

## *Love in a Headscarf: A Feminist Reading*

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### **Abstract**

As an iconic and suggestive woman writer in terms of informing readers about issues in women's studies and gender ideology, Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's work *Love in a Headscarf* has been analyzed and approached through multiple theories. Janmohamed (1974) dreams to change the world by raising voice against the existing injustice, discrimination and convention of the society which try to marginalize women as subaltern, suppress and control individual's identity in a boundary. This paper is a humble attempt to explore the elements of feminism and seeks to study the work *Love in a Headscarf* as a text of feminist writing. The novel *Love in a Headscarf* breaks the glass barrier of rigid social rule that render women as subordinate to men and breaks the boundaries that confined and threatened women's very existence.

**Key words:** *Love in a Headscarf*, women, subaltern, feminism, feminist writing.

### **Introduction**

Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, a British writer, born on 13 April 1974, is of East-African and South-Asian origin. She is an established commentator on Muslim social and religious trend, particularly around young Muslims and Muslim Women, writes for *BBC*, *ITV*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The National*, *The Muslim News*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* etc. Her blog, Spirit21, has won several awards, including the Brass Crescent Award for Best Blog. Janmohamed is serving Ogilvy Islamic Marketing, the world's largest advertising and branding agency as the Vice President. She was named one of the world's 500 most influential Muslim, and specifically one of the UK's 100 most powerful Muslim women. The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising named her as one of the 'Future Female Leaders of British Advertising.' Janmohamed's journey began with her debut novel *Love in a Headscarf*, turned out in 2009, depicts the genuine essence of traditionalist society. *Love in a Headscarf* (2009), was only the start and Janmohamed never thought back; she continued searching out the genuine picture of society with different works. Her book *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World* (2016), explores a faithful identity in a modern era and how this is defining a global cohort of young Muslims who are having a worldwide impact on society, economics, culture, and consumerism. Janmohamed's debut children's book, *The Extraordinary Life of Serena Williams* (2020), tells the story of an incredible tennis champion who battled many

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things, from life-threatening illness and sports injuries, to sexism and racism in the tennis world.

### **1.1 Background of the Study :**

In a writing career which began in 2009, British writer, Shelina has published three books, which are aimed at young people, Muslim women's and children. Her first novel *Love in a Headscarf* (2009), which is at the center of this paper, is an account of the author's search for "the one" (a righteous husband) through highly structured and family and community -oriented means. She also dwells a great deal on how her faith shaped her search for a partner, alongside more general discussion about Islam and being Muslim in the West. However this paper argues how Janmohamed breaks the glass barrier of traditional society that renders women subordinate to men and denies to carry out the stereotypical legacy that confines women within the four walls of kitchen. She also challenges the narrative around her about falling in love, getting married and living happily ever after. This paper also sheds light why Janmohamed chooses the route of Islam over her culture and argues why she sticks to the path of Islam. She is an epitome, who denies to go with the flow rather breaks the boundaries that confined and threatened her existence in order to bring about a change. Asking for a room of her own in a traditional patriarchal society is something challenging, but the writer takes her decision to be an Integrated ready to face the oppressive society around her. Like Albert Einstein Said, " The woman who follows the crowd will usually go on further than the crowd. The woman who walks alone is likely to find herself in place no one has ever been before."

### **1.2 Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology of narrative analysis and content analysis are used in this research. Here narrative analysis combines how the author interprets her everyday lived experience which is mainly linked with the primary source, the book itself. In content analysis, secondary sources like journals, articles, book reviews, Wikipedia have been used.

### **1.3 Research Questions :**

Hence, this study addressed the following research questions:

- i.** How did the author challenge the narrative around her about finding the one, falling in love, getting married and living happily ever after?
- ii.** Why the author takes the route of Islam to find a righteous husband?
- iii.** How the author manages to raise her voice against the oddities and stereotypical mindset of people and makes her voice heard?

- iv. What initiatives did the author take to challenge her traditional culture?
- v. How do culture and Islam respectively deal with racism?
- vi. How does Islamophobia affect Janmohamed's life?

The study answers the questions by examining different incidents and situations from the selected text.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study:**

- i. To analyze the women questions.
- ii. To analyze Janmohamed's struggle to her prince charming
- iii. To analyze Boxom Aunties rules, mothers-in-law's checklists for marriage.
- iv. To analyze the effects of Islamophobia in women's life.
- v. To analyze the difference between culture and Islam regarding women questions.

#### **1.5 Significance of the study:**

The finding of this study will redound to the benefit of literary field considering that feminism plays an important role in today's literature. This paper explores the feminist strain of the novel, *Love in a Headscarf*, which can be proven as helpful to other researchers. This study explores how women especially the Muslim women are being suppressed and oppressed in the name of religion, which in reality is driven by culture and power in order to subjugate women. The readers will be informed how the author disagrees on the stereotypical mindset which treat women as ignorant one and subaltern, and becomes the voice of those subaltern. The ground of her counter arguments against the traditional society gains a powerful backup when she lets Islam to speak on her behalf.

Nowadays feminism is being more westernized, although living in a Western country rather being a wholly Westernized feminist, the author upholds the idea of Islam regarding feminism to solve her both public and private life's problems and obstacles. The finding of this study would be beneficial for the Muslim, non-Muslims, Western, and non-Western people.

Muslims use Islam as a tool to subjugate women in all spheres of life. This paper argues how Islam has give women an extraordinary spiritual status. It further sheds light how traditional Muslims fabricate Islam for their own interest but Islam is completely different from how they misrepresent it.

Finding of this study would clear the confusions of the Non-Muslims who without knowing Islam's teaching often jump to the conclusion that Muslim women are ignorant, oppressed, and living in the dark age.

In the western country migrated Muslims especially the Muslim women sometimes treats as "outsiders" and "others" because they have already badged as "terrorists" and Muslim women's hijab is the visual representations of terrorism. This paper argues how some people are using the name of Islam to conduct their heinous act, whereas Islam stands for peace and harmony.

Non-western women who are still torn between their traditional culture would get inspired by the finding of this study, would learn for what is socially accepted one should not surely neglect what is morally correct.

*Love in a Headscarf* has gone through under some researchers theories but this paper shows how Janmohamed explores her feminist view with Islam, a new dimension that would stand as an unique version among all the previously done work.

## **Literature Review**

Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's bestselling book, *Love in a Headscarf*, an Islam-oriented non-fiction, had undergone certain researches. Some of them are abridged here.

One of the researchers, MD. Mahmudul Hasan (2015), in his article "Seeking Freedom in the " Third Space" of Diaspora :Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* and Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf* " sheds light on how Muslim women often received fetishized attention in (neo-) Orientalist literature. He also focused how Janmohamed writes back to multiple discourses that project Islam and Muslim women in a narrow and essentialist way. Janmohamed finds enough room in Islam to reconcile her Muslimness with Western national identities.

In an another article, " Oppression Versus Liberation : Representation of Hijab in Two Post-9/11 British Literary Texts" Md Mahmudul Hasan (2016), shows how Shelina decided to wear hijab reflectively after long contemplation and much soul searching. He further takes notice on the stereotypical mindset that says hijab is imposed on Muslim women by patriarchal society and dispel the most widespread stereotype that it is synonymous with female oppression.

"She Writes in Many-Coloured Headscarves! A Conversation with Shelina Zahra Janmohamed " by Divya Girishkumar (2016) deals with the impatient feelings of the author of the book *Love in A Headscarf*, because of the stereotypical labels attributed by the West to Asian Muslim women.

Halimah Mohammad Ali (2017), in her article, " *Love in a Headscarf* : A Muslim Woman's Journey of Finding the Self " combines Janmohamed's journey of looking for a suitable marriage partner with the journey of finding the self. She also investigated the book with the Islamic marriage framework in mind. She tries to crack how a Muslim woman finds love, without sacrificing her religious belief and practice.

Tasnima Yasmin (2019), in her article, " Characteristics of a Memoir: A Reading of *Love in a Headscarf* by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed " analyses the characteristics of a memoir that are present in the book.

However, this paper explores the feminist strain and perception of Islam about feminism in the novel, *Love in a Headscarf*.

### **Analysis**

"When Love picked up the pen to sketch out our futures, its gentle stroke painted in firm ink a partner, companion, and Lover who would complete me and whom I would complete in return. And then it painted in that final drop to remind me that we are interlinked. Whenever I would turn, there he would be: romantic, divine, exquisite Love" (Janmohamed 261).

*Love in a Headscarf* is a memoir that deals with the detailed and generous personal account of the author's search for ' Mr. Right ' or ' garments for each other ' as the Quran describes a married couple, through "the tried and tasted traditional methods" (69). Janmohamed finds her fantasy of marrying John Travolta( Only if he converts to Islam) and finding Prince Charming as bubble which shortly after burst, reality is more challenging than she ever expected to be. Though the novel is undeniably about Janmohamed's voyage of finding a righteous husband, intrinsically this novel is an argument for and against the good and evil in society with special reference to women. As Divya Girishkumar puts it, "Through her memoir, *Love in a Headscarf*, she breaks out all the miserable images of what it is to be a British Asian Muslim, addressing issues that range from Asian marriages to Islamic terrorism and the question of the veil" ( Girishkumar, 366).

The text sheds light on the western narrative about finding the one, falling in love, getting married, and living happily ever after which is associated with fantasies and fiction. But Janmohamed finds the process of love and being loved as universal, "only when you wake up in the morning and you smell his breath and you see her with her hair standing on end like a Jinn, only then can you know what love is" ((61), an active process related to reason and practicality. At the very beginning of the book she puts forth a definition of Love:

Love, Amour, ishq, hub, amor, pyar. All these are words in my lexicon.. Love inspires great actions, absurd choices and inexplicable consequences. It directs lives and it makes or breaks heart. It can arbitrate between life and death, and it can connect the body to soul and join them with lightning. It is essence of the human condition (7).

Janmohamed grows up seeing Western "rom-com" like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Chinderalla* and somewhere expecting for something filmy to happen in her life. But at a certain point, she figures out how "rom-com" were fooling her by injecting the idea that life is a fairy tale, but it is not. Life has problems, ups and downs, failures but "rom-com" have no answer for these, completely cut off from reality. All the story ends abruptly on a happy note, when love and joy at its peak and hero gets his heroine. Film makers leave their characters to live happily ever after but what actually happens and what is the reality of that " after" always remain unspoken. As Janmohamed asks, "Was it endless summer breezes, and dreamy flushed gazes? Or was it a negotiation around dirty dishes, unfinished DIY projects, and unpaid bills?" (Janmohamed 61) Western movies depict love and marriage as fantasy and fantasy has nothing to deal with realities, whereas " marriage and love are not grand abstract emotions that exist outside of the realities of life. They come shackled to the drudgery of daily routine.. " (62) She is not actually "anti-romance" but surely "anti-blind-romance." Janmohamed suggests, " Marriage was an act of worship and love was the gift given in return" (62). By going against the prevailing narrative around her, fueled by Western world, she determines to find someone as her Counterpart with whom she would go on a spiritual journey and he would also be able to take care of her "materially " and " spiritually ".

The first chapter of the book *Good Head Scarf Day*, opens with a description where Shelina is going to meet her first suitor. She always aware with the fact that her marriage would be arranged, that suggests her firm believe in the marriage institution. She states, "Finding that special someone is so critical to the fabric of muslim existence, that almost everyone is involved -parents, siblings ,aunts ,uncles, imams, even neighbors" (8). Shelina knows how people mix up the idea of arranged marriage and forced marriage though there in a thin line between being forced for marriage and willingly allowing family in to find a perfect match. Parents are more experienced and always expected to come up with the best suggestion for their daughter. As Al-Suhali puts it, " Parents are guardians to their daughter, not their master." Choosing a life partner should be " everyone's businesses because they affected everyone." (37) According to Janmohamed, along with her family she is doing a "team work" to find her love of live, every attempts of her parents is just for her happiness. She suggests , "My family took their Islamic responsibilities very seriously. I had to agree to my future partner willingly and happily. What they were offering was an arranged marriage -Something very different from a forced marriage (35).

Janmohamed's consent was the determining factor. When she rejects her first suitor, Ali, her family allows her that freedom of saying 'NO'. She States, " so my mum fell back on a thoroughly modern phrase: 'she says that she just didn't feel that Click'" (36).

Through Shelina's journey to find 'the one' she encounters with oddities and stereotypical mindset of people -how they define marriage and women. She finds Boxom Aunties, mother-in-laws, and committee of matchmakers as the gatekeepers of marriage system. Mother-in-laws have some check-lists in their mind, selection criteria that's going to seal many girl's fate. They are in search for girls who can cook, look after the house, " moldable" so she can easily "adopt " the way of doing things just like her in-laws. There are some female relatives too, who come to select the bride-to-be but they actually grill the "poor young woman" and then pass their verdict to the boy whether the girl is worthy enough for marriage or not. If the female relatives and mother find a girl less worthy then there is a little option open for the boy to find that girl worthy and attractive. Usually they jump to the conclusion that " Mother knows Best." Janmohamed has torn between traditional boundaries and standstill stereotypical mindset of people that aimed to marginalized women into domestic roles. In traditional society being a "flexible" housewife, giving birth of children, raising them up are the criteria to judge a woman and her worthiness but Janmohamed shows how a woman's life is like a "fig-tree" with a lot of chances and possibilities in its every branch. She suggests women to shackle the chain of suppression coming from powerful patriarchal society and to "enter the workplace, and establish equality" (Janmohamed 176).

In the opening chapter, Shelina's mother was frying samosa," teetering between perfect bronze and cinder black" (11) to cast groom-to-be and his entourage's eyes over Janmohamed's potentiality as a wife. Because in Asian culture they consider "Cooking " and "hostessing skill" as a sign of "real women" ( domestic godedess). It was like " The serving of the samosas was able to change futures,destinies, and families " (19). Janmohamed was an oxford graduate, but more than her personality it was samosas that snatched all the spot lights. Nothing could be more hilarious than this. The whole process of marriage is like a trial where women have no role to play. They only supposed to be "modest" and "demure". Women simply wait for the verdict whether they passed the trial or not. Man portrays the role of a "Hunter" and women simply "Hunted." Janmohamed questions the traditional and patriarchal norms that render woman subordinate to her male counterpart. She placed women at the forefront where they play major roles to improve their status and society as a whole. At the same time, she emphasizes that, in such an unchanging society, women can still struggle, resist and overcome the obstacles of male dominated society in order to find her identify.

Janmohamed was at her 'time to get married' phase of life and her culture suggests her to pursue marriage at any cost and if needed to subsume her mind, because," the good boys get snapped up very quickly these days" (31). But she was not ready to be

"hunted" in the name of marriage, she listened to her instinct whenever she didn't feel that "click" towards any suitor and took the privileged to say no. Ahmed, one of the suitors that Janmohamed had come across, didn't have any social grace and ability to have a conversation. In their first meeting, she tried her best to make the conversation as pleasant as possible but Ahmed showed a little interest and responded less. Later on, Janmohamed was informed by the matchmaker that whatever Ahmed did in that meeting, he did it purposely, "he says, it was a test." (Janmohamed 92) She gets annoyed when the matchmaker finds Ahmed's unsocial behavior as normal and stands by his side. Agents of the patriarchal society's flaw should be overlooked as they are " bunch of strange thing", they should be loved and accepted the way they are, a double standard of morality practiced by the traditional society. But Janmohamed is well-educated, working in a marketing sector and boldly remarks, " I did not have time to frillen away on a man who wanted to test me before he even knew me" (92). She further encounters with another suitor, Sayed, who left Janmohamed awaiting for two hours for him at a coffee shop, while he himself was enjoying a cricket match at home. He was not even apologetic for being late as if he has all the right to keep a women waiting because he is a men. People like Syed "character has the most fundamental flaw: disrespecting and devaluing of another person " ( 105). But traditional culture often overlook these audacities and suggests to pursue marriage at all cost. But Janmohamed protests this idea by saying, "My right was to be treated with courtesy .My culture had belittled the respect I should have had for myself. On the other hand I saw that my religion offered respect to me...at that moment, I took it out of the books and applied it to my life: I was a human being and I deserved to be treated with respect" (106).

The concept of women's submission to patriarchal traditions and values is portrayed by some female characters, the author named them as "Boxom Aunties", who do not believe in the rights of women .While meeting the suitors, in Janmohamed's unconscious mind she hears the voice of Boxom Aunties and their lectures . She was informed by the Aunties not to be over confident in front of a suitor because boys never want a confident girl as their wives. One of her friends Sara got a visitor, Javed, who rejects her by saying, " You're too clever. That's not for me" (90). Boys also have special kind of allergies with independent girls because they find them untrustworthy and in-confident for marriage.

With a defensive gesture towards rigid social rules, willingly ignorant women like Boxom Aunties cherish gender discrimination and restriction especially on women's participation in education and public life at the core of their heart. Girls education is always a debatable question to the Boxom Aunties. They wonder why a girl should get educated when she already knows her life in going to end up within the four walls of kitchen. To make roti, biryani and to handle the kitchen education is of no use. They guffawed, " What you need a master's for to clean the kitchen I don't know! " Janmohamed

belongs to a society where some women still believe that being housewife, raising children, confined within four walls of kitchen is their only sacred duty, most importantly woman can have her identity only by associating with man. Other fellow women are also expecting to carry forward that legacy. Education, freedom, equal rights these are nonsense. If women themselves are against the idea of breaking the glass barrier of patriarchal norms and appreciate the idea to be confined within four walls of kitchen then nothing can be more worst and horrible than this. Traditional culture, Boxom Aunties left no stone unturned to depict woman as subaltern, but Janmohamed tried to confront the existing social inequalities in order to bring about a change.

Boxom Aunties also have some arbitrary rule that are literally annoying. Janmohamed raises her voice against those 'so-called' rules and also provides number of examples how her faith( Islam) overrules these rules. According to the traditional rule, in the process of arranged marriage girl's party can't make the first move because this responsibility is up to the boy's party. She criticized this rule by giving a finest example of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) and Khadijah to support the argument that girl's party can make the first move too and there is nothing to be considered as "desperate" if they do so. According to Aunties, if a girl herself show any interest to get married, it is something shameful as she is not allowed to be interested in worldly matters such as men. Khadijah, was known as the queen of the Arab both for her business and beauty and Muhammad was working for her. She found Muhammad as an honest man and believed that he would prove as her ideal partner too. Instead of waiting for Muhammad to propose, she took the first initiative to approach him first for marriage.

Matchmakers are very conscious about the age of girls. A rigid social rule that says women have to be younger than men in the process of marriage. Here, author questions this system by saying, " I found myself wondering why, if the relationship at the very heart of the birth of Islam had a woman who was older than Muhammad, was there an unspoken yet rigid rule that the girl should be younger than the boy?" (Janmohamed 139)

Asians are very much color-conscious and "dark" skin tone is a curse which is "worst than death." Janmohamed found herself " unappealing" and " unattractive " as she was criticised by Boxom Aunties as "Unattractive teenager " She states," to be fair is to be beautiful, to be dark is to be ugly" (Janmohamed 39). Mothers-in-law always prefer girl with fair skin tone as their would-be daughter-in-law because fair tone of skin stands for status. Moreover, boys also can't say no to a pretty girl (fair girl, of course) because they want to show off to people that he has got the most " luscious wife." But in this case Islam has something else to say. Janmohamed puts forth what Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said in this regard, " Do not look for wealth or beauty as these will last only a short time and then you will be left with nothing. Look for piety and faith and you will get everything, including beauty and wealth with it." Shelina understands how

people fabricate Islam for their own interest and to subjugate other, when Islam is completely different from what people says about Islam. She also finds her faith and culture as completely contradictory. She prefers her faith over culture.

Janmohamed has a plural cultural backgrounds. Her great grandparents had traveled from Gujrat in India to settle in East Africa in the late nineteenth century. They were dominated by the British Empire in India and in East Africa they also found themselves in minority situation. After her parents got married, they migrated to the UK but like their families in East Africa they also found them as minorities in the UK. Janmohamed's father was refused job because of his Asian origin. When her father wanted to buy his first house again because of his Asian origin the bank manager asked 50 percent deposit. Moreover, the neighbors also ran a campaign to stop them from buying it. Racial discrimination was at its peak. The author also experienced the "bubbling ethnic mix of North London" (Janmohamed 41). In her school days she found one question as most difficult and that was, "where do you come from?" This is a tricky question to hush up racism, but Janmohamed could sense their curiosity. They wanted to know something more - why she wears brightly colors? Why her food smells weird? Why she eats with her finger? and so on. Though they never asked these questions directly "tucked between lips and teeth" (42), otherwise they would badge as "racist" and this would be the 'hot- topic' to discuss on. But sometimes silence speaks louder than words. Author's plural cultural background puts her on that situation though it should not be the case. Author backlashes this system that marginalizes and subjugates human being in the name of race, ethnicity, and creed. She shows how Islam does not allow one person above another by virtue of race or ethnicity. Janmohamed suggests how prophet Muhammad (SAW) actively challenged and dismantled racism by saying, "All human beings, regardless of age,gender, creed, race or color,are totally equal." She further talks about two of Muhammad's closet friends, one was Bilal, a black African slave and another one was Salman, who originally from Persia. Both of them were taunted for their non-Arab origins, and "looked down upon." But Muhammad never supported that racism and actively challenged racism. He appointed Bilal as the "muezzin".( the one who announces to call to prayer) and further gave Salman the title of "pure one" because of his spiritual nature. Islam always cherishes anti-racism. Racism is actually a symptom and its root cause is nothing but arrogance in human hearts.

Md Mahmudul Hasan, suggests ," Migrant women already experience a double colonization as migrants and a female, but for Muslim Islamophobia is the third apparatus of discrimination and oppression" (Hasan 99). After the Twin Tower attack George W.Bush announced Al-Qaeda as the culprit. Some Muslim were doing such heinous act in the name of " Jihad", on the belief that they would become martyrs for their faith and then reach paradise. But jihad stands for " spiritual struggle " means to do one's best in order to live the highest moral and ethical life. But some criminal

minded people twisted the true meaning of jihad so that they can continue their wrong doing in the name of Islam. Islam stands for "peace" and does not allow to kill people in the name of faith. But for some criminal people, Muslim became the target as well cast as "murderous", "hateful", and "barbaric villains." Janmohamed states, "It was September 11 that marked the date of the very first time that I felt subhuman in Britain, and the first day that I felt scared to live in my own country" (Janmohamed 152). Muslim women were not at fault even though their headscarf became the target for both verbal and physical attack. She says: "My headscarf was suddenly a neon flashing light as I walked along the wide-eyed fearful streets. The horrific tragedy in New York and the thousand of innocent deaths were, it seemed my fault" (150).

After the twin tower attack, London bombing on 7 and 11 July; Muslim women's headscarf marked them out and they were badged as "terrorist." For Muslims it was impossible to conduct their "ordinary activities". Janmohamed suggests "If you were boarding an airplane, you would be subjected to extraordinary and unwanted checks if you had a Muslim name..." (154) Once she dressed herself up in a black coat with a matching black headscarf. But her colleague Emma whispered, "people might get the wrong impression... You might get hurt" (150). This remark made her worried as she observes how stereotypical mindset controls people's perspective even about a mere color. Centuries before mainstream society decided that pink stands for girly color but in a world of pink Janmohamed dared to choose "black", but people associated black with "evil". A mere black scarf could seal her luck as "terrorist", horrible! Though women were not involved in the terrorist attack but stories in newspaper "invariably carried pictures of Muslim women wearing headscarves or veils" (172). Women had to pay a lot! In these circumstances, some people were thinking to advise women to take off their headscarf for their own safety. But Shelina decided to stick to her faith. She says, "I refused to change the way I practiced my faith or to let fear stop me from carrying out what I believed in" (Janmohamed, 155). According to her, she has her own choice and she would exercise that choice to the fullest. She finds men as nobody to tell her how to dress? She broke all the boxes with one simple statement, "I am me" (157).

As MD Mahmudul Hasan puts it, "As Muslim women like Shelina are rebuffed by both traditional-bound and non-religious Muslims, they also face the growing Islamophobic hostility of host society" (Hasan, 99). Janmohamed shares an incident, during her tour in Jordan where she encounters with a French girl, Anna. Anna was wearing shorts and a low-cut vest whereas She (the author) and her friends were in long sleeved shirts and Scarves. Seeing them in Scarves Anna ends up by addressing them "backward" though the author and her friends were Oxford graduate. Anna assumes on her own that, "You Muslim women are oppressed, forced to cover up and not express yourselves. You have to stay at home and men run everything" (Janmohamed 197). She goes on, "You only think you are free but they are still

controlling you women. Stop kidding yourselves. Muslims are evil and Islam is religion of barbaric people" (197). Some people like Anne who still think that Muslim women are subjugated and independent on men and men have all the controlling power. They define Islam as evil one because it allows patriarchal society to oppress female, and it's male group is the privileged one and women are simply cross-bearer. But they are ignorant of the truth that women have a high spiritual status in Islam. Janmohamed gives reference of Prophet Muhammad( SAW),as he said, " Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mother." In the event of hajj,the pilgrims walk between Safa and Marwa to remember Hagar( Abraham's wife) but " there is no man included in this way in the rites of hajj" ( 249). These evidence are the answer to those non-Muslims who think women as oppressed and subjugated in Islam.

Apart from this the author encounters with some non--religious Muslim like Hasan who thinks,"girls who wear hijab are probably very religious and stay at home all day praying. They must be a bit dull..." ( 171). She was surprised how can a Muslim himself define his religion like this. If a girl chooses to wear hijab it doesn't mean she is highly religious and perfect in all the way. A girl who wears hijab is also a human being but people most likely treat them as something "strange thing" on earth.Hijab is part of her faith but it doesn't wholly define her who she is. Some of Janmohamed's friends also wanted to wear hijab but their families did not allow them because they " didn't want their daughters turning into 'fanatics'" (176). Matchmakers also brought a proposal from a man who " is becoming more and more interested in Islam and he says he would like to marry someone who is also religious" (179) but irony lies in the fact that " he doesn't want someone who wears hijab" (180) Hypocrite people! Obviously Shelina does not want to marry a person who would destroy her faith rather than complete it.

Janmohamed was fascinated by the struggles that European women had gone through because they were asking the same question exactly like today's new women, "Who are man to tell women how to dress? Why were women being deceived with ideas that they had already been given their due, when in fact they hadn't? Why did women not get their voices heard? "( Janmohamed 176) Once she was targeted by some non-Muslim colleagues for wearing hijab because Muslims are " violent -terrorists" and Muslims women's hijab is the visual representations of terrorism . But before could put forth her Counter arguments about non-Muslims misconceptions, some other men came forward in her defense without her permission. She got annoyed thinking that men always act like a powerful agency by speaking on behalf of women to remind women that they always need a patriarchal medium to speak. In spite of being able to take a stand for her own, women's voice remain unheard because men are self-declared agency to talk on behalf of "poor women ". As Janmohamed puts it, " How dare other people speak on my behalf? If i have been liberated by Islam to be fully human, with full rights, then I am liberated enough to speak for myself. If you think i am oppressed then stop oppressing

me further by telling me what to say and think" (143). But still traditional culture treats women as "subaltern" and when those subaltern start questioning the patriarchal norms then they hit a glass barrier and people started abusing them as "sell-out" and "Westernized feminist" Postmodernist and "so-called' Muslim defined feminism as a dirty word. Janmohamed got stucked between the Asian Muslim culture and traditional culture that interpreted Western feminism as misguided and misguidedly interpreted Islam in order to subjugate woman. She finds her culture and faith vice versa. If she would say anything against her culture, she knows the consequences. Knowing everything, she decides to stick to her faith because her faith allow her to remain who she is. Moreover, she was not ready to replace what is morally correct for what is socially acceptable. Janmohamed remembers what Gandi said, " I had to be the change that i wanted to create" (Janmohamed 141).

Janmohamed's first challenge to her culture was climbing a mountain, Kilimanjaro. Aunties again find that approach odd and says that "good girl" don't climb mountain. But she is bolder and snappier to choose to dissent and overlook the stereotypical thoughts. She justifies her decision to climb mountain through Islam. She explains Quran's first word is "Iqra" means "Read" and God encourages us to travel and to see His creation. She further gives a reference of Hazrat Muhammad and his meditation at the cave of Hira, she adds, "This cave of Hira is at the top of a very steep mountain which it is no easy task to climb. Khadijah would climb this mountain every day to visit the prophet... The wife of Prophet climbed a mountain. And I'm going to do the same" (143).

She then buys herself a car and then goes on a girl's trip respectively in Egypt and Jordan that according to culture not something "good girl" type of things. But Janmohamed thinks, " no matter what other people said, there was only one overarching principle : to thine own self be true." Hence, she breaks the boundaries that confined and threatened her existence and walks out of the unbearable circumstances. She, in fact, challenges and rebels against the power structure of the social order.

Along the way of finding her 'Mr.Right' and a righteous spouse, she discovers herself. She states, " finding the one was my mission, and in looking for love, I would find myself, my faith, and Divine Love along the way" ( 37). She breaks the rigid social rule that upholds women's dependence on, and subordinate to, man in all provinces of life. Finally, she finds her Prince Charming without sacrificing her ideology. She neither paid heed to Boxom Aunties lectures and rules nor she tried to make herself fit into mother-in-laws checklists. She faced obstacles in her way of challenging the prevailing stereotypes, rigid social rule, patriarchal norms but determined to do what is matter to her. By the end of the text, she both have love and faith with her. In the epilogue she says, " When we recognize Love with a heart that is courageous, open and honest, when

we invite Love into our lives without conditions, that is when the story truly begins " (262).

Janmohamed is now going to the mosque for her wedding ceremony. At the end, she finally makes mission impossible possible by having 'Mr.Right' in her life and along the way she finds her love for God. Eventually, she completes her religion by way of marriage. The book ends in a happy note, "I turned to close the door of the car. I look back at my home, and then forward to the road that lies ahead" (Janmohamed 263)

## **Conclusion**

In Janmohamed's teenage age, she romanticized Western ideas of marriage and love, fueled by Hollywood. But when she discovers her culture as contradict to her religion "in the cutthroat world of bagging a partner " (Janmohamed 68), she challenges the narratives around her about finding the one, falling in love, getting married, and living happily ever after. But picking up "Mr Right" was not a cinch rather it was more like a sticky wicket. Every new suitor comes up with a new story, filled with inquisitiveness, high-expectations, and unfortunately ended up with disappointment. Saying 'Yes' too early to any suitor makes one's desperate and saying 'No' means the girl is stubborn and stuck-up.

Janmohamed has torn between Boxom Aunties 'so-called ' rules, mothers-in-law's check-list, matchmakers lectures, patriarchal glass barrier, Islamophobia that ultimately subjugated women as subalterns. Islam ensures women's room of their own but traditional culture and some people fabricate Islam for their own personal agendas, Islam is completely different from how they say and how they preach. She breaks the boundaries that confined and threatened women's very existence, further tries to confront the existing social inequalities and rebels against the power structure of the social order in order to bring about a change. Janmohamed knows by being true to her religion, she is questioning traditional culture and social structure and she would be ended up being confined in a "ball-jar", cut off from the society, still had the mettle to stick to what is morally right because this is more important than social acceptance. She suggests, "if we can see discrepancies, then it is our duty as thinking human beings to challenge them" (139).

*Love in a Headscarf* is also a reply to those discourse that, "rendered the Muslim residents in the West as " exoticized others" and "outsiders" whose presence is said to constitute a threat to the Western way of life." (Hasan 95)

Every cloud has a silver lining, this became true in Janmohamed case. Fighting against all the ill-thinking, difficulties, and oddities she became more closer to her religion than ever before and along the way she discovered herself, too. She writes back to those stereotypical mindset that says only by being "more flexible ", "moldable", and "

adoptable " a girl can have a husband in her life. Without compromising with any oddities, she finally gets a righteous spouse in her life. The text ends on a happy note with Janmohamed both having prince charming and faith in her life. She has beautifully affirmed that a woman too, is a living entity not an appendage of man. She is an independent being, who is bestowed with capacity to tread her own path to salvation.

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