

**EVIDENCES FOR THE OBLIGATION OF A MUSLIM WOMAN'S HEADSCARF  
(KHIMAR) & OUTER GARMENT (JILBAAB)**

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BA Thesis – THS 400

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April 3, 2016

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## Introduction

There is numerous amount of controversy today, especially in the West, regarding the Muslim woman's headscarf, popularly known as *hijab*. The opponents argue that it is a cultural thing and has no basis in the Qur'an or Islam. The main proponents of this theory are usually neo-liberal progressive Muslims or non-Muslim Islamic studies academics, who carry no credibility in our faith for their opinions. Since both of these groups do not give any credibility to hadith literature, they ignore numerous texts in the Sunnah which prove the obligation of both the headscarf (*khimar*) and the outer garment (*jilbaab*).

The above notions are completely rejected by mainstream Islam. We argue that the obligation of a woman to cover herself in accordance to Islamic law is rooted in the Qur'an, Sunnah and over 1400 years of Islamic scholarship. Rather, the rejection of it only came into existence in the modern era, specifically the 20th century. There is no reputable scholar in the history of Islam before the modern era that has ever questioned its obligation all the way up to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Even today it is the dominant and mainstream position in the Muslim world.

What follows is a detailed discussion on this matter and evidences to support the dominant mainstream position of Islamic law that a woman is obligated to cover herself in front of men who are not her immediate blood relatives (*non-mahram*).

## Meaning of the Word Hijab

There are two meanings of *hijab*. There is a classical usage and modern usage of the term. In the classical usage, the word *hijab* means barrier, partition, or curtain to cause separation (Qabeelat Hosna 2009, 53). The word *hijab* comes up seven times in the Qur'an and implies this meaning. For example, Allah Says in the Qur'an [meaning of which is]:

وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ  
رَسُولًا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ ۗ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

*“And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a hijab [partition] or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills” [Qur’an 42:51].*

Similarly, Allah Says regarding the people of paradise and the people of hellfire on the Day of Judgement [meaning of which is]:

وَبَيْنَهُمَا حِجَابٌ

*“And between them will be a hijab [partition]” [Qur’an 7:46]*

According to Dr. Yasir Qadhi, “This classical usage was restricted to the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)” (Qabeelat Hosna 2009, 53). This form of *hijab* is only mentioned in reference to the wives of the Prophet (pbuh). The other verses speaking about Muslim women covering in general do not mention the word *hijab*.

Hence, this is why Allah says in Surah Ahzab regarding the wives of the Prophet (pbuh) [meaning of which is]:

وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ

*“And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a hijab” [Qur’an 33:53].*

In this verse, it literally means a curtain. The wives of the Prophet (pbuh) had to speak from behind a physical curtain. Their level of *hijab* was a degree higher than that required by other Muslim women. This is why in the Battle of the Camel, Aisha was in a tent on the camel and was not seen.

In modern usage, the word *hijab* means headscarf. It seems there is some confusion today in which some people came to believe that since *hijab* in the Qur'an is only in reference to the Prophet's wives, it is not mandatory for the rest of the Muslim women but was restricted to the Prophet's wives. This is because they erroneously think that *hijab* in the Qur'an in reference to the Prophet's wives carries the same meaning as it does today [i.e. headscarf]. However, this is a mistake because the type of *hijab* mentioned for the Prophet's wives was a literal curtain as mentioned above and in no way referring to the headscarf.

There is some evidence to suggest that it was Umar who first suggested the idea of *hijab* for the Prophet's (pbuh) wives but the latter did not abide by it because it was not commanded by Allah at the time. It is reported that Umar said:

*"I said: 'O Allah's Messenger! Good and bad persons visit you! Would that you ordered the Mothers of the believers to cover themselves with Al-Hijab' [some versions of the narration from Aisha say 'but the Messenger of Allah did not do so']. So then the Divine verses of Al-Hijab were revealed."* (Bukhari 1997)

### **Proof of the Obligation of the Headscarf (Khimar) for All Muslim Women**

Allah Says in the Qur'an [meaning of which is]:

وَقُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا

مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ  
يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ

*“And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their khumur [headscarves] over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women.” [Qur’an 24:31].*

The word *khumur* mentioned in the verse is a plural of *khimar* and comes from the root word *khamr*, which means intoxicant (Baalbaki & Baalbaki 2005, 523) because it messes with your head. This is why in Hans Wehr dictionary, one of the definitions given for *khumaar*, a word also derived from the same root, is “aftereffect of intoxication or hangover” (Wehr 1979, 302). Point being that even the root of the word is related to the head. As for the word *khimar* used in the Qur’an in the verse cited above, then according to Lane’s Lexicon, it means “a piece of cloth with which a woman covers her head” (Lane 1863, 809).

In order to further prove that the word *khimar* was understood to mean a head covering during the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) time, it is important to look into hadith literature. One of the meanings of *khimar* that was popularly understood during the Prophet’s (pbuh) time was a turban. In other words, men used to refer to their turbans as *khimar* because they cover their heads. For example, it is well known in Islamic law that during the act of purification (*wudu*), it is permissible to wipe over your socks and turban. In the following hadith, one of the companions defines this action of the Prophet (pbuh) by describing his turban using the word *khimar*, “I saw the Messenger of Allah

(*pbuh*) wiping over the *khimar* [turban] and leather socks” (An-Nasa’i 2007). Another hadith says, “The Messenger of Allah wiped over his leather socks and his *khimar* [turban]” (Ibn Majah 2007). Lane’s Lexicon also has a very interesting entry related to this in his book under the discussion of *khimar*. He says:

“Also a man’s turban; because a man covers his head with it in like manner as a woman covers her head with her *khimar*: when he disposes it in the Arab manner, he turns [a part of] it under the jaws [nearly in the same manner in which a woman disposes her *khimar*]” (Lane 1863, p. 809).

Therefore, all of the above shows that the word *khimar* used in the verse mentioned above is referring to a woman’s headscarf. In other words, Allah is saying in this verse to tell the women to take a portion of their *khimar* and use it to cover the upper chest area [neck, chest, bosom] in addition to their heads and ears. Aisha said, “When [the verse]: ‘They should draw their *khimar* over their chests’ was revealed, (the ladies) cut their waist sheets [worn as a lower garment] at the edges and covered [themselves] with it” (Bukhari 1997). Ibn Hajar said in Fath Al-Bari, the most authoritative text with mainstream Islam explaining the hadiths compiled by Al-Bukhari:

“Meaning of ‘they covered’ is that they [the women] covered their faces. The description of this is that the woman places the *khimar* [headscarf] over her head and then throws the right side of it over her left shoulder so that it [all completely] covers. Al-Faraa’ said: ‘In the pre-Islamic days, the women used to let hang down their *khimar* behind their backs and reveal that which is in the front [neck, chest, bosom], so they were commanded to conceal [their frontal area]. The *khimar* for the woman is like the turban for the man” (Hajar 1986).

In addition, there are a number of hadiths in which the word *khimar* is mentioned in a way that proves that women used to wear headscarves outside their homes because they felt it was obligatory. For example, Aisha reported an incident which took place with her brother:

*“He seated me behind him on his camel. I lifted my khimar [from my head] and took it off from my neck. He struck my foot as if he was striking the camel. I said to him: Do you see anyone [else here]” (Muslim 2007).*

Further, it is reported in another hadith that, *“Umm Sulaim went out wrapping her khimar hurriedly until she met Allah’s Messenger” (Muslim 2007).* She was not one of his wives yet when she left her house, she quickly put on her *khimar* to go and meet with Allah’s Messenger (pbuh). Similarly, when the mother of Abu Hurairah accepted Islam, it is reported that when he knocked on the door, *“she took a bath and put on her shirt and quickly [put on] her khimar and [then] opened the door” (Muslim 2007).* She opened the door only after putting on her headscarf. Thus, all of the above shows that women used to consider their headscarves (*khimar*) as mandatory.

Some progressive Muslims may question the reliability of some of the sources cited above, such as, hadiths, tafsir books, Fath Al-Bari, etc., but then these people do not have any right to call themselves mainstream Muslims. They are a miniscule minority and are in no way representative of mainstream Islam, because the above sources are fundamental to the mainstream and widely accepted among Muslim scholars past and present. It is also hypocritical from some such minded Muslims to reject hadiths which mention *khimar* for women in front of *non-mahram* men but then they resort to hadiths and wear the *khimar* during prayer, which is nowhere to be found in the Qur’an specifically for the prayer but is mentioned in hadith literature. Picking and choosing which hadiths to follow based solely on desire is not how religion works.

### **Was the *khimar* just a cultural thing?**

Critics of the *khimar* argue that it was just a cultural practice among Arab women during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and is not intended for all times and places. Regarding the previously mentioned verse on *khimar*, they say that the “verse...instructs how to wear an existing traditional garment. It doesn’t impose a new one” (Nomani & Arafa 2015). They also claim that covering of the head was a common practice among people of many faiths and cultures, thus, it has nothing to do with religiosity.

While it is true that women did traditionally cover their heads as pointed out earlier, they were still instructed to wear it in a specific manner which was outside of their tradition. They used to throw it back behind their backs without covering the front so Allah commanded them to bring it to the front to cover themselves. Further, Allah is very clear in the verse as to which males can a woman display her charms in front of. This is again outside of their tradition. It is imposing a new way to cover their chests in addition to their heads. This is why Aisha was so surprised to find the women from the Ansar abiding by the new command so quickly.

And even if it was a cultural tradition among many people of faith and cultures, then Allah can take a cultural tradition and make it part of sacred law to be imposed on believers for the rest of time. As Muslims, we believe that all of Allah's laws have some good in them whether we understand them or not. If Allah takes a particular part of Arab culture and makes it part of Islamic law, then this is completely acceptable. For example, before Islam the practice of *zihar* was part of Arab culture. This was a pre-Islamic form of divorce in which the husband says to his wife, "You are to me like my mother's back." After the coming of Islam, this practice continued and became part of Islamic law where a man is required to give expiation to release himself from it. Allah explicitly refers to it in the Qur'an:

وَالَّذِينَ يُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُوا فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مِّن قَبْلِ  
 أَن يَتَمَاسَا ۚ ذَلِكُمْ تُوَعَّظُونَ بِهِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

*"And those who pronounce zihar from their wives and then [wish to] go back on what they said - then [there must be] the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. That is what you are admonished thereby; and Allah is Acquainted with what you do" [Qur'an 58:3].*

Similarly, in the Sunnah, it is narrated that a man came to the Prophet (pbuh) who had declared *zihar* from his wife, then he had intercourse with her. He said to the Prophet (pbuh):

*“O Messenger of Allah, I declared zihar on my wife, then I had intercourse with her before I offered the expiation.” He said: ‘What made you do that, may Allah have mercy on you?’ He said: I saw her anklets in the light of the moon. Prophet said: ‘Do not approach her until you have done that which Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, has commanded’” (An-Nasa’i 2007).*

Other pre-Islamic practices which were adopted into Islam include fasting on the Day of Ashura, the *talbiyyah* for hajj and ‘umrah with slight word changes, sacredness of the four holy months, vows which were made before Islam were required to be fulfilled, etc. Therefore, Islamic law adopted some practices which were common in the Arab culture and made them permanently part of Islamic law. Anything that is explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah as a command cannot be explained away by just stating that it was culture.

### **Does the *khimar* have to be a particular color?**

It is believed in some circles among both Muslims and non-Muslims that the head covering of a woman must be black. However, there is no proof for this, rather, the reports from the companions’ lives show that women used to wear different colored head covers. The color has more to do with the culture in which a woman lives than what is religiously ordained. Hence, it is more appropriate for a woman to wear a color that is culturally accepted in her locality.

It is reported in a hadith that a woman by the name of Rifa`a (رِفَاعَةَ) came to visit Aisha wearing a green colored *khimar* (Bukhari 1997). However, the *khimar* must not be such that it attracts attention because the purpose of the *khimar* is to conceal and not draw more attention. Thus, any color that does not draw extra attention to the woman is permitted.

## Proof of the Obligation of the Outer Garment (*jilbaab*) for All Muslim Women

Allah Says in the Qur'an [meaning of which is]:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ  
 مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ۖ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their *jalabeeb*. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused” [Qur'an 33:59].

The word *jalabeeb* mentioned in the above verse is the plural of the word *jilbaab*, which, according to Hans Wehr dictionary, mean, “long, flowing outer garment or loose robe-like garment” (Wehr 1979, p.153). Lane's Lexicon gives a number of similar definitions for the word *jilbaab*. According to Lane, the word *jilbaab* means:

“A woman's outer wrapping garment or this is its primary signification...or one that envelops the whole body...or one with which a woman covers over her other garments...or a garment wider than the *khimar* [headscarf] but less than the *ridaa'* (upper garment) with which a woman covers her head and bosom” (Lane 1863, p.440).

Further, the view of Ibn Mas`ud, `Ubaydah, Qatadah, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Sa`id bin Jubayr, Ibrahim An-Nakha`i, `Ata' Al-Khurasani and others is that *jilbaab* is a garment worn over the *khimar* (Kathir 2003). Some scholars said that it is a cloth that covers the whole body (Qurtubi n.d.).

In light of the above, it is clear that a *jilbaab* is a garment that a woman wears over her clothes. Therefore, this verse tells us that women need to cover themselves with an outer garment [*jilbaab*] in addition to their regular clothes covering their skin. Following is a list of further evidences proving requirements for a *jilbaab*.

It is reported that 'Atiyyah reported:

*"Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) commanded us [women] to come out on Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha...I said: 'Messenger of Allah, [what if] one of us does not have a jilbaab?' He said: 'Let her sister cover her with her jilbaab (Muslim 2007).*

The meaning above is that let another Muslim sister lend an extra *jilbaab* to her from herself (Hajar 1986). This also shows that when women go out for Eid, they should be properly dressed.

It is reported by a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) regarding helping the wounded:

*"We used to treat the wounded, look after the patients and once I asked the Prophet, 'Is there any harm for any of us to stay at home if she doesn't have a jilbaab?' He said, 'She should cover herself with the jilbaab of her companion and should participate in the good deeds and in the religious gathering of the Muslims'" (Bukhari 1997).*

It is interesting to note from the above two hadiths and others with similar meaning that the Muslim women at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not desire to go outside without their *jilbaab*. This means they understood it to be obligatory for Muslim women to go out with their *jilbaab*. If it was just culture, they wouldn't need to ask if it was harmful to go out without it.

Thus, the verse discussed in the previous section about the *khimar* and the verse here discussing the *jilbaab* show us that there are two items that a Muslim woman must wear in order to fulfill the requirements of covering: a *khimar* that is worn to cover the head and a *jilbaab* that is worn over regular clothes to cover rest of the body.

### **Can a *jilbaab* and *khimar* be combined in one?**

It seems based on hadith literature that a *khimar* refers to covering of the head and a *jilbaab* refers to covering most of the body in addition to the head and is worn over other

clothes [this is why it is translated as 'outer garment']. It seems that the female companions, after the revelation of the previous two mentioned verses for covering, used to sometimes use the term *jilbaab* to refer to this complete latter form of covering. Therefore, a *jilbaab* can either be a separate flowing garment worn in addition to the *khimar* over the clothes or it can be one long cloth that covers most [and even all] of the body in addition to the head as a one piece suit. The latter is what seems to be the one practiced by at least some female companions based on hadith literature.

For example, it is reported that Aisha said:

*“Riders would pass us when we accompanied the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) while we were in the sacred state (wearing ihram in Hajj). When they came by us, one of us would let down her jilbaab from her head over her face, and when they had passed on, we would uncover our faces”* (Abu Dawud 2008).

Aisha here refers to the garment on her head as a *jilbaab* and not *khimar* alone because it is covering more than just the head. Similarly, when companions were asked to describe the *jilbaab*, they would describe a complete covering including the head. For example, Ibn ‘Abbas said:

*“Allah commanded women of the believers that, when they go out of their homes to take care of some need, they hide their faces with the long sheet from over their heads leaving only one eye open (to see the way)”* (Kathir 2003).

Historically, “since there are no pictures of 7th century *jilbaab*, nor any surviving garments, it is not at all clear if the modern *jilbaab* is the same garment as that referred to in the Qur’an. In general terms, *jilbaab* is a garment/sheet that is worn on the head, draped around the body and that totally covers the body of the woman” (Anon 2016).

Today, the *jilbaab* is commonly known as a lengthy outer garment which stretches from the neck to the feet. However, it seems that during the Prophet’s (pbuh) time, the *jilbaab* was restricted mostly to the upper half of the body. For the bottom half

of the body, women would wrap long cloths around their waste which would reach to their feet [like a long skirt]. Generally, the women would wear a shirt, something to cover themselves [*jilbaab*] on top of it, and an *izaar*, which means anything that wraps around the lower half of the body. This *izaar* was very commonly worn by both men and women at that time.

Aisha narrates how one day she followed the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) outside the house. Pay close attention to how she describes her clothing before leaving the house, she states, “*I put my shirt over my head, covered myself and put on my izaar, and I set out after him*” (An-Nasa’i 2007). So she describes an *izaar* as the cloth that she uses to cover the bottom half of her body. From this, it may be that their *jilbaab* was restricted to their wastes. As for the bottom half, they used to cover it with an *izaar* through convention. The word used in the hadith for shirt is *dir’un* (دِرْع), which is defined as a woman’s shirt worn in the house. This is why the women were told that if they wanted to pray in this type of shirt [in the house], then it must be long enough to reach the top of their feet.

### **What is the minimal requirement for a Jilbaab?**

There is no doubt that garments that you find in Muslim convention centers today called *jilbaab* does the job. The modern *jilbaab* covers the entire body, except for hands, face, and head. The head and neck are then covered by a scarf or wrap (*khimar*). As for the bare minimum requirements based on the definitions given, it can be said that an extra-large cloth/scarf will do the job of the *khimar* and *jilbaab* in one. Remember, the *jilbaab* is wider than a *khimar* and smaller than an upper garment. Therefore, if a really large scarf is worn such that it covers the upper half of the body with the head and underneath a skirt is worn, then it is considered a *khimar* and *jilbaab* in one. A small headscarf alone without a *jilbaab* does not fulfill the requirements for covering in Islam. It is more than just covering the hair and must cover the body in a loose manner (Qabeelat Hosna 2009, p. 57).

In conclusion, the bare minimum is to cover the head, including the ears, upper portion of the body, and the bosom with a long enough scarf. This is assuming the

shirt/blouse she has on underneath this scarf is long enough to cover most of her body and is loose. Also, the scarves must not be neatly tucked into the shirt as is common among some Muslim girls. A Muslim woman who wears loose clothing without a headscarf is closer to the spirit of proper Islamic covering requirements than a Muslim woman who wears tight pants and clothes but covers her hair.

It is important to note that this was not simply a culture for them as some have falsely argued. They had their own cultural styles of clothing from which the Qur'an commanded them to differ. Therefore, a new stipulation came from Allah mandating them to differentiate from their culture and dress appropriately as ordained in the Divine command. This Divine command will remain valid until the end of time.

### **Was the *jilbaab* only obligatory due to specific circumstances and no longer applies?**

Some critics of Muslim women covering argue that the command to wear the *jilbaab* came down for a specific situation and does not apply any longer. They use as evidence the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their jalabeeb. That is more suitable **that they will be known and not be abused**” [Qur'an 33:59].

They say it is clearly stated in this verse that it was sent down because the believing women were being harmed and abused; however, this is no longer the case so there is no obligation for a woman to cover herself with a *jilbaab*. They also claim that

now we have laws in place which protect women in society and covering as a way of protection is no longer needed. Thus, they historically contextualize the verse's ruling.

It is true that this verse came down because some of the hypocrites used to verbally abuse and tease bondwomen and because the free women used to dress similar to them, Allah commanded the free believing women to dress with a *jilbaab* so that they will be recognized by the abusers as free believing women and be left alone. Muhammad Shafi states:

*“One of these two kinds of pain caused was at the hands of vagabonds from among the general run of hypocrites who used to molest bondwomen from Muslim homes when they came out to take care of family chores. Then on occasions, they would mistreat free women under the impression that they were bondwomen because of which pain was caused to Muslims at large and the Holy Prophet” (Shafi 2005, p. 239).*

So they were commanded to wear a *jilbaab* to distinguish themselves from bondwomen. But the critics of covering derive from this context that this order was specific to that time and place and no longer applies.

However, this understanding is not correct. Just because a particular command from Allah came down due to certain circumstances does not negate the possibility of it being permanent even in the absence of those circumstances in the future. The general principle is that revealed rulings apply to all Muslims at all times unless there is evidence to indicate otherwise. It is reported by Ibn Mas'ud that:

*“A man kissed a woman (unlawfully) and then went to the Prophet (pbuh) and informed him. Allah revealed [the verse]:*

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفِي النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ ۚ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ

السَّيِّئَاتِ

*'And offer prayers perfectly at the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night. Verily! good deeds remove (annul) the evil deeds' [Qur'an 11:114]. The man asked Allah's Messenger (pbuh), 'Is it for me only?' He said, 'It is for all my followers'" (Bukhari 1997).*

From this the scholars conclude that laws in general apply to all Muslims at all times unless there is evidence to indicate the contrary. For example, it is well known that it is forbidden for men to wear silk. This is the general ruling that applies to all believing men; however, there is an exception for those who have skin problems and cannot wear anything but silk. Hence, Anas reported that the, *"Prophet (pbuh) allowed Az-Zubair and `Abdur-Rahman to wear silk because they were suffering from an itch"* (Bukhari 1997). Therefore, today men are still forbidden to wear silk unless they have problems in their skin that requires them to wear silk.

Furthermore, there are examples of rulings which came down due to particular circumstances but the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) continued to apply them despite the absence of those original circumstances later on. For example, it is reported by Ya'la bin Umayyah:

*"I asked `Umar bin Khattab: 'Allah says:*

وَإِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَقْصُرُوا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ  
خِفْتُمْ أَنْ يُفْتِنَكُمْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۗ إِنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ كَانُوا لَكُمْ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا

*'And when you travel in the land, there is no sin on you if you shorten the prayer if you fear that the disbelievers may put you in trial (attack you), verily, the disbelievers are ever to you open enemies,' [Qur'an 4:101] but now there is security and people are safe.' He said: 'I found it strange just as you do, so I asked the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) about that, and he said: 'It is charity that Allah has bestowed upon you, so accept His charity'" (Ibn Majah 2007).*

Hence, the original ruling continues unless Allah and His Messenger specifically restrict it to a time and place. An excellent example of this is the temporary marriage, which is a type of marriage that is contracted for a number of days and then divorce occurs. This was a practice which was allowed only for a particular time and place during the Prophet's (pbuh) lifetime and then permanently forbidden. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

*“O people, I had permitted you to contract temporary marriage with women, but Allah has forbidden it (now) until the Day of Resurrection. So he who has any (woman with this type of marriage contract) he should let her off, and do not take back anything you have given to them (as dower)”* (Muslim 2007).

This is why when Umar became caliph, he said to the people:

*“The Messenger of Allah permitted temporary marriage for us three times, then he forbade it. By Allah, If I hear of any married person entering a temporary marriage, I will stone him to death, unless he can bring me four witnesses who will testify that the Messenger of Allah allowed it after he forbade it”* (Ibn Majah 2007).

Imam Nawawi said in his famous *Sharh* of Muslim regarding temporary marriage that:

*“It was permissible but then was abrogated on the Day of Khaybar. Then it again became permissible on the Day of Conquest but was again abrogated during the Days of Conquest. Its prohibition continues to remain today until the Day of Judgement”* (An-Nawawi 1996).

All of the above shows that if rulings were meant to be only understood to apply for a certain time and context, then the Prophet (pbuh) made this very clear. It is not reported that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) or his companions ever articulated the ruling of a Muslim woman's *jilbaab* to only be restricted to a particular context. Rather, after the conquest of Mecca, the Muslims were the most powerful force in Arabia yet it is

not reported that the women took off their *jilbaab* because the ruling no longer applied. Similarly, during the caliphate of Umar, the Muslim empire was expanding vastly and Medina was very safe, however, there is no evidence to suggest that Muslim women had taken off their *jilbaab* and were roaming freely without it in the capital. This is because they understood the command to be permanent until the day of judgement.

### Is There an Exception for Elderly Women?

Allah Says [meaning of which is],

وَالْقَوَاعِدُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ اللَّاتِي لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ  
ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجَاتٍ بِزِينَةٍ ۗ وَأَنْ يَسْتَغْفِنَنَّ خَيْرٌ لَّهُنَّ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

*“And women of past child-bearing age who have no desire for marriage – there is no blame upon them for putting aside their thiyaab without flaunting their charms. But it is preferable for them not to do this. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing”* [Qur’an 24:60].

This verse has led some to believe that a woman’s covering of her head is optional. They argue that if it was mandatory, then why would Allah allow for elderly women to remove their head covers? Even if we were to accept this rationale to be true, it would still not allow women, who do not fall into this category [elderly past child-bearing age], to not cover. We do have certain rules in our religion which permit the elderly some exceptions to the general rule which do not extend to their younger counterparts.

For example, all Muslims who have reached the age of puberty are required to fast in the month of Ramadan, however, there is an exception for a certain section of the elderly, for whom it is extremely difficult to fast in the month, to feed a poor person for each day missed in replacement to fasting. Allah Says [meaning of which is]:

فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ  
يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ ۖ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ ۗ وَأَنْ  
تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۖ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

*“For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to  
compensate-feed a needy person. But if anyone does good of his own  
accord, it is better for him, and fasting is better for you, if only you knew”*  
[Qur’an 2:184].

The scholars use the above verse not just for those of the elderly for whom it is extremely difficult to fast but also those who have terminal illnesses and cannot fast. The point being that the rationale used by critics of head covering on the basis of this verse is invalid. Based on that logic, this rule would only apply to the elderly and not the general Muslim female populace. In other words, it is the exception not the rule.

However, this is not what is meant by this verse. The word used in the verse is *thiyaab*, which literally means clothes, garments, attire, etc. Obviously it is not saying for them to be naked so it must be referring to a certain type of clothing or a portion of their clothing. We have numerous statements from the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who knew the Qur’an better than anyone else, that the word *thiyaab* in this verse is referring to the outer garment known as *ridaa’* or *jilbaab*. According to Al-Tabari, one of the oldest and most relied upon exegesis of the Qur’an [often considered the mother of all exegesis], this verse means that:

*“There is neither harm nor sin upon them [the elderly past-child bearing women] for putting aside their jilbaab, which is a covering placed on top of the khimar, and putting aside their ridaa’, which is placed on top of the clothes. There is no harm on them for putting aside these things in front of mahram or non-mahram men”* (Tabari n.d.).

Imam Al-Qurtubi said in his famous exegesis of the Qur'an:

*“It is not permissible for her [the elderly woman] to remove her khimar [headscarf]. The correct position is that she is to cover just like a young woman except that she is allowed to remove her jilbaab, which is placed on top of the shirt and khimar. This was stated by the companions Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn Jubayr, and others”* (Qurtubi n.d.).

Allah ends the verse by stating that it is better if they do not remove their *thiyaab* but leave them on just like their younger counterparts.

## Consensus

There is no difference of opinion among the Muslim scholars on the obligation of complete covering for a Muslim woman, who has reached the age of puberty, since the days of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The scholars only differed over the issue of the face, hands and feet and whether these come under the obligation of covering or not (Anon 2009).

Ibn Hazm said, “They (scholars) agreed that the hair and body of a free woman is ‘*awrah* (that which must be covered) other than the hands and face. They differed about the hands, face, and nails of the woman and whether these count as ‘*awrah* or not” (Al-Albani 2001). Ibn ‘Abdul Barr said, “The scholars (*fuqahaa*) in the corners of Hijaz and Iraq agree that a freed woman must cover all of her body with a long and thick shirt and cover her head. This is all ‘*awrah* with the exception of her hands and face.” (Al-Fatwa 2012). Imam Al-Qurtubi said, “The Muslims have agreed that the two private parts of the man and woman are ‘*awrah* and that all parts of the woman are ‘*awrah* except her face and hands. The scholars differed about them” (Al-Fatwa 2012). Even the four imams have explicit statements about this. Abu Hanifah said, “All parts of a woman are ‘*awrah* except the face, hands, and feet (in another narration he counted the feet as part of the ‘*awrah*)” (Al-Albani 2001). Imam Malik has a similar statement. Imam Shafi’ said, “All parts of the woman are ‘*awrah* except her face and hands” (Al-Albani 2001). Imam Ahmad has various statements on the matter. He agrees with Imam Shafi’ in one while

in another he only gives exception to the face and nothing else. Yet in another narration he considers nothing of her permissible to show not even the nails (Al-Albani 2001). It is possible that he held multiple opinions throughout his lifetime. However, at the end of the day, none of them disagreed in the obligation of covering except for the hands, face, and feet.

After the four schools of thought in Sunni Islam became established, the Shafi' and Hanbali schools of thought considered it obligatory for a woman to cover her face and hands. The Maliki and Hanafi schools of thought consider it only recommended and not obligatory (Anon 2004). As for the feet, the majority say they must be covered as well except the Hanafis (Laher n.d.). These legitimate forms of differences have existed in the Muslim world since the days of the early generations (salaf) and are based on their understanding of the Qur'an, Sunnah and practices of the companions. They have legitimate proofs from the texts to support their arguments. If Allah wanted to settle these legitimate forms of dispute using explicit text, then He could have, however, through His Divine Wisdom, He left it open to interpretation.

Denying the obligation of proper covering is a modern phenomenon. It is unheard of in Islamic history. No reputable scholar in the history of Islam has ever denied it. Therefore, those who try to argue that it is a well-established opinion of the past are either mistaken or guilty of forgery. They are going against over a thousand years of scholarship. This newly invented opinion is not a legitimate one and is not supported by any proofs from the Qur'an, Sunnah, or the practices of the companions.

### **Origin of the Idea of Rejecting the Islamic Veil as a Religious Obligation**

If there has always been a consensus, then where does the idea of rejecting the Islamic veil as a religious obligation come from? It seems to have two causes for its existence. First, during the reign of Western imperialists in Muslim lands, they used to look down on the practice of veiling for Muslim women and thought it should be abolished (Campo 2009, 297). Second, some Muslims, who had developed a sort of inferiority complex towards the West, thought it would be wise to adopt Western ideals in order to achieve the same success as their colonial rulers (Ahmed 1992, 148). Thus,

it was an imported idea brought in Muslim lands from the outside in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

During colonialism, in order to justify the practice of conquering other lands, they would dehumanize the citizens of those lands and would argue that their inferior practices demand control of their lands. Juan E. Campo, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara, writes, “Non-Muslim imperialists often used *hijab* as an example of the “inferiority” of nations they wished to conquer, claiming it was a discriminatory practice that should be abolished” (Campo 2009, 297). The colonial powers felt that such practices were one of the main reasons that Muslims were so backwards and that if only such customs “were cast off could Muslim societies begin to move forward on the path of civilization” (Ahmed 1992, 152). Thus, they began to view themselves as the liberators of these degraded women. Even Christian missionaries opined that “Muslim women needed to be rescued by their Christian sisters from the “ignorance and degradation” in which they existed, and converted to Christianity” (Ahmed 1992, 154).

The colonials saw their own ways of life as superior to their conquered subjects. In their minds, the “Victorian womanhood and mores with respect to women, along with other aspects of society at the colonial center, were regarded as the ideal and measure of civilization” (Ahmed 1992, 151). Missionary school teachers would encourage their Muslim female students to defy their parents and abandon the veil. One of these missionaries “openly advocated targeting women” because they mold future generations (Ahmed 1992, 154). Since that time (and even before that during the crusades), the idea of Muslims, as a civilization, oppressing and degrading women have carried on until today even though it was originally developed to justify Western colonization and to eradicate cultures of the conquered in favor of its own.

Perhaps, all this is what led to Turkey and Iran in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as supporters of Westernization, to ban the *hijab* “as a symbolic way of demonstrating that their nations were modern and progressive” (Campo 2009, 297-98). This is because the Muslim political leaders of these nations “had accepted and internalized the Western discourse” (Ahmed 1992, 168). However, these “reforms” did not last very long

especially for Iran. As Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian American writer on Islam and Islamic feminism, argues, “reforms pursued in a native idiom and not in terms of the appropriation of the ways of other cultures would have been more intelligible and persuasive” (Ahmed 1992, 168).

The very first documented Muslim that this author could find who openly rejected the Islamic veil as a religious obligation for Muslim women was the Egyptian French-educated lawyer Qasim Amin. He was not a religiously trained scholar but a Western educated judge. He is often considered the first Arab feminist (Boles & Hoeveler 2004, 38). In 1899, he published his highly controversial book *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (The Liberation of Women) in which he argued that “Islam did not require women to veil and that veiling and seclusion had kept women from enjoying the rights Islam granted them” (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 15). He also advocated in the book education for girls and reform in polygamy and divorce laws. More than thirty books were written in response to his book criticizing his arguments (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 15). This may be because he attacks in it many aspects of Egyptian life and culture, but his “demand that was most vehemently and widely denounced was his call for an end to segregation and veiling” (Ahmed 1992, 160). His praise in it is only for the Europeans. This work of his is widely regarded as the beginning of feminism in Arab culture (Ahmed 1992, 145).

The question is where did Amin get this anti-veiling idea? There seem to be two factors which may have influenced his conclusion. Firstly, it is well accepted that Amin had a Eurocentric bias and supported the British occupation. Many of his arguments in his controversial book were the exact same used by European settlers and missionaries leading to a rumor at the time that he had written it due to the urgings of Lord Cromer, British administrator and diplomat who ruled Egypt for 24 years as an agent and consul general (Ahmed 1992, 159). Perhaps after years of enduring colonial propaganda on the oppression of women in Islam especially with regards to veiling and segregation, he may have internalized these arguments and accepted them to be true due to his own inferiority complex. In fact, academic scholars today “criticize Amin’s Eurocentric bias in that he accepted the superiority of Western civilization and expressed contempt for Muslim society and Egyptian women in particular” (Boles & Hoeveler 2004, 38).

Secondly, an Egyptian princess by the name of Nazli Fazl may have influenced his thinking as well. She also had a Western education, which she completed in Great Britain and France (Talhami 2013, 117). She is accredited with reviving the tradition of the literary salon in the Arab world. She hosted them from the 1880s until her death in 1913-14. She used to host them in her palace in Cairo. In these salons, the attendees “debated Egypt’s social and political crisis, as well as holding discussions on leading Arabic and European books of the day” (Talhami 2013, 117). Her salons were attended by some of the leading personalities of her day, such as, Muhammad Abuh, Jamal al-Din Afghani, and of course Qasim Amin. However, these were not attended by Egyptian women, rather, it was just “statesmen, politicians, writers, journalists, and intellectuals, both Egyptian and European” (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 143). It is said that “her input into these conversations influenced Qassem Amin’s seminal work, *The Liberation of Women*” (Talhami 2013, 117). It is highly likely that it was a combination of both of the above mentioned factors.

Amin’s book and the controversy that followed it led to some women, who were frustrated with certain aspects of Egyptian society towards women, to hold their own salons. One of the first of these women were Eugénie Le Brun, who was a French convert married to an Egyptian landowner and future politician Hussein Rushdi Pasha. Le Brun had been conducting her salons even before Amin’s book but its publication “further stimulated their efforts” (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 19). Moreover, her salon was open to regular Egyptian women in Cairo (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 143). Having grown up abroad as a feminist, she carried the European understanding of the veil into her conversion. For example, she “earnestly inducted young Muslim women into the European understanding of the meaning of the veil and the need to cast it off as the essential first step in the struggle for female liberation” (Ahmed 1992, 154).

Le Brun’s gatherings were highly influential and one of her regular attendees and a close friend was Huda Sha’arawi. She had an immense influence on Sha’arawi, who many years later after Le Brun’s death would publicly take off the veil in Egypt at a train station in 1923 after returning from an international feminist meeting in Rome (Shaarawi & Badran 2015, 5). This one act from Sha’arawi “began a radical activist phase of the

movement” (Boles & Hoeveler 2004, 295) and “within a decade of Huda’s act of defiance, few women still chose to wear the veil” (Engel 2012). Sha’arawi also mentored Aminah Said, who was much more radically opposed to the veil (Talhami 2013, 286). When we reflect over all of the above, then perhaps Aduwig Adamec in his *Historical Dictionary of Islam* put it best:

“As a result of Westernization, women began to appear on the streets without a veil, and modernizing reformers tried with varying success to abolish the veil. The Islam revival, beginning in the 1970s led to the adoption of the ‘Islamic’ dress as a political statement in many parts of the Islamic world and even among Muslims in the West” (Adamec 2001, 115).

In conclusion, the concept of rejection of the obligation of the Islamic veil for believing women was imported from the imperialists reigning over the Muslim world. Some of the Muslims in Egypt, who were influenced by Western education, achievements and lifestyles, began to accept criticisms against the veil from their European rulers. This eventually led to a debate over the issue within Muslim society, especially after Qasim Amin’s book. The result was that the idea of it not being a religious obligation became well accepted among certain crowds until today. The idea began in Egypt but eventually spread throughout the Muslim world. What is interesting to note is that many of the arguments used against the Islamic veil have not changed since the colonial times. This author has heard some of them verbatim from Muslim liberals and non-Muslims.

### **Issue of *Niqab* (face veil)**

The face veil has been in practice since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) but is it obligatory? It is not an invention into the religion or something the Persians added as some falsely accuse. This is one of those issues where there is a difference of opinion within the schools of thought. The very fact that there is intra-madhab debate shows that *niqab* has always been a controversial debate in terms of its obligation. The books of exegesis from the earliest times are full of statements from the companions holding opinions that women should cover their faces. There are also many

hadiths which indicate that there were women during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that used to cover their faces in addition to the rest of their bodies.

Those who said it was obligatory used the following evidences:

- From the Qur'an: "*wrap [a portion of] their khumur over their chests*" [Qur'an 24:31]. In their opinion this means the *niqab*.
- The various hadiths where the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) states that a woman in the state of *hajj* or *'umrah* should not cover her face or wear gloves. These scholars argue that it means outside of this state she would be wearing it. He wouldn't say this unless they were commonly wearing the *niqab*.
- Aisha said: "*The male riders used to pass by us when we were with the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) in state of ihram [for Hajj or 'Umrah]. When they came near us we would lower our jilbaab from our heads over our faces, and when they had passed by we would uncover our faces*" (Abu Dawud 2008).
- They have many other evidences as well.

Those who said it was not obligatory used the following evidences:

- Aisha reports that: "*Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) turned away from her. He said: 'O Asma', when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this', and he pointed to his face and hands*" (Abu Dawud 2008). – This hadith is controversial because scholars debate whether it is authentic or not. Many say that it is weak while others say it is of a *hasan* level.
- Jabir reported that: "*A woman having a dark spot on the cheek stood up and said: Why is it so, Messenger of Allah?*" (Muslim 2007) – They argue that Jabir would have not known this unless she was not wearing a *niqab*.

- Ibn ‘Abbas reported about his brother named Al-Fadl bin ‘Abbas that: *“Al-Fadl was riding behind the Prophet (pbuh) and a woman from the tribe of Khath’am came up. Al-Fadl started looking at her and she looked at him. The Prophet (pbuh) turned Al-Fadl’s face to the other side”* (Bukhari 1997). – They argue he looked at her because he found her attractive and this would not be possible unless she was not wearing a niqab. Ibn Hajar said that Al-Fadl was pleased by her beauty (Hajar 1986). Further, the Prophet (pbuh) did not command her to cover her face.
- They have other evidences as well.

### **Covering the Head for Women in Traditions Other than Islam**

Today, the idea of covering the head for women has become associated exclusively with Islam. It is seen as something which is derogatory and only practiced within Islam. However, throughout history many other civilizations also practiced this concept in one form or another. It is only post-Renaissance that this action has gradually become abandoned among women.

In France, from 1485-1510, covering the head was a show of virtue and honor. In fact, “married women’s headdresses completely concealed their hair through most of the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century” (Leventon 2008, 102). In England, the practice of “completely covering the woman’s head was wholeheartedly adopted” (Leventon 2008, 316). Up until the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was considered immoral and shocking to wear a hairnet alone without some sort of ribbon or barrette around the head to along with it, in addition, some women also wore veils (Cosgrave 2000, 113). In Italy, “women often wore turbans” throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cosgrave 2000, 140). In some orders, during this period, female widows wore “head-rail covering the hair, ears and neck” in addition to a veil during daytime (Boucher 1966, 187). The only thing changed this was the Renaissance in northern Europe when women started to show “occasional glimpse of hair” (Leventon 2008, 102). Hence, some form of covering the head for

women was seen as appropriate for most European cultures until the Renaissance. This was especially true for married women.

This phenomenon is not restricted to the middle ages in Europe. It is well known that Roman women were “customarily veiled” when they went outside the house (Leventon 2008, 314). In Classical Greece, women wore scarves wrapped around their heads (Cosgrave 2000, 53). During the Byzantine period, men and women both wore clothes which concealed the body’s shape, in fact, there was an obsession with it (Cosgrave 2000, 86-87). It is important to note that the Byzantine Empire was a superpower before and during the initial stages of Islam. Some of their fashions may have been adopted by Arab women at the time in the Arabia peninsula. For example, it is reported about the Byzantine women that some of them “wore veils made from a long piece of material which could be allowed to fall behind the head, or folded forward and draped over the arm” (Cosgrave 2000, 86-87). This is not much different than what Arab women used to do before the verses of covering came down as mentioned earlier.

We can go back even further and find women covering their heads as norms. During the second and third millennia BCE, in the coastal countries (Mesopotamia, Arabia, Syria), married women wore “very enveloping veils” and in the first millennium BCE women wore veils covering their heads (Boucher 1966, 56). Women from the Hittites people, who occupied the region of Anatolia (also known as Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey) prior to 1700 BCE, wore long veils which they would sometimes draw forward to cover their faces (Boucher 1966, 64). In the Iberian Peninsula, during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, some women wore long veils that covered them from head to feet while others wore short veils (Boucher 1966, 131). In France, during the Carolingians (752-987 CE) era, women “for the sake of respectability they had to cover their heads with veils...draped like a turban” (Boucher 1966, 160-161). In Central and Western Europe from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, women still covered their heads and concealed their hair under a veil (Boucher 1966, 172).

As for religious covering in other than Islam, then historically Christian and Jewish women have covered their heads. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Jewish women are reported to be covering all the time and Tertulian (155-240 CE), an early Christian

author, encouraged Christian women to veil themselves outside and used Jewish women as examples (Boucher 1966, 58). The book *Dress in the Middle Ages* states that Jewish women “were strictly obliged to veil their heads in all circumstances” (Piponnier & Mane 1997, 121). The phenomenon of Christian women covering their heads in Church is well known throughout history even as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still practiced today in eastern churches. They did so in response to the Biblical verse, “*But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved*” (1 Corinthians 11:5). There is much debate in Christian circles whether this refers to covering only in church or anytime a woman is in public. However, today among the Christian community only the Mennonite, Amish, Brethren and Hutterite women still practice wearing a head covering at all times.

From all of the above, it is quite clear that covering of the head is not something exclusive to Islam, rather, many religions, cultures, and civilizations throughout history have had some form of covering for women’s heads. Some societies emphasized it stronger than others. However, in the modern times, the practice is largely abandoned by women across the world.

## **Conclusion**

The argument by some modern neo-liberal progressive Muslims that the *khimar* (head cover) is not obligatory for women and is something cultural is completely unfounded. There are explicit verses in the Qur’an as well as explicit statements from the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that both the *khimar* and *jilbaab* are obligatory for women. In the history of Islam, no reputable scholar ever questioned the requirement for a Muslim woman’s covering. They only differed over the issue of the face, hands, and feet of a woman and whether these are obligatory to cover or not. It is only in the last century that certain voices have become popular in calling to question its obligation with relatively no textual support for their arguments.

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