

Islamic Dress Code

Islamic traditional women's dress code is one of strict modesty. This requirement starts at home as all Muslim women are required to observe *purdah*, that is, the screening or veiling of women from men or strangers by means of a curtain. This practice is said to have originated in Persian culture and to have been acquired by Muslims during the Arab conquest of Iraq in the 7th century AD.

The practice of *purdah* is variously interpreted, but it generally means that they are to observe this in front of any man they could theoretically marry – in practice this means all men that are not family members (i.e., grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers, and young children). Thus all visitors and strangers must not cast their eyes on the women of a home. They can be heard but not seen!

The word that is used to apply this principle to what women wear is *hijab*. However, forms of *hijab* can vary and is open to a wide range of interpretations. Some Muslim women wear full-body garments that only expose their eyes. Others may cover every part of their body except their face and hands. Some maintain that only their cleavage or their hair must be hidden. There are even those who do not observe any special dress rules (for it is claimed that these are influenced by the open attitude to women in western cultures).

In the English speaking world *hijab* has come to mean the covering on the head of a Muslim woman, but that more accurately I termed a *khimaar*.

The various 'acceptable' forms of covering:

Hijab



①

Headscarves covering head and neck.

Shayla



②

A long rectangular scarf wrapped around the head, and tucked in place at the shoulders, popular in the Gulf

Niqab



③

A two piece veil consisting of a loose cap with a tubelike scarf.

Al-Amira



④

A veil for the face leaving the eyes clear, worn with accompanying *hijab*.

Khimar



⑤

A long capelike veil that hangs down to just above the waist, covering hair, neck and shoulders completely but leaving the face clear.

Chador



⑥

A full-body cloak, often accompanied by a small headscarf underneath, worn by many Iranian women.

Burka



⑦

The most concealing of all Islamic veils – one piece covering face and body, with a mesh screen to see through.

The covering worn is very much a cultural issue, depending on family origin – but it is all justified in the Qur'an. Most Muslim women today do not wear a full face veil - it is more common to see them in loose clothing topped by a scarf as described at (1)-(5) above. For many it shows that they are following Allah's commandments, dressing modestly, or simply that they are wearing the type of traditional clothes they feel comfortable in.

In spite of the usual focus on what Islamic women wear, the Qur'anic references to modesty apply to both men and women.

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them: Allah is well acquainted with what they do” (Surah 24:30).

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that and 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, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss” (Surah 24:31).

Therefore men and women are equally under the same rule for conduct, but greater emphasis upon the idea of veils (*khimaar* - plural *khumur*) is placed upon- and is considered obligatory for - women. Yet interestingly, many Muslim scholars point out that men's turbans are sometimes called *khumur* as well.

More can be found on this issue at the archived BBC website [article](#): 'Hijab'.

Special emphasis appears to be placed on how women are to conduct themselves. One [website](#) gives extensive instructions on women's etiquette, and interestingly it is written by a Muslim woman and makes interesting further reading for a greater appreciation of what is expected of a Muslim woman.

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