



The Hijab – Faith or Fashion?

In the 21st century, it is undeniable that the pressure upon women, and the youth particularly to look a certain way, has never been greater. In a globalised world revolving around pop culture and celebrities, with social media reinforcing societal standards at every turn, it is impossible to escape the emphasis on image.

Unfortunately the Muslimah has not been spared this pressure, and over the past few years, the hijab has secured its place in the fashion industry. Whether via the numerous hijabi youtubers, “Islamic fashion shows”, or boutique lookbooks, the young Muslimah is encouraged to aspire to the Mipsterz definition of a hijabi; someone hip and chic who incorporates a headscarf, whether as a turban or draped around, into Western fashion effortlessly, showcasing her sense of style and the trends to which she subscribes to. This has led numerous Western fashion agencies like H&M to hire Muslim hijabi models, and launch collections specifically for the Muslim woman, as did Dolce and Gabbana earlier this year.

Yet disappointingly, these trends have altered and changed the hijab to such an extent that it no longer resembles the Muslim woman’s dress code. The furore in the media over the hijab being a head covering has turned it into simply that, a piece of cloth that covers the head. The intention behind wearing the hijab has completely been lost, alongside the understanding of *hayaa* (modesty), and the comprehensive details of what the hijab even consists of!

The Muslim youth have forgotten that under Islam, fashion is not a part of the dress code of a Muslim woman. Allah (swt) has defined our dress code specifically, so we are not subdued to the demands of designers, men or society. It is not for anyone to take it upon themselves to decide what women should wear and not wear for each differing season. Allah (swt) in His Mercy has liberated us from this. Am I saying that Muslim women cannot dress beautifully? Of course they can, but in public Allah (swt) has specifically set out how we must dress as part of the wider Islamic social system.

The Qur’an and Sunnah have detailed clearly what the Islamic dress of the woman is rather than leaving it to the subjective whims of individuals to define what it is according to what they view is modest or not. In Surah An-Nur, Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَنْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ﴾

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and protect their private parts. They should not show their Zeenah (charms) in public beyond what may (decently) be apparent thereof; hence let them draw their head-coverings (khumur) over their necks and juyub. And let them not display (more of) their charms to any but their husbands, their fathers, their husbands fathers, their sons, their husbands sons, their brothers, their brothers sons, their sisters sons, their womenfolk, what their right hand possesses, such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women’s nakedness; and let them not swing their legs (in walking) so as to draw attention to their hidden charms.” [An-Nur: 31]

In this verse of the Qur’an, Allah (swt) orders the Muslim woman to cover her beauty (zeenah) except that which is “...beyond what may (decently) be apparent thereof” to all men with the exception of those mentioned, e.g. her husband, father, sons, nephews, father-in-law, and so on. The words, “...beyond what may (decently) be apparent thereof” refers to the face and hands. This is agreed upon by the majority of the classical scholars such as Aisha (ra), Imam Malik, Imam Shafi, Imam Tabari, Imam Qurtubi, Qatada, Mujahid, al-Hasan and Ibn Hazm, May Allah have mercy upon them. In the verse, Allah (swt) also orders the believing women to draw their khumur (head-coverings) the Arabic plural of khimar (head-cover) over her

necks and juyub. ‘Juyub’ refers to the neckline of the woman’s dress or the upper chest. Women at the time of the Prophet (saw), prior to the revelation of the verse used to cover their heads with the khimar, throwing its ends upon their back but in the process leave their necks, ears, and upper part of the chest bare, in the manner of the Christians. Then through the revelation of Surah Nur, verse 31, Allah commanded them to cover those parts as well with the khimar. Imam ibn Kathir said regarding the verse, “Draw their khumur to cover their juyub means that they should wear the khimar in such a way that they also cover their chests so that they will be different from the women of the jahiliyyah who did not do that but would pass in front of men with their chests uncovered and with their necks, forelocks, hair and earrings uncovered.” Hence Allah (swt) orders the woman to cover her head, neck, and chest.

In addition, the Prophet (saw) said, *«إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا بَلَغَتْ الْمَحِيضَ لَمْ تَصُلْحَ أَنْ يُرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا هَذَا وَهَذَا وَأَشَارَ إِلَى وَجْهِهِ وَكَفْيِهِ»* **“When a young girl begins to menstruate, it is not correct that anything should be seen of her except her face and hands up to the wrist.”** [Reported Abu Dawud] According to these Islamic evidences and many others, the woman is obliged to cover her whole body except her face and hands in the presence of any non-Mahrem man (those men whom she can marry). The clothes she wears should therefore not be transparent such that her skin can be seen, nor should she wear her khimar in a manner such that her neck or a part of her hair (even a single hair) is visible.

Furthermore, Islam has defined and ordered a specific dress for the woman when she leaves her house and enters the public life. In the public arena, she has been commanded to wear the khimar (headscarf) and the jilbab (a one-piece outer garment that covers her home clothes and drapes from the neck to the ground). As mentioned previously, Surah An-Nur discusses the obligation (fardh) of the khimar,

«وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ»

“Let them draw their head-coverings (khumur) over their necks and bosoms (juyub).” [An-Nur: 31]

And a verse in Surah Al-Ahzab, discusses the obligation (fardh) of the jilbab,

«يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِكُمْ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ»

“Oh Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (Jalabeeb) all over their bodies.” [Al-Ahzab: 59]

In addition, in one hadith narrated by Umm Atiyya (ra), she said, “The Messenger of Allah (saw) ordered us to bring out the young women, the menstruating women and veiled women for the two Eid festivals. The menstruating women were to keep away from prayer, yet witnessing the goodness and the dawa (address) to the Muslims. I asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah, what about the one who does not have a Jilbab?’. He said, *«فَلْتَعْرِهَا أُخْتُهَا مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهَا»* **“Let her use the Jilbab of her sister.”** In this hadith, the Prophet (saw) states clearly that wearing a jilbab is the condition that a woman must fulfil in order to enter the public life as he did not give permission for the one who does not have a jilbab to leave her house, specifying that she must borrow one from her Muslim sister in order to enter the public arena. This is an indication that the order in this hadith constitutes an obligation.

Hence, in the public life, it is not sufficient for the woman that she wears the khimar accompanied by a skirt and blouse or shirt and trousers or any form of dress that simply covers the awrah but does not conform to Allah (swt)’s command of the khimar and jilbab.

Alongside this, Islam has also prohibited the concept of Tabarruj for the woman. This means wearing any clothing, jewelry or accessory which draws attention to her beauty in any way in the presence of non-Mahrem men. Allah (swt) states in Surah Al-Ahzab,

«وَلَا تَبْرُجْنَ تَبْرُجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ»

“...and do not keep exhibiting your beauty and decorations like what used to happen in the Jahiliyyah period (before Islam).” [Al-Ahzab: 33]

Hence, it is clear that even though a specific type of clothing may cover the awrah, it does not mean that it is allowed for the woman to wear it in the presence of non-Mahrem men. For if the clothing is tight, reveals the shape of her body or is beautified in a way that draws attention to her beauty then it is not permitted for her to wear in front of these non-Mahrem men, for she would be in a state of Tabarruj. The Prophet (saw) said,

«صِنْفَانِ مِنَ أَهْلِ النَّارِ لَمْ أَرَهُمَا قَوْمٌ مَعَهُمْ سِيَّاطٌ كَأَدْنَابِ الْبَقَرِ يَضْرِبُونَ بِهَا النَّاسَ وَيَسَاءَ كَاسِيَاتٌ عَارِيَاتٌ مُمِيلَاتٌ مَائِلَاتٌ رُءُوسُهُنَّ كَأَسْنِمَةِ الْبُخْتِ الْمَائِلَةِ لَا يَدْخُلْنَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يَجِدْنَ رِيحَهَا وَإِنْ رِيحَهَا لِيُوجَدُ مِنْ مَسِيرَةِ كَذَا وَكَذَا»

“Those women who seem naked even when dressed and those who walk flirtingly and those who plait their heads like the humps of camels, thus inviting people’s attention, will not enter Paradise nor will they smell its fragrance even though its fragrance can be smelt from a very long distance.” (Muslim)

In reality, the Muslim fashion industry has only served to reinforce the Western construct of the ideal image of beauty, something non-existent in Islam. And let us not be naïve in assuming that this has not been orchestrated. Rather the continual connection made between this fashion and the Muslim woman’s dress code, has been fabricated in order an attempt to distance the Muslimah from Islam, to make her subservient to society and live to fulfil its expectations rather than live by Allah’s (swt) instructions. Is it not ironic that whilst secular liberal countries are ban our sisters from wearing the hijab and niqab in public, their industries simultaneously promote “hijabi fashion”? This is because the Western fashion industry is aware of the power a Muslimah who adopts Islam correctly has, the threat that she poses to a capitalist system that exploits the insecurities of women for its own monetary benefit. A Muslimah who is freed from the demands of society is free to think for herself, love herself for who she is, and dedicate herself to the worship of Allah (swt), not the worship of designers. The true value, empowerment and liberation of women come from Islam; a system in which women are treated as human beings. And secular societies fear this, and so have created Islamic fashion to prevent Muslimah’s from embracing Islam holistically.

Alhamdulillah it is a good sign that so many young Muslim girls are starting to wear the hijab in order to adhere more closely to their Deen and please their Lord. However, following these ‘hijab fashion trends’ or adopting any dress-code which does not conform to that clearly defined by the Islamic texts betrays the very purpose for which they began to cover. Furthermore, it is simply exchanging the following of the shallow, restrictive expectations set by the Western fashion industry for how women should look and dress by the expectations of those who work in the Muslim fashion industry. There is hardly anything liberating for the Muslim woman in this! The Muslim youth must realise this manipulation of the Islamic dress is designed to secularise her, to make her compromise, to make her pick and choose what parts of Islam she wishes to implement. She must stand against this attack and be determined in her resolve to wear the hijab for Allah (swt) alone in the way He (swt) prescribed. In times of difficulty, we must remember the hadith of Muhammad (saws):

«فَإِنَّ مِنْ وَرَائِكُمْ أَيَّامَ الصَّبْرِ الصَّبْرُ فِيهِنَّ مِثْلُ قَبْضِ عَلَى الْجَمْرِ لِلْعَامِلِ فِيهِنَّ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ خَمْسِينَ رَجُلًا يَعْمَلُونَ بِمِثْلِ عَمَلِهِ»

“After you there are going to be days of patience. The patience during that time is like the one clutching on to a hot coal. During those days the reward for the one who adheres to the Commands of Allah will be equivalent to the reward of fifty men who did an action like his.” Such times were foretold by Rasoolallah (saws), but we must take comfort in the knowledge that the rewards of such times will be great and that this Deen is worth striving for.

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