

## A VIEW OF HIJAB WEARING FROM MUSLIM FEMINISM PERSPECTIVE

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*Received: 16 Januari 2021*

*Accepted: 20 Febuari 2021*

*Published: 31 Mac 2021*

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**Abstract:** Feminist movement in the world of Islam has grown over time. They are influenced by the feminist movement that occurred in the West in the early 18th century, a movement that voiced out dissatisfaction towards men who conquered everything and women were only seen as a symbol of weakness. This movement demands for gender equality in many forms. This writing debates on hijab wearing from Islamic perspective, Muslim feminist and the view of hijab wearing from Muslim feminist. The research aims to look into the Islam demand of hijab wearing and to study Muslim feminists' view who interpret their own understanding. They look at hijab as no more than a local society's demand and a symbol of oppression from the men towards women. They also claim that forbearance (taqwa) is the priority in judgement instead of clothing.

**Keywords:** Hijab, Thoughts, Muslim Feminism.

**Cite This Article:**

Wahidatul Hannan Nazari & Razali Musa (2021). A View Of Hijab Wearing From Muslim Feminism Perspective. *UFUQ International Journal of Arts and Social Science Research*, 1(1), 19-26.

## INTRODUCTION

Obligation of hijab is a demand in Islam. It has been a basic and common practice in Islam since the early era. However, since the arrival of the Western powers who colonized Islam countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not only they have conquered the politic and economy, but also tried to change this basic thinking to suit their taste. One of the ways they did this is by building their own education centres and recruiting new generation among Muslim children that will inherit their thinking and power once these children return to their home country. Hence, the existence of people who rejected hijab wearing claim among Muslims is not a peculiar issue. Based on the phenomenon, this report will portray a number of Muslim feminist scholars who have given their view on hijab. Among those who are selected include Siti Musdah Mulia, Aminah Said, Fatima Mernissi, Taslima Nasrin, Ayaan Hirsi Ali dan Sisters in Islam (SIS).

## HIJAB FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAM

Aurah (nakedness) in fiqh means parts of someone's body that is compulsory to cover or protected from the view of someone who is not a mahram (Muhammad Zahiri, Zariah Zakaria dan Siti Salwa 2017). Obligation of covering aurah is compulsory once someone has reached his or her puberty.

The word hijab itself has various meanings based on its mention in the Quran. According to Ellya Zulaikha (2003), in terminology, hijab originates from the word h-j-b: the verbal form is hajaba which translates to covering, laying, putting a veil upon, hiding, forming a divider and wearing a mask. It was also translated as cover, wrap, blind, sheet and layer. Based on scholars' opinions, *jilbab* or veil means shawl or a wide cloth that is worn to cover heads, chest and back (Ibnu Munzir, 1987).

Suciati (2012) thought that hijab has a general meaning as everything that includes the act of limiting or dividing and covering to restrict somebody else's sight in order to avoid oneself from the restrictions in a religion. The literal meaning of hijab is wall, blind or sheath with a shawl and clothing for Muslim women. Meanwhile, according to (Zulkifli and Fatin, 2013), hijab in language term refers to an object to cover something with it. It is a veil worn by Muslim women that hides their hair, neck and it has a niqab that covers the whole face except the eyes.

Hijab wearing is a responsibility and also an obligation as a Muslim woman in covering aurah. Islam instructs Muslim women to cover their aurah so to not be sinful and to avoid oneself from tarnishing her own dignity (Suryadi Marzuki 2014). The term aurah is taken from the Arabic word, 'aurah' which means disgrace or shame (Muhammad Abdul Aziz, 2009). Based on fiqh, aurah means parts of someone's body that needs to be covered or protected from the view of non-mahram (Asmawati Suhid et. Al 2013). In Islam, the concept of hijab should be comprehended well as mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah. Generally, women's aurah consists of whole body except face and both palms, meanwhile neck and hair, even one strand, are aurah in front of an *ajnabi* (male strangers) (Wan Zainina, 2013).

Obligation of sharia in covering aurah is mentioned explicitly in the Quran and Hadith. The following are the *dalil* (evidence or argument). The descent of Surah Al-A'raf (7):26 is an order from Allah on the obligation of women in covering their aurah including hair.

يا بني آدمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوَاتِكُمْ وَرِيثًا وَلِبَاسِ النَّفْوَىٰ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ  
يَذَكَّرُونَ

O children of Adam, We have provided for you clothing to cover your nakedness as an adornment. However, clothing is righteousness. This is one of Allah's bounties, so perhaps you will be mindful.

Next, Allah has explained His order of covering aurah in Surah al-Ahzab: 59:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَرْوِجَنَّكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا  
يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

O Prophet! Ask your wives, daughters, and believing women to draw their cloaks over their bodies. In this way it is more likely that they will be recognized as virtuous' and not be harassed. And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful

This verse clarifies the obligation of every Muslim woman to wear a hijab. Before the revelation of this verse, women were often harassed by immoral men whenever they went out.

In that era, there was no difference between freed women and slaves in terms of clothing. Thus, this verse was revealed to command the Muslim women to wear hijab when they were outside of their houses so they will not be harassed as well as to differentiate between freed women and slaves (Amir Taufik, 1986).

Hijab in al-Ahzab verse 53 shows the blinds in the house of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W functioned as a divider between men and women so they would not have the chance to look at each other. It also refers to the hijab worn by Muslim women (Hariati Ibrahim and Nur Hafidah Abd Kadir, 2019). There are other words in Arabic Language that refer to head covers such as *khimar* as mentioned in the Surah an-Nur verse 31 “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears”.

According to a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, narrated by Khalid, Ya’qub Ibn Durayk said from “A’isyah r.a, verily Asma’ binti Abu Bakr r.a entered to meet Rasulullah S.A.W in thin clothes. He then turned his gaze away from her and said, “O Asma, indeed when a woman has reached her puberty, her body parts shall not be seen except these”, while pointing to Asma’s face and both her palms (Baginda), Sahih Abi Dawud; 3580.

The evidences presented showed that hijab wearing is an obligation and its validity shall not be questioned.

## MUSLIM FEMINIST

According to Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Fourth Edition (2005), feminism means a movement or understanding that claims equality rights for women as much as what men have benefited from. Lisa Tuttle (1986) in her book, Encyclopaedia of Feminism, defines feminism as used in English language which describes feminism as a word originated from Latin, *femina* (Arimbi and R. Valentina (2004). She added, feminism is having the qualities of females that refers to the theory of sexual equality, movement of women’s basic rights and replaced womanism in the 1980s.

Marry Wallstonecraft (1972), in her book called The Rights of Woman defines feminism as a movement in working towards claiming women rights, a movement which voices out about women position and rejects social status of men and women. Maggie Humm (1995) in The Dictionary Feminist Story expounded feminism is an ideology of women’s freedom as her approaches are all grounded on the belief that women experience injustice mainly due to their gender.

The early stages of Muslim feminisme began with the feminisme movement in Muslim society that emerged in Egypt as early as the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the struggle pioneered by Zaynab al-Fawwaz (1960-1914) and Aisyah al-Tayamuriyyah (1840-1902). Apart from Egypt, the campaign for women’s rights could also be traced In Iran, through Tahirah Qurratul al-Ayn in the mid-1890s, in Turkey by Aliyah Hanim in the late 1800s and Nazirah Zayn al-Din in Lebanon around 1920s (Moghissi, 1995).

However, the struggle of Muslim feminist over the past two decades has been a different approach from their previous leaders, when they began to discuss issues related to women within the framework of Islam and challenge their religious sources and interpretations, to justify their struggle (Adibah, Akmaliza, Norhafizah, Siti Suhaila dan Indriaty, 2017). Some

controversial issues such as hijab, women's leadership, women's rights and men's superiority began to be the topic of debate and dispute (Khalif Muammar, 2009).

Muslim Feminist is also known as Liberal Muslim Feminism, such as Nawal es-Sadawi from Egypt, Rifat Hassan from Pakistan, Taslima Nasreen from Bangladesh, Amina Wadud from United States of America, Siti Musdah Mulia from Indonesia and Zainah Anwar from Sisters in Islam Malaysia (Tengku Intan Zarina, 2012).

## **HIJAB IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF MUSLIM FEMINIST**

One of the Muslim feminists, Siti Musdah Mulia is an Indonesian woman figure who put a lot of work in fighting for gender equality in Indonesia (Karimuddin Nasution, Mohd Faizulamri dan Wan Nasyrudin, 2018). Siti Musdah criticised the exception of covering aurah in Surah An-Nur: 31 that means:

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments<sup>1</sup> except what normally appears.<sup>2</sup> Let them draw their veils over their chests, and not reveal their ‘hidden’ adornments<sup>3</sup> except to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons or sisters’ sons, their fellow women, those ‘bondwomen’ in their possession, male attendants with no desire, or children who are still unaware of women’s nakedness. Let them not stomp their feet, drawing attention to their hidden adornments. Turn to Allah in repentance all together, O believers, so that you may be successful.”

According to Musdah, the exception occurred because the people mentioned in the verse are the people who are able to guarantee a security on women's body. Other than that, the exception exists to avoid problems. Musdah explained that the limitation of aurah is strongly influenced by social context, tradition, or social culture (Husein Muhammad, t.th).

A Muslim feminist scholar from Republic Arab of Egypt, Aminah Said considers hijab as a copy of the Christian nuns “What can be seen today, among the Muslim girls and women, something that is called “Islamic clothing” while Islam freed itself from it, because it is a literal copy of the Christian nuns” (al Barazi, 127).

Another famous Muslim feminist figure, from Morocco, Fatima Mernissi views hijab as a community agreement, social construct and it reflects the men's domination towards women. She stated that hijab is a symbol of oppression towards women “the veil as a tool and symbol of oppression and subservience” (Fatima Mernissi, 1985). In her book, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, she mentioned that obligation of hijab is not from the prophet, but it is an opinion from companions who hated women (misogynist), and did not want women to become leaders (Fatima Mernissi, 1991).

Taslima Nasrin is a woman activist from Bangladesh who criticised hijab wearing through her Twitter account on 22 March 2019 when the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern wore hijab as a sign of respect when she met the Muslim community in Christchurch. Nasrin said “Brave women in Muslim community around the world have been fighting against misogynistic Islamic oppression and throwing off hijab and burqa. But New Zealand's Prime Minister by wearing hijab, not only deny those brave women's struggle for freedom, she insults them too”. Hijab wearing campaign in New Zealand was launched in

honour to the Muslim community and the families of victims from the terrorist shooting incident at al-Noor Mosque and Linwood Mosque (Ain Najhan,2019).

Based on the article *The Times of India* (2020), Nasrin has also criticised hijab wearing through her Twitter towards an Indian composer's child in the country, AR Rahman whose name is Khatija by uploading a picture of Khatija wearing a burqa on 11 February 2020, "I absolutely love AR Rahman's music. But whenever I see his dear daughter, I feel suffocated. It is really depressing to learn that even educated women in a cultural family can get brainwashed very easily"

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Muslim feminist from Somalia who supports the fatwa towards Salman Rushdie. However, after she has moved to Europe, her view changed and starts to oppose Islam. Hirsi Ali said that hijab is used to show how much women are responsible towards sexual control of men, for the women who do not wear hijab, they are considered as someone who seeks for sexual harassment such as rape (Andrew Anthony, 2007). This statement was expressed by Hirsi Ali through her Twitter account on hijab on 22 December 2015, "Worse, the hijab as a symbol justifies the rape of women who refuse to wear it. It is time to discard it like chastity belt".

While in Malaysia, an organization that fights for women rights, Sisters in Islam (SIS) when discussing about aurah of Muslim women, they emphasize on the concept of decency and modesty by presenting an argument from surah al-A'raf verse 26 which means:  
O children of Adam! We have provided for you clothing to cover your nakedness and as an adornment. However, the best clothing is righteousness. This is one of Allah's bounties, so perhaps you will be mindful

Based on their interpretation, even the verse mentioned about clothing to cover aurah, they emphasized "clothing that represents taqwa is the best". (Nur Zainatul Nadra, 2015). In terms of modesty in clothing, Sisters in Islam (SIS) argued using the words of Allah SWT from surah al-A'raf verse 31 that means:

O Children of Adam! Dress properly whenever you are at worship. Eat and drink, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful

What Sisters in Islam (SIS) meant by decency is Islam demands Muslims to cover their shame or disgrace that cannot be exposed purposely.

Based on their understanding, both verses of al-A'raf 26 and 31 emphasized that sharia of Islam demands Muslim to cover their shameful acts. Sisters in Islam added, what more meaningful is, it is clear that from both verses, Quran has emphasized on the importance of taqwa compared to cloth that covers our body, it does not matter whether it is big or small (Mazlan Ibrahim, Latifah, Jaffary, Muhd Najib dan Fadlan, 2012).

In a newspaper statement from Utusan Malaysia (2000) entitled Terengganu Dress Code, the Terengganu government has made it compulsory for Muslim women to wear hijab. According to Sisters in Islam (SIS), similar to the PAS administration in Kelantan, Taliban in Afghanistan and conservative scholars that once ruled Iran, the Islam parties that won and in power will always choose to control women's attire and social life as their first policy to prove their authority towards Islam. Sisters in Islam further explained, they stand by the fact that the authorities are not supposed to implement coercion in asking women to cover their aurah to fulfil their wish. Religion depends on the faith and willingness. Enforcing rules and regulation on attire will not help in improving Muslims' taqwa. Instead, the people will follow the rules

on the basis of fear towards the authority and Islam. This is definitely not the way heading towards taqwa. They added that the Quran says that modesty comes from taqwa and taqwa cannot be attained through coercion, be it covering aurah or exposing them (Sisters in Islam, 2000).

Next, they also emphasized that hijab wearing is an issue that is related to someone's faith. Hence, public institution or the government is not supposed to amend laws in obliging or restricting women to wear hijab. This matter is mentioned in conjunction with the issue of hijab wearing among female students in Malaysia who are not made compulsory to wear a hijab and Datuk Dr. Shafie Mohd Salleh who was the Minister of Higher Education during that time said, the non-Muslim female students in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) are not obliged to wear hijab to lectures, they need to respect Islam and comply to the university's dress code, which clearly asking non-Muslim female students to cover their heads by wearing a scarf (Sisters in Islam, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

From what have been discussed above on Muslim feminists' views towards hijab, in a long run, they see hijab as a social claim. More interestingly, some of them consider hijab is against the Islam claims. It is also a symbol of dominance and oppression of men towards women. Some of them argued that taqwa attire or clothing is far more important than the attire or clothes use to cover women's body.

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