.

The concept of veil emerged time and again as an issue of religious traditions as well as a symbol of feminine social identity. I will try to explore the theme of veil in works of contemporary Arab women writers who have very well used the term to demonstrate veil as a subject of religious symbolism and as a social whim. I have chosen the theme of veil in the works of Assia Djébar's *A Sister to Scheherazade* and Moroccan thinker Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*.

**Theme of Veil in the work of Assia Djébar's novel**

***A Sister to Scheherazade:*** Assia Djébar's novel *A Sister to Scheherazade* brings to light the complexities of the veil and veiling inside Algerian culture through the development of characters whose connections to the veil move and change as the story advances. By highlighting the Algerian women's encounters with veiling, *A Sister to Scheherazade* draws in with prevailing discourses that demark the veil either as 'a device of oppression or as a cultural symbol'. Djébar's text addresses Algerian women's diverse relations with veiling and uncovers that veiling is an activity as well as a procedure. Through a problematization of distinctive colonialist and nationalist discourses, Djébar challenges the development of the veil as a marker of Algerian women's oppression inside colonialist discourses and as an image of Arab women's coexistence with *dar al Islam* inside nationalist discourses. In both interpretations (i.e., colonialist and nationalist), the demonstration of veiling and the veil itself go to the cutting edge while women's encounters with the veil blur into a noiseless foundation. As such, women's subjective connections to veiling vanish inside the hegemonic discourses encompassing the veil. *A Sister to*

Scheherazade neutralizes the erasure of women's lived-encounters of veiling through her improvement and investigation of individual characters with different connections to the veil.

Through her characters' varying connections to veiling, she shows the shakiness of the paired development of the veil as either 'oppressive or emblematic'. Djebbar reinterprets the way toward veiling through her characters' choices to either veil or unveil themselves over the span of the novel. During the process of disassembling the 'oppressive or emblematic' twofold representations of veiling made by colonialist and nationalist individually, Djebbar adds to option understandings of the veil that join women's subjective associations with veiling. As it were, it mediates in the portrayals of the veil as a hyper-noticeable image that supersedes the subjectivity of its wearers. By reformulating the veil in such a way that it highlights women's lived-encounters of veiling, Djebbar undermines the onerous or-meaningful paired surrounding veiling while at the same time moving attention far from the material veil and toward the specific women who wear it. In this manner, she closer views the routes in which singular Algerians shape their relationship to the veil along with the courses in which women's encounters of veiling modify as their subjectivities experience change. *A Sister to Scheherazade* challenges the development of Algerian women's bodies as symbols of social imagery by reinvigorating such bodies as destinations of subjectivity and agency. Through the portrayal of her characters' connections to the veil and their elucidations of veiling, Djebbar entangles hegemonic thoughts encompassing the veil by presenting pressures concerning the variety of implications the veil can have for various Algerian women, or for one woman over the span of her life. In *A Sister to Scheherazade*, Djebbar joins the tale of Hajila (a traditional Algerian woman) with the account of Isma (a non-traditional woman) as a method for foregrounding the changed and subjective encounters that go with women's choices as they identify with veiling.

In *A Sister to Scheherazade*, Djebbar exhibits the courses in which decisions influence consciousness; she bring to light how the characters' reconfigurations of how they identify with the veil result in sudden changes of their exemplified subjectivities. In addition, through their capacity to shape perception and consciousness, the shifts that happen as for the protagonists' epitomized subjectivities prompt to the advancement of characters who are outfitted with new proficiencies concerning the role(s) of the veil and the procedure of (un)veiling.

In addition, *A Sister to Scheherazade* confuses more extensive discussion on the socio-political

ramifications of (un)veiling by demonstrating diverse ways in which the veil can be appropriated as a tool of empowerment. The account of *A Sister to Scheherazade* challenges the conventional understanding of Algerian women's bodies and decisions in relationship to (un)veiling as images of socio-political qualities; Djebbar proffers storylines that present to Algerian women's subjectivities and embodiment to the fore and that, in this manner, perceive their agential possibilities. With the characters of Isma and Hajila, Djebbar exhibits the way(s) in which Algerian women can make a case for their epitomized organization through moving their subjective connections to the veil far from assimilation and toward cognizance of oppression. All through *A Sister to Scheherazade*, Djebbar shows how changes in Algerian women's communications with and assignments of the veil empower them to wear the material veil without being enslaved by the way toward veiling. In addition, changes that happen inside women's subjectivities add to the previous knowledge on Algerian women, their socio-political subject-positions, and empowerment.

**Theme of religion in Fatima Mernissi's Autobiography:** *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of A Harem Girlhood*

Mernissi composed many books in which she demystifies subjects like collection of mistresses, cloak, and women's status in Islam. Despite the fact that in her work Mernissi claims that Islam should not be compared to democracy because it is a modern political concept while Islam is a medieval religion, she is still considered the one who gives Islam its liberal meaning.

To show such colonization's impact she gave the case in her '*Dreams of Trespass*' of a Moroccan patriot who builds up the National school that shows young girls as "a defense reaction to Western attacks on Islam as a backward religion". Western women regards Islam as a monologic thought and this is the thing that transnational women's hypothesis contends against, when it states that women in the third world and Arab are ought to be examined inside their religion and as indicated by their own particular experience and translation and not as observed or deciphered by the Western women's activist who depict them as casualties of their religion. Western women consider Islamic thought as a one solitary unit that deals with all Muslims including women. Western women's writers trust that Islam has just a single translation which permits the control of Muslim women and regard them as casualties and frail. Mernissi as an Arab Muslim feminist resembles other third world women's writer and someone who is resolved to affect the social and prudent changes in her social orders, however she trusts the most ideal approach to accomplish these progressions is through

establishing laws that guarantee women's educational rights, women's equal access to economical and social privileges. McGarvey presumes that the test confronts Islamic feminist is not to proof whether Islam is compatible with democracy or not but rather how Islam can empower and include women to part of the political life in the new Islamic.

The examination of Islam similarity with democracy and the need of empowering Muslim women by their consideration in the political procedure in their Islamic States were by all account not the only subjects that Mernissi takes concerning Islam as a religion. Besides, she has her own interpretation for Islam as a religion in its two primary components Qur'an and Hadith\*. This elucidation by-pass an unmistakable argument and that is women's oppression did not emerge from the Qur'an or Mohammad but rather from the Hadith reports of Mohammad's words, deeds, and guidelines that were accumulated by his clerics. She rather fights that a considerable lot of those preachers were misanthropic. This affirmation by Mernissi is so genuine thus huge in light of the fact that it addresses things that Muslims have doubtlessly like when she states that Hadith may have been changed or even changed upon her clerics' own interpretation. Muslim trust that both Qur'an and Hadith are the soul of Islam and these were to be ensured. Mernissi herself will be assaulted to interpret Qur'an and Hadith in a way that fills her need which is emancipating Muslim women.

Understanding Islam in its two components Qur'an and Hadith by Mernissi herself and by other Muslim women is clear in her 'Dreams of Trespass'. In her understanding of religion she meets Transnational feminist subject that encouraged Western women's activist to read Arab women and other third world women through their unique circumstance and claim interpretation of their religious, social, prudent, and historical context. Deciphering her religion and perusing what other men and women of her society translate Islam is a principle theory in her autobiography 'Dreams of Trespass'. In one of her notes in her life account Mernissi recognizes Qur'an as she comprehends it and the Islamic laws in most Arab Muslim nations battling that women's rights are terminates in most Arab Muslim nations today "as a form of Western aggression against Muslim values". In a considerable lot of Mernissi's composition, , veil

is portrayed as a symbol of women's oppression.s In any case, not at all like Leila Ahmed another Arab Islamic women's activist who trusts that veiling of Mohammad's spouses is a sensible coherence to the male mastery framework that rose in Arabia before Islam and proceeds later, Mernissi battles that Mohammad is a model of uniformity and equity whose practices and lessons change ladies from being mistreated before Islam to take an interest in wars, pick up goods, enter the mosque, and have their own particular words in marriage and separation.

Connecting disclosing to advance and improvement is supported by her verifiable case in *Dreams of Trespass* when she displayed the Moroccan King Mohammad V in 1943 presented his own little girl Princess Aisha revealed before the country to convey a discourse. Shama's perusing of the shroud constitutes a keen sign that veiling is a hindrance in ladies' expectation to be dynamic, have their flexibility in development, and in trespassing the wildernesses of the collection of mistresses when she expresses that the haik, the customary long dress that ladies wore out in the open, went with the head covering or the cloak " was probably designed to make a woman's trip through the streets so tortuous that she would quickly tire from the effort, rush back home, and never dream of going out again ".

Then again, in *Dreams of Trespass* the shroud is connected to the occupation and is considered in many places in Mernissi's personal history as a class issue. She avows that after the freedom of Morocco in 1956 her mom took part in a walk that was sorted out by the patriots' spouses and that she returned from the walk revealed to proceed with her existence without it and accomplish what she coveted all her life . In any case, Mernissi asserts that even after independence old women and young or newly migrant peasants kept wearing the veil.

**Conclusion:** This interpretation and comprehension of the thought behind the cover in Islam discredits the Western women's activists' presumptions which infer that Arab Muslim women are just receptionists of men's elucidation of Qur'an and Hadith. By perusing their own particular religion, Arab Muslim women delineate that they ought to be found in their own particular focal points and not be depicted by Western women's activists as being misled and cover is constrained upon them by Islamic law and men Islamists' elucidation of both Qur'an and Hadith.

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