

Blackburn Muslim Association

Serving The Community

info@bmassociation.org



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Q: Can you please clarify the meaning and ruling of Hijâb for women? Is it just a cultural issue or is it an Islamic issue?

A: To observe the Hijâb is necessary as Allâh the Almighty clearly instructs in the Holy Qur`ân, “O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (Jilbâb) all over their bodies” (33:59) “and when you ask them (the wives of the prophet) for any goods, ask them from behind a veil” (33:52). With regards to the meaning of Hijâb or Jilbâb, there has been much speculation. The correct meaning explained by the majority of the scholars is to cover and conceal the whole body including the face in such a way that the figure of the body does not show. The interpretation of Jilbâb has been narrated by many including `Abdullâh Ibn `Abbâs (RA) who says, “Jilbâb is a cloak that should conceal the whole body except one eye to see the way”.

A common misunderstanding between many people is the differentiation between Niqâb (as covering the face) and Hijâb (as the headscarf or the full `Abâyah (cloak) excluding the face). This is incorrect as the Ahâdîth related to the verse of Hijâb clearly indicate that in early Islâm, Hijâb i.e. covering the face was not necessary. Then the verse of Hijâb was revealed instructing women to cover their faces from men other than their husbands and Mahârim. The great companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Anas Ibn Mâlik (RA) who is the most learned about the verse of Hijâb says, “Then I entered the house, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) drew a veil between me and him and the verse of Hijâb was revealed” (Bukhârî 4794).

This is further evident from the Hadîth of Aaishah (RA) when she was wrongly accused, she says about the companion, Safwân Bin Mu`attal, that he recognised her when he saw her, as he had seen her before the revelation of the verse of Hijâb. She clearly mentions in one narration, “So I covered my face with my Jilbâb” (Bukhârî, 4750). The Mother of Believers `Aaishah (RA) narrates, “Riders would pass us whilst we would be in the state of ihrâm with the Prophet (peace be upon him). When they would come by us, one of us would let down her outer garment from her head over her face, and when they had passed on, we would uncover our faces” (Abû Dâwûd 1829). There are also many other Ahâdîth, all of which clearly indicate that Hijâb includes covering the face. The aforementioned Qur`anic verses and Ahâdîth clearly indicate that the issue of the veil is a religious and Islamic issue and not only a cultural issue. In fact, the veil did not exist in the Arabian culture prior to the revelation of the verse of Hijâb or else there would have been no need to reveal the verse.

Y. Shabbir

Moulana Yusuf Shabbir
Blackburn Muslim Association