

Niqāb in Pluralistic Society: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: In Sri Lanka, which is a multi-ethnic nation in religion and cultural aspects, there is an increasing number of campaigns and allegations against Muslim women's *niqāb* (face veil). Thus, the study is based on a Qualitative Method with the aim of exploring Islamic guidelines on how Muslim women should dress in their *niqāb* in a multicultural context, which is under threat. Data was gathered using only a secondary data collection technique. Books, journals, magazines, and websites have been used as data sources. The study concludes that although wearing the *niqāb* is not an obligatory duty on Muslim women who believe piously, a certain number of Muslim women are found to be fascinated with it. Although there is a law in the country to follow particular religious principles, criticisms of the *niqāb* (face mask) have arisen for the protection of other people, the proper expression of identification, and the coordination of everyone in the country. It has been found that, in this situation Islam allows a slight evil to be committed to prevent a serious evil in the society, it guides Muslim women to give up nothing obligatory to live in harmony in a multicultural context while adhering to only the most fundamental Islamic principles.

Key words: *niqāb*, pluralistic society, *burqa*, Islamic perspective, *awrah*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a developing country with multicultural characteristics. This country is home to ethnic groups such as Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Christians, and Malays. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are among the major faiths practised here. Muslims are the second largest ethnic minority in Sri Lanka after the Tamils. Different identities depend on them in terms of being a community.

The identity of Sri Lankan Muslims is considered diverse and has been reconstructed in line with political, social, and historical changes. From the point of view of researchers, we can see that Muslims uphold religious identity beyond their ethnic identity for certain political and interest's reasons. As a result, clothing culture is considered the main discourse on the identities of Sri Lankan Muslims today.

There are hundreds of different clothing cultures around the world. Clothing cultures are different according to each region, community, race, culture and habitat.

Sri Lanka also has traditional, cultural clothing marinas for every ethnic group. Unfortunately, as the three ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are influenced by Western dressing cultures, each has lost their own basic dress traditions. However, beyond this, it is worth noting that the *burqa*, *niqāb*, *abaya*, *juba*, and was worn by men and women in the Muslim community are entirely different from those worn traditionally in other societies. The researchers indicated that the impact of this

clothing culture has been driven from middle-east countries into Sri Lanka for two or three decades and it has influenced the Sri Lankan people's culture, even among those who went for business and professional prospects. (Report on the Plan on Preparation and Implementation of Bills to Ensure National Security, 2020).

Muslim women's *niqābs*, in particular, are seen as entirely different. The *niqāb*, in the sense that it covers the head and neck of the women and only exposes their eyes outside the home or in the presence of men who are not eligible to marry and has a helmet and a face veil on it. In a nutshell, the *burqa* is a covering that protects the whole body outside the home (Anita L. Allen, 2014).

Islam considers it obligatory to hide a man's *awrah* (area to be hidden). Al Quran expressed that,

“And tells the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears. Let them draw their veils over their chests, and not reveal their ‘hidden’ adornments 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” (Al Quran 24:31).

Accordingly, Muslims, like everyone else, are able to hide their bodies and dress in their preferred clothing culture to protect their privacy and maintain their dignity. The *niqāb* is one of them. However, this clothing culture followed by Muslim women has been subjected to various criticisms in Sri Lanka following the suicide bomb blast last year (21.04.2019). Today, the impacts of this mean that those who wear the hijab are more common in Asian region (Susan SM Edwards, 2014). Moreover, the effort to ban it is continuing. Muslim women are required to wear the *niqāb* in certain countries. For example, in tribal areas of Pakistan, the *burqa* (complete covering of the body) is considered necessary (Susan SM Edwards, 2014). Thus this study examined how Islamic guidelines and comments are provided regarding the wearing of the *niqāb* or the dress code for Muslim women who are living under threat by the *niqāb* in non-Muslim countries such as Sri Lanka.

1.1. Definitions of *Niqāb*

The *niqāb* is also known by names such as *kināf*, *himar*, *hijab*. "That the hijab refers to a hidden screen" (Abd al haleem, Abu Shakka, 2015).

A face veil that women wear over their face or on their nose (Mufjamul Mangan Jamif). A piece of cloth is worn by women to cover their face (Mufjamul, Lungthil, Arabiyathul Mu'azra).

Also the dress or cloth that a woman wears on her nose to cover her face (Al Muzammul Waseed). A veil that covers a woman's eyebrows and covers her entire face is called *niqāb* (Mujam Lungatil Bukhaf).

A sari is worn by a woman on her nose to cover her face (a scholar named Avas). A mask that woman wears over her nose or under her eyebrows (Al-Habib ibn al-Hajr al-Asqalani.). The *niqāb* is seen in various contexts.

1.2. Criticisms That Have Arisen About *Niqāb*

The criticisms of *niqāb* and *burqa* have been compiled by Mufisal Abu Bakr on April 19, 2019 as followed in Madawala News, Sri Lankan news paper under the title of "face covering and opening the mind".

1. In a multi ethnic society, Sinhala-majority country it is believed to be a protection for the person wearing the dress, but for others it is frightening.
2. It is worn by female teachers in educational schools, making it impossible to recognize facial gestures as part of the learning process.
3. During medical interactions, the patient and the physician face many risks.
4. In a tense, life-threatening environment, it causes many problems for the wearer and others.
5. Women's identities and images are forever erased from the world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the study conducted on the topic of Natasha Bakht 'Facing Public Opposition to the *niqāb*' The *niqāb*, a symbol of Non-integration>a symbol of Women's Oppression>The *Niqāb*, an affront to Secularism, The Intimidating/ Proselytizing *Niqāb*>A security/ Safety Concern>Impolite *Niqāb*, Incommunicative *Niqāb*, An identification Problem, Intolerant, *Niqāb* is a cultural symbol, Not a Religious Requirement Presents such matters. From his study, it is clear that the subject of the study of the *Niqāb*, a cultural symbol, and not a Religious Requirement are clearly helpful to the ongoing study.

Myriam Hunter –Henin (2012)'Why the French Do not Like the Burqa: National Identity and Religious Freedom" in this study noted that the *niqāb* was banned in European countries in 2004 and that cultural symbols of minorities were banned with the aim of promoting a way of living together through secularism.

Natasha Bakht 'Objection, Your Honour! Accommodating *Niqāb*-wearing in Courtrooms' said that: 2006, Shabnam Mughal, a masked lawyer representing someone in the UK's asylum and immigration tribunal, has been subjected to a field research including the replacement of a man by that lawyer.

Irene Zempi . (2016)'it's a part of me, I feel naked without it': Choice, agency and identity for Muslim women who wear the *niqāb*, said that:Several countries have imposed bans on the wearing of face veils in public places based on the premise that the *niqāb* is a 'threat' to notions of gender equality, integration and national security. While the wearing of the *niqāb* has elicited a good deal of media, political, and public debate, little attention has been paid to the opinions of Muslim women who wear it. It has been drawn on individual and focus group interviews with Muslim women who wear the *niqāb* in the United Kingdom (UK), this article places at the centre of the debate the voices of those women who do wear it, and explores their reasons for adopting it. The findings show that the wearing of the *niqāb* emerges as a personal choice, an expression of religious piety, public modesty, and belonging to the '*ummah*'. It is also perceived as a form of agency, resistance and non-conformity to Western consumerist culture and lifestyle. It will be concluded that wearing the *niqāb* empowers women in their public presence and offers them a sense of 'liberation', which is associated with the notion of anonymity that it provides them.

Jim A.C. Evertt (2015), given the prominence of Muslim veils—in particular the hijab and full-face veil—in public discourse concerning the place of Muslims in Western society, it examined their impact on non-Muslims' responses at both explicit and implicit levels. Results revealed that responses were more negative toward any veil compared with no veil, and more negative toward the full-face veil relative to the hijab: for emotions felt toward veiled women (Study 1), for non-affective attitudinal responses (Study 2), and for implicit negative attitudes revealed through response latency measures (Studies 3a and 3b). Finally, we manipulated the perceived reasons for wearing a veil, finding that exposure to positive reasons for wearing a veil led to better predicted and imagined contact (Study 4). Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Muslim clothing culture in Sri Lanka has undergone various changes over the past two decades. It has been argued that such a dress code did not exist among Muslims before and that this culture, derived from the Arab world, was not needed by a multiracial nation.

It is also a subject of much debate in European countries. While some politicians argue for its ban, they feel that this is disrupting communication or creating a security barrier (facing history & ourselves).

The Sri Lankan government banned for wearing a face covering clothes under the emergency Act, immediately after the April 21 bomb lost last year, Muslims also complied to the

law and enforced that. It was pointed out that the law should be enacted to prohibit it under the common law of the country even if it is prohibited under the emergency law of the country. Following this, a Cabinet Memorandum numbered 19/2015F126F034-1 dated 17.07.2019 entitled ‘Restricted to Covering the Face in Public places’ was not approved by the Cabinet due to opposition from Muslim Ministers in the Cabinet (Report on the Plan on Preparation and Implementation of Bills to Ensure National Security, 2020).

In several non-Muslim countries, the *niqāb* is recognized, while in others, banning orders have been issued. In particular ‘France - 2011, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the Muslim country of Tunisia also banned the *niqāb* and *burqa* in August 2019 (Report on the Plan on Preparation and Implementation of Bills to Ensure National Security, 2020). And Muslim women are being forced to break it in violation of the law demanding the right to wear it. In this context, there is a need to uphold the Islamic guidelines on what Muslim women should adhere to the dress code and what decisions should be made regarding *niqāb*.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Exploring Islamic guidelines on how Muslim women should dress their *niqāb* when threatened in a multicultural environment.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Human beings have to live within different ethnic, religious, and cultural structures in a multicultural environment. Although they are the direct opposite of each community, the environment of the world will create equality, co-operation and peace when each community supports the other community to take them on. However, rather than a coordinated acceptance of religious and cultural differences, today's Sri Lankan environment is creating tension. Culture is also an element of political mischief. Thus the role of such studies is very important in unravelling this situation found in this country. Therefore, the study is designed to address the issue of the Islamic perspective on the *niqāb* of Sri Lankan Muslim women.

In Sri Lanka, not only the clothing culture, but also the language, religion, and political culture, have created divisions among the people. This study will therefore be helpful for future researchers to explore and fill the literature gaps left by this work.

VI. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This is a Qualitative Study. The data for this study were obtained through a secondary data collection method. Received data has been theoretically analysed.

➤ Secondary data Sources

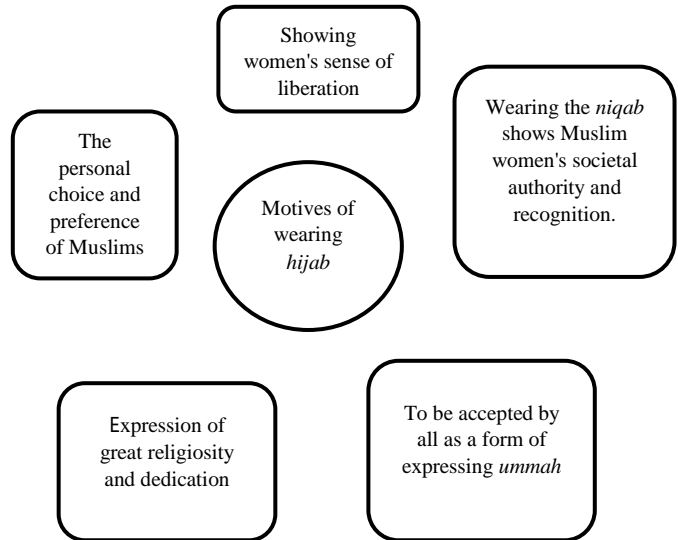
1. Books
2. Research Articles
3. Magazines
4. Web Publications and websites have been used.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and results of this research is discussed with the sub headings followed.

7.1 The motives of wearing a hijab

The motives influencing the *niqāb* of women have been structured through the previous literature to simply explain it.



The influencing factors that why Muslim women wear the *niqāb* depend on their social context. It is generally seen as a cultural symbol. Sometimes the scope for this varies in non-Muslim countries as well as in Muslim countries. "In Iran, the *niqāb* is seen as a political weapon." (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). Thus, the reasons mentioned above are indicative of the reasons why women in a non-Muslim environment tend to wear masks. Irene Zempi, 2016 ‘It’s a part of me, I feel naked without it’: Choice, agency and identity for Muslim women who wear the *niqāb*” from this research Some Muslims have mentioned the reasons for wearing the *niqāb* as follows:

“I decided to wear the *niqāb* because I wanted to be identified as a Muslim.”

“When people see me, they know straight away I’m Muslim. The message I send is that I’m a Muslim because I’m fully covered.”

“Before I didn’t look Muslim 100% because I was not wearing it, if I were to remove the *niqāb* when I go outside, nobody knows who I am or what I am.”

7.2 Islamic Guidelines On How Muslim Women Should Dress Their Niqāb

The Islamic guideline on how Muslim women should dress their *niqāb* when threatened in a multicultural environment is explained as follows.

7.2.1. Niqāb is not obligatory one

“And not to reveal their adornments (such as costume jewellery) except what normally appears” (Al-Quran 24:31). The fact that the Qur’an verse uses the word ‘except what normally appears’ reveals just how compelling it is for women to hide. The woman’s face and wrists must be visible during prayers. The verse of the Qur’an illustrates the same. That is, women are allowed to express their hands and face.

Ayesha (Razi) mentioned this in the announcement (*Riwayah*) coming in the book of Muslim about this: ‘The believed women covered their heads while the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was attending the Fajr prayer with them. Then when the prayer is over they will return to their homes and they will not be appeared because of the early morning darkness (Naeem, 2019). The phrase ‘they will not be appeared because of the early morning darkness’ in the above hadith clearly shows that the women had their faces open. Perhaps there would have been no need to mention something like this if they had covered their faces like that.

At the same time, it would not be considered here that people who want to cover the area should be permitted to do so, unless they are not using force. “*And tell the believed women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears...*” (Al-Quran 24:31). Surah An-Nur, verse-30, “*Tell the believing men to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates. That is purer for them. God is cognizant of what they do.*” If the Qur’an had commanded women to cover their faces completely, what is the command for men to ‘lower your gaze’ in this verse? This is only possible when women have their faces open. And once the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Ali (Razi) once they saw it, do not look again! The first view is yours, the next is not yours; this is to emphasize that when women look at their faces, they do not get increasingly focused on their attractiveness.

Furthermore, Al-Quran “O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.” (Al-Quran 33:59) According to this verse, the forearm worn by women should be used to inform and protect them. Being known in this context refers to the act of disclosing one’s identify. That is, his face is seen as a factor in determining a person’s identity. Therefore, Islam emphasizes the need for women to dress in a way that identifies them and protects their dignity. Others argue that the word “Avoid covering the face while wearing Ihram” means that women should wear it at other times. If this is the case, the males in this passage do not need to cover their heads at this time, but he should do so at other times. However, there is no such thing. The Prophet would not have told women to open their faces, if they were forced to cover their faces with foreign men, even during the Hajj in which the same foreign men congregate. Instated of this, he would not comment so.

7.2.2. It is enough to maintain the criteria rather than impose a specific dress code

Habaya’s popularity among Muslim women has been growing for two decades, while the Burka’s clothing structure has received much attention. However, Islam does not require a single dress code for all communities. Each community’s culture and way of life can change according to the time and in different surroundings. The guidelines of Islam are in place accordingly. It hates clothes that are tight-fitting, glamorous, and expressive. The change is free of the requirement that everyone wear the same clothing.

AbU Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) had said this: “Two are the types of denizens of Hell whom I did not see: people having flogs like the tails of the ox with them and they would be beating people, and the women who would be dressed but appear to be naked, who would be inclined (to evil) and make their husbands incline towards it. Their heads would be like the humps of the bukht camel inclined to one side. They will not enter Paradise and they would not smell its odour, whereas its odour would be smelt from such and such distance.” (Sahih Muslim: 2128).

Imam Suyuti says that women who wear thin clothes are considered to be the ones who expose the nudity of their bodies because they are the ones who show off their bodies. In any case, maintaining the limitations of one’s clothing is considered a duty imposed on women.

A woman may choose to wear a head covering in order to attract the attention of others. It would be prohibited in Islam. This is due to the loss of *taqwa* and cultural deterioration caused by the women’s dress system. Women’s clothing has also been identified by researchers as a factor leading to the sexual abuse of women. That is why it is enough for Muslim women to strengthen their faith by maintaining the simplicity of their dress in a way that does not suit men, except for the glamor and tightness of their dress.

7.2.3. Screening is only for the mothers of believers

The Quran says “.....and when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts....” stating that. The whole aspect of this verse refers to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house and wives and the word hijab, which comes here, refers entirely to ‘screen veil’ (Al Quran 33:53). The following hadith is located to further clarify this. “*Umar (ra) reported O Messenger of Allah! The good ones are coming to you and the bad ones are coming. Therefor it would be better to ask Umhadul Mu’minin to wear a hijab!*” After that, Allah revealed the verse regarding the *hijab*. (Abd al-Halim Abu Shakka, 2015).

The author of *Tabaqatul Kubra* mentions that ‘the verse about the hijab was revealed in the fifth year of the Hijri in the month of Tul-Qaeda. He mentioned that the verses, which follow must have come down later that year’; (Abd al-Halim Abu Shaqa, 2015). From that point of view, it is clear that the hijab, the veil that is completely hidden, is obligatory only for the wives of the Prophets. This is because if Khadijah (Razi) had marked the time of the Prophet’s marriage following their

death in the year mentioned above and if this command had been imposed on the believed women, it would not have been possible to delay the command until the 5th century. Not only has that, 'other Sahabi women do not have the *hijab* practice of imitating the wife of the Prophet'; Al Halim Abu Shakka (2015) mentioned in his book *Women's Liberation*.

As a further example, it should be noted here that some of the mothers of the believers participated in jihad before the *hijab* was made obligatory. However, the mothers of the believers did not participate in the jihad after the *hijab* was made obligatory. It is noteworthy that the obligatory screen on them does not allow for it. Although they serve as a guide to the underprivileged, mothers should wear the *hijab* and are restricted from participating in jihad. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) says 'I said to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) "O Messenger of Allah! We consider jihad to be the best practice. So cannot we join the jihad?" I asked. He said, however, that the best jihad is the Hajj, which is performed properly! At the same time, jihad was obligatory to the mothers of believers because *hijab* is not obligatory for them. It's also not necessary for believing women to keep their bodies completely hidden.

7.2.4. There is no compulsion in religion

Considering the above, it is clear that the *niqāb* (facial veil) is not a religious obligation for Muslim women and not imposed by Islam. The *niqāb* is a cultural symbol and is not considered a necessity or a command of religion except that it is intended to be created for the sake of human needs. One of the discussions that took occurred in British on this is as follows, Raheel Raza (2006) has started: "Contrary to some peoples view, covering the face is not a religious requirement for Muslim women." In response to a British Muslim woman who lost her job Because she wore the veil, Farzana Hassan (2006), President of the Muslim Canadian Congress, started "there is nothing specified in the Qur'an that says you need to cover your face... the veil is a tradition, a tool of oppression created by men" (The Canadian Press, 2006).

To interpret such a thing for the sake of the environment and for the safety of others leads to the peace of the pluralistic environment. The Muslim women's clothing culture has been called into question following the 09/11 attacks in the United States. This situation happened in Sri Lanka following the 4/21 attacks. The wearing of the *niqāb* is considered as a threat to concepts of integration and national unity in this context (Irene Zempi, 2016). Following such views and debates, Muslim women need to implement concessions and flexibility in the context of the country. Muslims are not forced to monitor their faces, hands, or entire bodies with a screen. Is it possible for Muslim women to violate the law of the country in which they live, despite the fact that it is worn for their freedom and protection? so, how do Muslim women who wear the *niqāb* and those who are moderate about it perceive the divine mandate of "no coercion in religion" if religion is their guide? Indeed, Islam encourages us to collaborate in a multi-ethnic environment.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the past, suicide bombers have attacked with the appearance of *niqāb*, which is Muslim women's clothing Culture, due to this terrorism, the growing fear of this dress code in pluralistic communities; the country's security law has recommended sanctions for it. Although wearing the face mask is obligatory for believing women in the religion, a certain number of Muslim women are found to be obsessed with it. Although there is a law in the country to follow a particular religious policy, the protection of other people, In order to properly expose the identity, Criticisms of the *niqāb* (face veil) also arise to bring about coordination among all in the country. In this case, Islam, which allows minor sins to be committed in order to prevent a major sin from happening in society, it guides everyone to live in harmony in a multicultural environment with only the basic guidelines of Islam, giving up something that is not obligatory.

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