

Meanings, Patterns and the Social Function of Hijab amongst Female University Students

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Abstract:

This study intended to explore the meanings, patterns and the social function of hijab in university students. In-depth interviews were conducted in university of the Punjab, 5 wearing veil and 5 not wearing veil. The participants were selected through snowball sampling. The thematic analysis was done. There were mainly 6 themes ; meaning of hijab, hijab is personal choice experiences, social protection, modesty, hijab is hindrance in progress or not, Data revealed hijab does not mean to wear long gowns, just wear reasonable dress; cover the body properly is hijab. It was also found out that personal preferences, religious obligation, family pressure and cultural values were the main causes of wearing veil. Furthermore, hijab gives more modesty and social protection to the women it does not restrict her mobility and progress.

Key words: Veil, attitude, universities, hijab, Muslim women

Introduction

Over the period of time, veil has been adopted in its different forms across the societies and different geographical locations. Whereas it is partly an expression of religious adherence, it is also cushioned in socio-cultural and political factors and has

been 'subject to changing fashion throughout past and present history' (Hoodfar 1997). There are several meanings of the term hijab: a thing that prevents, a thing that veils or protects, because it prevents seeing. The hijab also means a partition' (Lane 1984, cited in Ruby 2006). The terms veil and hijab are often used interchangeably, but the hijab has an Islamic significance that distinguishes it from the veil (Ruby 2006). Furthermore, the term hijab encompasses women's behavior/attitude, and studies have found that a vital feature of the hijab is modest behavior (Ruby 2006).

In Islam, the human body is regarded as a cause of shame that must be hidden and covered, a view that relates back to Adam and Eve (Khuri 2001). Modesty and chastity are coveted and sacred aspects of one's personality and character. However, a woman's entire body is imbued with sexuality: bodily movements and the style, shape and color of female clothing have the potency to instigate male sexual arousal (Tseelon 1995). Advocates of the hijab highlight the distinctive masculine proclivity for untamed sexual desire and interpret the hijab as a divinely ordained solution to the seeming disparities in male and female sexual appetites. References to the Qur'an are integral to examining the hijab as 'divinely ordained', yet, although the Qur'an instructs both sexes to dress modestly, there is a particular emphasis on female modesty: Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them. And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers . . . and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. (Qur'an 24:30–31).

In this article researcher acquired the meaning , different patterns and the social functioning of hijab in Pakistani culture that how people take it , for the inner satisfaction or for the sake of formality. The experience and perceptions of Muslim women who veil and the cause of inspiration for women wearing veil in universities and the opinions of women wearing veil, about those women not wearing veil and vice versa.

Methodology

Sample Selection

The researcher conducted her study in university of the Punjab. This university is largest university of Pakistan located in Lahore .Women were selected through purposive sampling method under which used convenient sampling from the Punjab university hostels, 5 were the who strictly observed hijab and 5 were who takes duppata. Reason for selecting, it was feasible for researcher to access the site and to collect data. The data was collected through in-depth structured interviews with each participant between 22 July 2013 and 31 July 2013. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, and at the request of all participants the interviews took place at their rooms. This setting was particularly significant in terms of the relationship that I, as the researcher, was able to form. The participants were relaxed and, within the privacy of their own hostel room, were able to talk freely about their personal experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were all given a pseudonym to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. The participants lived in Punjab university Girls hostel no 1, with the exception of two girls who lived in the neighboring hostel no 4. The sample consisted of women between the ages of 20 and 30 years. The educational level of the participants was high, 5 were students of masters, and two were M.Phil and three were PhD scholars.

My gender also facilitated my access to the women, as several participants made it clear that they would not have participated had I been a male researcher. However, the researcher's position as either the insider or outsider is not rigid.

For this article data were drawn from 10 in depth interviews. Researcher selected in depth interview because in-depth interviews are used when seeking information on individual, personal experiences from people about a specific issue or topic, when to capture people's individual voices and stories. It is important of gaining a detailed insight into research issue from perspective of the study participants themselves. This reflects the emic perspective that is essence of qualitative research.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used nvivo for analysis in making nodes and themes. The interviews were reciprocal: both researcher and research subject were engaged in the dialogue. Therefore, duration of interviews and the number of questions varied from one participant to the other. Interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of interviewees, each interview was assigned a code, and notes were taken during the interviews. For the very purpose of phenomenological analysis (explicitation) researchers transcribed key words, phrases and statements to consolidate the emerging themes. The systematic procedure of transforming the data through interpretations was followed. The researcher concluded the explicitation by writing a composite summary of themes emerged under six major sections 1; meaning of hijab, 2; hijab is your personal choice 3; experiences of veiled women 4; Hijab is protection 5; hijab is the sign of modesty 6; hijab is the hindrance in progress.

Thematic Analysis

The participants who wore the hijab had varying styles of dress.

For instance, 5 are wearing abbaya with proper veil, means to cover their faces. The other 5 take duppata but they are not strictly observing hijab.

Meaning of hijab

There are the different meanings and views about hijab

The hijab is a veil . . . for women to conceal their outer and inner beauty. It is to cover and protect the individual from lustful gazes of the opposite or same sex. Islam gives individuals the means to protect their modesty by enabling them to cover themselves while in public spaces and away from the eyes of onlookers who are not directly related to them.

Another girl says

There is Variation in hijab regarding social and religious perspective but in my point of view Cover face is Called hijab.

Another sensitive girls says

I think, Hijab means don't show the vulgarity, It does not mean to wear long gowns, even do not wear long gown, wear reasonable dress, cover the body properly is hijab.

Another explains it giving her explanation of Islamic teaching:

In my point of view In Islam, it is approved from Quran and hadith ,Cover face and the other not cover face, not cover feet and hands ,Hijab is I think , to cover body according to the injunctions of Islam.

Hijab is your personal choice

There are a lot of interpretations about taking veil in Islam and different sects promote different forms of veil starting from simple scarf taking to covering the face, hands and feet etc. So the veiling is considered as the prominent feature of Islam and same is mentioned by the veiled women. The women who are taking veil by their own choice defend veil very strongly. As one of the participant mentions;

I am proud of my decision of veil taking, nobody compel me to

do so, that is the God almighty who blessed me and I decided to use veil.

Another woman gives the similar response;

I take it by my own choice, no family pressure but I do it according my family context. My family doesn't like to move without duppata.

Another woman gives the different response;

I take duppata by my own choice, because I think girls cover their faces they are more conservative therefore I wear duppata feeling more confident and easily move in society and can interact with people conveniently.

One of the respondents states that;

I take duppata because it is trend in family, In my family abbaya is not considered good , The chadar is taking more good than abbaya because of distorted image of the girls who wears abbaya.

Another woman gives the counter response;

I observe hijab after reading and understanding about the concept of hijab in Islam when I was came in university, I was not observed parda ,I understand the hijab , the meaning , Functions of hijab then I opt it by my own choice Alhamdulillah. Now I am taking it from last 6 years when I was in MA part 2 now I am doing PhD.

One respondent tells that:

I wear hijab because I inspired from my family, from my cousin , in family we opt the many things , norms , values , , and we follow the tradition of family. Taking hijab is not exactly my choice.

During the interviews 6 out of 10 respondents mention that they cover themselves because it is the requirement of their family especially the male members. One respondent quotes:

Taking veil is considered as a responsibility and a good habit by my family. In my family when a girl is grown up to the stage of puberty then she have to take veil and we the girls don't have any choice for that matter.

Experiences of Veiled Women

Veiled women mention both the benefits and the problems associated with veil wearing. As one woman asserts that:

In veil women can be secure and safe while without veil the woman has to face the eyes of every one on her body which can spoil her soul and snatch innocence. Actually I mean without veil nothing is concealed so women become a hot-cake. Women without veil are considered being the public property and men consider it their foremost right to steer her.

Another mention the fact that:

Veil gives me a satisfaction that I am obeying the God and my parents at the same time and I am promoting the right image of the women in Islam. I feel proud and satisfied. I think I am not facing the problems which the unveiled could face e.g. staring, chasing and teasing by men.

Another participant states that:

One feels ashamed of it, but we should inscribe in others minds that veiling is a Positive merit and world routine is no recommendation or a standard to Judgment.

Protection

The hijab afforded women the ability to guard their reputation, because they were physically able to control what others saw of them, and as a result they were protected from the male gaze.

One respondent tells that:

The purpose of the hijab is so that other males can't look at our beauty, and Allah wants us to keep that for our husbands. I feel that there is a beauty that a woman has. From hijab I can protect myself and my beauty as well.

Another woman gives the similar response;

Hijab is not just a piece of cloth but a protector that protect the heart of mu'aminat, that protects me.

One of the respondents states that;

Yes , wearing hijab I receive more respect and protection when I go to many places in veil even ins professional

institutions I receive respect no body putt objection on it.
Nobody gazes me.

Modesty

While wearing hijab , women feel more modest but because of taking hijab modesty not come in actions and on the whole , so in this regard there are the different views of respondents

The hijab is a means to protect my respect, honor and modesty, which will envelop my beauty and emphasis my mind and intellectuality. The hijab is my method of protecting my personal view of myself. I can't do this without hijab; it would leave me lacking control over what people see of my body, I would feel exposed to strangers.

Another woman gives the similar response;

When you go out and see something beautiful in front of you, who is going to stop looking? Nobody will stop looking, because it looks nice. Important parts of your body have to be covered – because that's your decency. The way she should speak . . . has to be modest. If she is speaking to a man, she has to be abrupt, she shouldn't be polite. The reason is you can give them the impression that 'I am interested in you', that's where the problem starts.

One respondent tells that:

The hijab is the whole covering, the modesty, the clothes, the way you are inside.

There is one more similar response:

Modesty it's the matter of inner , but in our society who takes hijab people says she is more modest, but it doesn't means who takes hijab she is most modest.

Hijab is the hindrance in your progress in any field

The covering of the head did not separate women from the world, but rather it allowed them access to public space and eased their movement outside the home (Ardener 1993).

Not at all , who wear hijab that is not hindrance in progress

for her but in fashion industry there is hindrance for her, she cannot, and in corporate sector there is little but hindrance for hers, who said, if you continue hijab, we will not give you job.

One of the respondents states that;

Who wear hijab they also achieve high aims in their lives, they are no behind from modern ones it's not play important role in the progress, because I don't think so that hijab is the hindrance in progress, but it gives me more confidence to achieve my aim.

Another woman gives the similar response

No both have equal opportunities, mobility is same, hijab is personal choice, it's not restrict the mobility

One more respondent gives the similar explanation in response of it she tells

I am teaching now and doing my PhD its not hindrance, I thought that I takes hijab because of it I will not qualify my interview they will not appoint me but I gave interview in veil I was the top of the list. Alhamdulillah. So hijab is not the hindrance in my progress in my life.

Conclusion

Today we find that the Muslim community divided on the subject: the veil or *hijab*. But there is sweeping consensus among Islamic religious scholars around the world that Muslim women are required to, or at least should, cover their hair. So the head scarf, or some type of head covering, is widely viewed as mandatory in Islam. The present study tries to explore the experiences and perceptions of university students who veil and who do not veil. What are the meanings of hijab according them and what is the social function of hijab. Findings of the study indicate that students' have multiple reasons for their decision to veil and not to veil. Majority of the students see family pressure and social obligations as the main reasons of covering themselves. Others see it as a profoundly religious personification of modesty and soberness in clothing. Data also revealed hijab does not mean to wear long gowns, just wear

reasonable dress; cover the body properly is hijab.. Furthermore, hijab gives more modesty and social protection to the women it does not restrict her mobility and progress. Those unveil don't have any specific reason and religious explanation of not covering themselves except taking it as their personal choice and dressing the way they like.

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