

# society's view of hijab

BY NAHEED MUSTAFA

## MY BODY IS MY OWN BUSINESS

I often wonder whether people see me as a radical, fundamentalist Muslim terrorist packing an AK-47 assault rifle inside my jean jacket. Or maybe they see me as the poster girl for oppressed womanhood everywhere. I'm not sure which one it is.

I get the whole range of strange looks, stares, and covert glances. You see, I wear the hijab, a scarf that covers my head, neck, and throat. I do this because I am a Muslim woman who believes her body is her own private affair.

Young Muslim women are reclaiming the hijab, reinterpreting it in light of its original purpose to give back to women ultimate control of their own bodies.

The Qur'an teaches us that individuals should not be judged according to gender, beauty, wealth or privilege.

*"Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." Qur'an 49:13*

Nonetheless, people have a difficult time relating to me. After all, I'm young, Canadian born and raised and university educated, so why would I do this to myself, they ask?

Strangers speak to me in loud, slow English and often appear to be playing charades. They politely inquire how I like living in Canada and whether or not the cold bothers me. If I'm in the right mood, it can be very amusing.

But, why would I, a woman with all the advantages of a North American upbringing, suddenly, at 21, want to cover myself so that with the hijab and the other clothes I choose to wear, only my face and hands show?

*Because it gives me freedom!*

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Women are taught from early childhood that their worth is proportional to their attractiveness. We feel compelled to pursue abstract notions of beauty, half realising that such a pursuit is futile.

When women reject this form of oppression, they face ridicule and contempt. Whether it's women who refuse to wear makeup, shave their legs, or expose their bodies, society-both men and women-have trouble dealing with them.

In the Western world, the hijab has come to symbolise either forced silence, or radical, unconscionable militancy. Actually, it's neither. It is simply a woman's assertion that judgment of her physical person is to play no role whatsoever in social interaction.

*Wearing the hijab has given me freedom from constant attention to my physical self.*

Because my appearance is not subjected to public scrutiny, my beauty, or perhaps lack of it, has been removed from the realm of what can legitimately be discussed.

No one knows whether my hair looks as if I just stepped out of a salon, whether or not I can pinch an inch, or even if I have unsightly stretch marks. And because no one knows, no one cares.

Feeling that one has to meet the impossible male standards of beauty is tiring and often humiliating. I should know, I spent my entire teenage years trying to do it. I was a borderline bulimic and spent a lot of money I didn't have on potions and lotions in hopes of becoming the next Miss World.

The definition of beauty is ever-changing; waifish is good, waifish is bad, athletic is good - sorry, athletic is bad. Women are not going to achieve equality by putting their bodies on display, as some people would like to have you believe. That would only make us party to our own objectification. True equality will be had only when women don't need to display themselves to get attention and won't need to defend their decision to keep their bodies to themselves.

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# my journey to freedom

BY SUMAYYAH JOAN

It will be three years since I stood before two Muslim sisters and declared openly my belief in God (Allah) and His Messenger, peace be upon him, and thus freeing and liberating myself from my former self-imposed bondage. Stepping out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of Islam, it's funny that I found such freedom in the very thing that was keeping me from Islam in the first place - the hijab.

Even though I get the wide gamut of strange stares, points and comments, this covering makes me feel honored, safe and cherished.

The word hijab comes from the Arabic word "hajaba" meaning to hide from view or to conceal. Women who don't reveal their beauty in this society and give in to this oppressive system, are looked upon as invisible, without sexuality and backward. Because I'm often mistaken for a nun, or terrorist, I feel the reactions to the hijab for many women, is the truest test of being a Muslim.

## *But in reality, the hijab is easy!*

In instructing us to wear the hijab, Allah has given Muslim women what they can bear of injunctions and obligations. For Allah says:

*"And we do not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent of its ability, and with Us (God) is a Book which speaks the truth..." Qur'an 23:62*

Unfortunately, Satan and his cohorts are calling the Muslim woman to enslave her to the creation, and to forget about her servitude to her Creator. Chastity, modesty and piety are deceptively marked as shackles on personal freedom.

Allah warns the believers that they should not let Satan deceive them, as he deceived their parents, Adam and Eve. Under the guises of fashion, culture, and modernism, Satan has succeeded and is succeeding to lead the Muslim woman –and all women– into immodesty.

*Since the heyday of the feminist movement, there has been an increasing amount of scrutiny placed on the dress and status of Muslim women.*

According to these "liberated" women, the hijab not only covers the head, but also covers the mind, will and intellect. They say that our dress code is outdated and oppressive, and it stops us from being productive human beings. They speak out of ignorance when they say that our hijab does not belong in these modern times, when due to the constant decrease in moral values in the world today, circumstances make the hijab even more necessary.

From the dawn of civilisation, flowing dresses and headscarves have always been associated with "Godliness" or "God consciousness". Even the Christian pictorial representation of the earlier prophets and their womenfolk bear familiar likeness to the dress ordained for Muslim men and women (e.g. Mary). This tradition of modesty is reflected in the Qur'an (7:26), wherein Allah says:

*"O Children of Adam! We (God) have bestowed clothing upon you to cover yourselves and as an adornment (for beauty); and the clothing of righteousness – that is best."*

*Allah enjoined hijab on the Muslim woman to protect her from harm.*

He knows His creation, and knows that when women make a dazzling display of themselves, with immodest clothes, perfumed bodies and made-up faces, it serves to increase the sexual deviance of the overall society. Many of those who are misguided however, would have us think that the hijab is a portable prison that restricts our minds, lives and hearts. It is none of these things, and in order not to fall victim to their plots, we must begin to understand what the hijab truly is - a source of liberation, dignity and protection.

## *What the Hijab is...*

- ✔ An act of Obedience to The Creator
- ✔ An act of Honour & Dignity
- ✔ An act of Belief & Faith
- ✔ An act of Modesty
- ✔ An act of Purity
- ✔ An act of Bashfulness
- ✔ An act of Righteousness
- ✔ A Shield

## *What the Hijab is NOT...*

- ✘ It is *NOT* something new. Muslim women follow the example of righteous women in the past such as Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- ✘ It is *NOT* a symbol of oppression.
- ✘ It is *NOT* required in non-public places where there are only muslim females and close male relatives.
- ✘ It is *NOT* a means to restrict a woman's freedom to express her views and opinion, or to have an education and a career.
- ✘ It is *NOT* an act of defiance, confrontation or protest to non-Muslims.
- ✘ It is *NOT* a portable prison.

*"Indeed, the men who submit and the women who submit, the believing men and the believing women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the fasting men and the fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who remember - Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward." Qur'an 33:35*