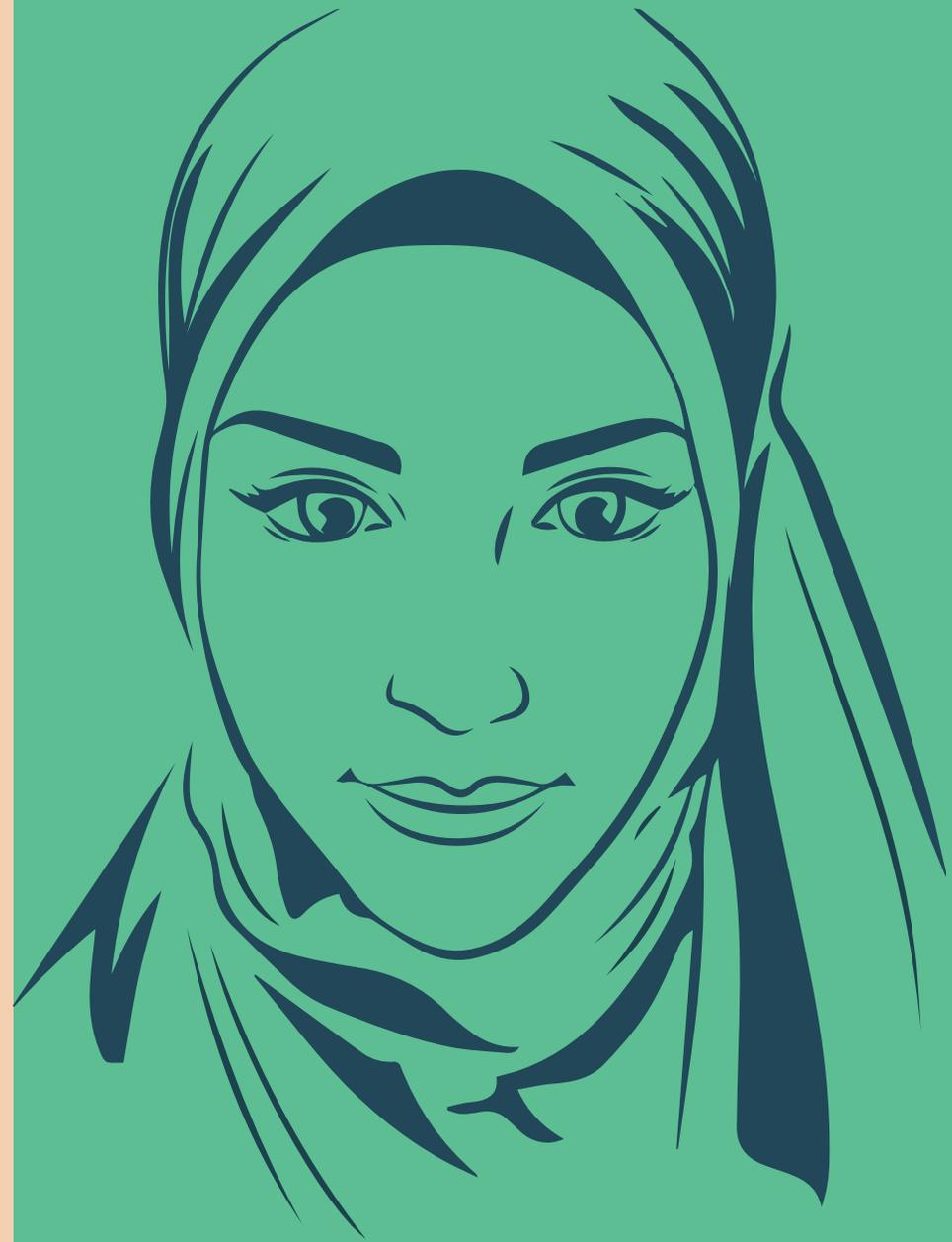


6 Facts about Hijab and Modesty in Islam



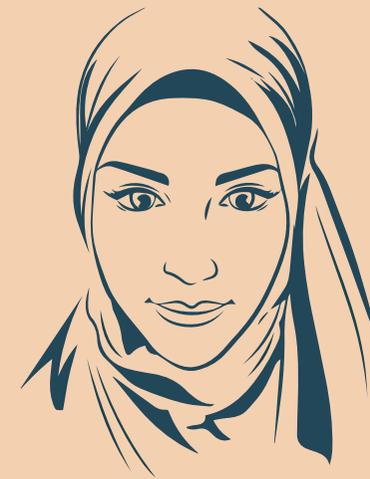
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Introduction



Hijab is a common term in Islam which represents a range of personal and social codes of behavior and addresses women specifically while requiring specific actions on the part of men as well. In what follows Hijab and modesty in Islam will be explained through seven facts which reveals different aspects and reasons regarding this concept.



1. Hijab Existed before Islam

● Hijab & Judaism:

● It seems that covering certain parts of the body and maintaining a modest demeanor for women in society was of much importance in Judaism. The manner of Shuaib [i]'s daughters toward Prophet Moses, explicitly mentioned in Holy *Quran*, Surah al-Qasas verses 23 to 25 can best illustrate the necessity of acting modestly in the society for women.

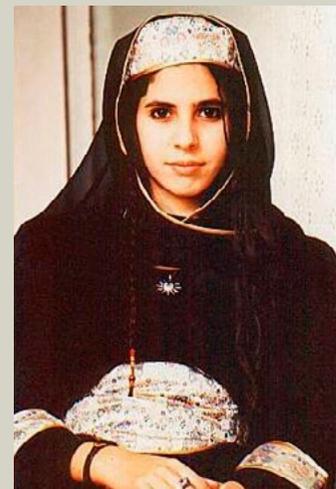
● Moreover, there are some verses in Torah that name different kinds of clothing -Burqa or a veil covering one's face- used by women as a kind of Hijab (e.g., in the book of Genesis [15-38:14])

● As Will Durant [ii] puts, a common tradition for women among Jewish tribes was to attend public places with head-covers. This practice had to be followed as a rule and transgression from it would bring some consequences including

divorcing the woman without paying her marriage portion [1].

● Appearing bare-headed and without any cover for women, in some societies -e.g., the Far East and Mesopotamia- was considered as the symbol of inferiority and the characteristics of lower social standings.

● Moreover, women regarded the act of uncovering their hair in front of public eyes as a huge humiliation, to the extent that this act was performed in punishing the women who were guilty of a crime. Also, according to some Rabbis, women's attendance without a kind of Hijab in the religious ceremonies and rituals was strictly forbidden [2].



●Hijab & Christianity:

●From the chosen and highly respected women named in Islam, the Holy Quran directly mentions Blessed Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of a chaste, modest, pure woman and a true believer in God. Her status is so high in Islam that one of the chapters of the Holy Quran has been given her name.



●In many of the Christian paintings and portraits, the figure of Virgin Mary has been depicted with complete head-cover as well as

a long loose dress. So, Christian women who follow their prophet's mother and the laws of Christianity, have attempted to observe modesty and chastity in their social interactions.

●There is some textual evidence in Bible which refers to this tradition and its necessity among Christian communities (e.g., In the Old Testament, the book of Genesis [24:65], and by Saint Paul in the New Testament [Corinthians 16-11:2])

●The special kind of dress worn by nuns in churches which covers most parts of their body shows the emphasis of Christianity on the necessity of appearing with appropriate and non-provocative clothing in the society.

●Considering the paintings that portray western aristocratic females, as well as the literature of pre-twentieth century, it can be realized that wearing a suitable and modest dress by women represented their higher social standing and evoked the respect of other members of

the society. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, wearing hats and using long and decent clothing was common for women.

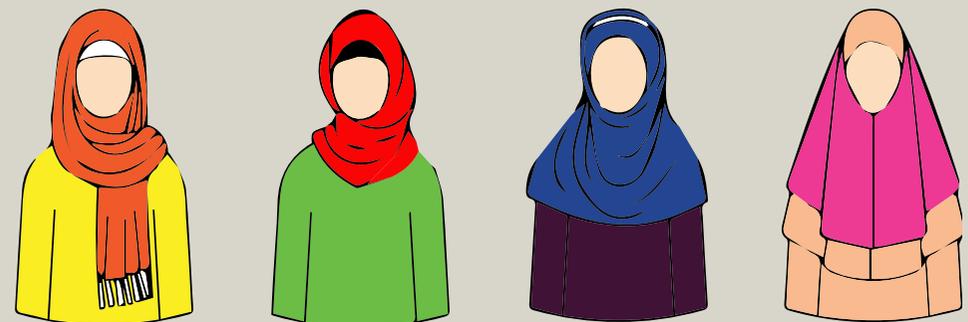
- In some eastern catholic and orthodox churches such as Russian Orthodox Church, women are required to wear a head-cover when entering the church for attending religious ceremonies[3].

- In Continental Europe and North America, most women of the Christian denominations including Anglican [4], Baptist [5], Methodist [6] and Roman Catholic [7] use a kind of head-cover when participating the religious rituals inside the church.



2.Hijab in Islam Defines a Certain Framework for Women's Dress code

- According to most of the Islamic jurists, Muslim women are required to wear the clothing that covers their hair and entire body except the face and the hands, from the wrist to the fingers, in the presence of *non-Mahrams* or small boys whose consciousness of sex has developed or the evidence of sexual urge is noticed on them [8]. So, in the circumstances where *non-Mahrams* are not likely to be present, there is no need for Muslim women to wear Hijab.



•In Surah Nur, women are ordered to “not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears” (24:31). In a narration from Imam Sadiq (AS) and some other Islamic narrations [9], the hair is known to be an adornment for a woman, then, it is obligatory (*Wajib*) to cover it. The very first reason to veil the hair is, therefore, the commitment to the Islamic ruling on *Hijab*.

• Muslim women, like men, are not permitted to wear tight and revealing clothing; especially the ones showing the details of their body. The clothing should cover their hair and body, but covering the face and the hands, from the wrist to the fingers, is not mandated [11].



3. Hijab and Modesty are beyond a Dress code

● Controlling the glance

•Islamic precept has introduced a particular way of decency by presenting the concept of controlling the gaze. It is stated in the Quran that: “Tell the faithful men to cast down their looks” (24:30); and: “And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks” (24:31). It means that women and men are both required to keep their gazes downcast unless permitted [vi].

Imam Sadiq (AS) said: “A glance is a poisoned arrow from the arrows of Satan. He who refrains from it [glancing] for the sake of Allah and for nothing other than Him, Allah will grant him a faith, the taste of which he will experience.” [12].

•Keeping the glance downcast prevents men from lustful thoughts when looking at any woman other than their wife and allows women to protect themselves and guard their modesty. If

one truly believes that God is present everywhere and at every second, He sees all he does [vii], and “*He knows the treachery of the eyes, and what the breasts hide.*” (40:19), he controls his glance in public and in private.

- Since the two sides are both affected by a forbidden (*Haram*) gaze, women and men are equally required to take part to avoid such looks. To this kind of gaze and its consequent mental pressures, Islam orders women to cover their hair, and more generally their body. This is, in fact, the strategy to remove the external causes of sinful looks which concern women. For the men’s part, they should participate by controlling their eyes. Forbidden (*Haram*) gaze is such that brings about one after the other.

So, men are commanded not to follow the first unintended look by the second one; in other words, they should put an inner barrier to such looks.



- **Limits to talking to the opposite gender**

- As the society is composed of women and men, their social interactions and communications are inevitable. Emphasizing the concept of decency, Islam has special guidelines for the interactions between members of the opposite sex. Islam, as the religion of moderation [viii] [13], does not allow a free relation, neither severely restricts this interaction, but allows women and men to communicate in good

intention [14].

This means that the speech should be direct and both sides should consider the human identity of the other person, not the gender.

- Allah says in the Quran: *“wives of the Prophet! You are not like other women: if you are wary [of Allah], do not be complaisant in your speech, lest he in whose heart is a sickness should aspire; speak honorable words.”* (33:32). Although this verse of the Quran addresses the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who were mostly at the old age, it also applies to all other women especially young ones [15]. This requires Muslims, specifically women, to use a serious tone of voice and expression when talking to the opposite gender; otherwise, their sweet words might seduce the person whose heart might be diseased with lust.



4. Hijab and Modesty have many Social Effects

- The more simply a woman is dressed and is dignified, the more she will be respected by men and will be protected from the harmful gaze. The after effects of a forbidden (*Haram*) gaze are not limited to the unpleasant feeling that it brings about. Women who do not wear Hijab, including the ones who do not cover their hair, are more

susceptible to such annoying looks at anytime and anywhere, and this consequently makes them feel more “unsecured” in the society.

- Moreover, the *Hijab* of a body is the basis for other types of *Hijab* that are commanded in Islam and which have the same aim in the society. It means to invite the humans to modesty and dignity to guarantee a normal and equilibrated society. These kinds of Hijab offer a reference on how one should look at non-*Mahrms*, the way of talking with them and the behavior in their presence:

- **Hijab of the eyes**, recognized as controlling the glance, which mainly concerns men (as discussed above);

- **Hijab of talking** when dealing with non-*Mahrms*, which concerns both women and men. It is about using a serious tone of voice, caring about the words exchanged, considering the human identity of the other person other than his/ her gender, and just focusing on the subject

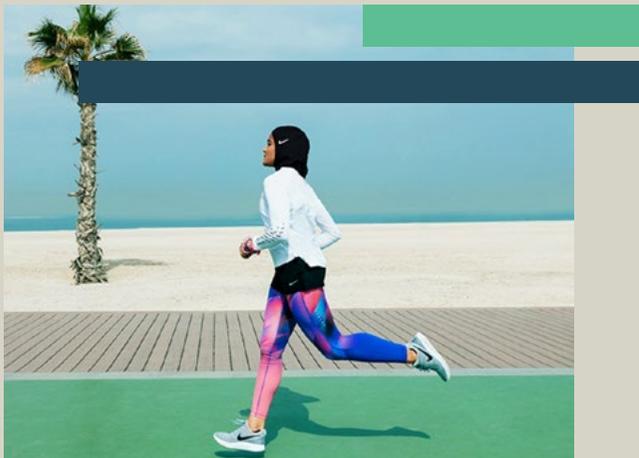


and the purpose of the discussion. Otherwise, the goal of the conversation, either scientific, formal, social or working, won't be achieved;

- **Hijab of the behavior** that implies being decent and modest towards the opposite gender, in a way that the person with the lust in the heart cannot dare to violate one's privacy (especially women's privacy).

- Another social effect of *Hijab* manifests itself in the family, as the basic unit of the society. Muslims are advised to satisfy some natural needs such as emotional and sexual ones, as

well as beauty seeking desire only and only within the framework of the family. This allows a regulated enjoyment of the beauties a woman has, accompanied with the commitment, which respects the principles of women's rights. Besides, disobeying the Islamic ruling on Hijab in the society and exposing men to the feminine beauties in the streets, which would be tempting for them, is undesirable from the Islamic point of view. This makes the foundation of the family vulnerable and equally affects the relationship between the spouses.



5. Hijab in the sense of modesty Includes Men as Well

- The fact that Hijab (in Islam) is not exclusively for women is equally important and worthy of attention; men also should be heedful of their clothing and their behavior. The Holy Quran first speaks of modesty regarding men and then to women (31-24:30).

- Islam requires both women and men to dress simply, modestly and with dignity. Simply said, one should not dress in a way to draw the attention of the others to their physical features. Islam has forbidden wearing the clothing that attracts the attention of the general public, making its wearer known for it because of the type of the fabric, its color, model or because of being worn and unclean [1]; and this applies to women and men both.

- Since modesty as the reason to wear the *Hijab* is a subjective term, the Quran and Sunnah

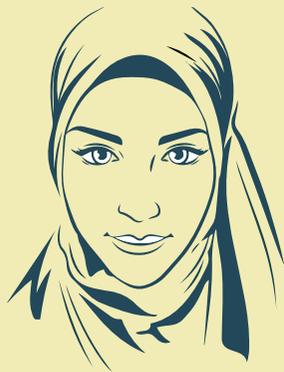
have laid out the bare minimum to prevent any confusion. The absolute minimum covering in Islam set for men is loose and unrevealing clothing from his navel to his knee. Men are not allowed to wear gold jewelry, silk clothing, or adornments that are considered feminine [10].



6. Hijab Presents you as a Muslim

- Unlike previous religions, Hijab does not present a monastic attitude in Islam. Islamic Hijab follows certain social and individual purposes and helps one to live a better life. The Quran invites Muslim women to wear Hijab in order to be recognized as Muslims in the society and prevent being abused (33:59). This becomes however suspended in case of distress and constriction [16]. The majority of Muslim women choose to wear Hijab to obey God and to be recognized by their intellect and minds rather than their physical appearance. They often believe that Hijab liberates them from the need to conform to unrealistic stereotypes and images dictated by the media [17]. They do not consider Hijab as a symbol of oppression but as a sign of Islamic consciousness. That is why they view it as a right and not a burden.

The Last word



Becoming a Muslim is a choice, and any choice that we make in our lives faces us with some new changes and requires us to take some further actions. Wearing Hijab is one among many actions in Islam that a Muslim woman should observe which in return places some demands on men.

Notes:

[i] An ancient Midianite Prophet, sometimes identified with the Biblical Jethro. His name is mentioned in the Quran a total of 11 times.

[ii] William James Durant (November 1885 ,5 – November 1981 ,7) was an American writer, historian, and philosopher. He is best known for *The Story of Civilization*.

[iii], e.g., in the case that a witness looks at the face of a non-Mahram to recognize him/her.

[iv] "does he not know that Allah sees [him]?" (96:14)

[v] "Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people" (2:143)

[vi], e.g., in the case that a witness looks at the face of a non-Mahram to recognize him/her.

[vii] "does he not know that Allah sees [him]?" (96:14)

[viii] "Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people" (2:143)

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[8] A. Aroussi Howayzi, «Tafsir Noor al-Thaqalayn», vol. 589/3, T. 105.

[9] H. Al-Ameli, "Wassail Al-Shia", vol. 20, p.59.

[10] <http://www.hawzah.net/>

[11] A. Aroussi Howayzi, «Tafsir Noor al-Thaqalayn», vol. 589/3, T. 105.

[12] M. B. Majlesi, «Bihar al-Anwar», vol. 101, p. 40.

[13] N. Makarem Shirazi, «Tafsir Nemooneh», vol. 1, p. 483.

[14] <http://www.maarefquran.org>

[15] M. Qaraati, «Tafsir Surah al Ahzab.»

[16] R. Mugehi, "Family religious precepts", p.38

[17] <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/2770/why-muslim-women-wear-veil/>





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