

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF DRESSING AND WHAT CONSTITUTES ITS DECENCY OR OTHERWISE AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN

By

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Abstract

Islam is a revealed religion, with a divine book in form of the holy Quran sent to the chosen prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). Quran contained divined instructions and guidance for all mankind for all times. The dos and don'ts of life are contained in the holy Quran, and that covers all aspects of human living from birth to death. This is in exception to the guidance for proper mode of dressing. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) whom the Quran was revealed to, was commanded by Allah (SWT) to instruct his family members and the women believers to dress decently. These criteria set by Islam are for all lands and all times. This study therefore, has based its examination and assessment on what constitutes decent and indecent dressing in Islam, and data presented therein were based on direct deduction from the Qur'an, *sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) and the writing from the prominent scholars. From the findings, this paper prescribed how a Muslim woman should and must dress to appear decently. Rules regarding Muslim women's attire are derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). So Muslim female youth are either compliant with these regulations or violate them. The paper also analyses the effect and consequences of indecent dressing among the Muslim ummah, and some recommendations were highlighted.

Keywords: *Concept of dressing in Islam, decent and indecent dressing.*

Introduction

Decent and indecent dress and dressing in Islam is clearly defined, spelt out and practically demonstrated by prophet (SAW), his family, his companions and those that follow their teaching and footsteps in the service of Allah till date and beyond. However dressing and the manner it is done, is not much significant among non Muslim societies. The objective of dressing to them was just to cover the human nakedness, or a form of their identity. Islam attaches much significance to dress and dressing then

just covering nakedness. Islamic religion is the most comprehensive in treating the issues of dress and dressing. It specifically spelt out differences between the genders, and how each group must dress; i.e how women should dress is different from how men should. Women specifically are enjoined by Islam to be properly dressed. The religion of Islam is more specific about the manner and mode of dressing for the Muslim women. Verses of the Qur'an and Ahadith of the prophet (SAW) clarify on this. Infarct, Islam's concern on this aspect

began by instructing the prophet (SAW) to instruct his family and subsequent Muslim women to properly dress and cover their body except which is allowed by the shari'ah.

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely). that will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. [and Allâh is ever Oft forgiving, Most Merciful".Q33V59

Allah (The exalted) also instructs the Prophet to tell the believing men and women to guard their modesty. Allah (The exalted) said;

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do.

The Islamic Concept of Dressing

Islam enjoined all Muslim Woman to dress decently when she reaches puberty, she should cover all parts of her body except the face and the hands. These injunctions are the basis on which Muslim jurists, in the past and present, have determined the basic or minimum requirements for Muslim women's dress. These requirements are that;

- The cloth should cover the entire body, with the exception of the face and the palms. Any dressing

that contradicts this is regarded as indecent.

- Secondly, the clothing should not be tight or firm-fitting that it sticks to the body.
- Thirdly, the clothing should not be sheer or so eye-catching such that it attracts men's attention.
- Fourthly, the clothing must not reveal the shape of the body parts. The Qur'an admonishes Muslim women to dress modestly and cover their breasts, and genitals.

Islam is a complete way of life, and each and every aspect of the religion is designed by Allah for the advantage of we mankind to live a happy, healthier community.

“O prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women believers to draw their cloaks (veil) all over their bodies (i.e screen themselves completely except the eyes to see the way). That will better that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is ever often forgiving, most merciful.”Q33:59

From this verse, Muslim women enjoined to dress properly and well covered every part of their body except what is allowed, whenever venturing outside the house. This is because of their very nature, and threat (fitnah) which indecency in women dressing it might cause to moral uprightness in the Muslim's community. More so women are vulnerable to abuse, they are weak, they are narrow and shallow minded and need to be protected. A long verse in suratul Nur also emphasize the

women to cover every part of their body, except which is allowed to be exposed by shariah like, the eyes, palms, or feet. It is mandatory for every Muslim woman to cover her whole body when venturing outside, and even in the house while receiving people other than her prohibited people to marry (Muharram). The verse also prohibits women to reveal their adornment to people other than the ones mentioned above. The verse reads thus:-

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidding things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except that which is apparent (like or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves hand cover apron), and to draw their veils all over ‘Juyubihinnah’ (i.e their bodies, faces, necks, and bosoms) and not to revealed their adornment except to their husbands, fathers or their sons or her husband sons or their brothers or their brothers sons or their sister’s sons or their (Muslim) women (i.e sisters in Islam) or their (female) slaves whom their right hand poses, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all o believers that you may be successful. Q24:31

Islam laid down certain conditions for women dressing as follows;

1. The dress must conceal the entire body except the face and the hands.
2. The dress should not be transparent or tight. Tight clothes, even if they conceal the colour of the skin, still describe the size and shape of the body or part of it and create vivid images.
3. It should not attract the attention of the male gender; thus it should not be extravagant or excessively opulent. Nor should jewelries and makeup be on display.
4. It should not be a garment worn because of vanity or to gain popularity or fame. The female Companions were known to wear black and other dark colors so as to avoid transparent dresses. However, other colorful dresses are permitted as far as the dresses were not worn because of vanity or ostentation.
5. It should not be perfumed. This prohibition applies to both the body and the clothes. It should not resemble the clothing worn by men.
6. It should not resemble clothing that is specific to the non-Muslims.

The Importance of Decent Dressing
Hadith narrated by Jabir bn Abdullah al ansari. Quoting the prophet (SAW) saying “all parts of women body is “aura” (nudity) except her face and the two palms”, also shades more light on the importance of decent dressing by covering her whole body. This is made more compelling by the fact that in Islam every injunction must be obeyed for the safety of the believer and the community at large, because negligence or denial of one

aspect ultimately affects not only the individual Muslim but the community at large. For instance the negative effect of nudity or indecent dressing by our female children in the society affects not only the women but also demoralize the community. In some society today, modesty is seen as a sign of weakness or un-socialized attitude. This is not the case in Islam, where modesty is seen as a sign of respect for oneself and others. Islam has a dress code, the purpose of which is to protect the society as a whole and promote modesty in dressing between the sexes and allows people to conduct their lives with modesty, dignity and respect. Islam holds women in very high esteem and the Islamic rules of covering are intended to protect and guard their dignity and honor¹

What Constitutes Proper and Improper Dressing

A dress is said to be indecent when it is morally offensive, that is, if it exposes the vital parts of the body that are meant to be covered. As the truism goes “the way you dress, so you will be addressed”. As to the Muslim female, immoral or indecent dressing is any dressing that is contrary to the dictates of Islam. Rules regarding Muslim women’s attire are derived from the Qur’an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Allah (The exalted) commands the Prophet to instruct his family members (wives and daughters) and the rest of the believing women to cover their body and not to display their beauty unless where permissible Allah says;

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking

at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like palms of hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc.), and to draw their veils All over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms, etc.) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters In Islâm), or the (female) slaves whom their Right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small Children who have no sense of the shame of sex. and let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. and All of You beg Allah to forgive You all, O believers, that You may be successful.²

Features of an Indecent Dressing

A dress is said to be indecent when it is morally offensive, that is, if it exposes the vital parts of the body that are meant to be covered. As the truism goes “the way you dress, so you will be addressed”. As to the Muslim Women, immoral or indecent dressing is any dressing that is contrary to the dictates of Islam, such as tight fitting dress, transparent dress, miniskirts, dresses that are meant for men only e.t.c. Rules regarding Muslim

women's attire are derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Allah (The exalted) commands the Prophet to instruct his family members (wives and daughters) and the rest of the believing women to cover their body and not to display their beauty unless where permissible Allah says;

“O prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women believers to draw their cloaks (veil) all over their bodies (i.e screen themselves completely except the eyes to see the way). That will better that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is ever often forgiving, most merciful.”Q33:59³

Wearing of indecent dressing is a very common occurrence in the society today. It is a very common phenomenon among female Muslims youth of nowadays. Indecent dressing has become much popular that these women do not pay heed to the religious rules and injunctions, as a result of so called modern civilization some Nigerian Muslim ladies dress half-naked, especially during occasions all in the name of fashion and this is contrary to the prestige placed on the African women. For instance, Nigerian ladies derive pleasure in wearing cloth such as miniskirts, bumper shorts, armless or topless dresses. In some cases, some dress with most part of the body that is meant to be covered exposed.³ Dressing in a way and manner that parents, community, and religion frown at, is not civilization, it is

satanic. The way a lady/girl dresses shows whether she will be respected or not. Some female youths take pleasure in being fashionable, and their definition of fashion is walking the street half-naked. In the present times many different types and styles of dresses are in vogue. These include low west, hot bosom, sagging, all of which are contrary to the society's norms and values and the Islamic dress-code.⁴

Ladies of nowadays especially during celebrations, festivities and occasions feared that they may be looked at, regarded and talked of as being old fashioned. They feel that if they show pride in their societal values and dress in local or traditional attire or in accordance with the dictates and injunctions of their religion, they would appear as anti-social, villagers, locals, and many such other degrading terms which the modern day lady wishes to avoid by all means. In their quest to be modern, they jettison the accepted for the rejected. They degrade themselves. Indecent dressing are by its very nature, become breeding ground for rampant immorality and indecency. Most religious scholars believed that, the most important and highly responsible factor that leads to immorality and indecency in the Muslim society is the freedom and permissiveness that is found in most places regarding dressing.⁵

Some religious organizations put the blame on modern tools of communities such as electronic media, these include satellite television, in most cases, these television's channels/ stations air mostly films,

features, and musicians. The people shown in such films dressed anyhow, so also the musicians, models and fashion people.

It is common among celebrities, particularly among artists, to dress immorally and indecently. This type of people, while on stage, would want to look unique and in the process turned themselves into lunatics. They wear tattered jeans with holes, tight fitting shirt, some even go to the extent of wearing ordinary pant while on stage. All this is the cause of juvenile delinquency, the desire of our ladies to copy these “fashionable ladies that is portrayed in the indecent dress exhibited in our campuses.”⁶

It is most unfortunate that female Muslim youth neglect and ignore the provisions of the religions of Islam. This is in spite of the fact that these provisions are made to protect and promote their honor, dignity and pride and to make them outstanding and respected personalities among the Muslim community.

... and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance, and perform As-Salât (IqamâtasSalât), and give Zakât and obey Allâh and his Messenger. Allâh wishes Only to remove ArRijs (evil deeds and sins, etc.) from you, O members of the family (of the Prophet Sal-Allaahu 'alayhe Wa Sallam), and to purify You with a thorough purification.⁷

Muslim women are prohibited from dressing like the opposite sex. Ibn Abbas [ra] reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon

him) cursed women that imitate men and men that imitate women’.⁸

Today, however, wearing of male cloths by women is common. Women wear such male clothes as shirts, trouser, T-Shirts, Jackets, and even suits. They also wear male track suits and shorts, and this includes some Muslim women. They have embraced the culture and attitude of indecent dressing, in that, it has turned into a social malady in many Muslim communities because these female spread the culture into the wider society. This society is full of ladies who dress in a way that is likely to shock people’s sense of decorum, Parts of the body including g even the most vital organs, which should all be covered, are carelessly uncovered. Sadly, most ladies have been sexually abused because of their mode of dressing.

Effects and Consequences of Indecent Dressing in the Society

Like other vices, indecent dressing has become the order of the day, particularly by the Muslim women youth. They dress with the aim of looking extremely attractive, sensual and inviting, forgetting that they ought to look responsible and decent, and the effects such indecent dressing therefore leads to committing so many atrocities like raping, illicit sexual relationship, sexual harassment where the female always appear to be the victim, unwanted pregnancies e.t.c. All these are some of the consequences which were aided by the culture of indecent dressing. All the above are threat in the Muslim society.

Today, in our society ladies deliberately expose sensitive parts of their bodies to draw the attention of the men. This manner of dressing has been condemned by many right thinking individuals in the society who see it as unacceptable, because it portrays the highest level of immorality.⁹This immorality extends to the larger society. It is common to see ladies walking on the streets are almost naked, in the name of modern fashion. Thus, the way and manner which a believer should and most dress so as to be decent and proper is prescribed in details by Islam. Dress is also described as a favour and protection bestowed upon man to cover and protect his private parts. The Qur'an described this in surah al-A'raf and Nahl.

'O children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon to cover your private parts, and as an adornment'.....' Q7 V26(1)
"..... and has made for you garments

".... And has made for you garments to protect you from the heat (cold)..... Thus does He perfect His favour to you that you submit yourselves to his will (in Islam)." Q16:81

Meaning, dress garments are blessings, protection covering the body and adornment to man.

Conclusion

Islam is most specific the manner and the mode of dressing for the Muslim women. The concern of Islam in this matter leads to revelation of some verses in the Holy Qur'an. Unfortunately, one might think today

that Islam is silent or permissive on indecent dressing. This is because of the way the injunction is being disobeyed among Muslims women whose Iman were poisoned by the so called modernization. Thus, the level of impurity and indecency in the manner of dressing among supposedly, women is not only astonishing, astounding and frightening, but also unbecoming.

Information and technology represented by the social media compounded the situation. The more our daughters are exposed to films, T.V show programmers, documentaries, fashion parade etc, the more they tend to forget or ignore their religious injunctions and descent so low as to be copy cats of infidels culture. These social Medias complemented by their services, So much influenced our Muslim women to the extent of completely forgetting their religious prescriptions with regards to not only dressing but also social relationships, conduct and values.

The problem is so entrenched and commonly practiced that the few that comply with these religious injunctions are looked at as out of date, anti-social, and outmoded or simply pretensions. Parents also contribute to this menace, as their children dress indecent right from home before venturing out. Infarct some parents buy such dresses themselves for their daughters/and wives to appear "modern" or "of class" cut across socio-economic status, involving women for the reach the reach and poor parents, from royalty to common parents.

This trend is dangerous as it is not only a threat to the society and its well being but also the cause of many undesirable behaviors in the society. There is no doubt that indecent and immoral dressing among women in their effort to copy the west led us to the social ills vidivelling the western countries. These include rampant rape cases, prostitution, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, pre marital sexual relationship and even extra-marital sexual relationship among Muslim women. And rampant illegal sexual relationship cause serious calamities such as disasters, insecurity, hunger, incurable diseases, draught e.t.c. Despite the fact that our society is currently witnessing these consequences, still people pay not so much attention to these devastating problems of indecent dressing in our society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made in order to arrest the menace of indecent dressing:

- **Islamisation of the society.** This is the task mainly of Muslim scholars and leaders in any Muslim society to always try to point out the importance of obeying the Islamic injunction by the Muslims.
- **Da'awah** To be organised regularly. Registered Islamic organisations, bodies, and centres should collaborate with the Muslim scholars in Islamic propagation.
- **Enact Laws regarding decent and indecent dressing:** Rules and regulations regarding proper dressing should be imposed among Muslim women in the

society, and culprits must be punished according to the rules in order to serve as a deterrent to others.

- **Preaching:** Muslim scholars as well as knowledgeable academicians should intensify Islamic preaching in the society. Similarly, Muslim scholars who are well versed in Islamic knowledge can also be encouraged to give sermons, lectures, and preaching sessions especially during wedding occasions and other festivities.

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Notes:

¹Bani, Sultan *op.cit.* P33

² Quran 24:30-31

³ *Ibid* p33

⁴ *Ibid* p25-26

⁵ Shaykh B. Yusuf [65 years]. traditional makaratarallo teacher Dandagoro. 20th shaaban 1436.

⁶ Oyeleye, Aminat and Lawal [2012] *op.ct.* p31

⁷ Quran 33:33

⁸ Haytham. *Op.cit* p458

⁹ Dickson, Sophia (2009) *immorality in campuses: the way out*, Fomwan p47-48