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Research Article

Hijab (Veil) from the Islamic Perspective: An Interpretive Analysis from the Quran and Scholars' Views

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Abstract. This research examines the concept of the *Hijab* (veil) from both Quranic and scholarly perspectives, with a particular focus on its role in promoting justice and equity. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on primary sources, including key Quranic verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:31) and Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59), which provide foundational principles regarding modesty, dignity, and ethical conduct. Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and online publications, are analyzed to contextualize scholarly interpretations and explore the broader significance of the *Hijab*. An interpretive research approach is employed to uncover the multifaceted meanings of the *Hijab* as a spiritual, social, and ethical practice. Classical and contemporary Islamic scholars' perspectives are critically examined to highlight the *Hijab*'s dual function as a personal act of devotion and a societal symbol of identity and respect. The findings demonstrate that the *Hijab* is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, reflecting principles of justice, equity, and mutual respect. Furthermore, the study addresses prevalent misconceptions about the *Hijab* and its association with gender roles, illustrating its broader implications within Islamic thought. This research contributes to

a nuanced understanding of the *Hijab*, emphasizing its enduring relevance and its role in fostering justice and equity within contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Hijab (veil), Islamic Perspective, Quran, Scholars view, Justice

Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji konsep Hijab (kerudung) dari perspektif Al-Qur'an dan pemikiran para ulama, dengan fokus khusus pada perannya dalam mempromosikan keadilan dan kesetaraan. Menggunakan metodologi penelitian kualitatif, studi ini mengandalkan sumber primer, termasuk ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang penting seperti Surah An-Nur (24:31) dan Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59), yang memberikan prinsip-prinsip dasar terkait kesopanan, martabat, dan perilaku etis. Sumber sekunder, seperti buku, artikel jurnal, dan publikasi daring, dianalisis untuk memberikan konteks terhadap interpretasi para ulama dan mengeksplorasi makna lebih luas dari Hijab. Pendekatan penelitian interpretatif digunakan untuk menggali makna-makna yang lebih mendalam dari Hijab sebagai praktik spiritual, sosial, dan etis. Perspektif para ulama Islam klasik dan kontemporer dikaji secara kritis untuk menunjukkan fungsi ganda Hijab sebagai tindakan pribadi dalam beribadah serta simbol identitas dan penghormatan dalam masyarakat. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Hijab sangat mendalam dalam ajaran Islam, mencerminkan prinsip-prinsip keadilan, kesetaraan, dan saling menghormati. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga membahas kesalahpahaman yang berkembang mengenai Hijab dan kaitannya dengan peran gender, serta mengilustrasikan implikasi yang lebih luas dalam pemikiran Islam. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi untuk pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang Hijab, dengan menekankan relevansinya yang abadi dan perannya dalam mendorong keadilan dan kesetaraan dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Hijab (jilbab), Perspektif Islam, Al-Qur'an, Pandangan Ulama, Keadilan

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the hijab, often worn by Muslim women as a symbol of modesty, is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, cultural traditions, and varied interpretations. According to Doi (1990) and Qaradawi (1960), the hijab is fundamentally a garment designed to cover a woman's hair, neck, and sometimes shoulders, while typically leaving the face uncovered. However, its significance transcends its physical form, embodying profound spiritual, ethical, and cultural principles. This study seeks to examine the Quranic guidance on the hijab, its interpretations, and the cultural dimensions of Muslim women's dress code. Additionally, it explores the perspectives of Islamic scholars (*ulama*) on female modesty and evaluates the principles of justice underlying the regulations on women's attire in Islam.

The Quran, the primary religious text of Islam, provides explicit guidance on modesty in clothing for both men and women, with a particular focus on preserving the privacy and dignity of women. Key verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:31) and Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) are frequently referenced in discussions about the hijab, instructing women to cover their adornments and adopt modest attire in the presence of non-mahram individuals (those outside close familial relations). The interpretation and application of these directives are significantly influenced by the perspectives of Islamic scholars (*ulama*), who derive rulings through Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). These interpretations often vary, with some scholars considering the hijab a

mandatory religious obligation for all Muslim women, while others advocate a more context-based and personal approach to modesty.

A critical exploration of justice in relation to Islamic dress codes reveals the underlying rationale for these guidelines, often framed as mechanisms for safeguarding women's dignity, offering protection, and promoting empowerment. This research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the hijab by examining its religious, cultural, and social dimensions. Through a study of Quranic teachings, scholarly interpretations, and justice-based frameworks, the research will investigate the multifaceted significance of the hijab, its impact on the lives of Muslim women, and its broader implications for Islamic jurisprudence and gender dynamics within Muslim societies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the interpretation of religious texts and the perspectives of Islamic scholars (*ulama*) on the concept of the hijab. Qualitative research is well-suited for examining subjective interpretations and nuanced understandings of religious teachings. An interpretive research approach will be adopted, seeking to uncover the meanings and interpretations embedded in key Islamic texts, particularly the Quran, and scholarly works regarding the hijab.

The primary data sources for this study will include Quranic verses that address modesty and hijab, along with interpretations provided by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. To enrich the analysis, the research will also incorporate secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and academic papers offering diverse perspectives on the hijab within Islamic tradition. By focusing on these textual sources and scholarly interpretations, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the religious and ethical dimensions of the hijab, contributing to a deeper understanding of its significance in Islamic teachings and practices.

Islamic Perspective on Modesty and Hijab: What is Hijab (veil?)

The hijab, traditionally recognized as a headscarf worn by Muslim women, holds profound significance within Islamic theology, cultural practices, and scholarly interpretations. In Islam, hijab transcends its physical form, symbolizing a broader commitment to modesty in appearance, behavior, and interactions. Quranic guidance on modest dress is articulated in verses such as Surah An-Nur (24:31) and Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59), which emphasize the importance of covering the body and drawing veils over the bosom to uphold modesty and dignity in public life.

Interpretations of modesty and the hijab vary among Islamic schools of thought, such as Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali, each offering diverse perspectives on the extent of coverage required. While some scholars assert that the hijab is a religious obligation explicitly mandated by the Quran, others view it as a cultural practice, adaptable to personal, social, and regional contexts. This divergence underscores the complexity of the hijab, highlighting its dual role as a tangible garment and a principle guiding modest conduct.

Scholars such as Boulanouar (2006) and Sulaiman & Raifu (2020) extend the understanding of hijab beyond physical covering, emphasizing its integration into modest speech, behavior, and actions. They argue that a woman wearing the hijab who fails to embody appropriate behavior does not fully adhere to its intended purpose in Islam. Thus, hijab represents a comprehensive ethical framework, encompassing dress, moral conduct, and spiritual reflection. It serves as a holistic approach to modesty, encouraging both outward and inward expressions of integrity and dignity.

The concept of modesty in Islam is intrinsically linked to the idea of *awra*, which refers to the parts of the body that must be covered to maintain privacy and dignity. For men, *awra* generally includes the area from the navel to the knees, while for women, it extends to the entire body except for the face and hands (Qaradawi, 1960). Modesty is thus a foundational virtue in Islam, deeply intertwined with spiritual purity and moral integrity.

Agar Muhammed (2015) elaborates that Islam not only prohibits illicit sexual relations but also discourages behaviors and actions that might lead to such transgressions. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized this principle by cautioning against unchecked glances, explaining that while the first, involuntary glance may be excused, the second is a deliberate act and therefore a sin. This highlights that modesty in Islam encompasses more than physical appearance; it extends to thoughts, intentions, and actions.

Modesty as a value is equally applicable to both men and women, as highlighted in the Quran. Surah An-Nur (24:31) instructs women to lower their gaze, guard their modesty, and cover their adornments, revealing only what is necessary, such as the face and hands. Furthermore, women are directed to draw their veils over their bosoms and refrain from displaying their beauty except to their immediate family members or those they cannot marry. Similarly, in Surah An-Nur (24:30), men are instructed to lower their gaze and maintain modesty when interacting with the opposite sex, thereby preserving the purity of intent and avoiding distractions.

This shared emphasis on modest behavior and attire underscores the reciprocal responsibility of men and women in upholding the ethical framework of modesty in Islam. It demonstrates that modesty is not merely a personal obligation but a collective effort to foster a morally upright and spiritually aware community.

The rationale behind the Islamic guidelines for modesty stems from the distinct sexual natures of men and women. Doi (1990) posits that men are inherently more visually attracted to women's physical features, necessitating women's coverage to protect their dignity and minimize undue attention. This protective approach to modesty is rooted in Islamic teachings, which prioritize the spiritual purity of both genders. Conversely, women are generally less influenced by men's physical features, which accounts for the less extensive outward visibility required for men. These guidelines are not intended to oppress women but rather to safeguard their honour and dignity within a framework that promotes moral integrity for all members of society.

Furthermore, scholars such as Yufenu (2017) and Ruby & Siddiqa (2018) highlight that women's obligation to cover their *awra* extends to their participation

in the workforce. This underscores that modesty in attire transcends the private sphere and applies equally to professional and public settings. Both men and women are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with Islamic principles of modesty in all aspects of life. Similarly, Okon (2013) and Siddiq & Ruby (2018) emphasize that modest clothing and behaviour are vital for preserving personal dignity and spiritual well-being.

The Islamic concept of *hijab* goes beyond physical covering, encompassing all dimensions of modesty in appearance and behaviour. It serves as a safeguard for the moral and spiritual integrity of individuals. While the guidelines often emphasize women's dress, they also hold men equally accountable for maintaining modesty in their actions and interactions. The Qur'anic and Hadith-based directives aim to uphold societal dignity, protect individuals from immorality, and reinforce values of purity and respect in both private and public spheres. By encouraging both genders to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, Islam aspires to cultivate a community where spiritual and moral boundaries are respected, fostering harmony and ethical conduct across all facets of life.

Qur'anic verses on Hijab

The concept of hijab, understood as modesty in both dress and behaviour, is deeply embedded in Islamic teachings. Although the term "hijab" itself does not always directly refer to a woman's dress code in every verse, several Quranic verses establish clear guidelines for the behaviours and attire of both men and women, all grounded in the principle of modesty. These verses serve as the foundation for what is commonly recognized as hijab in contemporary Islam, emphasizing that modesty is not solely about outward appearance but is also intrinsically connected to one's internal conduct. The Quran highlights that modesty plays a critical role in protecting personal dignity, preserving privacy, and promoting respectful interactions within society.

Surah An-Nur (24:30-31), Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59), and other verses offer specific instructions on modesty and the practice of hijab. These verses underscore that modesty extends beyond the physical covering of the body and encompasses ethical behaviour, including lowering one's gaze, avoiding unnecessary display of beauty or wealth, and guarding one's speech and actions. In this comprehensive view, hijab becomes more than a mere garment—it evolves into a behavioural framework that upholds the dignity of individuals and preserves the moral integrity of society at large. Modesty, as outlined in these Quranic verses, is thus a holistic approach to conduct, integrating both outward appearance and inward ethical values to cultivate an atmosphere of respect, morality, and social harmony.

Surah An-Nur (24:30) – Modesty for Men:

This verse addresses the importance of modesty for men, emphasizing the need to control one's gaze and regulate one's behaviour to maintain purity. Allah commands:

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do." (24:30)

This directive highlights that modesty is a shared responsibility, extending to both men and women. By first addressing men, it establishes that modesty in Islam is not solely a concern for women but also applies to men's actions, including the control of their gaze. This call for self-restraint sets a foundational principle of modesty in Islamic teachings, underscoring the importance of maintaining moral integrity in all aspects of behaviour. The verse emphasizes that modesty is not merely about physical appearance but involves internal discipline and ethical conduct, demonstrating the holistic nature of modesty in Islam.

Surah An- Nur (24:31) Modesty for women:

Surah An-Nur (24:31) is a pivotal verse in the Quran regarding women's modesty and dress code. It outlines clear guidelines for modest behaviour, addressing both external conduct and internal intentions. The verse instructs:

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which [ordinarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their outer garments over themselves and not to expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, those their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And return to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers that you might succeed." (24:31)

The verse provides several specific instructions that guide Muslim women's behaviour and attire:

Lowering the gaze: Women are instructed to lower their gaze to preserve modesty.

Guarding private parts: This refers not only to physical modesty but also to guarding one's emotional and personal dignity.

Covering adornments: Women are advised to cover their beauty and adornments, including hair and body curves, with the exception of what naturally appears, such as the face and hands (though there are various interpretations regarding whether the face and hands should be covered).

Khimar: The term "khimar" refers to a head covering or veil that women should wear to cover their bodies, especially their hair and chest.

Authorized individuals: The verse specifies those to whom a woman may reveal her adornments, such as close male relatives and other women.

Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) – The Jilbab (Outer Garment)

Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) further reinforces the concept of modesty in Islam, particularly for women, by instructing them to wear a jilbab when going out in public. The verse states:

"O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves part of their outer garments (jilbab). That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful." (33:59)

The jilbab is described here as a loose, outer garment meant to cover women in public spaces, providing a layer of protection for both their modesty and their safety. This verse illustrates that modest dress serves as a means of social protection,

helping to shield women from harassment and mistreatment. By wearing the jilbab, women distinguish themselves as individuals who adhere to the values of modesty prescribed in Islam, which ultimately fosters respect and protects them from harm or unwanted attention.

This directive emphasizes that modesty, while rooted in religious teachings, also has practical social benefits. The Quranic guidance encourages not only spiritual protection but also safeguards the physical and emotional well-being of women in society. The connection between modest dress and protection from abuse highlights Islam's concern for both the individual's dignity and the broader community's moral integrity. Additionally, the verse concludes with a reminder of Allah's forgiveness and mercy, acknowledging human imperfection and offering reassurance to those who strive to adhere to these guidelines.

Other Quranic Verses

Additional verses in the Quran further reinforce the concept of modesty and the broader practice of hijab, emphasizing the importance of maintaining respectful boundaries between men and women. Surah Al-Ahzab (33:53) provides guidance on maintaining physical separation between non-mahram (unrelated) individuals:

"And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition (hijab). That is purer for your hearts and their hearts." (33:53)

This verse, while specifically addressing the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), introduces the practice of maintaining a physical partition (hijab) between men and women to preserve purity in their hearts and interactions. It emphasizes that physical separation promotes moral and spiritual integrity, highlighting the importance of modest conduct in social exchanges.

Another verse, Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35), underscores that modesty is a virtue that applies to both men and women equally:

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women..." (33:35)

This verse emphasizes that modesty, which includes the practice of hijab, is a fundamental value for all Muslims, regardless of gender. It promotes the idea that modesty is a shared responsibility, extending beyond women's dress to include men's conduct, speech, and interactions as well.

Through these verses, the Quran establishes that modesty is not limited to women's attire but is a comprehensive ethical principle that shapes both behaviour and appearance. The practice of hijab, therefore, encompasses more than just physical covering—it embodies modesty in thought, action, and interaction. These teachings aim to preserve the dignity, purity, and moral integrity of individuals and society as a whole, creating a framework for respectful and harmonious relationships between men and women.

Terms Related to Hijab in the Quran

Several terms used in the Quran are directly related to the broader concept of **hijab**, which encompasses modesty and protection:

Hijab – A physical barrier or partition, often referring to modesty and separation between unrelated men and women.

Khimar – A head covering or veil, covering the hair, neck, and chest.

Jilbab – An outer garment that covers the body for modesty in public.

Satr – The act of covering the private parts of the body, central to modest behavior.

'Awrah – The parts of the body that should be covered, signifying modesty.

Tafannuj – The excessive display of beauty, which should be avoided to maintain modesty.

Zina and Fahisha – Immoral or lewd behavior, which modesty and **hijab** seek to prevent.

These terms collectively outline the Islamic ethical framework for modesty, which aims to protect individuals' dignity and ensure respectful interactions between men and women. Together, these terms represent the Islamic principles of modesty, which extend beyond mere physical covering to include behaviours, speech, and interactions, ensuring dignity, respect, and protection for all individuals in society.

1. **Hijab - The General Concept of a Barrier or Partition**

The term *hijab* in the Quran carries a broader meaning than just referring to a woman's head covering. It signifies a barrier or partition, emphasizing the principles of modesty, privacy, and separation. In its literal sense, the Arabic word *hijab* refers to a curtain, veil, screen, or barrier that functions as a means of separation, illustrating the concepts of privacy and modesty within Islamic teachings.

Although commonly understood as a reference to a woman's headscarf or veil, *hijab* appears in several Quranic verses where it does not specifically denote a head covering. Rather, it is used to describe a physical partition or separation. For instance, in Surah Al- Ahzab (33:53). Allah instruct:

"And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition (hijab). That is purer for your hearts and their hearts" (33: 53).

In this context, *hijab* refers to a physical barrier or curtain that separates men from the Prophet's wives during interactions. The purpose of this separation is to preserve modesty, privacy, and mutual respect, ensuring that personal boundaries are maintained and that the interactions remain dignified.

From a broader perspective, *hijab* signifies the separation between non-*mahram* men and women—those who are not closely related by blood or marriage. This separation is designed to maintain modesty in social interactions and to prevent any inappropriate behaviour or temptation. In this sense, *hijab* is not confined to a specific item of clothing, such as a headscarf, but extends to a wider set of ethical and social guidelines governing male-female interactions in public spaces.

These guidelines are part of the Islamic framework of modesty, which aims to safeguard the dignity of individuals and promote a respectful environment, free from unwarranted social or sexual advances. The concept of *hijab*, therefore, serves not only as a physical form of modest dress but as an overarching principle that shapes the conduct and interactions between men and women within society.

2. *Khimar – The Headscarf or Veil for Women*

Abdullah (1999) explain that the term *khimar* refers to a headscarf or veil that women are instructed to wear to cover their hair, neck, and, in some cases, their chest. Directly linked to the concept of modesty, *khimar* is explicitly mentioned in the Quran, where it outlines how women should cover their adornments to maintain their dignity and modesty in public spaces. In its original Arabic usage, the word *khimar* referred to a cloak or garment designed to cover the head. In classical Arabic, it denoted any garment that envelops or covers a person, highlighting the broad application of the term to signify coverage.

The concept of *khimar* is mentioned in the Quran in Surah An-Nur (24:31): *"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which [ordinarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their outer garments (khimar) over themselves and not to expose their adornment..."* (24:31)

This verse provides clear guidance for women, instructing them to cover their beauty and adornments, especially their hair and chest, with a *khimar*. The primary purpose of the *khimar* is to preserve modesty and uphold dignity in public. The verse also emphasizes that the *khimar* should be worn in such a way that the bosom (chest area) is covered, reinforcing the importance of modesty in dress.

Historically, when this verse was revealed, women used to wear head coverings tied behind their necks, which left their necks and upper chests exposed. The Quranic injunction to draw the *khimar* across their bosoms was understood as a directive for women to modify their head coverings to ensure more comprehensive coverage. Classical Arabic dictionaries, as noted by Fornara (2018), define *khimar* as a head covering, supporting the interpretation that Muslim women must cover their hair and neck as part of their modest dress.

The verse has been further explained in various hadiths. For instance, 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), is reported to have said, "May Allah have mercy on the women of the first Muhajirun. When Allah revealed, 'That they should draw their head-coverings across their breasts' (24:31), they tore their mantles and veiled themselves with them." This account highlights the immediate and practical response of women during the time of the Prophet, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the modesty guidelines as prescribed in the Quran. The *khimar* thus plays a central role in the Islamic understanding of modest dress, serving to protect women's dignity and prevent the exposure of their adornments in public settings (Abdullah, 1999).

3. *Jilbab – The Outer Garment or Cloak*

According to Abdullah (1999), the term *jilbab* refers to a loose outer garment or cloak worn by women to ensure modesty and privacy, particularly when going out in public. Derived from the Arabic root word *jalb*, meaning to cover or wrap, the *jilbab* is typically a large, loose garment that envelops the body. This garment is designed to provide full coverage over regular attire, serving both as a physical covering and as a social symbol of modesty.

The *jilbab* is explicitly mentioned in the Quran in Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59): "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves part of their outer garments (*jilbab*). That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful." (33:59) This verse provides clear instruction for women to wear the *jilbab* when leaving their homes, with the goal of ensuring their modesty and protecting them from harm. The *jilbab* is not only a garment but also a means of safeguarding the woman's dignity and honour in public.

The purpose of the *jilbab* can be understood in two primary ways:

1. **Modesty:** The *jilbab* ensures that a woman's body is fully covered in public spaces, helping to maintain her modesty and dignity.
2. **Protection:** The *jilbab* serves as a form of social protection. By distinguishing women who adhere to the practice, it helps prevent them from being harassed or treated disrespectfully. The garment signifies that the woman wearing it should be treated with honour, discouraging objectification or inappropriate behaviour.

Moreover, he indicated that the historical and social significance of the *jilbab* is further reinforced by hadiths. One narration mentions that when the verse was revealed, the women of the *al-Ansar* tribe in Medina immediately adopted the practice, wearing a black cloth over their heads as a sign of modesty. Another hadith recounts a conversation between Umar ibn al-Khattab and the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), where Umar suggested that the Prophet order the women to veil themselves to protect them from being spoken to by both wicked and well-intentioned men. This led to the revelation of the verse, further highlighting the protective and modest role of the *jilbab*. Thus, the *jilbab* functions not only as a garment but also as an important social tool, contributing to the preservation of a woman's dignity, promoting respect, and offering protection against potential harm or inappropriate behaviour in public settings.

4. *Satr* – **The Concept of Concealment and Covering**

Abdullah (1990) explained *satr* refers to the act of covering or concealing one's private parts, which is a fundamental concept in the practice of modesty (*hijab*) in Islam. It is not limited to the physical act of covering but extends to behaviour and the general requirement of modesty, which encompasses both actions and appearance. The Arabic term *satr* means concealment, covering, or veiling. It is an essential part of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and emphasises the necessity of covering the body to protect one's dignity and maintain social decorum. In Islam, modesty is deeply integrated into both behaviour and dress. The concept of *satr* is reflected in the requirement to cover the '*awrah* (private parts). These are the body parts that must be concealed to preserve modesty and protect social respect. The '*awrah* differs between men and women:

- For men, the '*awrah* generally refers to the area between the navel and the knees, which must remain covered at all times.
- For women, the '*awrah* traditionally includes the entire body, except for the face and hands (though some interpretations argue that even these should be covered in certain contexts).

According to his view, *satr* embodies not only the physical covering of the body but also the broader principle of modesty in behaviour, dress, and interactions. This principle is rooted in the idea of preserving respect, humility, and dignity, both for individuals and society as a whole. Modesty, in this sense, serves as a safeguard against immodesty and inappropriate behaviour.

Awrah: The Parts of the Body to Be Covered

The term '*awrah*' refers to the parts of the body that must be covered to preserve modesty in Islam. It is derived from the Arabic root "'a-w-r", meaning deficiency or imperfection, highlighting areas that are considered inappropriate or shameful to expose in public. While the Quran does not explicitly mention '*awrah*' in relation to hijab, it is a fundamental concept discussed in Islamic jurisprudence. For women, the general interpretation of '*awrah*' includes the entire body, except for the face and hands, although some scholars argue that these parts should also be covered in specific situations. For men, the '*awrah*' refers to the area between the navel and the knees, which must always remain covered. The concept of '*awrah*' plays a central role in defining modest dress codes in Islam, emphasising the importance of maintaining dignity, respect, and modesty in both public and private spaces (Doi, 1990; Rizvi 1992).

Tafannuj: The Excessive Display of Beauty

Tafannuj refers to the excessive or deliberate display of one's beauty, particularly in public spaces, which is considered inappropriate in Islam. The Arabic term *tafannuj* implies showing off or exhibiting one's beauty in a manner that attracts undue attention, often leading to objectification or improper behaviour. Although *tafannuj* is not directly mentioned in the Quran, it aligns with the broader ethical guidance on modesty (Doi, 1990; Badawi, n.d). In Surah An-Nur (24:31), women are instructed not to display their adornments excessively but only what ordinarily appears. This prohibition of excessive display helps maintain modesty and dignity while preventing inappropriate attention or behaviour. The concept of *tafannuj* emphasises that both appearance and behaviour should reflect modesty, thereby discouraging actions that might lead to unwanted attention or objectification.

Zina: Immorality and Illicit Sexual Relations

Zina refers to unlawful sexual relations, encompassing both fornication and adultery. Zina is considered a serious sin in Islam, with profound social and moral consequences (Qaradawi, 1962). The concept of zina is closely linked to the practice of hijab, as hijab serves as a protective measure to safeguard individuals from immoral behaviour by promoting modest interactions and minimising temptation. In Surah Al-Furqan (25:68), Allah describes the characteristics of the righteous, saying, "*And those who do not commit zina...*" (25:68). This verse connects the avoidance of zina to maintaining moral integrity and the sanctity of relationships. Modesty, including the practice of hijab, functions as a preventive measure, creating boundaries and respect in interactions to protect individuals from engaging in zina. Hijab is thus not merely a physical covering but also a tool for behaviour regulation, reinforcing modesty and respect in both dress and interactions, reducing the likelihood of immoral acts like zina.

Fahisha: Immorality or Lewdness

Fahisha refers to acts of immorality or lewdness, particularly those of a sexual nature, but also encompassing any behaviour that transgresses ethical boundaries. The term *fahisha* is used in the Quran to describe actions that violate the moral and ethical standards set by Islam, including acts of sexual misconduct. In Surah Al-Araf (7:33), Allah says, "Say, 'My Lord has only forbidden immorality—what is apparent of it and what is concealed...'" (7:33). This verse emphasises the importance of avoiding fahisha and maintaining moral integrity. The practice of hijab, both in its physical and behavioural forms, plays a key role in protecting individuals from fahisha. By encouraging modest dress and behaviour, hijab helps create a respectful environment and reduces the potential for immoral acts. Hijab, as a framework for modesty, encourages individuals, particularly women, to maintain their dignity and respect, minimising exposure to actions that could lead to fahisha or unethical behaviour.

Ulamas Women's attire

The discussion surrounding the Islamic dress code for women, particularly the *ḥijāb* (headscarf) and full-face coverings such as the *niqāb* or *burqah*, reveals a nuanced and varied spectrum of interpretations within the Muslim scholarly community. Abdullah (1999) and Hamza et al. (2014) assert that although there are minor differences among various Islamic legal schools of thought, there is broad agreement that women are required to cover their bodies as an expression of modesty (*ḥayā'*), which is a core value in Islam.

Most scholars ('ulamā') agree that wearing the *ḥijāb* is an obligatory form of modest dress, but opinions diverge significantly on whether covering the face with a *niqāb* or *burqah* is a mandatory practice. Some scholars, such as Abdalati (referencing Quran 24:30-31), argue that the veil functions as a moral safeguard, protecting a woman's integrity, character, and spiritual purity. On the other hand, some critics view the practice as an instrument of social control. Roald (2001) references the interpretation of at-Tabari (d.923) of the Qur'anic verse 24:31, in which he argues that the phrase "only that which is apparent thereof" refers to the face and hands. According to this interpretation, the rest of a woman's body is considered *awrah* (that which should not be exposed), meaning that it is not forbidden (*haram*) for a woman to expose her face and hands. At-Tabari explains that the phrase "let them draw their gaze coverings (*khumur*) over their bosoms" means that women should cover their necks and chest, including their earrings. This interpretation is notably different from that of Ibn Abbas, who advocates for full covering (Doi, 1990). The four primary Islamic legal schools—Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Hanafi—differ on the issue of female veiling. The Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali schools hold the view that covering the face with a veil is obligatory, while the Hanafi School does not regard the face veil as mandatory (Mansoor, 2020).

In Sri Lanka, some scholars, such as Mansoor (2020), argue that while modesty should be maintained, the *niqāb* and *burqah* are cultural practices rather than religious obligations. This perspective is shared by the All Ceylon Jammiyathul Ulama (ACJU), which asserts that the *ḥijāb* is a religious obligation based on Qur'anic teachings, but that face covering is not universally required. Ambikai Forman (n.d.) notes that ACJU's position aligns with the view that wearing the *niqāb* or *burqah*

should be a personal decision. Omardeen (2021), the secretary of the ACJU, further maintains that this decision can be waived in situations of necessity or emergency, thus emphasizing the personal nature of this choice. This view is also echoed by Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the former rector of Al-Azhar University, who stated that the niqāb is not a religious mandate but rather a traditional cultural practice (Chowdhury et al., 2017). In line with this perspective, Sri Lankan scholars such as Marikkar (2019) and Mansoor (2020) assert that neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith require women to cover their faces, and they argue that a woman's dignity and safety are better protected through her moral character, faith, and active social participation rather than through the practice of covering her face.

In summary, the practice of wearing the ḥijāb, and particularly the niqāb or burqah, remains a subject of diverse interpretations. While modesty is universally acknowledged as an Islamic virtue, the specifics of how modesty should be expressed—especially regarding face covering—are influenced by a combination of Qur'anic interpretation, cultural context, and personal belief. This diversity in opinion highlights the complexity of Islamic dress codes and the importance of individual choice in adhering to religious guidelines.

Islam promote equity (justice) behind the hijab

The criticism that Muslim women are oppressed by wearing the hijab and covering their beauty overlooks the idea that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. Women can be just as remarkable with their beauty concealed as they are when it is visible. It is important to recognize that women should never be victims of sexual harassment or abuse, regardless of whether they wear the hijab. Some research (Raheema & Omar, 2017) suggests that women wearing the hijab face less harassment compared to those who do not, but the key issue should be that harassment is unacceptable in any circumstance.

Although Islam has granted women employment rights, it is essential that these rights are exercised in accordance with Islamic law. Siddiqā & Ruby (2018) emphasize that work should not require either men or women to violate Islamic principles, such as serving alcohol. This principle applies equally to both genders. Moreover, Islam mandates that women maintain their modesty in public, and if a woman's work requires her to leave her home, she must do so while adhering to the principles of modesty, which includes the wearing of the Islamic veil. This is equally applicable to men and women. Furthermore, the Quran (Surah Al-Nisa' 4:32) affirms that both men and women should receive their rightful share of what they have earned, suggesting that the differences in dress and public roles reflect the natural differences between men and women.

The Islamic veil is seen not as an instrument of oppression but as a safeguard for a woman's morals, dignity, and character. As Ibnouf (2015) suggests, the veil protects a woman's personality and is a measure that upholds her self-respect. This protection is particularly significant when it comes to certain professions. Nawab (1997) argues that a Muslim woman should not be involved in professions that exploit her femininity for commercial gain, such as being a dancer, model, actress, or prostitute—even if her husband agrees. However, other work and professions that align with Islamic principles regarding dress and modesty are permissible.

Despite the benefits of modesty in preserving dignity, some people misunderstand these limitations, viewing them as obstacles to Muslim women's participation in public life. Syed (2010) observes that such limitations have often been perceived as hindrances to women's careers. However, studies like those by Rahim et al. (2022) and Sulaiman and Raifu (2020) show that wearing the hijab can foster a sense of confidence, safety, and respect for women, while also providing protection from sexual harassment. Abdulssalam (2006) suggests that the hijab protects not only women but also men, by reducing the sexual stimulation that could lead to harassment.

The purpose of covering, as Okon (2013) explains, is to cultivate a strong sense of chastity and faithfulness, which forms the basis of morality in both private and public life. Abdulssalam (2006) further points out that Western societies often exploit women's sexuality for commercial purposes, as women's physical attractiveness is a significant marketable commodity. In workplaces where men and women interact, there is always the risk of mistakes occurring in situations where they are alone. Islam's restrictions are designed to protect both men and women from these potential pitfalls, safeguarding dignity and respect.

Therefore, the restrictions imposed by Islam do not hinder women's rights or equality. Rather, they empower women, enabling them to live freely and safely, without fear of exploitation or harassment. Far from being a symbol of oppression, the hijab represents a protective measure, a source of confidence, and a means of ensuring both dignity and morality in public and private life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the practice of hijab in Islam is deeply rooted in the principles of modesty and dignity, as outlined in the Quran and interpreted by Islamic scholars. The term "hijab" goes beyond physical covering, symbolizing a broader ethical approach that encourages modesty in behavior and appearance for both men and women. The Quran provides guidance on modest dress, particularly for women, while allowing for varying interpretations by scholars regarding the extent of covering, such as the face. The hijab, therefore, reflects a diversity of views within the Islamic tradition, but it consistently promotes respect, protection from objectification, and equality. Ultimately, hijab is not just a garment but a means to uphold justice, modesty, and dignity in society, fostering both personal empowerment and societal harmony.

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