

# Hijab

## (Modest Islamic Dress for Women)

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**What is Hijab?** The common understanding of Hijab for women in Islam is covering the hair, side of the face, the ears, the neck, the upper extremities up to the wrist, the torso, and the lower extremities up to the ankles. The face and the hands are not required to be covered.

For the non-Muslims, especially in the west, it is important to know that the Veil covering the face is not the same as the Islamic Hijab.

**The Veil.** Covering the face is not mandated by Islam. It is cultural, practiced by certain tribes in Arabia and in North Africa. The Qur'an uses the Arabic word "*Khumur*" which is translated as "Veil" or "head covering." It is used as a cover over the bosom. Please refer to the verse below.

**The Burqa.** It is not mandated by Islam. It is a loose covering of the whole body with a veil covering the face. Women of lower middle class in India and Pakistan use it to go to market for shopping for upper class people.

**The Hijab.** In the Qur'an this word is not used for women's dress code. It means a covering, a partition, a curtain, etc.

### The verse of the Qur'an about the women's attire:<sup>1</sup>

*"And to say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and adornments, except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils (head coverings) over their bosoms, and not display their beauty, except to their husbands, their fathers ..."* (Chapter 24, verse 31)

The key phrase in the verse is underlined. "Not display beauty and adornments" and "Except what appears thereof." Hair is a sign of beauty of women that is displayed in many styles and decorations, so it is logically included in adornments not to be displayed. Ear rings are another adornment that women display, and they are not to be displayed. Islamic scholars all schools agree that the exceptions implied in the above verse are the face of the woman and eye liner (collyrium).

Murtaza Mutahhari<sup>2</sup> in his book "Islamic Hijab" explains that it is not obligatory for women to cover their face and hands. Things that adorn them may appear as long as they are part of common usage.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Qur'an. Translation and commentary by A.Yusuf Ali

**Hadith.** There are many traditions in this regard. The sixth Imam from the family of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh&p) was asked what adornments were exempted in the above verse. His answer was, "It refers to collyrium and a ring and they are on the face and hands."<sup>3</sup>

A tradition related by Ali bin Ibrahim from Imam Al Baqir (AS), when asked about the exceptions, he said, "it included a woman's clothes, collyrium, ring, coloring of the palms and bracelet."<sup>4</sup>

**The other verse in the Qur'an that refers to women's dress code is:**

*"O prophet, tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad), that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. ..."* (33: 59)

**Hijab of the eyes and modesty for men.**

*"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; ..."* (24: 30)

**The Qur'anic use of the word "Hijab."**

*"Between them shall be a Hijab (veil), and on the heights will be men ..."* (7: 46)

*"...Between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a Hijab (veil) invisible:"* (17: 45)

*"She placed a Hijab (screen) (to screen herself) from them ..."* (19: 17)

*"And when you ask for anything you want, ask them from before a Hijab (screen) ..."* (33: 53)

*"... Until (the Sun) was hidden in the Hijab (veil) of the night."* (33: 32)

*"... In our ears is deafness, and between us and thee is a Hijab (screen) ..."* (41: 5)

*"It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by inspiration or behind a Hijab (veil) ..."*  
(42: 51)

**In Summary.** Muslim women are instructed through the Qur'anic verses and Hadith to cover the, hair, ears, neck, upper and lower extremities, apart from the usual clothing that covers the body. When In public, they are also instructed to put on an outer garment (Jilbaab) to cover the body contours which may appear sexually attractive to onlookers. This is to indicate their honorable status and to limit the likelihood of molestation.

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<sup>2</sup> Book "Islamic Hijab, Modest Dress" by Murtaza Mutahhari, p.52.

<sup>3</sup> Al Kafi, vol. 5, p. 521

<sup>4</sup> Tafsirul Quran, Safi, 24:31