

The Hijab Debate: My Hijab My Right

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Abstract: This study focuses on the dispute that there is an on-going political debate and controversy over Hijab. This paper examines the individual choice and veiling motives of Muslim woman. This study is based upon the perspective of 100 adult Muslim women students living in India who practice a form of physical hijab on a daily basis. Hijab is a symbol of modesty and privacy worn by Muslim women. Wearing headscarf is more of their personal choice, personal stand based on their unmoving faith in Islam. Hijab is their feminist identity- away from political or social manipulation. In this study, the role of society influenced women to wear hijab as well as their awareness of modern culture. Secularism is a foundation stone of India's Constitution, but unfortunately the line between the state and religion has distorted in recent years. A quantitative analysis has been conducted of over hundred women who are wearing hijab in India. The purpose of this study is to study and simplify the meaning of hijab and the assertion of wearing it. It is not a symbol of disruption but modesty. The Islamic practice of hijab (veiling) empowers those women who practice and if it has any influence upon feminist identity and body image.

Key Words: Women, Hijab, Empowerment, Secularism, faith

1. INTRODUCTION:

Our Indian Constitution comprises of both liberal, secular and communitarian dimensions. Over the last few weeks the issue of hijab (headscarf worn by Muslim women) has been often condemned in the Indian educational institutions surrounded with arguments and explanations. All belligerent sides are fanatical with the Muslim female body judging her dressing, her attire, or uncovering her hijab. Unfortunately the present socio-political environment which is often aggressive towards the Muslims and in particular, Muslim women, this study is needed to understand hijab and what it means to women who wear it.

Wearing a hijab or not wearing one has become more of a political debate rather than individual choice. Don't the Muslim women have the right to make their own choice and have the freedom to abide by their religious values and to openly practice their chosen faith? This paper examines the personal choice and veiling motives of Muslim woman. The idea of Muslim women as passive receivers of conventional political and secular narratives imposed upon them. This hijab (Islamic scarf) seems to have created a controversy in India and media have abused the matter even further. The argument of the hijab has actually exposed the character of the Indian society/ mentality with reference to the Muslim community.

Hijab has created a controversy in India. Unfortunately innocent Muslim girls are becoming unwitting pawns of political forces whose ideology and ideas are the opposite of the ideas that define India in our Constitution. It's not about Muslim girls being denied access to education but giving them the liberty and freedom to follow what they want to. Wearing headscarf is more of a personal choice based on one's religious faith in Islam. For them these women wearing hijab is their feminist identity- away from political or social manipulation

2. Methodology:

This qualitative and quantitative study examines however, if at all, the Islamic practice of hijab (veiling) empowers those women who practice it and if it has any influence upon feminist identity and body image. So as to analyse in to the idea of hijab, a study was conducted that self-addressed views of students in a Muslim minority institutions. As an exploratory study, a quantitative design was chosen to gather data about Muslim student's perceptions of hijab and

religiosity. Data was collected using questionnaire by means of Google form and few students interviewed in person by the researcher. Responses from 100 students were analysed and 10 in-depth case studies were conducted.

2.1 Understanding Hijab

In the Islamic tradition, both men and women are required to dress modestly. Muslim women conventionally cover their hair with a head scarf called hijab. The purpose of the hijab is to protect women from the male stare and not to constrain women.

In the Qur'an, the term hijab refers to a barrier or screen in the literal or symbolic sense. It is a curtain of some sort that partitions an individual from another. Hijab means curtain, separation, wall and, in other words, anything that hides, masks and protects something”.

Verses that have to do with hijab are as follows:

1. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves, head cover, apron), and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband’s fathers, or their sons, or their husband’s sons, or their brothers or their brother’s sons, or their sister’s sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful.” [Al-Nur 24:31]

2. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And as for women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock, it is no sin on them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show their adornment. But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower.” [Al-Nur 24:60]

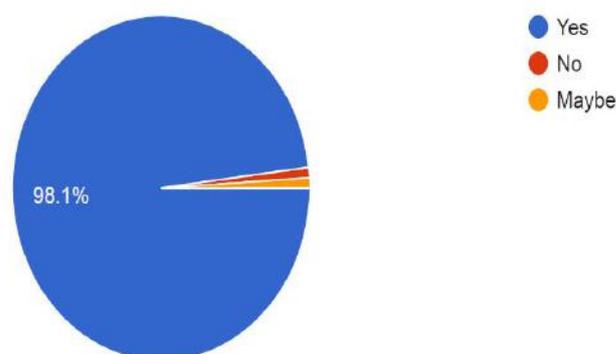
“Women past childbearing” are those who no longer menstruate, so they can no longer get pregnant or bear children.

2.2 Data and Graphs

Graph 1

Do you wear Hijab

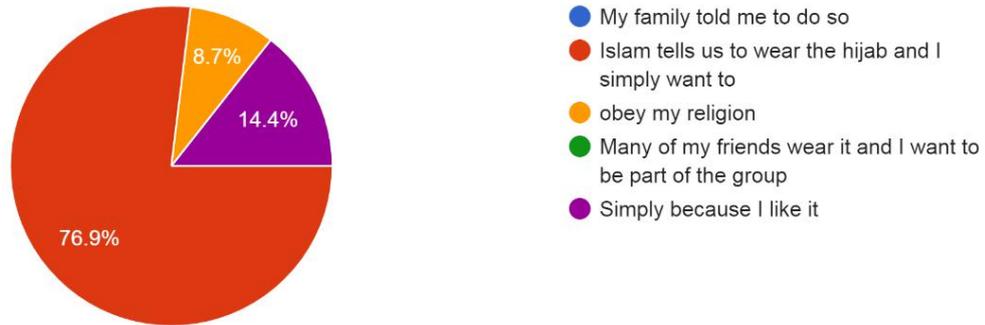
104 responses



Graph 2

What is the most important reason that you are wearing the Hijab

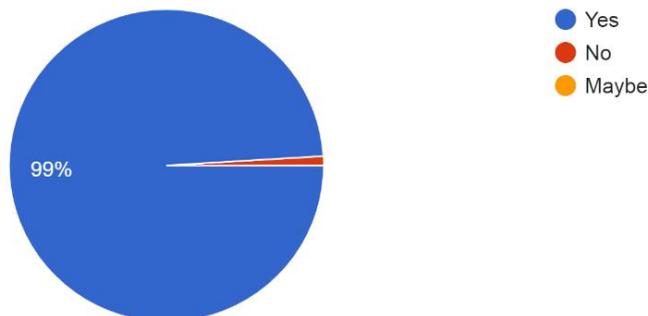
104 responses



Graph 3

Do you feel that wearing a hijab gives you more respect

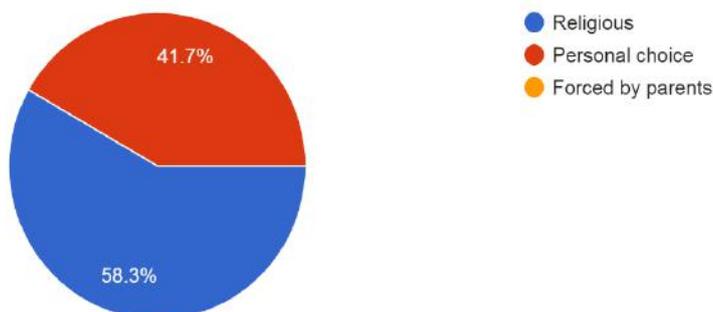
104 responses



Graph 4

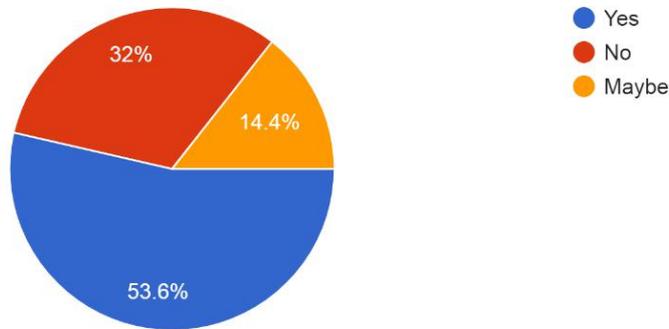
In your opinion wearing Hijab is it completely religious or to some point - political, personal choice or social

103 responses



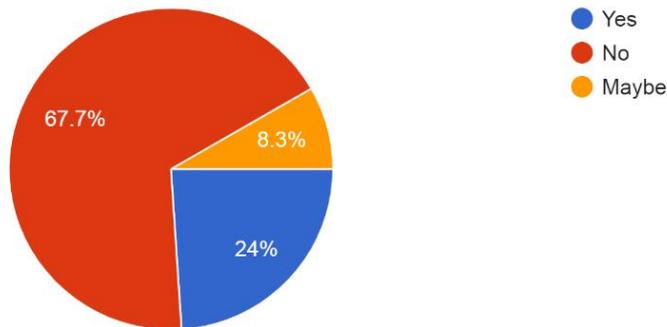
Graph 5

Why do you think that wearing Hijab is becoming an issue now in a certain part of the world
97 responses



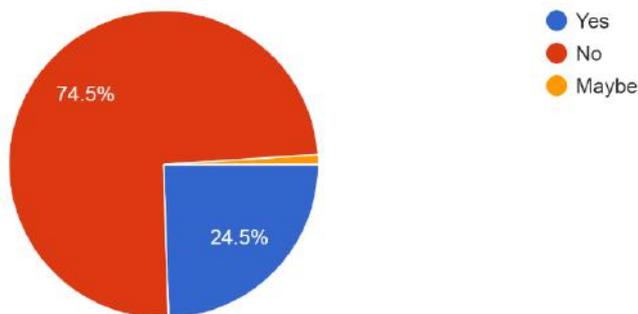
Graph 6

Do you feel that wearing hijab is a kind of sexual segregation or dominance
96 responses



Graph 7

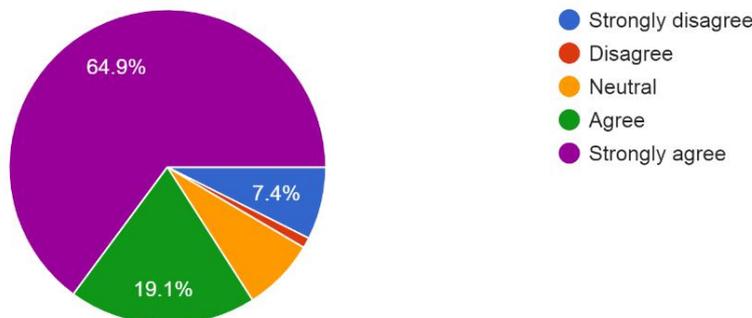
Do you feel hijab is a barrier to your education, empowerment or other activities
98 responses



Graph 8

Would you agree that, in general, wearing the hijab enhances a woman's beauty and empowers her

94 responses



2.3 Hijab Controversy

Arguments with reference to hijab have increased public responsiveness about traditional multiplicity. Veiling, unveiling or re-veiling is personal choice of Muslim women. However Muslim girl students wore the hijab from personal choice and their decision to wear it was related to their relationship with God.

The hijab has aroused feeling of hate and doubt and not of pity or confusion. Unfortunately women student wearing hijab have found themselves targets of ethnic violence in educational institutions and discrimination leading to anti-Muslim sentiment arising from labelling in the media. However these students are asking to be freed from the stereotypes placed on them because of the tradition and religion they follow.

“Investigations in France and elsewhere have found that most Muslim women, whether they wear the hijab or not, perceive prejudice as the primary source of their oppression, and Islam as providing rights and protection against oppression”. (Windle, 2004. Pp.99)

2.4 Case studies:

The vast majority of the answers to the question about the hijab mentioned religiosity. The majority of Muslim women students agreed that the believing women must cover their hair by putting on hijab in the presence of men who do not have a direct family relationship with them.

Sana Shaikh Says, “I think hijab should not be banned because it's the person's own right whether she want to wear it or not. No constitution has written something about banning any religious wear”.

Momin Masera says, ‘Mai ye kahongi ki ki hijab per hamara huq hai or hamari zindagi ka ek part hai hijab per band lagana galat hai or mai es khilaf hu government se guzarish hai ki humse hamar huq na le’.

Ansari Misbah says, ‘Mujhe hijab cahiye. Wahi me hamari sharam. Haya sab kuch h or education k liye to bohat hi zaruri h’.

Saba Muqem says, ‘There can be no comparison as both the women's (Muslim and non-Muslim) protect their body's by different clothing as in Islam the outfit is named hijab and in non-Muslim those are named as scarf or shawls’.

Another students said, ‘Like surakhsha kawach.....jaise corona se bachne k liye mask zaroori hai waise hi bure logo se bachne k liye hijab..... really I like hijab it's my identity’.

Rukhsar says, ‘Hijab is our precious cloth that gives us respect and cover our body, beautifies our soul, Islam has given this right to us no one can take it from us’.

3. CONCLUSION:

There is a need to expand our understanding and depictions of Muslim women away from the hijab and indeed outside clothing practices. It is essential to recognize and acknowledge the fact that the Hijab is a ubiquitously powerful symbol of Muslim women. Students should be forced to choose between her faith and education

These women students are knowingly choosing on their own how they want to express their faith and values. They are exercising their own agency through their choice to wear hijab. There is an urgent need of improving the social conditions of Muslim women and giving them more opportunities to express themselves as that would guarantee a fulfilment of real individual freedom and would allow for a social and political rather than simply a cultural management of their problems.

We need to stop judging serenely resolve this misconstruction and misunderstanding of hijab in the contemporary world cutting across geographical and cultural barriers.

There certainly exists a right to wear the veil. Moreover, it is true that the countless bills, laws, and cases banning or limiting this right in various European jurisdictions allude to the veil's inherent anti-feminist nature. The veil—or particular types of it— has been judged as difficult to reconcile with gender equality, with women's equal value, with their autonomy, dignity, and freedom

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