

“Is it Necessary to Ban Burka and Niqab?” An Analytical Study Based on Mawanella, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The debate over Muslim women’s attire has become one of the more controversial topics in the current world. In Sri Lanka, this topic became the topic of discussion in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack because Muslims were the major suspects in this attack, and then onwards, Muslim women’s attire has started to be considered a major threat to national security. Because of this, a huge debate has risen in society. Therefore, in this context, it is vital to find out the opinion of the general public. Therefore, this study attempts to explore how people from multiculturally diverse societies feel about their neighboring communities. Here, I have conducted research based on the Mawanella Divisional Secretariat, which consists of a huge diversity, and used qualitative methodology as my research methodology. This study discovered that, as a result of their previous experience with ethnic riots, the community has a better understanding of and respect for other ethnic groups. Also, this study finds that with regards to the prohibition of the burka and niqab, the Muslim community has their own interpretation and rationale for their clothing practices. And according to the Muslim women’s opinions, wearing the niqab and burka is a tradition they should maintain and transmit from generation to generation. However, this study was conducted based on one divisional secretariat, and this may have led to missed perspectives from the people who live in another divisional secretariat.

Key Words: Muslim Women, attire, Easter attack, clothing practices

INTRODUCTION

One of the key topics that has generated controversy both nationally and internationally is the debate over “Muslim women’s attire.” Because these attires are frequently regarded as one of the most important identifiers of a Muslim woman. However, it gained more popularity during the Islamic movements that emerged in the final quarter of the 20th century (El Guindi,1999). Because of the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, it is clear how the discourse surrounding the hijab and niqab, which was brought to light as a threat to state security, has continued despite objections from the majority Islamic population and from human rights organizations.

In such a background, the series of attacks that occurred in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, 21st April 2022 provided a sufficient background for the emergence of the ban on the burka and niqab in Sri Lanka. Because it was discovered that Muslims were the primary suspects and Muslim women were also involved in those attacks. The nation’s mistrust of the entire Muslim population has increased as a result of the widespread perception that most Muslims were complicit in the attack. However, amid the prominence of influential organizations such as Ravana Balaya, Sinha Le, Sinhala Ravaya, and Bodu Bala Sena, organized protests against the hijab and niqab, which Muslim women wear as a distinctive identity, raising concerns that they pose a threat to national security. Here, this opposition was primarily motivated by the revelation that Muslim terrorists involved in the attack were using women dressed in burka and niqab to transport the

explosives they intended to use in the explosion.

As a result, the Gazette published under the emergency law on the basis of national security, stating ‘no individual shall wear any apparel in public places in such a manner as to prevent his identification’ under Section 32A (1) (a). Also, it was made clear that the face shouldn’t be covered by clothing or other items. And according to Section 32A (1) (b), “whole face” refers to the entire face of a person, including the ears (The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,2019). As a result, the ability for Muslim women to wear the niqab and burka in public places was restricted by the prohibition law established under the emergency law with reference to national security.

In this context, a number of popular and opposing discourses emerged, led by the Muslim community, human rights advocates, and Buddhist monks. Given those circumstances, the objective of this research was to investigate the debate over the niqab and burka ban, which centred on both national security and an ethnic group’s cultural practice and beliefs. In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack, it was clearly identified that a debate over Muslim women’s attire has risen, especially in the political sphere. However, there was not sufficient literature available to identify the public’s opinion of this discourse. Therefore, in this context, there is a clear research gap in this area to identify the general public’s opinion of Muslim women’s attire practices.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the above facts and a thorough literature review, this research was directed to identify how members of multicultural societies view the customs of various ethnic and cultural groups. To investigate this, I have chosen a qualitative research methodology as my research methodology. I have selected Mawanella Divisional Secretariat, Sri Lanka, as the field of study. The reason to select this area was that this division contains a large, heterogeneous community. For the purposes of this study, I primarily used key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Fourteen focus group discussions (FGDs) and ten key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with both Muslim and non-Muslim male and female participants.

Background of the study area

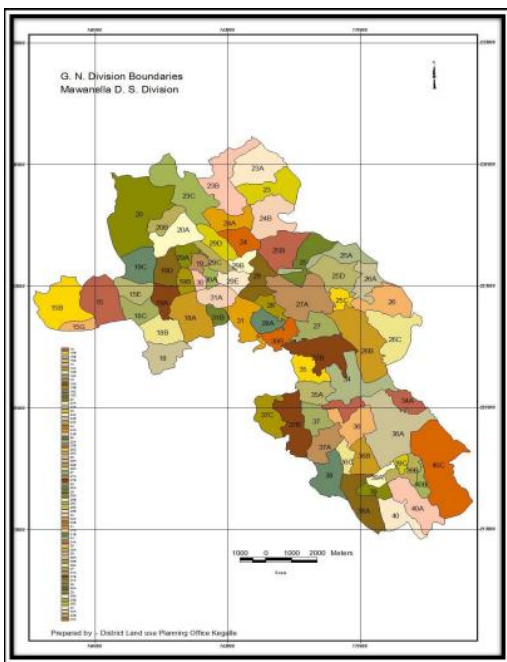


Figure 01: Grama Niladari Divisions Map in Mawanella Divisional Secretariat (Mawanella Divisional Secretariat,2020)

The Mawanella Divisional Secretariat is situated in Kegalle district in Sri Lanka. 71 grama niladari divisions are administered by the Mawanella divisional secretariat. There are 135041 residents in total in this area. In this location, there are 69585 women and 65456 men (Mawanella Divisional Secretariat,2020). This is one of the divisional secretariats with the most diversity, with people of different ethnicities, religions, and races. The divisional secretariat of Mawanella is comprised of the following ethnic and religious groups:

Ethnicity						Religion					
Sinhalese	Tamil	Muslim	Burger	Male	Other	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Catholic	Other	Total
89609	1646	43720	41	0	25	89411	1372	43846	410	2	135041

Table 01: Ethnic and Religious composition (Mawanella Divisional Secretariat,2020)

Analysis of Respondent’s Demography

The information regarding the social and demographic variables of those who take part in these interviews can be analyzed based on their age level, gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status, and educational background.

Age Range	No. of Respondents	Gender	
		Male	Female
15-25	04	2	2
26-35	14	9	5
36-45	28	11	17
46-55	13	7	6
56 and above	07	6	1
Total	66	35	31

Table 02: No. of respondents by their age range and gender

Ethnicity				Religion				
Sinhalese	Tamil	Muslim	Other	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Catholic	Total
18	16	21	11	15	11	21	19	66

Table 03: Ethnic and Religious composition of the study sample

Married	Unmarried	Divorcee	Widow	Other
40	14	7	4	2

Table 04: Marital Status of the study sample

Educational Qualification	No of respondents
Degree/ Higher degree Level	03
Up to Advanced Level	07
Above Ordinary Level	03
Up to Ordinary Level	13

Grade 5 pass and above	09
Up to Grade 5	09
Never went to school	22

Table 05: No. of respondents by their educational qualification

When looking at the demographic data in the tables, it is clear that these respondents belonged to various levels of social stratification. When it comes to their occupations, it is clear that the majority of the respondents were engaged in various types of occupations such as studying, office work, teaching, serving as police officers, attendants and nurses in hospitals, garment factory workers, doing some labor work, being self-employers, and being housewives, while representing a wide range of diversity and social levels.

RESULTS

This section involves exploring the views of people who live in the Mawanella divisional secretariat on the banning of the niqab and burka after the Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka. Here, I have chosen this area as my study area due to the fact that this was an area where there had been two riots over ethnic and religious issues. The interviews began with an inquiry into the ethnic harmony practiced there. According to the responses that I received, what I identified was that because of the past incidents that they experienced in 2001, 2018 and 2019 due to the ethnic misunderstanding between the communities, now every person has a better understanding of themselves. Especially after the 2019 Digana incident, there is now an upward trend for ethnic groups to come forward and work together as a community without considering their ethical or cultural backgrounds (Safi, 2019).

Investigating the opinions on the banning of the niqab and burka, it became clear that different opinions exist even within the same communities. Some residents of Mawanella feel that these kinds of restrictions are unfair to Muslim cultural customs and practices.

“Since our nation has a great deal of diversity, banning some cultural customs is not acceptable. We are a nation that upholds human rights. So... such a prohibition may be against a certain ethnic community’s fundamental rights. Furthermore, such poor government policies may one day have a negative effect on the nation” (Buddhist monk in the Mawela Temple, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

“We are living in a country that ensures our human rights. We already have the freedom to practice our religious practices. Wearing a niqab and burka is a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is our religious belief that Alla’s teaching is a practice that every Muslim girl or woman should follow. Following this type of clothing practice is not harmful for anyone or for society”(Imam in one of the Mawanella Mosque, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

When taking into account the aforementioned quotations, it is evident that religious authorities in Mawanella hold the opinion that allowing room for the different minority cultural traditions is a positive step toward ensuring human rights. This demonstrates their conviction that ethnic harmony in society has a significant effect on respecting others’ cultural uniqueness in order to sustain peace.

In order to better grasp the various opinions regarding this ban, it is also essential to find out what the general public thinks about the prohibition of the burka and niqab. When examined about this, the study found out that Muslims have their own interpretation and rationale for their clothing practices. What we discovered from the Muslim women’s focus groups and key informant interviews is that the majority of the Muslim women respondents considered wearing the niqab and burka as a kind of tradition they should maintain and transmit from generation to generation. The majority of Muslim women then outlined a few

justifications for why they keep wearing this attire. Those are:

- Such a clothing practice is a norm that they should follow.
- It is a practice that they got from their parents.
- It is a symbol of their devotion and honesty to the religion and culture.
- Because this is their cultural identity.
- This is a way that they can show their solidarity.
- To protect from the harassment.

“Since I was a small child, my mother has always instructed me on how to dress when I leave the house. They said that as girls, we should cover our whole body and obey without question” (Fathima, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

Fathima claims she learned this dressing practice from her parents. Especially from her mother. She believes that because she was instructed not to question that practice by her mother, it is not appropriate to question that practice.

“I also learned this from my family. My parents always told me how I should dress and behave. Since then, I have practiced those things, and now I’m also teaching the advice that I learned from my parents to my children as well” (Ameera, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

The views expressed above are from Muslim women who explain why they began wearing the niqab, burka, hijab, and other traditional attire. These ideas demonstrate that they didn’t question their elders about their attire choices because they typically hold the opinion that doing so is inappropriate. And when I asked the respondents if they were aware of Allah’s (God in Islam) teaching regarding the way women should dress, almost all of them said they were. However, most of them had no idea exactly what was stated in the Quran with regard to the way women should dress or why such a condition was stated. This indicates how these Muslim women adhere to the traditions and practices their parents taught them.

Moreover, some respondents stated that they were willing to wear this as their safety cover. Also, some of the respondents have stated that because of this, they can protect themselves from the perpetrators.

“When we are travelling by public transport, it is really difficult to travel by bus or train. Especially if a girl or woman is travelling alone, then many perpetrators are trying to harm and harass them, sometimes sexually. So I believe that because of our dress, we can easily keep ourselves protected from mentally ill people. So I believe this dress provides us with extra protection to protect ourselves from those people.” (Ameera, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

When examined about the opinion of these Islamic women with regards to the banning of the burka and niqab in Sri Lanka, I found that, they do have different opinions regarding this matter. They all agreed that this attire practice is a part of their identity. As a result, they are easily recognized, and it is a symbol that gives them some sense of security in some situations. However, because of this, they can again be victimized and marginalized. This is clearly demonstrated by the experiences of a few respondents after the Easter Sunday attack.

“I went to the store a few days after the Easter attack to buy some necessities for my baby. People began to stare at me as soon as I walked into the store. They started examining every inch of me. Because I’m wearing a burka...” (Fathima, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

“This is an experience that I had soon after the curfew was lifted after the attack. I remember going to the bank that day and getting into the bus on my way back. Soon after I got on that bus, people started to

suspect that I was also a terrorist. They started to look at me. Then I heard someone shout at the bus driver to get me off. However, I ignore that thing. Then I got a seat to sit. Soon after I sat on that seat, the person next to me stood up and went to the front of the bus. On that day, I got really upset. I felt unsecured” (Shanaaz, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

According to the study that I conducted regarding Muslim women’s attire, I realized that some Muslim girls and women hold a progressive view point with regards to this matter.

“Wearing a burka, a hijab, and other attire has now become a factor that measures our social status. I’m not sure whether you are aware or not, but these dresses can be purchased for 5000 to 50000 rupees and above. The price of a garment is determined by the material it is made of and the design embroidered on it. However, everyone cannot purchase expensive attire”

“In the Quran, Allah said that women should cover their bodies to protect their bodies and their private parts. But Allah did not mention or impose this type of clothing practice. In that case, the current attire practices are problematic. In this sense, I personally believe it is good to take action to ban this practice” (Anonymous, Personal, 17th February 2022).

“Wearing a burka or a hijab should be our choice. It should not be a mandatory norm. I know many Muslim girls, including myself, who are facing lots of difficulties due to this practice. Wearing this clothing on sunny or rainy days is simply uncomfortable. We know how to dress properly as girls. This limits our freedom” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

“Wearing a niqab and burka has become an uncontrollable habit for us. As girls, we also like to wear clothing that we like. But, making decisions becomes beyond our choices” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

Focusing on the ideas stated above, it can be identified that these women have progressive ideas regarding this matter. When I cross-checked the ideas of these women, I found that the variable factor behind this was their education and the level of education they received. Because most women simply followed their parents’ orders without questioning, they only attended school at the ordinary level. But the women who are supporting this ban passed their advanced-level examinations, and a few of them are pursuing their bachelor’s degree as well. We can thus conclude that these respondents’ beliefs were influenced by their educational background. On the other hand, it is evident from this topic that the Muslim women’s community holds contrasting opinions on what they wear.

Considering the views of the Muslim men on this prohibition, I observed that they also have different opinions. According to the Muslim men, since Muslims are a small community, in order to recognize their community members, this dress code is necessary. Because then they can keep an eye on their community members.

“After the Easter Sunday attack, we noticed that this incident was negatively affecting the members of our community. We got to know that our sisters and brothers, who lived in different parts of the country, got victimized and faced lots of troubles. However, in that type of situation, in order to clearly recognize our community members, these types of clothing practices are essential. Then we can ensure the safety of our community members” (Hussan, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

I had encountered similar viewpoints in my previous discussions with Muslim women. It is clear how the Muslim community uses this clothing code as an indicator to ensure the safety of its members.

According to the government, this ban was imposed because the niqab and burka posed a threat to national

security. However, Muslim people don't believe this attire practice is a threat to society. Instead of this, they believe that by imposing such a law, the government is trying to target minorities, violating and undermining their rights.

"I don't think it is necessary to ban the niqab and burka to ensure national security. Because, if the parliament wants to prevent crimes, they must also take other preventive measures. Without taking appropriate actions to stop crimes, it is really funny that they accused innocent Muslims of being perpetrators and took action to ban their cultural and religious practices. This clearly demonstrates how the government is attempting to violate our rights by deliberately targeting us"(Abdul, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

"Because of our cultural customs, the government has unfairly targeted us. We also worry about leaving our houses during the Easter Sunday attack time. Because the major suspects were members of our Muslim community, we too felt responsible. We thought the people in our town rejected us and treated us unfairly. That's what we believed. However, the truth was rather different. They all stayed with us. However, the people who live here always take care of us during that period. This demonstrates that society welcomes us and does not see us as a threat. However, it is the government that is attempting to cast us as terrorists and a threat to the nation." (Hakeem, Personal Communication, 17th February 2022).

When analyzing the data, it was identified that the community members, including the religious leaders, believe that giving a space and the platform to practice their own cultures and cultural freedom is an important. According to the study findings, following the Easter tragedy, the locals in the Mawanella area did not view Muslims as their enemies or terrorists since they were well connected and had a better level of reconciliation than the authorities had anticipated. When we examine further on this, the study reveals that, as a result of the religious leaders active engagement in constructing ethnic harmony in this area, they used to organize cultural events, including celebrating other ethnic festivals, organizing multicultural programs, and encouraging and supporting inter-ethnic marriages. Therefore, people who live in this area never differentiate others by their ethnic background. And because of this, people who live in this area have a better understanding of each other, which has created a strong ethnic and cultural bond with each other. Therefore, the villages in this area believe that, after the Easter Sunday attack, they still do not suspect their neighboring Muslim community as a result of the ethnic harmony practicing within their community.

Examine the opinion of the members of the other ethnic groups; it is revealed that they, too, do not agree on a single point regarding this clothing practice restriction. Some of the respondents think that because Sri Lanka is a democratic nation, everyone should be allowed to exercise their rights without obstacles, regardless of whether they belong to the majority or the minority. And they also believe that women should have the right to decide what they want or don't want. Likewise, when it comes to the Muslim community, Muslim women should have the right to choose what to wear. Even if there are some religious obligations or practices, Muslim women are still the ones who need to choose what they want to do. Because no one can influence their decisions because everyone has the capacity to make their own.

"Tomorrow, the government will outlaw the robes worn by Buddhist monks. What is your response? Buddhists will then begin to raise their disapproval. They can say that has been a tradition since the time of the Buddha and then inquire as to how it can be prohibited; similarly, individuals can criticize the government. Islamic culture also includes wearing various attire, such a burka. In light of this, they also have the same right to claim them" (Nalini, Personal Communication, 18th February 2022).

"It is entirely their option to wear whatever they wish. The government cannot be involved in these choices. The government should take further appropriate measures if that clothing poses a threat to security. The answer to the security problems is not to ban their traditional clothing" (Dilhani, Personal Communication,

18th February 2022).

It is obvious that certain individuals totally opposed the government's decision to outlaw the niqab and burka. They believe that every person who lives in the country should have an equal opportunity to practice their culture and their beliefs. However, throughout this study, a few respondents expressed the opinion that it is necessary to ban this Muslim women's attire practice completely. However, when cross-checking the backgrounds of the respondents who agreed to this ban, it was discovered that those respondents had migrated to or relocated to that area within a year. Moreover, there was another opinion identified in favor of this attire ban. Some of the respondents believe that if this garment poses a risk to national security, at the very least a temporary restriction should be imposed until the danger is reduced. Considering this fact, it is also clear that people in this area are not ready to agree to imposing a complete Muslim women's attire ban.

DISCUSSION

When analyzing the findings of the study, it is important to think why this niqab and burka ban becomes a debatable topic in the Sri Lankan context. Normally, people wear clothes for five main reasons, including adornment, protection, identification, modesty, and status (Utah Education Network, 2012). Accordingly, it can be seen in reference to the Muslim community how they went above and beyond their socioeconomic requirements and used clothing as a symbol that signified their identity and modesty in society as a whole. The human rights chapter of the Constitution's articles 10, 11, and 12 has created the environment necessary for that. This shows the fact that, according to the constitution, every citizen of this country has been given an equal right to practice a religion of their choice. Due to this, it is customary for Sri Lankans to adhere to their respective religions and engage in cultural practices associated with them. It is therefore fair to claim that the way Muslim women dress is a type of practice used to uphold their religious identity. But one gets the impression that this practice among Muslim women today has evolved beyond simple belief and has come to represent the oppression of women. In the context of the Easter Sunday incident, it is vital to pay attention to the restriction on Muslim women's clothing, which feels like a great development for women's freedom. On the other hand, it is also crucial to consider how this restriction would affect Islamic women.

Hijab carries different symbolic meanings (Jorgensen, 2008). To Muslims, it is a symbol of modesty, whereas Europeans and some feminists see it as a mark of the inferior status and oppression of women (Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013). When examining the above-mentioned statement, it is vital to identify the reasons behind this attire practice among Muslim women in Sri Lanka. There is an idea that Muslim women have obtained a distinct religious identity by adopting hijab in non-Muslim countries (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Droogsma, 2007). Based on this, it is necessary to find out the reasons behind this attire practice and reasons to oppose this attire ban.

Taking this into account, we may discover that Muslim women's clothing is a topic of debate on a national and international scale. Some people are aware that wearing a niqab or burqa is a symbol of maintaining connections with their community, representing their religious identity, and also reflecting solidarity. This can be understood with a scholarly understanding of this practice, such as, 'hijab defines Muslim identities, performs a behavior check/control, resists sexual objectification, affords more respect, preserves intimate relations with family, and provides freedom' (Droogsma, 2007 & Kopp, 2005), 'Practicing hijab may also not be considered an outcome of religious oppression. Rather, it can be a symbol of religious commitment' (Kamal, 2016).

However, when analyzing the study findings, it is a clear fact that a number of opinions exist even within the Muslim community. To some of them, it is a part of their identity, and to others, it is their responsibility and their duty. According to the study's findings, some women are willingly wearing these dresses even

though they have no barriers to wearing other clothing and have permission from their families. Therefore, it indicates that these women are wearing this because it's their preference, and this again proves the idea of Jones that they are wearing this because it is, however, women's choice (Jones cited in Kamal & Fayyaz, 2016). In that context, they also preferred to wear these dresses rather than consider their comfort. They have grown accustomed to wearing this attire because they believe they can demonstrate their religious devotion by doing so. And now they use this practice. This proves the fact that this Muslim woman's traditional dress carries a different meaning. Muslim women's who live in this area are wearing their traditional attire because of their willingness and because they were taught to do so. Also, they believe that it is their duty and responsibility to carry forward this tradition.

However, this study found that some people, particularly young girls and women, believe that Muslim women's clothing is used to oppress the freedom of innocent women rather than as a symbol of their identity. Because, according to some young Muslim women, they believe that this practice has become an avoidable habit. They want to wear nice clothes, the same as other girls who are the same age. They cannot do that due to this cultural barrier. According to the findings of this study, the niqab and burka attire practice has become an unquestioned and voluntary practice among the women who live in the Mawanella divisional secretariat. Considering this, it's emphasised the idea that the hijab is ultimately a symbol; it oppresses, liberates, or empowers, according to society, tradition, and the woman who places it over her hair (Clark, 2007).

Moreover, through clothing like the niqab and hijab, it can be identified how male-based hegemonic practices are enforced on women. The custom of Islamic women's clothing is founded on Allah's instructions, as evidenced by their religious writings. *According to what Allah the Exalted says in Surat an-Noor, ayah 31, it states, "And tell the believing women to **lower their gaze**, guard their private parts, and not show of their adornment except that which is apparent, and draw their **veils over their (necks and) bosoms** and not reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no knowledge of women's private parts"* (Allah, n.d.). From this, it is clear that this practice of attire is a gift given to them according to the teachings of their religious leaders.

However, in this instance, we should think about how acceptable and just it is for a culture or a religion to dictate what women should wear. In the time that Allah lived, perhaps this can be justified and considered valid. However, what makes this situation unique is the fact that Islamic males were involved in assisting in the development and establishment of Islamic women's dress practices. Thus, it is evident that the Islamic woman has lost even the most fundamental freedom, the right to choose how she should dress herself. This is a kind of representation of masculine supremacy. And an increase in his control over the woman. This idea, which was mentioned above, may not be accepted by everyone. However, when taking these ideas into account, this also indicates how the concept of intersectionality practices behind cultural and religious practices. According to Crenshaw and his argument, black women suffered from disadvantages, discrimination, and exploitation while suffering from triple oppression, like blacks, women, and the working class (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Similarly, by using this concept to our research, we are able to identify the ways in which Muslim women face discrimination, exploitation, and disadvantages just because they are women and members of the minority community in the nation.

Moving on to the imposing niqab and burka ban laws after the Easter Sunday attack also caused a huge debate in the country. This can be identified by the quote stated by Dinushika Dissanayake, Deputy Director of Amnesty International South Asia. 'At a time when many Muslims in Sri Lanka fear a backlash, imposing a ban that effectively targets women wearing a face veil for religious reasons risks stigmatizing them. They will be forced out of public spaces to stay at home and will be unable to work, study, or access

basic services. The ban violates their rights to non-discrimination, freedom of expression, and religion' (Amnesty International,2019). However, in the debate, after the Easter Sunday attack, according to my point of view, it is not right to ban Islamic women from practicing the practice, whether it is a threat to national security or not. On the other hand, as I previously mentioned, making this type of attire mandatory was an entirely Muslim male-led decision. However, the banning of this practice was again a male decision that belongs to all ethnic groups that are represented in the decision making body in Sri Lanka. The most crucial point to keep in mind is that this was a decision that affected women; women did not ask for this law to make these outfits required or to outlaw this custom. Thus, this illustrates the influence patriarchal relationships have on society through cultural institutions like the media, religion, and education (Walby,1989). Not only that dictating how a woman should dress in this manner and prohibiting a practice that she has been accustomed to for a period of time without consulting her is a form of dual discrimination against the Islamic woman, both as a woman and as a woman representing the ethnic minority. This is clearly the way intersectionality practices work. This clearly demonstrates the nature of male-centric power politics concealed behind the niqab and burka.

It is also critical to comprehend the hidden political economy that surrounds the wearing of these clothes. Looking at Islamic women's clothing, one might think that it is simply a tailored garment. But one might not think that there is a large political implication involved. Looking at the clothing stores that sell hijabs and burqas today, it is clear that there are Islamic women's clothing items sold in the market that range from low-cost Islamic women's clothing sewn from common fabrics to high-cost Islamic women's clothing sewn from rare fabrics like velvet. Therefore, the question of why the same garment is sold in the market at various rates and standards arises if the actual goal of using such clothing is either to keep their identity or to not display the beauty of their bodies to men who are not members of their family. Following a thorough investigation, it appears that these clothes have progressed from reflecting religious collectivity and identity to serving as a symbol of showcasing their economic potential and social position. Therefore, this reveals how this dress has become a determining factor in determining the social status of Muslim community members. This is due to the fact that this clothing may be said to have a semiotic function that signals something about the social identity of its wearer (Burroughs,1992). This fact makes it quite evident that clothing has been an influential tool utilized throughout history to preserve identity, supremacy, and power. "In the era of colonization, colonial powers used clothing to assert domination," can be used as evidence for this (Desai, 2022). Analyzing the study's findings in this context enables us to observe how Muslim women are utilizing traditional clothing customs to uphold their status and identity by expressing both the political economy and the politics of clothing.

Therefore, when we analyze Islamic society, we may identify Islamic women who purchase and wear expensive hijab and niqab garments as belonging to the upper class and possessing social, economic, and cultural capital. Through this, we can clearly identify how the ideas of Bourdieu's are portrayed in society. Because, Bourdieu's conceptualization is grounded in theories of social reproduction and symbolic power. Bourdieu's work emphasizes structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race (Claridge,2015). In this instance, we can see that the women who represented the lower or middle classes of Islamic society were the real victims of the argument over the prohibition on the niqab and burka in the wake of the Easter Sunday attack, rather than the entire Islamic women's community. When thinking back to the Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka, for instance, it is very evident that the Muslim community that was most impacted by the ban on the burka and niqab was the one that traveled by public transportation rather than the one that traveled in private vehicles. There is a kind of class indication behind this. In that, it was the Muslim community that represented the middle and lower levels that became the victims due to discrimination in the majority society as well as the feeling of being accused, and these Muslim women began to suffer more oppression based on their dress during that period of time and it was a clearly observable situation. Therefore, it is critical to consider the political and economic implications of Muslim society in the discourse that has brought niqab and hijab to the forefront of society.

But following the attack, the government banned the burka and niqab. But we must carefully consider whether banning the burka and niqab, which were worn as symbols of minority identity, is actually justifiable or not?. This is something more that has to be considered. In this case, criticism should be directed at western clothes rather than clothing that expresses the identity of the minority, as the suspects in this incident did not arrive at the scene with their faces hidden, and it was evident that they were all dressed in western attire. As such, this is not so much a matter of national security as it is a period of what seems to be tension between the majority and the minority in the nation. Because of this kind of prohibition, women who wear the burka and hijab would consequently experience discrimination in their access to jobs, education, and essential services, which would violate their fundamental rights and cause them some discomfort.

It is also important to pay attention to the protests that arise in the country regarding this ban. The argument raised by some groups said that this ban would harm their cultural identity as a religious community. Thus, the main argument of the protesting groups is that passing such laws is a violation of multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and constitutional freedom. However, on the other hand, based on Will Kymlicka's argument in the Multicultural Citizenship, demanding group differentiated rights by ethnic and national minorities can be justified in the liberal context and framework. Also, this type of group differentiated rights matches the liberal components like liberty and equality and highlights the importance of these types of rights (Uyangoda, 2015). In this context, as a country that has ensured all citizens' rights under the constitution, taking action to ban a cultural clothing practice is not a wise decision to take. When we look at the Sri Lankan context, the past implementation of some policies resulted in discrimination against minorities and exerted additional tension between the majority and minority groups. The Citizenship Act of 1948, the National Language Act of 1956, and the University Standardization Policy of 1971 are some of the examples that initiated conflicts between the two groups. With these types of biased policies, minority groups became much more marginalized, the division of majority and minority became broader, and the tension among the minority groups rose to an intolerable level that later burst out in the form of terrorism. With this, it was evident that giving rights and legal citizenship was not enough to establish good cultural relationships. We need to welcome other cultures, traditions, and practices as well to prevent minority groups from becoming marginalized, which is not an applicable practice in a democratic country.

Yet when we think about the controversy surrounding Muslim women's clothing prohibitions, we have to question ourselves: is it really possible to determine someone's religious commitment based only on what they wear?. The S.A.S. vs. France case (Raday,2014), which was subjected to a strong international controversy in 2010, would be a perfect example of this. According to this case judgment, it was stated that it would not be appropriate to measure the religious devotion of a person based on a dress, as well as to use that dress as a tool to reflect identity. Because of this kind of practice, what really happens is that the view of society as 'the other' is further confirmed, as well as the division between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minority is further intensified. Such conditions are detrimental to social emancipation and progress in society, and thus this should be based solely on democratic practices such as freedom and equality, rather than on any ethnic group's culture or cultural elements.

Another notion that surfaced during the debate on outlawing the burka and niqab in the wake of the attack on Easter Sunday was that the prohibition was helping to establish the equality of men and women. Islamic women are no longer required to wear clothing with full-face head coverings because of this decision. Considering this, it becomes clear that this is both a progressive choice that upholds Muslim women's religious freedom and a progressive effort that establishes their cultural freedom. On the other hand, we can counter that if the government truly wants to achieve gender equality, there are other measures that may be taken to ensure equality for Muslim men and women instead of outlawing this dress custom.

Not only that, another point that is worth considering is that, as stated by the scholar Gurpeet Mahajan's

ideas in the book of multiculturalism, he raised a question, these minorities may be able to live together peacefully, but in the political sphere, do they truly live a peaceful life?. Because, according to him, this is a common question that arises when multicultural societies are deeply analyzed (Uyangoda,2015). Therefore, considering this, based on the study findings and our observations, we can identify that people in this study area think that, as a community, they do have a better understanding and co-existence with other communities. In terms of democratic practices, it is a good sign. But again, we have to think about ‘when it comes to the political sphere, do they really live a peaceful life or not?’. Because practicing multiculturalism indeed means we need to address every aspect of human boundaries. Thus, the responsibility of creating a more appropriate platform for this remains with the government and the state. The vulnerable approach argues that the state must be responsive to the realities of human vulnerability and its corollary, social dependency, as well as to situations reflecting inherent or necessary inequality, when it initially establishes or sets up mechanisms to monitor these relationships and institutions (Fineman,2017). And as a result, this can reduce the minorities’ tension while protecting their group values and giving them recognition in society. Therefore, considering all the facts, this question still needs to be thought about and investigated. Therefore, this is opening the space for further investigation.

CONCLUSION

Taking all of these into account, it is clear that, in order to fully understand the ban on the niqab and burka in the Sri Lankan context, we may also concentrate the world discourse on the same issue connected to this topic. We will thus have the opportunity to think about and investigate this matter in a setting that is more transparent. And it would become clear that despite being merely another national security measure, the bans on the burka and niqab had significant social, political, economic, and cultural ramifications. Hence, before enforcing these kinds of bans, it is vital to consider things more carefully and enquire about important questions like, “Does banning the burka and nikhab ensure the national security and the gender equality of Muslim women?”, rather than simply deciding whether or not an action is justified.

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